CENTRE FOR CRIMINOLOGY
FACULTY OF LAW

MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice 2023-24

Dissertation Submission

Candidate No.:	
Dissertation Title:	**The Price of Mobility: A Criminological Exploration of Minibus Taxis, Violence and Urban Space in South Africa**
Word count:	**14 856**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Ian Loader, Director of the Centre for Criminology at Oxford, for his invaluable expertise and support. Professor Loader's innovative class on Criminology and the Car was particularly inspiring, encouraging me to explore the complex intersections between transport, mobility, criminology and issues of safety. I am grateful for his mentorship and for introducing me to new dimensions within the field of criminology.

I am appreciative for the financial support provided by the Law Faculty at the University of Oxford as well as the University of Cape Town, which enabled me to pursue this masters. A heartfelt thank you to Brett and Mandy Muzzell for their unwavering support and generosity, for facilitating finances and offering their help whenever needed to make this opportunity possible. Your kindness and encouragement have meant the world to me.

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore the complex relationship between the minibus taxi industry and violence in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that the industry, shaped by historical legacies and path dependence, has evolved into a sector where violence is not merely a consequence but an embedded operational tool used by various actors to navigate the intricate spatial, political and economic landscape.

By tracing the industry's development from its roots in the apartheid era to the critical juncture of deregulation in 1987, this study reveals how the seeds of instability and conflict were sown. The examination of key actors - associations, mother bodies, owners and drivers - and their use of violence through an infrastructural lens underscores how the struggle for power and control over lucrative routes and ranks perpetuates a cycle of harm. Infrastructural violence, where urban space becomes a contested territory, is central to understanding the industry's dynamics. The analysis of the industry's political economy exposes the failures of regulation, the pervasiveness of corruption and the entrenched resistance to change that fuels violence. Ultimately, it is the commuters who bear the brunt of this dysfunctional system, facing daily risks ranging from unroadworthy vehicles and reckless driving to the ever-present threat of physical violence, particularly against women.

The dissertation contends that the violence plaguing the minibus taxi industry is not an anomaly but a fundamental feature, deeply embedded in its historical trajectory, institutional arrangements and everyday practices. By centering the minibus taxi as the focal point, I hope to bring often-overlooked harms to the forefront, opening up new avenues for criminological inquiry into the role of automobility in shaping patterns of violence, vulnerability and mobility in the Global South.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

During apartheid, black South Africans were subject to segregation laws that separated them from white South Africans in almost every aspect of life, including transportation. Black South Africans were forced to rely on inadequate and unreliable modes of transportation, such as buses and trains. In the townships, informal modes of transport, such as bicycles, wheelbarrows and pushcarts, were common (Loop, 2023). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a new form of transportation emerged in the townships — the minibus taxi. These taxis were small vans, usually white Toyota minibuses, that carry up to 16 passengers operated by private individuals. Taxis transport passengers on a fixed route for a fixed fare, but do not operate on a timetable (Ngubane, 2016). The taxis were cheaper and more efficient than the government-run buses and able to navigate the narrow and winding streets of the townships. The minibus taxi industry grew rapidly, with thousands of drivers and operators joining the trade. The taxi industry played a crucial role in connecting people in the townships and rural areas to the cities, where they could access jobs, education and healthcare (Loop, 2023).

Today, in the remnants of spatial apartheid, the minibus taxi industry continues to play a leading role in the public transport sector, transporting up to 65% of the South African population to their destinations (Fobosi, 2014). According to the National Household Travel Survey by Statistics South Africa, taxis accounted for most public transport use in 2020, with 80.2% of workers using taxis and 11.4 million households relying on minibus taxis (Jacobs, 2024; Business Tech, 2023). The industry is estimated to have a turnover of more than R16,5 billion, comprising more than 20 000 owners and 200 000 employees (Ngubane, 2016). But since its inception the minibus taxi has been a site of pervasive chaos and violence, stemming from intense competition, territorial disputes and a lack of effective regulation. Characterised by

threats, corruption, illegal dealings, assaults and assassinations, the state of the industry has become more and more criminal in nature (Ngubane, 2016).

Thesis Statement

In this dissertation I argue that the minibus taxi industry in South Africa, shaped by historical legacies and path dependence, has evolved into a sector where violence is not merely a consequence but an embedded tool used by actors to navigate the complex spatial, political and economic landscape. This violence emerges from the confluence of several factors: 1) The historical formation of the industry, rooted in the apartheid era and the deregulation of the late 1980s, which set the stage for intense competition, informality, and conflict. 2) The actions of key stakeholders, such as taxi associations, owners, and drivers, who use violence as a means to control lucrative routes, assert dominance and navigate power relations within the industry. 3) The political economy of the industry, characterized by weak regulation, corruption, resistance to reform and perverse incentives that fuel territorial conflicts and undermine attempts to curb violence. 4) The infrastructural dimensions of violence, where urban space, particularly taxi ranks and routes, become contested territories and battlegrounds for power.

These factors intersect to create a mobility system defined by instability, precarity and harm, with commuters bearing the brunt of the industry's dysfunction. The violence that permeates the industry is not an anomaly but a fundamental feature, deeply embedded in its historical trajectory, institutional arrangements and everyday practices.

By tracing the complex web of factors that sustain this violence, I challenge simplistic narratives that attribute the taxi industry's problems to a single cause, such as a lack of regulation or the criminality of individual actors. Instead, I propose a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the systemic nature of the violence and the multiple forces that perpetuate it.

Ultimately, this dissertation makes a compelling case for recognizing the minibus taxi industry not just as a transport issue but as a lens through which to understand the complex dynamics of violence, informality and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa.

Methodology and Literature Engagement

This dissertation does not include a traditional literature review section; instead, it integrates pertinent literature throughout each section to maintain constant engagement with relevant sources. The methodology involves a comprehensive review of academic literature, including journal articles, policy documents and national survey information, to provide a robust foundation for analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative studies from South Africa are utilized to vividly depict the industry's landscape and give voice to those involved. Additionally, news reports from various South African news agencies are incorporated, offering real-time insights into taxi wars and strikes.

This dissertation focuses specifically on the South African context, rather than adopting a comparative approach with other countries that have similar informal transport systems. South Africa's minibus taxi industry is unique in its scale, complexity and historical significance, making it a compelling case study for understanding the relationship between informal transport and violence. While there is literature on taxis in international contexts— from the yellow cab in the United States, the black cab in the United Kingdom, '*matatus*' in Kenya and '*danfos'* in Nigeria, it was decided that the unique characteristics of the South African taxi industry necessitate a focused study. The concept of a taxi in South Africa is fundamentally different from that in any other country. The industry's roots in the apartheid era, when discriminatory policies such as the Group Areas Act created a desperate need for alternative transport among marginalized black communities, sets it apart from other informal transport systems worldwide. The industry's turbulent history since deregulation in 1987, marked by intense competition,

territorial conflicts and a complex web of stakeholder relationships, offers rich insights into how violence becomes embedded in the very fabric of a transport system. By delving deep into the South African experience, this dissertation aims to provide a nuanced and contextually grounded analysis that can shed light on the broader challenges of informal transport and urban mobility in the Global South. While comparative studies with other countries would certainly yield valuable insights, the depth and specificity of the South African case make it a powerful lens through which to examine these issues. It is for these reasons a choice was made to focus on South Africa exclusively.

Structure

Chapter 1 provides historical context and background on the emergence of the taxi industry. Applying a historical legacy and path dependence framework to understand the industry's evolution, the chapter traces how the contemporary taxi industry is defined and shaped by South Africa's history of apartheid and forced removals, particularly stemming from deregulation in 1987. It is argued that the historical context of apartheid-era policies and the deregulation of the taxi industry have created conditions that normalise the use of violence as a means of asserting control and maintaining power within the sector. Chapter 2 turns to consider various stakeholders in the industry and how they use infrastructure as a tool of violence. The organisation of the taxi industry and its actors, consisting of owners, drivers and taxi associations are examined. A framework of infrastructural violence is used to understand how the control and contestation of urban space by actors in the industry, including lucrative taxi routes, intersects with dynamics of violence. Through the use of case studies of taxi wars or ‘turf wars’, it is contended that the industry relies on violence as a tool for establishing and maintaining dominance over contested spaces. The political economy of violence in the taxi industry is explored in chapter 3. This chapter examines how the economic structure and political conditions of the taxi industry,

including factors of informal regulation, intense competition and weak state oversight, shape incentives for conflict and violence. The political economy of the industry incentivizes the use of violence as a means of securing economic advantages and political influence. Finally, chapter 4 considers the types and prevalence of precocity experienced by commuters as a result of the industry's reliance on violence as an operational tool. The commuter experience is explored through various factors of unsafe vehicles, dangerous driving and exposure to physical violence, particularly experienced by women.

CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORICAL FORMATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S TAXI INDUSTRY

The birth and subsequent history of the taxi in South Africa is a long and complicated one. This chapter attempts to highlight the key turning points and events that formed the taxi industry as we know it today, with special emphasis on the impact of deregulation in shaping its trajectory. In doing so, the path dependence framework is utilised. Introduced by economists Paul David and Brian Arthur in the 1980s, the path dependence framework, also known as 'theories of path dependency', is a theoretical approach that explains how a set of decisions and events in the past can influence future outcomes, even if the initial conditions that led to those decisions are no longer relevant (Guiney, Rubin & Yeomans, 2023). It suggests that history matters and that the sequence of events can shape the trajectory of institutions, technologies, or economies. The concept was and has since been applied to various fields, including economics, political science, sociology and organisational studies. It helps us to understand why certain systems or practices persist even when they appear inefficient or suboptimal and why it can be so challenging to implement change in established institutions or industries (Guiney, Rubin & Yeomans, 2023).

By applying this framework, this chapter highlights how apartheid-era policies and the post-apartheid deregulation of the industry has shaped the current state of the minibus taxi industry and its association with violence. There are two main types of path dependence: self-reinforcing sequences and reactive sequences. Self-reinforcing sequences occur when initial steps in a particular direction encourage further movement in the same direction, creating a feedback loop that makes it harder to change course (Guiney, Rubin & Yeomans, 2023). Reactive sequences, on the other hand, involve backlash or resistance to early events, leading to a chain of reactions and counter-reactions that shape the final outcome. For instance, when a government introduces a new policy, it may face opposition from groups who feel disadvantaged by the change, leading

to a series of negotiations, compromises, or even conflicts that ultimately determine the policy's implementation and effectiveness (Guiney, Rubin & Yeomans, 2023). One key concept in the path dependence framework is the idea of 'critical junctures' - moments when a particular option is chosen among multiple alternatives, setting the stage for path-dependent processes. These critical junctures can be influenced by various factors, such as chance events, power dynamics, or external shocks and their outcomes can have long-lasting consequences (Guiney, Rubin & Yeomans, 2023).

1.1.The Inception and Deregulation of the Taxi Industry

The apartheid era in South Africa was a regime of severe racial discrimination. Segregation among different racial and ethnic groups was systematically enforced through a series of laws and policies. Among these, the Group Areas Act of 1950 (later re-enacted in 1957 and 1966) stands out, dividing urban spaces into racially segregated 'group areas' that restricted ownership and residency based on race (Turok et al, 2021). Under the guise of 'separate development', this legislation favoured white households while disadvantaging black South Africans and other non-white populations, forcing them to live in separate locales with distinct facilities and infrastructure. The Group Areas Act excluded non - whites from residing in the most developed regions and pushed them to the periphery of urban spaces. Consequently, many individuals of colour endured lengthy commutes from their designated residential zones to their places of employment. In conjunction with the Group Areas Act, other legislative measures such as the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 exacerbated restrictions on the movement and rights of black South Africans and other racial groups by confining them to specified areas, and mandating the possession of passes when outside their designated zones. The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 further amplified these constraints, confining all black South Africans to a mere 13% of the nation's total land area.

Under apartheid South Africa's public transportation system, consisting of buses (initially operated by municipalities and later by the private sector) and state-provided above-surface trains, proved grossly inadequate, inefficient and financially burdensome (Dugard, 2001). Primarily designed to ferry commuters from the 'homelands' to their residences, factories and other industrial hubs, this system compelled the majority of the black population to endure extensive daily commutes, with some allocating up to 20% of their income towards transportation costs (Khosa, 1995). Heavily regulated by the apartheid government, the public transportation system reinforced racial segregation and safeguarded the near-monopoly held by the South African Transport Services (Dugard, 2001). This disproportionately affected people of African descent, who predominantly relied on public transportation as they were forced to live on the outskirts of the city and were too poor to afford private motor vehicles (Ngubane, 2016). As a consequence of these oppressive policies and the deficiencies of the public transport system, a demand emerged among the black population for swifter, cheaper and more convenient transportation alternatives. This demand paved the way for the emergence of the black taxi industry in the late 1970s, which aimed to address the shortcomings of the failing public transport system and offer a more efficient mode of transportation for black commuters (Moolman et al, 1998).

The minibus taxi was able to serve the black population in terms of their specific mobility needs in a way which other forms of public transport had not been able to. Unlike traditional modes of transport, taxis provided late-night services, offered door-to-door pickups and drop-offs, and were willing to navigate remote locations such as the homelands. Moreover, they maintained reasonable fares and the abundance of taxis available minimised waiting times at stations compared to bus and train terminals (Mabitsela, 2016). Praised for their decentralised and affordable service, minibus taxis swiftly gained favour within black South African communities (Fobosi, 2014). However, the apartheid government staunchly opposed the establishment of the

black taxi industry. The government aimed to protect and support the South African Transport Services, a state-run entity, by maintaining a monopoly on transport (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004). This monopoly was not just an economic strategy but also a tool for political control. By dominating the transport sector, the government could severely restrict the movement of black populations, limiting their access to employment opportunities, social services and even social gatherings. Controlling transport routes and services was a critical component of the broader apparatus of apartheid, which sought to enforce segregation and maintain white supremacy. The black taxi industry, with its potential to empower black entrepreneurs and provide greater mobility to the oppressed, posed a direct threat to the apartheid regime's control and the systematic subjugation of black South Africans. Thus, the resistance to the black taxi industry was as much about maintaining the apartheid system as it was about economic interests. The government safeguarded existing public transport systems and obstructed entrepreneurs from operating taxis by withholding road carrier permits (Molefe, 2016). Securing a permit for operating a taxi was nearly impossible for Africans, and those who managed to obtain one were restricted to using sedan cars, which failed to meet the demands of the burgeoning African market. Sekhonyane & Dugard note that:

> '*Obtaining a permit … was all but impossible for black operators who, falling under the discriminatory influx control system, found it difficult to prove that they had a good formal employment record, had lived in the magisterial district as legally registered tenants for a number of years, and were in possession of a Daily Labourer's Permit. In effect, the system meant that over 90% of taxi permit applications by blacks were rejected'* (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004:14).

The demand for minibus taxi services surged, prompting drivers to operate without permits, risking fines and vehicle confiscation, often at the hands of the South African Railways Police Force (Molefe, 2016). Despite these challenges, minibus taxis persevered and became the predominant mode of public transportation in black communities (Molefe, 2016). As popularity for minibus taxis continued to soar, the government found itself grappling with how to respond

to the growing industry (Molefe, 2016). Against a backdrop of increasing political tension, the apartheid government feared that further intervention and regulation in the transportation sector would incite widespread boycotts and politicisation among black South Africans (Molefe, 2016). In response, the government convened the Van Breda Commission of Inquiry into the Road Transportation Bill in 1977. The commission's findings indicated that investment in passenger transport, namely buses and trains, had become politically and economically untenable, with taxis emerging as the more favoured option among the public (Dugard, 2001). Concluding that South Africa had reached a stage of economic and industrial development conducive to embracing freer competition in transportation, the commission recommended a shift in policy (Dugard, 2001).

In 1982, the establishment of the National Transport Police Study (NTPS) aimed to realign transport policy with national economic reform objectives (Dugard, 2001). The NTPS's 1985 report highlighted the incongruity between the existing regulatory framework and national economic principles, deeming it counterproductive to fostering competition (Molefe, 2016). Embracing the report's recommendations, the government formulated the White Paper on Transport Policy in 1987. This document, coupled with the enactment of the Transportation Deregulation Act No. 80 of 1988, deregulated and legalised 16-seater minibus taxis, marking a pivotal moment in the evolution of the taxi industry (Molefe, 2016). For the first time, the minibus taxi was legally allowed to operate, marking the beginning of the taxi industry as we know it today (Dugard, 2001).

Following deregulation, the minibus taxi industry underwent explosive growth, witnessing an influx of 45,000 unregistered taxis in addition to the 40,000 already affiliated with the South African Black Taxi Association (SABTA) (Moolman et al, 1998). The Minister of Transport noted a staggering tenfold increase in applications for taxi permits, a surge fuelled by several

factors (Moolman et al, 1998). First and foremost was the pressing demand stemming from spatial apartheid, which left Black communities yearning for improved mobility options. Additionally, the taxi industry represented a novel avenue for capital accumulation among black South Africans, constituting their first source of income. Proponents of free market enterprise hailed the taxi sector as a 'silent revolution' and the embodiment of 'popular non-racial capitalism', envisioning it as a vehicle for transforming South Africa into a more integrated economy (Molefe, 2016). Deregulation was implemented not only to bolster the economy but also to appease apartheid revolutionary sentiments, by affording a substantial number of black South Africans a stake in the system (Dugard, 2001).

For the first time, black South Africans could aspire to entrepreneurship and the prospect of earning a respectable income. As a result, the taxi industry swiftly became a fiercely contested economic arena, attracting a multitude of aspirant operators eager to capitalise on its potential. Beyond taxi drivers and operators, corrupt officials seized the opportunity presented by the deregulated market, turning a blind eye to traffic enforcement and vehicle roadworthiness. Consequently, issues of safety and security were compromised from the outset (Molefe, 2016). Permit issuance became lax; applicants were not required to demonstrate a specific need for their service in a given area or exhibit any degree of financial stability or competence. As a result, permits were distributed liberally, akin to confetti, with reports emerging of a 'buy one, get one free' permit system (Dugard, 2001). Unchecked by authorities, many taxi drivers operated without permits altogether, leading to the rampant entry of illegal operators, or 'pirates', into the system (Dugard, 2001). While deregulation seemingly empowered black individuals to enter the entrepreneurial sphere and amass capital, the government harboured ulterior motives. Deregulation served as a means for the apartheid regime to further its political strategy of destabilisation, fostering economic stratification within black society in the open market (Dugard, 2001).

'*The sudden deregulation of transport became a means of complementing the state's broader destabilisation strategies in the run-up to negotiations by exacerbating socio-economic and political tensions within black communities*' (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004:15).

Foreseeing the chaos and fragmentation that would ensue from the abolition of all entry restrictions, SABTA warned of the perils of unchecked industry expansion (Molefe, 2016). Their concerns were validated as the influx of new drivers caused route disputes and passenger competition, generating a proliferation of taxi associations and informal regulatory bodies, such as mother bodies.

With oversight lacking, industry competition escalated, often erupting into violence including tragic loss of life on the roads. In 1998 alone, taxis were involved in 70,000 accidents resulting in 900 passenger fatalities and 1,385 driver deaths (Molefe, 2016). Despite warnings that deregulation would create chaos and violence, the government knowingly unleashed the floodgates of the taxi industry. Some assert that this was done deliberately and was precisely the government's intention, to sow disorder and turmoil before the taxi industry had a chance to establish itself. The deregulation of the industry, intended to usher in a new era of economic empowerment and mobility, instead propelled it into a state of disarray and instability.

1.2. Path Dependency Theory

Path dependence theory offers a valuable lens for examining the profound impact of apartheid-era policies and the post-apartheid deregulation of the minibus taxi industry on the current state of the system and its inextricable link to violence. The deregulation of the industry represents a critical juncture, a pivotal moment where the choice of deregulation over alternative options set in motion a path-dependent trajectory that has shaped the industry's development ever since. The decision by the apartheid government fundamentally reshaped the operational landscape and created far-reaching changes in market competition, governance structures and socio-economic dynamics within the taxi sector. By relinquishing regulatory control, the government

inadvertently unleashed a process of market liberalisation that empowered individual operators and gave rise to a plethora of taxi associations and informal networks. This shift in power dynamics within the industry fuelled heightened competition, territorial disputes and the entrenchment of a pervasive culture of informality. The deregulatory intervention effectively dismantled the previous regulatory framework, leaving a void that was quickly filled by informal practices and power struggles among various actors in the industry. The entrenched interests and informal networks that have taken root since deregulation have proven to be formidable obstacles to change, resisting any attempts to curtail their power or impose greater accountability.

The government's subsequent attempts to reassert control and regulate the industry, as detailed in Chapter 3, have become a reactive sequence, characterised by resistance and backlash from taxi operators and associations. These efforts to formalise and regulate the industry have been met with fierce opposition, as entrenched interests and informal networks seek to maintain their grip on power and resist any perceived threats to their dominance.

> '*What is clear, however, is that once sparked, violence takes on a life of its own and is very difficult to eradicate. Much of the current taxi violence revolves around cycles of retribution, many with their origins at the time of apartheid. In sharp contrast to other forms of political violence, taxi violence has continued and, in fact, escalated in the post-1994 period. In fact, if one form of violence has characterised the post-apartheid period it has been the taxi wars*' (Dugard, 2001:12).

This reactive sequence has perpetuated a vicious cycle of informality, where informal practices continue to thrive in the absence of effective regulation, exacerbating tensions between the government and the taxi industry and further complicating efforts to address systemic challenges. Since deregulation, both the state and the taxi industry have found themselves trapped in a path-dependent trajectory, unable to break free from the foundational attributes of disorder and violence that have come to define the sector. Deregulation is largely responsible for the enduring challenges that plague the industry today, including deeply entrenched corruption within the state

apparatus, pervasive violence and disputes over route control, the proliferation of competing taxi associations and the widespread prevalence of unsafe vehicles on the roads.

At the heart of this path-dependent outcome lies the failure to adequately address the historical legacies of spatial apartheid and the profound inequalities it engendered. The spatial organisation of apartheid-era cities, characterised by segregated living areas and grossly unequal access to resources and opportunities, continues to shape patterns of mobility and urban development in contemporary South Africa. Despite the formal withdrawal of apartheid legislation and the reorganisation of institutions, there was no commitment to pushing through a bold new vision for integrated, inclusive cities (Turok et al, 2021). The World Bank in 2008 reported that:

> '*South Africa is exceptional in its spatial patterns of economic inclusion. Whereas regional divides are not uncommon along the path of economic development, the extent to which South Africa is unequal in space is unique*' (Harvard Growth Lab, 2023:81).

Consequently, many policies implemented since 1994 have had the unintended consequence of perpetuating various aspects of spatial exclusion and reinforcing the very inequalities they sought to redress (Harvard Growth Lab, 2023). This status quo is deeply rooted in a historical trajectory shaped by the enduring legacies of apartheid-era policies, such as the infamous Group Areas Act, which have cast a long shadow over the development of the minibus taxi industry and its complex relationship with violence. The failure to confront and dismantle these spatial and economic inequalities has created a fertile ground for the persistence of informal practices, power struggles and violent contestations within the industry.

The consequences of this path-dependent trajectory have been far-reaching and devastating, not only for those directly involved in the minibus taxi industry but also for the countless commuters who rely on this mode of transport daily. The pervasive violence, unsafe vehicles and unpredictable service that have come to characterise the industry have exacted a heavy toll on

the lives and livelihoods of millions of black South Africans, who have no alternative options for mobility.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE THROUGH ACTORS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

This chapter has two primary objectives. First, it aims to elucidate the various stakeholders within the taxi industry, specifically focusing on associations, owners and drivers, and analyses the intricate relationships between these actors. Understanding these relationships is essential for comprehending the operational dynamics of the taxi industry. Second, it seeks to explore how these actors engage in violence. By drawing on the work of Rodgers and O'Neill (2012) and Danielak (2019), this chapter adopts an infrastructural lens to understand the violence which emerges in the industry. The analysis focuses on how actors in the industry attempt to control and contest urban space, with a primary emphasis on lucrative routes. These routes effectively become 'property' or assets that are leveraged for advantage (Danielak, 2019). Whether infrastructure is the subject of the violence, such as conflict over specific routes, or the location of the violence, such as shootings on roads and at taxi ranks, it is argued that infrastructure is a tool used to assert control and dominance within the taxi industry. This phenomenon is characterized as infrastructural violence, where infrastructure itself becomes a central element in the struggle for power and resources.

2.1. Actors in the Industry

The taxi industry comprises various stakeholders, each with distinct roles and varying levels of power. Key actors include taxi owners, drivers, associations, mother bodies and enforcers such as queue marshals, taxi rank managers and hitmen (Fobosi, 2014; Seftel, 2021). These actors are organized hierarchically. At the apex are the mother bodies and taxi associations, followed by the owners. Below them are the queue marshals and rank managers, with the taxi drivers positioned at the base of this hierarchy. Understanding these different players and their

interactions is crucial for comprehending how the industry relies on violence as a tool for establishing and maintaining dominance over contested spaces.

2.1.1. Associations and Mother Bodies

Due to deregulation in 1987 and the ensuing lack of state oversight, the taxi industry has become self-regulated. Taxi associations, which developed as informal agents of regulation, protection and force, were allowed to expand unchecked by authorities (Mabitsela, 2016). These associations are not regulated under the current National Land Transport Act (Mmakwena, 2022). Rapidly proliferating across the country, taxi associations can be categorized into national, provincial, regional and local structures (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province, 2019). Initially, these associations were established to promote the interests of their members and to manage funds for this purpose. However, it was not long before taxi associations began leveraging their organisational strength to control the industry and extract income, often through violence (Dugard, 2001). Violence between associations, either tacitly encouraged or ignored by the apartheid regime, allowed these organisations to grow unchecked (Dugard, 2001). In the absence of effective state regulation, taxi associations have deployed violence to maintain an alternative system of internal rules, discipline and 'taxing' of operators. Over the past two decades, members of taxi associations have become key economic resources for the state through taxes, licenses and fines; for law enforcement officers through bribes; for warlords through 'membership fees' and protection rackets; for banks through obligatory credit; for insurance companies through obligatory policies; and for car manufacturers and dealers through obligatory vehicle replacement (Bähre, 2014).

The primary monopoly held by taxi associations is the control of specific taxi routes, encompassing every aspect from pricing to route design. The associations treat the routes they

operate on as their ‘property’. A route includes a start and end point, as well as a designated set of roads that a taxi, with the appropriate permit, is allowed to traverse (Kerr, 2021). Taxi associations often resist changes that would affect their control, even if such changes would improve efficiency and convenience for passengers (Kerr, 2021). For instance, the association controlling the Wynberg route resisted the introduction of a new direct route between Hout Bay and Claremont in Cape Town, despite the new route promising reduced travel times and costs for passengers (Kerr, 2021). This resistance underscores the associations' prioritisation of their territorial control and economic interests over the potential benefits to commuters. The associations also set the fare that all passengers on the route must pay, maintaining strict control over pricing structures (Kerr, 2021). This centralized fare setting not only ensures uniformity but also prevents competition that could drive prices down. Furthermore, the associations prevent entry by other taxi operators who have not been approved by them, effectively creating a closed market (Kerr, 2021). This exclusivity is enforced rigorously, ensuring that only those who are part of the association can operate on their designated routes. If a taxi owner or driver wishes to operate along a route controlled by a taxi association, they are required to join the association. This membership process is tightly regulated by the associations, which control who is admitted and who is rejected. The fees for joining an association are often exorbitant, creating a significant barrier to entry for many potential operators (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province, 2019). These fees are justified by the associations as necessary for maintaining the routes and ensuring the safety and reliability of the service, but they also serve to consolidate the associations' power and control over the industry. To enforce their rules and maintain control over their routes, associations utilize ‘squad cars’ to monitor their routes and ensure compliance with their regulations (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province, 2019). These squad cars are typically manned

by enforcers who patrol the routes, checking permits and ensuring that only authorized taxis are operating. This system of enforcement is crucial for the associations to maintain their monopoly and prevent unauthorised competition.

In addition to taxi associations, there exist entities known as mother bodies. Mother bodies typically comprise loose alliances of local and long-distance taxi associations within a particular region (Dugard, 2001). While they often span multiple provinces, some, like those in the Western Cape, operate solely within one province. There is no precise definition of a mother body, nor a specific distinction between a local taxi association and a mother body. Essentially, mother bodies are historical constructs: supra-local taxi associations that, by virtue of exerting significant influence and force, are regarded by other industry players and the government as official entities (Dugard 2001). Today, the common denominators among mother bodies are their focus on the violent protection of their interests and their self-conscious appropriation of the label (Dugard, 2001). While local taxi associations provide valuable services to operators – such as issuing permits and organizing routes – mother bodies primarily focus on extracting money and organising, enforcing and controlling violence (Dugard 2001). These organisations are behind much of the violence associated with the industry. Mother bodies have used their considerable influence and firepower to resist recent government attempts to re-regulate the taxi industry and are symptomatic of the rising levels of organised crime in post-apartheid South Africa (Dugard, 2001). Violence or the threat thereof is employed by mother body bosses to extort money and enforce compliance within the taxi fraternity. There is now more profit in controlling a mother body than in operating a route. Within these associations and mother bodies, a hierarchical struggle for power exists, with the real money being made at the executive level. Due to the lack of formal financial controls – no receipts, audits or taxation – a significant portion of the revenue flowing into mother bodies ends up in the pockets of association executives. The more senior the executive, the more money they can access, allowing for substantial fortunes to

be amassed in a short period and enabling the rapid rise of charismatic and powerful individuals (Dugard, 2001). Under such conditions, mother bodies experience internal tensions as they expand and certain individuals seek to displace the established leadership (Dugard, 2001). Violence, particularly assassinations, is used strategically to advance the economic interests of taxi elites.

All mother bodies, with the probable exception of the South African Black Taxi Association (SABTA), support hit squads, which are a vital component of their operations (Dugard, 2001). These hit squads often consist of professional assassins who have received military training in liberation movements, the police, or are part of skilled criminal syndicates (Khosa, 1995). These hitmen, who are compensated either through monthly retainers or per assignment, are frequently recruited from remote rural areas or neighbouring countries, making them more challenging to track down than local hired assassins (Dugard, 2001). Hitmen are deployed against rival local associations and mother bodies, targeting passengers, drivers and executive members, as well as against uncooperative members within their own mother body. For instance, in July 2018, gunmen armed with automatic weapons opened fire on a taxi, killing 11 people and critically injuring four (de Greef, 2018). The victims were all drivers for a Johannesburg minibus taxi association. Mark Shaw, the director of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, observed that:

> *'Large parts of the industry have begun to look very Mafia-like, where you defend and expand your business turf through the use of violence. The most lucrative routes are long-distance, such as between Johannesburg and KwaZulu-Natal'* (de Greef, 2018).

43% of all assassinations in South Africa between 2000 and 2017, were related to the taxi industry, according to Assassination Witness, a contract-killings database run by Shaw and other researchers (de Greef, 2018). Mother bodies are not only using hitmen but are increasingly making use of gangs. According to the Human Rights Council, several coloured taxi associations

have solicited the 'protection' of some of the Cape Flats' most feared gang lords (Human Rights Committee, 1996c).

> *'The combination of gangsterism and taxi violence, in an area renowned for violent gang warfare, is an explosive mix that has the potential to drive the taxi wars to new heights of violence. This disturbing new trend of the overlaying of gangster dynamics on the taxi industry is a fairly new, but increasingly visible, phenomenon'* (Dugard, 2001:16).

With the rise of ride-hailing services like Uber, Bolt, and Taxify, taxi violence is not only directed against other taxis in competition but also increasingly targets other types of public transport that threaten the monopoly held by the traditional taxi industry. Over 100 criminal cases were opened in the first nine months of 2017 in Johannesburg alone, related to conflicts between metered taxis and e-hailing services (Danielak, 2019). This violence manifests in assaults, stonings and petrol-bombings of vehicles and even the killings of drivers. In March 2018, a Taxify driver was kidnapped, locked in his car trunk and burnt to death (Danielak, 2019). Trains and buses are also targeted. In a spate of arson attacks in 2020, trains were burnt and stations vandalized, leaving commuters with no option but to use taxis for transportation. One man was sentenced to 20 years in prison for deliberately setting a train on fire (IOL, 2022). During the trial, it was revealed that the accused, who was employed at a taxi rank, had a vested interest in the disruption of train services. The taxi industry, it emerged, experiences a surge in business whenever trains are rendered inoperable. The accused himself admitted that he is paid higher wages when more taxis are in circulation due to heightened demand (IOL, 2022).

2.1.2. Owners and Drivers

Lower down the hierarchy within the taxi industry are taxi owners and taxi drivers. Typically, a person will own a taxi and then employ someone else to drive it. A study by Khosa in 1996 revealed that the majority of taxi owners entered the industry as a means to make money. Some owners were initially taxi drivers and then accumulated enough wealth to purchase their own

vehicles. Assistance from a homeboy or patron often facilitated the process, aiding them in obtaining a driving license, purchasing a taxi and finding a route (Gibbs, 2014). Formal education is not a prerequisite to become a taxi driver and the highest level of education commonly found among most minibus taxi operators is secondary school, although some may possess technical qualifications. Most taxi drivers work in the industry as it is the only employment they can find (Khosa, 1996) and a driver only needs to obtain a code 8 (lightweight motor vehicle) driver's license to transport passengers (Ngubane, 2016). Despite constituting the majority of workers within the taxi industry, taxi drivers are among the least powerful and most exploited (Ngubane, 2016).

Both owners and drivers typically act as free agents within the industry. Each taxi driver makes daily decisions aimed at maximising earnings, as expected by the taxi owner. Compared to workers in formalised public transport systems like trains and buses, the work of taxi drivers is considerably less structured or controlled, resulting in challenging working conditions (Gibbs, 2014). On short-distance commuter routes, drivers often endure long hours, working from 5am to 9pm – a grueling 16-hour workday – for sometimes as little as R80 (approximately £3) per week (Gibbs, 2014). While the Sectoral Determination 11: Taxi Sector introduced by the government aims to regulate employment conditions in the taxi sector, prevailing literature suggests that taxi owners often bypass these regulations to minimize labour costs (Fobosi, 2014). Drivers can be compensated in various ways: some receive no basic wage but pay a fixed percentage of the week's earnings to the owner, while others operate under a 'wage/plus system' where they receive a basic wage and share a portion of the earnings with the owner. Another common arrangement involves the driver surrendering all takings to the owner in exchange for a regular wage. Owners frequently allege that around 50% of the fare collected *en route* is stolen by drivers, justifying low driver salaries by accusing them of theft (Ngubane, 2016). This exploitative labour relationship between owners and drivers allows owners to maximise profits

in the absence of formalised employment contracts, often disregarding safety standards and taxes.

The relationship between taxi owners and drivers is characterized by unequal but reciprocal dependence (Gibbs, 2014). Drivers rely on owners for access to vehicles and protection while enduring difficult conditions, while owners depend on the labour and loyalty of drivers to generate income in a competitive and fractious industry. Croucamp (2003) captures this dilemma well:

> *'Given the dangerous nature of the work and the low income it generates for taxi drivers, the relationship between taxi owner and taxi driver has always been a precarious balance between economic desperation and coercion. The taxi owner provides the employment, the route and protection from competition, and the driver has no labour rights but an income and the prospect of earning an amount in addition to his arrangement with the owner'* (Croucamp, 2003:123).

However, these hierarchical relationships of obligation often become overburdened and break down, leading to conflicts of interest. In their research, Ngubane (2016) delved into the strained relationship between drivers and owners, revealing grievances such as disputes over payments and dissatisfaction with working conditions. Drivers express feeling undervalued and voice concerns about long hours, low wages and lack of consideration for their well-being:

> *'We usually fight over payments. Owners do not care about us. If the taxi has been involved in a road accident or a shootout, the first thing he will ask is "How bad is the damage to my vehicle?" They have no personal regard for us'* (Ngubane, 2016:89).

> *'…We work too many hours on a given day; long hours for very low wages. You are never told what your knockoff times are. When you try to voice out your grievances, they tell you to leave the vehicle, another person will fill your space'* (Ngubane, 2016:89).

When attributing responsibility for violence in the industry, drivers point to taxi owners and associations, highlighting their perceived indifference to driver welfare and their role in perpetuating conflicts within the industry. They attribute taxi violence to power struggles, internal greed and jealousy. When asked by Ngubane who perpetrates violence in the industry, drivers had the following to say:

'…taxi owners; it is not us drivers. We have no say in anything. Our job is to make money, that's all' (Ngubane, 2016:83).

'…it is the owners of associations who do not see eye to eye' (Ngubane, 2016:83).

'…corrupt and dishonest owners that fight over routes perpetrate taxi violence' (Ngubane, 2016: 83).

'It is taxi owners who are also members of the taxi board. They should be controlling the system in order to prevent violence from happening; instead, they are doing the opposite' (Ngubane, 2016: 84).

'Greed is the cause of taxi violence. They don't want to see another individual prosper in this industry. When one owner fails to properly manage his business, he becomes jealous and kills the one who is doing well. In Mpumalanga township, many people have died who were not even involved in anything dishonest. They were killed just because they were doing well' (Ngubane, 2016:80).

2.2. Infrastructural violence

'The transport infrastructure ... constitutes the material and networks on which violence unfolds, and, simultaneously, allows for its mediation. It embodies the continuous nature and blurry divide between war and post-war urbanism, and moreover provides insights into the role urban infrastructure plays in times of "conflict" and "peace"' (Danielak, 2019:138).

The spatial layout of taxi routes and ranks often reflects historical legacies, political decisions and socio-economic factors. Certain routes are perceived as more lucrative or strategically important, leading to heightened competition and territorial disputes among rival associations competing for control. The geographical concentration of taxi operations within specific neighbourhoods or districts exacerbates tensions, as different groups vie for dominance over limited spatial resources. The spatial dimension of these conflicts underscores how control over urban space translates into economic power and influence within the industry. Infrastructural violence highlights how the urban environment serves as a crucible for social interaction, economic exchange and political contestation. The urban landscape becomes a stage where power dynamics play out, with taxi associations and stakeholders strategically manoeuvring to assert control and influence. Urban infrastructure, including taxi ranks, terminals and road networks, becomes sites of contention and violence, as conflicting parties struggle for access and

dominance. The struggle over these spaces is not merely about transportation but about control over urban resources and the power they confer.

Through their control of lucrative taxi routes, associations assert ownership over urban space, transforming these routes into strategic assets in their violent struggle for power. These routes effectively become property and assets used to their advantage (Danielak, 2019). The concept of infrastructural violence elucidates this dynamic, highlighting how transport infrastructure not only facilitates direct violence but also embodies and reinforces structural violence and social exclusion. Rogers and O'Neill argue that 'infrastructure provides an ideal space for reflecting upon the systemic forms of violence that occur through a society's effort to organise and govern itself' (2012:404). In their work exploring violence in the Johannesburg taxi industry, Danielak suggests that infrastructure 'serves as the platform for direct, interpersonal and intergroup violence to unfold' (2019:141).

This violence is evident as associations employ hit squads and gangs to maintain control over routes, often leading to brutal confrontations and killings. Thus, the infrastructure itself becomes a battleground where power dynamics are violently contested. Infrastructure serves not merely as a physical manifestation of violence (whether structural or otherwise) but often as its functional medium. The material arrangement and structure of a landscape not only mirror but also strengthen social hierarchies, thus becoming a contributing element to repeated instances of harm (Rogers & O'Neill, 2012). In a context where legal means of accumulation are constrained, violence becomes the preferred mechanism for the maintenance of control and power. They capture and control lucrative routes and ranks by eliminating rivals and competitors (Seftel, 2021). This continuity serves the interests of an elite subset of taxi leadership, who often operate in an informal coalition with certain state and private sector actors, to the detriment of the majority of taxi operators, drivers and passengers (Seftel, 2021).

Infrastructural violence as a framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of violence and power within the taxi industry. By analysing the spatial and urban dimensions of transportation infrastructure, we are able to discern how physical spaces become entangled in power struggles and social conflicts. The violence within the industry is intrinsically linked to urban space because the conflict centres around routes, which are seen as valuable property. This spatial aspect of the conflict highlights how urban infrastructure is both a target and a tool in the violent contestations for control. This dual focus on internal dynamics and spatial relations provides a comprehensive understanding of how the taxi industry operates and its impact on urban environments. By examining these interconnected aspects, we can better appreciate the complexities and challenges of addressing violence and instability by actors in the taxi industry.

CHAPTER 3: A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF VIOLENCE

'*The taxi industry also has an important role to play in banishing poverty as the majority of South Africans still live on low incomes and are dependent on public transport. The ubiquitous taxi ranks throughout South Africa are literally lifelines of commerce and communication'* (Boudreaux, 2006:9).

'*We are the ones pushing the economy…everywhere, you see what happens when the taxi drivers are on strike – people get stuck and this interrupts the corporate world. …In rush hours, there has to be a difference between a public taxi and a private car…if you are loading 15-16 people, we should own the road'* (Randall, 2019:262).

This chapter delves into the economic and political dynamics of the taxi industry in South Africa, focusing on how informal regulation, weak state oversight, corruption and incompetence contribute to incentives for conflict and violence. The political economy of the taxi industry encourages the use of violence as a tool for securing economic benefits and power. The first section provides an overview of government attempts to regulate the industry since 1994, highlighting issues of incapacity and corruption that have led to regulatory failures. Following this, the chapter examines the resistance from within the taxi industry to these regulatory efforts. Drawing from Seftel (2021), the chapter argues that it is not merely a lack of formalisation or regulation by the state that perpetuates issues within the industry, but rather that the state's actions actively facilitate and sustain the existing problematic dynamics.

3.1. A History of Attempted Regulation

Between 1987 and 1994 official efforts to deal with the taxi industry were almost non-existent (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004). More generally, by their calculated inaction – which included a failure to disarm attackers or to respond to warnings of imminent attacks – the police fanned the conflict (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004). At worst, the police used their authority to promote rifts between associations, resulting in widespread allegations that the police manipulated the taxi

industry in terms of the broader political agenda of destabilising and dividing black communities and undermining the African National Congress (Dugard, 2001).

With the demise of apartheid in 1994 and the turmoil that followed the deregulation of the taxi industry, the newly established democratic government was compelled to intervene. In 1995, the government formed the National Taxi Task Team (NTTT) with the aim of resolving taxi conflicts and enhancing the industry's performance, particularly in terms of road safety (Molefe, 2016). The NTTT embarked on a series of public hearings nationwide, culminating in the publication of a comprehensive 300-page report with recommendations submitted to the Minister of Transport in 1996. The report underscored the failure of self-regulation within the taxi industry, citing a plethora of issues such as the proliferation of falsified or duplicated taxi permits, a fragmented industry structure lacking a unified national association and a dearth of essential skills ranging from business acumen to vehicle maintenance and safety protocols (Molefe, 2016). In light of the NTTT's findings, urgent re-regulation and formalisation of the taxi industry were recommended. Subsequently, the National Department of Transport crafted a White Paper outlining the proposed reforms. To implement the vision outlined in the White Paper while acknowledging constraints in resources, capacity and time, the Moving South Africa (MSA) project was launched in June 1997. The MSA's strategy, informed by a 20-year forecast aligned with global transport trends, aimed to steer the industry towards sustainable development (Molefe, 2016). The amalgamation of recommendations from the NTTT and the MSA paved the way for negotiations between the government and taxi organisations. However, by the time of the finalisation of the NTTT process in 1998, it was apparent that powerful interests had become vested in the mafia like use of violence as a means of suppressing competition. Many taxi associations and mother bodies actively opposed the government’s attempts at reregulation, sparking an escalation in taxi related violence between 1998 and 1999. Mindful of the apparent

failure of its re-regulation plans, in 1999 the government changed its focus to restructuring the industry through a recapitalisation process (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004).

The National Land Transport Transition Act of 2000 spells out the details of the Taxi Recapitalisation Program (TRP). There were three key provisions. The first was that all minibus taxi owners will be required to hand over their vehicles to the government, by a date not before 2008, in exchange for a government subsidy of R50,000. Taxi owners are then supposed to use their subsidies to buy new, bigger, safer 18 or 35- seat vehicles that are registered with the government (Bourdreaux, 2006). Second, minibus taxi operators must convert their old radius permits into route-based permits and, thirdly, the control over taxi ranks and routes will revert to local governments (Bourdreaux, 2006). Additionally, there would be the implementation of electronic fare collection systems to facilitate tax revenue tracking (thus far the industry had been cash only) and centralised vehicle tracking systems for improved movement and control (Taxi Recapitalisation: SANTACO Concerns and Recommendations: Paper prepared for Presentation to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Transport 20 September 2006). In a show of support, SANTACO (the leading taxi association at the time) endorsed the government's plans for industry recapitalisation and pledged collaboration in implementing the proposed program (Molefe, 2016). However, progress was hindered and after years of delays, the South African Cabinet announced a revised approach in 2004.

Over this time concerns about the feasibility of TRP began to grow amongst many stakeholders, particularly that the initiative did not address the key underlying issues that cause real problems in the minibus taxi industry. These issues included: the absence of recognition of the taxi associations' enforcement of route and rank access; a culture of official corruption; a serious problem of inadequate law enforcement; and restrictive labour and business laws that impose disproportionate costs on small businesses (Boudreaux, 2006). Another primary concern was

that the TRP empowered taxi associations as influential mediators between owners, government entities and commercial entities like banks and car manufacturers for the implementation of the program. Owners found themselves side-lined compared to the taxi associations and burdened with substantial debts for new vehicles and insurance (Molefe, 2016). One of the significant issues was the absence of accurate projections regarding potential job losses. This was due to the abandonment of a field study by the National Productivity Institute in early 2000s, due to purported threats against the research team by taxi owners (Molefe, 2016). Moreover, while the MSA project recommendations primarily focused on fleet replacement, critical issues such as destructive competition and route rationalisation remained unaddressed (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2016). Additionally, the recapitalisation program, with a planned capital injection of up to R7 billion, failed to consider the consolidation and coordination of other modes of public transport (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2016).

This oversight became glaringly evident when the government announced the establishment of the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) system in 2006, slated for implementation in 2009. The BRT system, viewed as a cheaper alternative targeting the same market as the taxi industry, enjoyed government subsidies that provided it with a competitive edge over taxis. Taxi associations decried the lack of thorough consultation by the government regarding the BRT's potential impact on the taxi industry, sparking vehement opposition and violent protests, including extensive taxi strikes in Johannesburg and Cape Town (Molefe, 2016). The strained relationship between SANTACO and the government further deteriorated as disagreements persisted over the TRP and BRT’s implementation, exacerbating existing tensions within the taxi industry. Various associations representing taxi drivers exerted pressure on both the government and industry organisations through negotiations and, at times, violence, underscoring their role as indispensable stakeholders in the recapitalisation process (Molefe, 2016). SANTACO lamented being marginalised from the TRP, stating that whenever progress seemed imminent, the program

faced derailment (Taxi Recapitalisation: SANTACO Concerns and Recommendations, 2006). Amidst the ongoing TRP struggles and escalating tensions with the government, the relationship between the taxi industry and government soured. As of 2024, the TRP remains ongoing, with multiple relaunches by the government. While the government asserts that a majority of taxi vehicles now meet safety requirements, progress has been sluggish. At its inception in 2006, the TRP aimed to scrap 135,000 old taxis, with a scrapping allowance initially set at R50,000. By early 2023, over 81,000 old taxi vehicles had been scrapped, albeit with the scrapping allowance increased to R151,000 (Taxi Recapitalisation: SANTACO Concerns and Recommendations, 2006). However, this achievement falls short of the original 2006 target, illustrating the program's slow progress eighteen years later, having achieved just over half its targets. In the 30 years of democracy, the TRP has been the state's most significant attempt at regulating the industry.

Today the minibus taxi industry operates under the National Land Transport Act, No. 5 of 2009, which regulates and governs the transportation of passengers for reward and whose objective is to provide for the transformation and restructuring of the national land transport system (Jacobs, 2004). The National Road Traffic Act, which provides for road traffic matters and applies uniformly throughout the Republic and for matters connected therewith, also governs the industry. However, in spite of the above pieces of legislation, one cannot say that the minibus taxi industry is regulated (Jacobs, 2024). Apart from provincial authorities currently responsible for the issuing of permits, there is little official involvement in regulating the minibus taxi industry. The government itself, in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province 2019, noted that 'despite the legal framework, the Minibus Taxi-Type Service is controlled by the Associations' (xvi).

3.2. Corruption and Incompetence

Most of the government's efforts, such as the TRP program above, have predominantly centred on improving the roadworthiness of vehicles in the taxi industry, with little to no attention given to the underlying issues of violence. This approach is perplexing, as it addresses only a fraction of the sector's multifaceted challenges. Ensuring that vehicles are roadworthy is undoubtedly important for passenger safety, but this narrow focus underscores the government's failure to tackle the deeper, more systemic problems. The regulatory measures implemented under the TRP primarily aim to replace old, unsafe vehicles with new, compliant ones (Bourdreaux, 2006). However, by concentrating almost exclusively on vehicle standards, the government has overlooked the critical factors driving the endemic violence within the industry, such as intense competition over routes, the lack of effective law enforcement and the role of taxi associations in perpetuating conflicts (Taxi Recapitalisation: SANTACO Concerns and Recommendations, 2006). This myopic strategy not only highlights the inadequacy of the government's intervention but also exacerbates the problem by ignoring the root causes. The persistent violence and unrest suggest that without addressing these fundamental issues, efforts to regulate the industry will remain incomplete and ineffective (Molefe, 2016). Thus, the government's focus on vehicle roadworthiness, while necessary, reveals a significant gap in policy and enforcement that continues to allow violence to flourish unchecked within the taxi industry.

This deficiency becomes particularly evident when examining the pervasive corruption and incompetence within the state, which significantly hinders efforts to mitigate violence and maintain order. Official corruption and collusion are major factors contributing to the continuation of taxi violence in South Africa. Dugard (2001) asserts that the ownership of taxis by police and other government personnel directly aids criminality in the industry and exacerbates attempts to resolve the violence (Dugard, 2001). During apartheid, corruption

primarily revolved around the issuing of permits, with bureaucrats selling permits at cut-price rates and police officers being paid to ignore illegal operators.

Since 1994, however, corruption has increasingly involved the ownership of taxis by officials. This shift has resulted in higher returns and consequently, a rise in the level of corruption. A major factor in the ongoing taxi violence and the government's failure to stop it is the ownership of taxis by officials, including police officers. Even transport officials acknowledge that police either turn a blind eye to taxi-related crime or are involved in the crime themselves (Dugard, 2001). Dugard's research provides detailed examples of how police officials leased government property, including firearms, bulletproof vests and police uniforms, to taxi associations for use in their attacks against rivals (Dugard, 2001). This problem extends beyond the police force, permeating the entire government bureaucracy (Dugard, 2001). Further compounding the issue, some law enforcers, tasked with policing public transport laws, routinely accept bribes from errant taxi operators. This practice has become so widespread that it is now described as the norm (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province 2019). Taxi drivers reportedly budget for daily encounters with law enforcement officers, anticipating the need to pay bribes. Bribery and extortion enable many taxi drivers to disobey road rules and operating conditions specified in their licences, confident that they can evade repercussions by paying off officers (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province 2019). Moreover, the quality and character of investigations into taxi-related crimes have been notably inadequate. Despite numerous cases reported each year, very few arrests are made, and even fewer prosecutions follow. Although there are instances of successful prosecutions, they represent only a small fraction of the total cases reported. The 2019 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus-Taxi Type Service in Gauteng highlighted several reasons for the lack of prosecutions in the industry. Key issues included the failure to

follow up on evidence and witness statements, not acting on prosecutorial instructions, and inefficient use of technical evidence. Investigations were often delayed, leading to the loss of witnesses and critical information. Witnesses were also frequently reluctant to testify due to fear of retaliation, causing many cases to be withdrawn by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). These factors collectively contribute to a significant number of unsuccessful prosecutions of perpetrators (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Minibus - Taxi Type Service Violence, Fatalities and Instability in the Gauteng Province 2019).

The combination of these factors – from procedural inefficiencies to systemic delays and the pervasive climate of fear – underscores a profound level of incompetence within the mechanisms designed to address taxi violence. This incompetence, coupled with the issues of corruption, creates an environment where taxi-related crimes are seldom prosecuted successfully, perpetuating a cycle of violence and instability within the industry. Addressing these challenges requires not only comprehensive reforms in regulatory and enforcement mechanisms but also a concerted effort to enhance the capacity, integrity and accountability of law enforcement and judicial institutions.

3.3. Resistance

The government is often accused of not doing enough to stop taxi violence, however it's important to note that many attempts to intervene in the taxi industry have upset fragile symmetries and have exacerbated existing conflicts and/or sparked new ones (Dugard, 2001). Dugard notes that government intervention invariably creates disturbances, from which certain protagonists stand to gain while others stand to lose, and this frequently leads to violence. Since 1994, government attempts first to re-regulate, and then to restructure the industry through the TRP, have in many areas worsened taxi-related conflict (Dugard, 2001). One only needs to look to recent news headlines in South Africa to see evidence of this.

In 2023 the City of Cape Town attempted to regulate the minibus taxi sector by announcing it would enforce bylaws by seizing unregistered minibuses, unroadworthy vehicles and abandoned minibuses and crack down on unlicensed drivers (Bhobo, 2023). The decision triggered a standoff between SANTACO and the police. The former believes that attempts to 'over-police' minibuses are seen as an insensitive attack on the poor Black working class community (Bhobo, 2023). As a result, city-owned buses were bombed, two people were shot dead and tens of thousands of low-income workers walked home (Bhobo, 2023). Police resorted to using live ammunition and stun grenades to quell the unrest. In the same year, SANTACO announced a one-week provincial shutdown in the Western Cape after failing to resolve various issues with the local government in Cape Town (Reuters, 2023). The grievances arose after a new municipal law gave local authorities the power to impound vehicles for violations such as driving without a licence or registration plates. The strike turned violent and five people were killed (Reuters, 2023). In 2024 taxi operators in Durban embarked on a strike over their long-distance taxis being impounded by the Road Traffic Inspectorate over permits. The strike brought large parts of the city to a standstill after they blocked the national highway using a truck and taxis (Nxumalo, 2024). The above are only a few examples of the many recent confrontations and violent altercations that have transpired between the minibus taxi industry and government authorities.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive exploration of the political economy of violence within South Africa's taxi industry. By dissecting the economic and political dynamics underpinning the industry, it becomes evident that informal regulation, weak state oversight, corruption and incompetence serve as key drivers of conflict and violence. Weak and failing states often lack the capacity to enforce law and order, creating a power vacuum that can be exploited by violent groups. This vacuum has thus been regulated, almost out of necessity, and

exploited, by the taxi industry. Government attempts to regulate the industry since 1994 have been marred by incapacity, corruption and resistance from within the taxi sector itself. While initiatives like the Taxi Recapitalisation Program (TRP) have sought to address certain challenges, they have largely overlooked deeper systemic issues, such as intense competition, lack of effective law enforcement, and the role of taxi associations in perpetuating conflicts. Moreover, pervasive corruption within state institutions, coupled with procedural inefficiencies and a climate of fear, hinders efforts to prosecute taxi-related crimes successfully. The government's narrow focus on improving vehicle roadworthiness, while important, fails to address the root causes of violence, highlighting a significant gap in policy and enforcement. Furthermore, interventions by the government often exacerbate existing conflicts, sparking violent confrontations between industry stakeholders and law enforcement. Despite these challenges, the taxi industry remains a vital component of South Africa's economy, providing essential transportation services and serving as lifelines of commerce and communication, particularly for low-income communities.

CHAPTER 4: CAPTIVE COMMUTERS

'The minibus taxi industry is riddled with reports of commuter unsafety at almost every point of the commuting system' (Martin, 2022:303).

Commuters making use of minibus taxis have been characterized as 'transit captives' (Moreira and Ceccato 2021: 204), a term that reflects their enforced reliance on this often dangerous and unstable transportation option due to a lack of alternatives. Captive users are defined as people who make use of a specific form of transport because of a lack of travel choices and they may continue to use the transport service, even if they are unhappy with the service (Jacobs, 2024). Commuters forced to use minibus taxis experience dangerous driving, unroadworthy vehicles, aggressive drivers and violent conflicts between taxis. This chapter aims to illuminate the impact of these conditions on commuters, focusing on their experiences with various forms of precarity. Special attention is given to the gendered dimensions of being a commuter in South Africa. The first part of the chapter explores road (un)safety through the roadworthiness of the taxi as well as driving behaviour, citing statistics from reports such as Arrive Alive. The second section of this chapter examines violence against commuters, particularly women, utilising current qualitative academic research.

4.1. Road (un)safety

South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa have notably high road fatality rates compared to the rest of the world (Booysen & Akpa, 2014). Often termed a 'coffins on wheels', the minibus taxi is particularly associated with unsafety (Barrett, 2003). A study by the Automobile Association of South Africa recorded an annual total of 70,000 minibus taxi crashes, indicating that taxis in South Africa are involved in crashes at double the rate of other passenger vehicles (Arrive Alive, 2021; Mmakwena, 2022). This high incidence can be attributed to two primary factors: the first

being the use of unroadworthy vehicles and the second being poor driving practices, implicating both vehicle owners and drivers in road safety issues.

Vehicle owners are notorious for neglecting maintenance, resulting in unsafe conditions (Eagle & Kwele, 2019). Maintenance of minibus taxis is generally poor; seatbelts are often non-existent or unused and taxis are frequently overloaded with passengers, exacerbating the risks. The cramped confines of minibus taxis, aggravated by drivers overloading passengers to maximise profitability, are a distinct spatial dimension of this mode of travel (Martin, 2022). Govender and Allopi (2006) analysed police accident reports and case studies, finding that overloading and poor tire quality significantly contributed to minibus taxi accidents. Although minibus taxis constitute only 4.5% of vehicles in South Africa, they are involved in 8.6% of crashes, reflecting a crash rate double that of other passenger vehicles (Govender & Allopi, 2006). As one commuter described:

> *'I've been in the worst kind of taxis. Sometimes the taxis don't have windows, and other ones you can literally see the tar underneath you as the taxi is driving!'* (Eagle & Kwele, 2019:8039).

Owners prioritize profit over safety, knowing they have a captive commuter market. Since commuters rely heavily on minibus taxis despite their poor condition, there is little incentive for owners to invest in vehicle maintenance. This industry-wide neglect of vehicle upkeep perpetuates a cycle where commuters continue to use unsafe services out of necessity.

The minibus taxi sector is also notorious for bad driving practices. Taxi drivers often engage in reckless and unlawful driving behaviours, contributing significantly to road fatalities (Booysen & Akpa, 2014; Eagle & Kwele, 2019). The stereotype of dangerous taxi drivers is well-supported by research. In a study by Booysen and Akpa (2014), GPS tracking devices recorded minibus taxi speeds and locations along a 1200km route between Cape Town and Mthatha. The results showed that taxis frequently exceeded the 100km/h speed limit, with a maximum speed of

159km/h (Booysen & Akpa, 2014). Taxis surpassed 100km/h over 45% of the time and exceeded 120km/h over 20% of the time (Booysen & Akpa, 2014). Further research by Sinclair and Imaniranzi (2015) into aggressive driving behaviours found that taxis were significantly more likely than other vehicles to obstruct traffic, disregard traffic signals and perform improper passing manoeuvres. Specifically, 2.4% of taxis obstructed traffic (compared to 0.06% of other vehicles), 1.9% ran red lights (versus 1.2% of other vehicles) and 8.2% performed improper passing manoeuvres (compared to 1.2% of other vehicles) (Sinclair & Imaniranzi, 2015). The most common aggressive behaviour was cutting in too close in front of other vehicles, reported by 40.4% of taxi drivers and experienced by 77.2% of other drivers (Sinclair & Imaniranzi, 2015). These aggressive driving behaviours, prompted by the need to maximise earnings by completing as many trips as possible, result in frequent and often fatal crashes. Speed and rapid passenger turnover are reflected in the colloquial terms drivers use to describe their vehicles. In an interview conducted by Barrett (2003), a Johannesburg driver referred to her kombi alternately as "*Lahla Mlenzi*" (throw a leg) or "*Bambalala siyajika*" (hold tight, we're turning).

Commuters are left with little choice but to use these dangerous services. In response, commuters attempt to exert some control over their safety. Research by Eagle and Kwele (2019) found that commuters try to assess the roadworthiness of vehicles and the reliability of drivers when selecting taxis, whenever possible (Eagle & Kwele, 2019). As one commuter recounted,

> *'Sometimes when you're in a taxi, like the previous day we're in a taxi and the driver was just driving kak, you know. The next day I'm gonna look carefully at the number plate. Next day I see a red taxi with the same number plate, you'll never see me in there again'* (Eagle & Kwele, 2019: 8049).

Another shared:

> *'There are certain taxis, neh . . . taxis that I don't get into (laughs). You can just see them from the outside that, this taxi, eish, it looks like the brakes can fail again'* (Eagle & Kwele, 2019:8049).

Commuters are acutely aware of the risks posed by unroadworthy vehicles and dangerous drivers. Because the same drivers and taxis operate the same routes every day, commuters become familiar with the quality of vehicles and behaviours of different drivers. They use their observations and experiences from their daily commutes to minimize future risks[1]. This familiarity allows them to make more informed decisions about which taxis to take, providing a semblance of control in an otherwise uncontrollable, unreliable and dangerous situation. Despite recognizing the dangers, they have no choice but to make do with the limited options available to them.

Taxi drivers are aware of the 'dangerous driving' stereotype that accompanies them and the risk and fatality that their behaviour creates. Conducting a bioethical study of work conditions, driver behaviour and road safety, Randall (2019) surveyed taxi drivers and their perceptions of taxi crashes. A large majority (96%) of the drivers expressed concern about minibus taxi crashes, with 84% indicating that they worried about crashes a lot and 12% indicating that they worried about them a bit (Randall, 2019). In their study the drivers were questioned on the factors they perceive as contributing to minibus crashes. The top factors chosen were bad weather (chosen by 90% of participants), drivers breaking laws (88%), taxis being in bad condition (70%), drivers speeding or making too many trips (66%) and drivers using alcohol or drugs (62%) (Randall, 2019). These results indicate that drivers largely attribute responsibility for taxi crashes to factors within their control. However, drivers often feel that they have no choice but to engage in this behaviour in order to meet demands and keep their jobs:

'Everything is time and money, which causes reckless driving…it is a pressure to work and get money.…In a situation where a driver is in front at the rank and loads first, he may then travel a certain route but on the way someone who was further back at the rank may pass him, which means he has to chase that guy to get back into the first position' (Randall, 2019: 238).

[1] For comparative literature on taxi drivers and trust, see Hamill, H & Gambetta, D. (2006) 'Who do Taxi Drivers Trust?' *Contexts*, 5(3), pp. 29-33 and Hamill, H & Gambetta, D. (2005) Streetwise: How Taxi Drivers Establish Customers' Trustworthiness (Russell Sage Foundation).

'Speeding happens during peak hours – for example, you may need to hurry and do 3 trips in the morning in peak period to cover the target…the owner needs the money' (Randall, 2019: 239).

'We work 6 days, or some work every day of the week…. you may get one day off per month. You must be at work at 5 [am] until 8 [pm], daily. This might be one cause of accidents – drivers are so exhausted, they don't get a rest.…Driving for 12-13 hours per day is very far different from the standard rate of 8 hours per day' (Randall, 2019: 243).

Randall asserts that drivers transport themselves along with their passengers, and whenever risky driving endangers the passengers' lives and safety, it also puts the drivers at risk. Except for the front seat passenger, drivers are probably more likely to die or sustain serious injuries than their passengers, especially in head-on collisions (Randall, 2019).

The daily life of a taxi driver in South Africa is fraught with challenges that go beyond merely driving from point A to point B. Drivers must navigate a complex web of expectations and demands from various stakeholders, all while contending with systemic issues that place immense pressure on them. This multifaceted struggle is vividly described by a former policeman, now a taxi driver, who captured the essence of their predicament:

'The job of a taxi driver is more stressful than police work. You have to be thinking of the owner, the passengers, and the traffic police all at the same time. The target system of payment makes you a slave. You are trapped because if you don't take the vehicle for repairs you are vulnerable for fines or bribes. And if you do take the vehicle for repairs then it's off the road and you're not paid. Drivers are seen as rude people, but they're not naturally rude. It's due to the pressures. Passengers are yelling at you because they're late for work and you've got the cops and employers on your neck' (Barrett, 2003:27).

It seems natural to assign the blame for dangerous driving to drivers. However, a more holistic understanding of the situation is required. Ian Loader notes that traffic injury and death tends to be reduced to, and presented as, dramatic instances of individual harm or crime (Loader, 2024). He argues instead for a 'theory of distributive agency' (Bennett 2009) in respect of road violence, which would include the decisions of motor manufacturers and lobbyists, the police, urban planners and traffic engineers, as well as dominant ideas of street design such as the 'ideology of flow' (Loader, 2024). In a similar vein, responsibility for minibus taxi crashes should not only

be attributed to drivers, but also to players and factors that are implicated in the causal chain of the minibus industry. This includes, but is not limited to, urban planning and the remnants of spatial apartheid; the state for their lack of oversight and corruption; and taxi associations and owners, as described in preceding chapters. It is necessary to broaden the scope of responsibility to account for all these interconnected elements to fully understand and address the pervasive issue of road safety in the minibus taxi industry.

4.2. Taxi Violence

Identified as noisy and uncomfortable, minibus taxis often feature blaring music, rude and unhelpful drivers and are overcrowded (Lucas, 2011). The experience of riding in a taxi is far from comfortable or luxurious, in stark contrast to the associations of riding taxis in the global North. Many low-paid workers rely on these taxis daily to commute long distances, often in extreme heat and at unsociable hours, such as early mornings or late nights after long shifts (Lucas, 2011). The minibus taxi commute is not only unpleasant but can also be deadly. In the post-apartheid era, commuters have been primary victims of violence, frequently caught in the crossfire of gun battles between taxi associations (Dugard, 2001).

Zissis, Ensink, and Robertson (2010) investigated distress symptoms among youth exposed to taxi violence in Khayelitsha, a South African peri-urban settlement. Their findings were alarming: 61% reported personal exposure to taxi violence, 79% had heard shootings at taxi ranks and 46% had witnessed taxi shootings. Additionally, 22%, 23%, and 22% reported knowing someone who had been shot at, wounded, or killed while traveling in a taxi, respectively (Zissis, Ensink & Robertson, 2010). Nearly all subjects (98%) reported distress symptoms. This data indicates that taxi violence is not an occasional occurrence but a pervasive part of the commuter experience, with significant social, economic and emotional consequences,

particularly in impoverished communities prone to further violence and trauma (Zissis, Ensink & Robertson, 2010).

The violence experienced by women is particularly severe. In South Africa, being female is a major risk factor for societal violence (Eagle & Kwele, 2019). The endemic nature of sexual violence has led scholars to describe South Africa's gender relations as characterized by a pervasive 'rape culture', where the daily reality for women, especially structurally marginalized black women, includes the threat of gender-based violence (Martin, 2022). Academic work and activism have highlighted the habitual misogyny and violence women face in both domestic and public spaces, with minibus taxis being no exception (Boonzaier & Van Niekerk, 2018; Martin, 2022). The minibus taxi industry is described as patriarchal and misogynistic (Gibbs, 2014). Taxi owners, drivers and queue marshals are predominantly male and territorial control is often maintained through violence (Dugard, 2001; Gibbs, 2014; Eagle & Kwele, 2019). Women frequently experience harassment from both male passengers and drivers, ranging from verbal abuse to physical assaults (Ngubane, 2016). In a 2021 study, Eagle and Kwele conducted interviews with black female students at a Johannesburg university, revealing that women in the taxi space face various forms of gender-related trauma and threats, including physical, psychological, economic and sexual harm. Women feel intimidated and constrained, and the public nature of these threats often adds a sense of shame or helplessness when others do not intervene (Eagle & Kwele, 2019). One interviewee shared:

> *'This one instance where I was the last one on the taxi, and usually I am not. So I start freaking out and thinking "okay, what if this guy decides to just kidnap me and run off with me in this taxi now?" So this driver, because I have big breasts, he puts his hand on my chest and then he laughs about it'* (Eagle & Kwele, 2019:8044).

Women are aware of the dangers and modify their behaviours to improve their safety. Again, we see commuters performing small acts to gain a sense of control in an otherwise uncontrollable situation. For instance, they may avoid taxis with only male passengers to feel safer:

'But I'm uncomfortable with taxis where there are just men . . . I will never climb into a taxi where I see that there are just men and just me. No' (Eagle & Kwele, 2019:8044).

And adjust their behaviour:

'You have to walk in a certain way. You just don't walk timidly. You just have to walk like "I know what I'm doing, I know where I'm going and I won't take no nonsense". You know like you just have to project this confidence, like just make people know that they mustn't mess with you' (Eagle & Kwele, 2019:8051).

A study by Martin in 2022 examined women's experiences of the threat of sexual violence while commuting in minibus taxis. He argues that space is not merely a backdrop to violence but actively shapes the experience of violence against women, with minibus taxis reinforcing gendered and racialized vulnerabilities (Martin, 2022). It 'brings to direct attention how minibus taxis are themselves gendered and gendering mobilities, with/in which gendered subjectivities and spaces are relationally reconstituted' (Martin, 2022:311). The daily commute for South African women of colour in minibus taxis is often marked by a real and anticipated sense of unsafety, as highlighted by the gender advocacy organisation Sonke Gender Justice. Their brief, 'Combatting gender-based violence through safer public transport: A policy shift', underscores the lack of gender-specific considerations in public transport policies, advocating for strategies to address gender-based violence and harassment (Sonke Gender Justice 2020: 3; Martin, 2022).

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter emphasizes the significance of road accidents, fatalities, crime and violence occurring within the taxi industry. It is important to note that neither category outweighs the other, and it is not productive to differentiate between them. Both represent distinct yet interconnected forms of harm which commuters must endure. Commuters, positioned at the very bottom of the minibus taxi hierarchy, are beholden to the decisions made by owners and drivers. They are transit captives who must endure daily risks of violence, from the roadworthiness of vehicles and dangerous driving to physical violence. Despite their lack of control, they resist the

system in small ways, attempting to exert a sense of agency over their circumstances. The myriad of issues plaguing the taxi industry – lack of regulation, intense competition, violence and exploitation – converge in the commuter experience, rendering it neither safe nor enjoyable. At best, commuting via minibus taxi is uncomfortable. At worst, it is deadly. Commuters are at the intersection of the multitude of minibus taxi problems, and they bear the brunt of these systemic failures most acutely.

CONCLUSION

Key findings

In the labyrinthine world of South African public transport, the minibus taxi reigns supreme, a ubiquitous symbol of mobility, entrepreneurship, and, all too often, violence. This dissertation has undertaken a journey through the complex history, intricate relationships and fraught political economy that have shaped this industry into a space where violence is not merely an unintended consequence but an embedded operational tool. By tracing the roots of this violence to the industry's apartheid-era origins, examining the actions of key stakeholders and situating these dynamics within a broader context of regulation, corruption and resistance, this dissertation unveils a mobility system characterized by instability and harm, with commuters bearing the brunt of its failures.

The path to understanding the industry's troubled present begins in the past, where the seeds of conflict were sown in the soil of apartheid's discriminatory policies. As the Group Areas Act confined black communities to the peripheries of cities, a desperate need for alternative transport arose, setting the stage for the birth of the minibus taxi. However, it was the fateful decision to deregulate the industry in 1987 that unleashed a proliferation of operators and associations, igniting intense competition and conflict. This critical juncture, as revealed through the lens of path dependence, locked the industry into a trajectory defined by informality, fragmentation and violence. Within this fractured landscape, a cast of actors – associations, owners, and drivers – wield violence as a tool to navigate the challenges of the industry. Associations fiercely guard lucrative taxi routes like strategic assets, deploying hitmen and forging alliances with gangs to maintain their dominance. Owners and drivers, caught in a web of hierarchical power dynamics and pervasive labour exploitation, find themselves at odds. Through an infrastructural lens, we see how urban space itself becomes a battleground, with taxi ranks and routes transformed into

arenas where power is violently contested. In the minibus taxi industry, infrastructure serves not merely as a physical manifestation of violence (whether structural or otherwise) but as its functional medium. These micro-level dynamics are inextricably linked to the macro-level political economy of the industry, a realm where attempts at regulation are met with incapacity, corruption and fierce resistance. The state's myopic focus on vehicle roadworthiness belies the deeper issues of cut-throat competition and weak oversight, while pervasive corruption and procedural inefficiencies form a bulwark against the prosecution of taxi-related crimes. Yet, amidst this volatility, the industry remains an economic lifeline, highlighting the complex incentives that keep stakeholders invested in the status quo. At the heart of this turmoil are the captive commuters, whose daily experiences lay bare the human cost of the industry's dysfunction. From unroadworthy vehicles and reckless driving to physical assaults and the ever-present spectre of gender-based violence, they are forced to navigate a dangerous landscape with few alternatives. Yet, even in their vulnerability, they find ways to resist, carving out small spaces of agency in a system that seems intent on denying them.

The picture that emerges from this analysis is one of a transport system where violence is not an aberration but a fundamental feature, a product of the complex interplay of history, actors, infrastructure and political economy. Efforts to address this violence must confront these deep-rooted complexities, recognizing that piecemeal interventions are likely to fall short.

Contributions

To date, criminological research has neglected the significant toll that motor vehicles take on human life and the environment. From traffic accidents and fatalities to air pollution and carbon emissions, the automobile has long been a source of harm that is often normalized or rendered invisible in criminological discourse (Loader, 2025 (*forthcoming*)). By centring the minibus taxi as the focal point of my analysis, this dissertation brings these often-overlooked harms to the

forefront, compelling us to reckon with the violence and social costs that are embedded in our systems of mobility and transportation. This research highlights how the minibus taxi industry, while providing a vital service to millions of South Africans, also perpetuates a range of harms that are structural, systemic and deeply entangled with broader issues of inequality, informality and urban governance. In doing so, this paper opens up new avenues for criminological inquiry into urban safety that take seriously the role of automobility in shaping patterns of harm, risk and vulnerability, particularly in the context of the Global South. This expanded focus is crucial for developing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of violence and social harm in contemporary societies, and for imagining alternative futures that prioritize safety and sustainability in mobility.

Limitations and Recommendations

While this paper draws on a range of secondary sources, including academic literature and news reports, it would have benefited from primary data, such as interviews with taxi owners, drivers, commuters and state officials. Their direct experiences and perspectives would have enriched analysis and provided additional nuance. This dissertation made a decision to focus specifically on the South African context, due to the unique history and dynamics of the taxi industry in the country. However, a comparative analysis with other countries that have similar informal transport systems (such as Kenya's '*matatus'*, the '*jeepneys'* of the Philippines or taximen in Mumbai[2]) may provide valuable insights and lessons for future research.

Reviewing literature for this dissertation revealed a significant gap in the current research on South Africa's minibus taxi industry: the absence of perspectives from law enforcement and government officials responsible for regulating the sector. While there is growing literature on

[2] See Tarini Bedi (2022) Mumbai Taximen: Autobiographies and Automobilities in India (University of Washington Press) and Tarini Bedi (2023) 'Bumpy Roads, Dusty Air: Gadbad and the Sensate Ecologies of Driving Work in Contemporary Mumbai' *Cultural Anthropolgy*, 38(1), pp. 60–86.

the experiences of commuters, drivers and taxi owners, the voices of those tasked with overseeing the industry remain largely unheard. Understanding the challenges, constraints and motivations of these key stakeholders is crucial for developing effective strategies to address the violence, informality and lack of safety in the minibus taxi sector. Future research should prioritize engaging with police officers and government regulators, using qualitative methods to gain insight into their experiences and decision-making processes. By bringing these perspectives into dialogue with those of other actors in the industry, scholars can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play and identify opportunities for collaborative, inclusive solutions that prioritize the safety and well-being of all those who depend on this essential mode of transportation.

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