

FOCUS

UPM Newsletter — November 2015



A UPM & Masifunde report on the Xenophobic attacks in Grahamstown

The UPM is sponsored by

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
SOUTHERN AFRICA

Our city of shame

By Pedro Tabensky
Allan Grey Centre for
Leadership Ethics

Our capacity to understand gives out when multitudes march like a colony of killer ants on scores of spaza shops owned primarily by expats of Muslim background strangely accused – accusations justified by inscrutable evidenced, by dark signs intelligible only to those living in a world imbued with magic, suspicion, even envy – of killing and maiming six local residents for muti. What I just stated is not quite right. Actually, it seems that predominently, but not entirely consistently, one man of Pakistani origin stood accused in the eyes of the mob, the owner of the shop that was either looted first or second. But who can say where the rumour started that implicated this man and, by extention – expressing unfathomable logic – everyone else who owns a spaza shop and is not, in the eyes of those who behaved as if possessed, South African enough?

The spark that led to the temporary suspension of rational life started with a taxi protest in Grahamstown on 21 October. The protest was allegedly about municipal incompetence expressed by the high levels of crime and the fields of potholes that once were roads. Taxis bore slogans such as mabahambe ('they must go') and abashwe ('they must burn'). The looting started in town, under the nose of the police who did little to stop them – who by omission seemed to condone the actions.

I have heard many rumours, strange rumours, imbued with magic, of body parts here and there, of vehicles dripping in blood, in short, of dark powers and even darker motives. Rumours everywhere, suddenly, moving swiftly from ear to ear and mutating in ghastly ways



Abandoned and bare. A formerly active shop lies broken and empty after xenophobic attacks forced the owners to gather what they could and run.

Photo Mia van der Merwe

the greater the distance from the original pronouncement.

And, suddenly, the spark, the looting of shops in town and the consequent march of the looters to the township, inspiring those who were already convinced by the murmurings that it was time to act, time to empty shops (In the name of justice?)! But what grounded such conviction. What sort of evidence set all of this in motion? Perhaps this is the wrong question to ask. Perhaps the rationale that set it all in motion is the rationale of fear and need, that this is our chance to loot, that I want to loot, that I don't like strangers who are doing better than I (and hence must be vermin), that my need to explain the killings and my desire to have things that my poverty prevents me from having must converge, and they converge in a homogenous space of agreement. Together we are stronger, together we are right, together we are the righteous, indeed the caretakers of truth.

Is it conceivable that much the same would have happened if the

muti suspect were the owner of one of the large shops in town? I suspect not. And if I am right, what does this mean?

One must also wonder where such conviction comes from. How is it that suddenly hundreds become utterly convinced of the improbable, entirely unable, indeed unwilling, to listen to countervailing evidence?

And one must ask what mass looting has to do with putting a stop to what the rumour treadmill has convinced hundreds either that an Asian psychopathic muti murderer is on the loose or, even worse, a fraternity of such psychopaths. And one must ask what such looting has to do with settling scores. One must wonder and yet such wonderings are bound to lead us along paths that leave us mystified.

In a recent municipal meeting with township residents, a councilor agrees with many of those present that 'they' must go. And a religious minister associated with the ruling party defends the right of taverns to

continued on page 3



Dream turned to nightmare. Children play in the remains of a looted store. Photo Mia van der Merwe

continued from page 2

remain open while proclaiming that the allegedly unhygienic spaza shops where owners often live and eke out living must go. The language of hygiene is telling. This is the language of mass murder, the language that turns a human being in the eyes of their assailants into vermin.

Apartheid schemas everywhere. Hundreds of years of bad habits of thought and affect, leading us instinctively to carve out humanity into distinct categories where those belonging a given category think of themselves as good and those outside are objects of suspicion and derision, often vermin if emotions are high. Makwerekwere!

How can we win in the context of this violence, this loss of our spiritual integrity? Where can we go from here, our dignity, our pride, the sense that we are, in some way, custodians of the good. Where has all this gone? How can we bring it back?

Belligerence conceals police inaction

By Paddy O' Halloran

While police monitored a peaceful and legal protest by Rhodes University students and staff at the western end of Grahamstown, shops were being attacked and looted across town. This was despite the fact that members of the Unemployed People's Movement had approached the police a week earlier with concerns that anxiety and rumours over a number of murders involving mutilations could lead to xenophobic attacks if they went unaddressed.

On Monday 19 October 2015, Grahamstown police reinforced by officers and equipment from East London twice dispersed protesting students at Eastcape Midlands College (EMC). Students at the college were protesting corruption by their institution's administration. They had been joined by students from Rhodes University, down the hill, who had shut down their institution early in the morning as part of the national protest against unaffordable tertiary education. The police threw stun grenades and, in the second dispersal, chased students with a water cannon using chemical water that caused severe itching. When the students retreated to the Rhodes University campus, the police gathered in force at the campus entrance until the vice-chancellor went to the police station to officially request that they stand down. Elsewhere in South Africa so far this week — in Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Port Elizabeth — protesting students and academics have been met with arrest, tear gas, stun grenades, and rubber bullets. With the exception

of Rhodes, the reaction by state and universities has been to break the protests using force.

In Grahamstown, police belligerence masks a dangerous lack of police action. As quick as the police were to send personnel, vehicles, and equipment to confront the students, they were far more nonchalant about serious community concerns.

Recently, a number of murders involving mutilations have spread fear among the residents of Grahamstown's townships.

The Unemployed People's Movement (UPM) told police that the anxiety and rumours caused by the murders could lead to xenophobic attacks if they went unaddressed. On 12 October, they called a community meeting at which the police could respond. The police representatives did not appear until they were called, and arrived an hour-and-a-half late.

Said UPM organiser Ayanda Kota: "Subsequent to that we went to the same person [at] the police station and raised our concerns. Nothing was done." The lack of action by the police has led to terrible consequences for Grahamstown.

Since the early afternoon of Wednesday, 21 October, Grahamstown has been the site of xenophobic attacks on shop owners and township residents from other countries and other parts of South Africa. While police monitored a peaceful and legal protest by Rhodes students and staff at the western end of the city, shops were attacked and looted across town. UPM members stood between flying bricks and the shopfronts,

continued on page 5

Voices from Africa

We used to be accepted

Before the attacks we were accepted in the community, but we were called by names, referred to as the woman of Amakwerekwere (derogatory name, like Kaffir). We were also subjected to sexist comments that we are married to brothers from the South because of money not that we love them. There were robbery incidents but they were not of grave concern.

We had accounts for pensioners; we treated them as our mothers, so we gave them everything on credit, including pre-paid electricity at zero interests. Many households are dependent on grant money, during the month many households struggle with basic essentials, like bread, electricity, etc.

We were aware of the rumours but we did not imagine that things would be this terrible. This has really left a hole in our hearts. It is painful not to be treated as a human being. You feel you are hunted like an animal, people live off you.

Then, on 21 October 2015, I have never felt so helpless in my entire life. That morning I remember there was a taxi strike which the taxis were complaining about potholes and crime in the township. I closed my shop before they could come, others were on top of the roof, removing the roof, trying to force their way inside whilst others were forcing their way through the door. I was inside the shop calling Hi Tech and police, they were calling me be bitch, a hoe, mother fucker to open, as they came in I asked for forgiveness and went out, screaming and shocked.

I am happy my husband was not there, he is very stubborn; maybe they could have assaulted him. In the evening I went to see and it was



Saying NO! Wives of the displaced shop owners, supported by members of the Grahamstown community, making their voices heard.

vandalized, there was nothing left, not even a fridge, a television, a mattress, the shop was empty, only walls left.

For some time I struggled to sleep at night. I have been abused as a woman both emotionally and physically. My child can't go to school because of the rumour, she is not safe and the department of education has done nothing to guarantee the safety of my child. I am now staying with my relatives and they are very supportive.

We spend time at the offices of Masifunde Education & Development project Trust and the Unemployed Peoples Movement (UPM). People in the township said we must go to offices of UPM for help, we did not know the offices so they gave us numbers to call. So we were there on the 22 October 2015.

They talked to us and encouraged us, asking us not to despair. They arranged a meeting with other organizations like Masifunde, Public Service Accountable Moniot (PSAM), and Legal Resources Centre (LRC). Since then we have been with both UPM and Masifunde, we eat our breakfast, lunch and dinner at Masifunde. Black Students Movement of Rhodes University has been with us as well, supporting us.

We go to township and distribute flyers with UPM, educating the community; we do interviews and call meetings. We now call ourselves voices of Africa. Our many thanks to Richard Pithouse, Siviwe , Paddy, May, Jane.

We are now working on re-integration with Masifunde and UPM. We want to be re-integrated back to the community.

continued from page 3

pleading with the attackers to stop or helping the people inside to escape.

Police responded to UPM's call, but when people told the police officers they were going to the township to loot shops, they were allowed to proceed. No one was arrested on the spot in spite of the announcement of criminal intent.

Local newspaper Grocott's Mail reports that 95 arrests have been made over the looting of 75 shops and that police increased their presence in Grahamstown overnight. This report fails to note that the police had at least a week to attend to the community's call for help.

In spite of arresting almost 100 people, the police have failed the Grahamstown community. Alerted to legitimate fears, they did not respect the people the people of Grahamstown and UPM enough to engage with them about either the murders or the possibility of xenophobic attacks. Meanwhile, students have been injured while fleeing from police at EMC.

The police clearly do not serve the community. They have demonstrated that their only function is to control the community. Rather than listening to the people, working to hold the community together, and preventing the xenophobic attacks, the police responded as armed enforcers once violence had already broken out, shops had been ruined and robbed, and the community endangered. The urgency with which police hurried to corral the protesting student contrasts starkly with their initial response to violent looters – whom they let go to continue looting in the township.

Equipment such as the armoured water cannon signifies the intent and function of the police not as community members but as community controllers.

The last time the water cannon that was used against students on Monday came to Grahamstown from East London was in August, during a peaceful protest organised by UPM against corruption in the municipality. That day, armoured police vehicles were arrayed in force across High Street in front of City Hall, and police in riot gear formed a cordon blocking the building's entrance. Ironically, the very people who had to march up to those armed police to protest against municipal crime had to protect local people in spite of the police when the attacks began on Wednesday. They were the same people who had had the community's safety in mind for more than a week before the attacks while the police had been indifferent.

The spate of police violence against protesting students across the country, including in Grahamstown on Monday, does not demonstrate the extent to which police have failed their communities. Indeed, the repression of student protests conceals the greater failures while contributing to them. In Grahamstown, as police waste their time intimidating, chasing, and shooting at young black students protesting in a wealthy quarter of town, they ignore the legitimate fears of township residents and allow preventable violence to ruin people's lives.

It was only yesterday
When the whole world
The greens and the reds and the pink
All shades of convictions and ethics
In a literal and symbolic exposition
Of the existence of three worlds in
one nation
And the yawning chasm in the
quality of life
Of the poors and the rich in this
great country
Distinguished for its penchant
for mix-masala
Marched to opulent Sandton
Via muddy terraces & falling shacks
Academic lenses, activist eyes
Tourist cameras and researchers videos
Zooming on children licking dry fingers
for lollipop & Yuskei River
humming a distressed Elegy to
people who
Fear summer for torrents
Of rain filtering in
Like water through a sieve
And cringe at the approach
Of the winter that adds coldness to
the long list
Of the natural and nurtured
Hostilities against the poorest of the poor
But now the poors of Alexandra
Bay for the blood of the poors of
Zimbabwe\ Nigeria\ Congo \ Somalia
Little urchins are verbal assassins
The target of their obnoxious vitriol is
not the system
As we tremble in worship of
the establishment
That forever quarantines us
on the periphery
And shudder to confront the demons
within us
We scrape our mother's wombs for
new soft targets
To turn our rage against our newly-found
national scapegoat
AMAKWEREKWERE

My business is my life

Mr. Kaleem shop is about 50 meters from the Grahamstown Police Station. He has 3 kids, 13 years, 11 years and 10 years. They are studying in the former Model C Schools.

On the day of the looting, on the 21 October 2015, his shop not affected, he was OK. It's among the shops that UPM managed to save on the first day of the looting.

His shop was looted on the second day, on the 22 October 2015. He is rightly angry and is also so devastated, that he lost an amount of R250 000 in stock, damages and stolen tills. In most of the meetings he argues: "On the first day I understand that the police were not ready for this, but on the second day how come my shop is vandalized and looted, because they should have had the plan. What is more devastating is that my shop is only meters from the police station. I am very disappointed and angry".

The police have, and continue to make a fair point that they were able to save lives on the day. However Mr Kaleem has different views altogether and shares different sentiments: he says "my business is my life. Don't tell me that you have saved my life when I have nothing, I have lost everything that I have worked hard for".

He argues his rent is R7 000 monthly, he must pay for kid's school fees which amount to R8 000 monthly and other expenses like petrol and groceries. "The police and the municipality have failed us – have failed everybody" insists Mr. Kaleem. "They haven't even contributed a cent since this disaster and yet they have a department for disaster, all they do is talk and the talk is cheap".

He concludes that he wishes to thank all the organizations and people who supported them, UPM, Masifunde, the Legal Resource Centre (LRC) and Public Social Accountability Monitor (PSAM) including



One of the many shops which, like Mr Karim's, had to be quickly evacuated and which were looted afterwards. Photo by Mia van der Merwe.

Mr. Tariq Hayet for accommodating people at no cost during the crisis.

Indeed our municipality demonstrated a lack of leadership and vision during this crisis. They were neither here nor there.

It was a major blow when they could not produce a re-integration plan, publicly admitting that they have no plan. This is an indictment

on and a shame for our city. This is an illustration of a clueless leadership.

The president of this country sums it eloquently in his address in Durban, that the when he said "I argued one time with someone who said the country comes first and I said as much as I understand that, I think my organization, the ANC, comes first."

Aviwe Duma was born in 1995 in Zolani informal settlement and is a grade 12 student at Kuthliso Daniels High School. Her mother died when Aviwe was only 14 years old.

After the death of her mother, like any other working class child, Aviwe was struggling financially she had no support whatsoever. She moved in to her aunt's house in Q Street.

A decision was taken to lease the house in Zolani to one of our brothers from Bangladesh and to use the money (R500) to support Aviwe. Since then the income has made a difference in Aviwe's life.

Aviwe said that she used her money to buy her toiletries and electricity for her aunt and the shop owner allowed her to take groceries every month for free. Not only did they give her groceries, but the wife of the shop owner was responsible for school fees and other expenses for the school including money to apply for different universities.

"When the looting occurred on the 21st October 2015 I was at school, I ran to my mother's house in Zolani, it was vandalized, they had already taken everything including stuff that belonged to my mother – but was used by the tenants, her fridge, kettle, iron and other stuff. I was devastated and crying. I asked the community bring back the stuff that belonged to my mother and indeed I found the fridge in the street the next day," said Aviwe.

"If they don't come back my life would be condemned to from bad to worse, who is going to support me and my aunt. I did not eat the entire morning because we don't have food. What we have done to deserve this and what have they done to be treated as less than human beings as well. Aren't we all human beings? If you cut me, my blood is red, if you cut them the also bleed the red blood, because we are all human beings first and foremost".

Aviwe's story is a confirmation that South Africans live below poverty line. According to the report, *Methodological report on rebasing*

We are all human



of national poverty lines and development of pilot provincial poverty lines; "... the latest update [from Stats SA] estimating that in 2014 the food poverty line is R400 per capita per month while the lower and upper bound poverty lines are R544 and R753 per capita per month, respectively."

Our people live in extreme and abject poverty and this is a crisis. In our city unemployment is estimated to be hovering around 70%. We have a municipality that is falling under the weight of corruption. This can't go on.

Instead of directing our anger at, and assaulting our working class brothers we should be uniting and confronting the capital and its managers – our government. We should be joining the students in demanding free education and a labour-absorbing economy. Our economy needs to be reorganised into an economy that will put people first – not the profit. We should be thinking of a government that will listen to



people not the bosses.

Capitalism has failed humanity, it has created crisis after crisis, wars, unemployment, poverty, inequalities and massacres like the Marikana Massacre. We need an alternative economic system and that is Socialism, Socialism and Socialism. Period!

WE ARE ALL IMMIGRANTS

A COLLABORATIVE POEM

We are all immigrants.
 We are all refugees.
 We are all outsiders
 We are all outsiders
 You are doing it again nameless child of Africa
 Ungivusel' amanzeba
 Your vampire empire broke my uncle's bones and scattered them in Tanzania
 If one of those immigrants you kill today carries his spirit,
 You are killing him again like that day in Marikana
 Ungivusel' amanzeba
 Azania we are all immigrants.
 We are all refugees.
 We are all outsiders
 They belong like us at the dinner table with us they are us,
 Don't make a fuss we are like them they are us
 They are the feet that brought us to meet us at the end of the rainbow where we
 found no gold they said be humble and learn from us our hearts are cold,
 We look at them with disgust ego constructed by foreign ego till the
 manufacturer takes his and we go schizo burn ourselves in the inferno fire
 burn fire burn fire burn
 suicide it is a suicide people killing themselves for promised gold the soul
 searching but cannot escape the hold you fled through the night,
 Clutching your two year old to your body i tossed and turned in the night,
 Fighting off dreams that oppressed my sleep i awoke to the news that you were
 hounded, hacked,
 Brutalized and burned you awoke to the reality.
 Perhaps we each sat that Sunday morning, me in my bed, you in an overcrowded
 tent, bewildered, bamboozled, battered and betrayed no longer at ease with
 ourselves and others faithless, frustrated, feral and fearful benign cells in the
 malignant mass of xenophobia

we are all immigrants.
 We are all refugees.
 We are all outsiders there are no immigrants.
 There are no refugees.
 We are all insiders.
 We are all insiders now that you neighbors of Maluti have received those
 bleeding actions as we pasted our disgust and lack of compassion.
 Are we ready as we should be to receive coffins and body parts?
 Remember already Maluti great fore-parents' bones lay bare all over Gondwana
 foothills and plain fields hear mount Tsion in Ethiopia calling out listen to
 Kilimanjaro fuming are we going to suffocate our own living?

We are all immigrants.
 We are all refugees.
 We are all outsiders there are no immigrants.
 There are no refugees.
 We are all insiders.
 We are all insiders.