

# 'Many shades of the truth': THE RAMAPHOSA CASE STUDY

by Nobayethi Dube



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**ATLANTIC**  
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Ramaphosa is a township situated in the East Rand under Ekurhuleni municipality. The township is part of Ward 42. In May 2008, Ramaphosa experienced violence which has been described as quite intense by some analysts as well as newspapers. A number of people lost their dwellings, were displaced and some were killed. There are a number of complex findings in the research particularly when it comes to what led to the violence – simply put – everyone has their own version of what happened. The research also shows that the community of Ramaphosa is uncertain about whether the violence will take place and feels alone.

The research found that the churches, community based organisations and ordinary citizens particularly from Reiger Park provided assistance. The churches from Reiger Park were the most organised. On 17 May 2008 they became aware that a number of displaced foreign nationals had taken refuge at the Reiger Park police station. A sms was sent out by one of the church leaders informing them of what was happening. A task team was set up to look at the different areas such as feeding the displaced, medical attention counselling and so on. The task team went as far as assisting those that wanted to go back to their countries.

The table below briefly set out the issue/problematic identified from the research data, then the recommendation

# Problems & recommendations

A number of churches, community based organisations and ordinary citizens from Reiger Park provided assistance to those that were affected by the violence.

- A need to strengthen such activities. This also opens space for civil society to engage and learn from those that responded to the plight of foreign nationals in Ramaphosa.

To date the community of Ramaphosa feels that it is misunderstood and has been unfairly blamed for the violence that took place.

- It is important that realistic programmes be undertaken to allow the community to talk and engage particularly with government. This will be a process.

Foreign nationals are slowly trickling back to Ramaphosa with some approaching local leaders to give back their shacks. This can only fuel violence.

- An urgent need to address issues of integration. Local government and other authorities need to ensure that this takes place orderly. This is again an opportunity for CSOs to work with other stakeholders.

The local police have been blamed for the manner in which they handled the situation. A further finding is that to date some of the families are not satisfied with the manner in which the police are handling their cases.

- An urgent need for the security cluster to look at how police deal with violence in communities on the ground. An important need for thorough investigations to be made particularly where perpetrators are known.

The media was seen to be biased and reporting only sensational issues.

- In reporting on some sites has the media been insensitive when reporting? The media needs to be responsible when reporting stories. There is also a need for the media to protect it's source of information.

In May 2008 violence against foreign nationals dominated media both print and radio. Different informal settlements and townships in South Africa were affected including Ramaphosa in the East Rand.

Ramaphosa experienced intense violence in the weekend of 16 May 2008 to 18 May 2008. **A number of people were killed during the violence although no official number has been provided.**

One of the respondents that I spoke to mentioned that about twelve people were killed. A number of foreign nationals were displaced and some left their shacks and rented places. A number of them have since been returned to their respective countries.

This paper is part of a broader research on the response of South African civil society to the xenophobic violence in 2008. The paper provides a detail of responses particularly in Ramaphosa. In

this paper I also have tried to understand how the community functions now after the violence and whether they think the violence could happen again. In this paper I also try to detail the causes that led to the violence in the area.

The violence that took place affected particularly the informal settlement section which is called Road Reserve and part of the RDP section. It should be noted that it was not easy to access the community as they still have very high levels of mistrust – especially to an outsider.

## Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for this case study was that I would research Ramaphosa a site situated near Germiston South that was affected by the violence in May 2008. The initial TOR indicated that Ramaphosa was the only site that had indicated that they would not take back the foreigners and media reports had also indicated that this area was the only place where foreigners were not welcomed back<sup>1</sup>. This research indicates otherwise.

Although the main focus of the study was to look and map responses from civil society to a large extent the study also looked:

- › Causal factors;
- › The history of the area;
- › Community/Local organizing;
- › Gender;
- › Social cohesion;
- › The accuracy of media reports;
- › The response by civil society;
- › Community organising
- › Post xenophobia and so on.

It is important to note that although the paper tries to cover every theme as much as possible this has been difficult. The difficulty lies in the fact that during the interviews respondents spoke more passionately about areas in which they felt comfortable and at times ignored some of the questions.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Mail&Guardian* May 15 to 21 2009.

# Methodology

The main methodology for collecting data on Ramaphosa was through in-depth interviews (idis'). In the TOR I had indicated that I would speak to a number of informants who would be able to provide information on the area. The targeted people were:

- Community structures;
- Ward councillors;
- Informal trader's committee (if it is still in existence);
- Victims of violence;
- Perpetrators;
- Local government;
- The police and metro police;
- Churches in the area; and
- Civil organisations.

The situation on the ground dictated otherwise as I could not access everyone on the ground. I gained access through the Community Development Worker (CDW) who referred me to a local organisation that had been actively involved in assisting families that had lost family members during the violence. The organisation is called Khayelisha Home Base Care a registered non-profit organisation (NPO). We talk in detail about this later.

There are limitations to the research in that I did not manage to speak to everyone listed above. The first limitation is that it took a while to gain the community's trust. I had to repeatedly go to the area and come back without having spoken to a single person even though I was accompanied by someone they knew.

It later transpired that **the community was weary of speaking to me**. This was worse in the case of those that lost their family members.

As a result I could not get interviews with the ward councillor. I also was not able to speak to any of the government authorities.

I strived to have formal interviews where I recorded the respondent and used a facilitation guide. Permission was requested from the respondent to record the interview. In some instances, however, I could not interview respondents as it would be meeting them by chance. I also used the snowballing method to try and source interviews with local residents. In some instances they refused to speak to me<sup>2</sup>. Most respondents interviewed wanted a verbatim transcript of the interview sent to them. So, for most of the interviews I had to type word for word and mail to respondents.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, a Pakistan national who runs a local shop which had been looted who refused to participate and said what is past is past.

In total I spent about 17 days spread across 14 weeks. For most of my visits I would park the car at Khayelisha Home Based Care and walk to respondents' houses.

## Structure of this report

Part 1 of the report provides a brief executive summary on the findings of the research. Part 1 also provides the introductory section of the report as well as a synopsis of the Terms TOR.

Par 11 of the report provides the history of Ramaphosa, background information to the area, the violence that erupted last year, the response by the churches and other community member, stories of those that were affected and Ramaphosa today.



## Overview

**R**amaphosa is part of Ward 42, Germiston South and falls under Ekurhuleni municipality. The area was established in 1994 shortly after the first general elections in South Africa. Ramaphosa started as an informal settlement with some of its residents coming from Reiger Park, others from townships like Daveyton in the East Rand and some from far off provinces such as the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Other residents came from countries such as Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and so on. Although it must be said that no crèches, and churches exist in the area.

Ward 42 is made up of four areas divided into formal houses, the informal settlement, the RDP section and the suburbs. The areas are Graceland, Ellispark, Sunward Park and extension 5. The RDP was established around 2004 and they are numbering to 1642<sup>3</sup>. There are approximately 1200 RDP houses that have been built in the area. Other stands are non-residential stands meant for building crèches, churches and so on.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Community Development worker – 23 September 2009

Ramaphosa for the purpose of this report (as indicated in the introduction) is made up of Road Reserve (informal part) and eGoli the RDP section. The RDP residents have access to water, flush toilets, refuse removal as well as prepaid electricity. For residents to get electricity they have to pay an amount to be piped and connected to the electricity grid. We learned that not everyone can afford to connect so some households still use candles.

Road Reserve (the informal settlement), on the other hand, can access water through communal taps and does not have any access to electricity. The municipality has arranged that Road Reserve residents dump their refuse at a dumping site that is cleaned once a week. This section also does not have sanitation. There are street lights but at most times they are not serviced so it means the area is dark at night.

**Box 1: Communal tap used by Road Reserve residents.**

*Figure 1: Communal tap used by Road Reserve residents*



There are no tarred roads in the entire Ramaphosa section except for the main road which most respondents described as an entry and exit point of Ramaphosa. The road appears not to be regularly maintained and has a lot of pot holes. The rest of Ramaphosa roads are not tarred.

There is no further infrastructure. There are no schools (except for a private Primary School), no clinics, no playgrounds, no soccer grounds nothing. This, therefore, means that Ramaphosa residents have to go to other areas for accessing these services the nearest place being Reiger Park. For example, the school going children travel to areas outside Ramaphosa such as Reiger Park and others to Boksburg for schools. This is a concern for younger children since they have to cross a busy road in the morning. A number of fatal accidents have happened and a recent incident in August where two children

were knocked down by a car – the one child died and the other child is still in hospital to date<sup>4</sup>. There is no clinic in Ramaphosa and residents travel to Reiger Park for health services.

The disparities between Reiger Park and Ramaphosa are quite disturbing. In one of the interviews with a community leader in Reiger Park I asked why there was such disparities. The community leader indicated that initially Ramaphosa was not meant to be a residential area because of its terrain. The area seems to have been invaded by people and who had built shacks. For some time there were no basic services such as water, sanitation and refuse removal in the area. It had taken some years for these services to be provided and by then it had attracted hundreds if not thousands of people from all over the country as well as outside the borders of the country.

It was only in 2004 that the government conceded and started building RDP houses for the community dwellers in that area. The establishment of this area is interesting when one compares it to areas such as Bottlebrush in KwaZulu Natal. In Bottlebrush a similar pattern of land invasion took place later forcing the government to build shackdwellers RDP houses<sup>5</sup>.

Some of the respondents that we spoke to were critical about the manner in which Ramaphosa has been built and planned. To some of the respondents it did not come as a surprise that the violence broke out. They described it as an accident waiting to happen. To some it was an area that should not have been built as a residential area. Respondents mentioned that since the building of the RDP houses no other infrastructure had been built in the area. One respondent mentioned that because the East Rand was expanding could have led to people flocking to the area – hence the place was densely populated. This explains why some of the residence spoken to indicated that they were happy to stay in the area since it was closer to the nearby towns.

The people flocking to the area were a problem and to some created the impression that foreigners were taking away what belonged to South Africans. These sentiments were also raised in the research conducted by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) shortly after the xenophobic attacks<sup>6</sup>.

As indicated earlier, the planning of Ramaphosa was also seen as a factor that could create more problems in the area. There is only one entrance and one exit to the place. As one respondent put it:

*Because first of all it more became an area the police if a riot can break out there it will continue to be difficult for the police to curb it because it is an area that has only one entrance from the top and all the others are into a stream.*

*For cohesion to take place you could not have so many people live in one area and that was the major challenge.*

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Community Development Worker – 23 September 2009

<sup>5</sup> By way of comparison, see Ngwane's case study, Xenophobia in Bottlebrush – An investigation into the reasons behind the attacks on African immigrants in an informal settlement in Durban – in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> HSRC (2008): *Citizenship, Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Perceptions from South African Communities (South Africa)*, pp29.

Residents of Ramaphosa are made up of many ethnic groups and tribes both from within South Africa and outside. It is a densely populated area made up of RDP houses and shacks. During the interviews with the community development worker she had no information on any planned development. She mentioned that there was land that has been earmarked for the clinic, however, the land was now occupied by shack dwellers.

The other observation I made during the research is that the area is full of shebeens. Unemployment is rife and one can see this when walking through the streets of Ramaphosa. Young men, women and children (especially those that are still toddlers) can be seen on the streets. A few stands can be seen where people trade informally – selling mostly vegetables and fruits. Others operate phone stalls.

### **Box 2: A stall operated by a group of Ramaphosa residents**

*Figure 2: A stall operated by a group of Ramaphosa residents*



This section details events that took place as recalled and related by respondents that I spoke to. It is important to note that there is no uniformity on the stories provided. For Ramaphosa residents the story is consistent that non-nationals started the violence whereas those outside the area say it was Ramaphosa that attacked non-nationals. The research did not attempt to find out what the truth was since in such cases the truth is always blurred.

The events that took place last year are still very clear in people's minds. The trouble happened on the weekend of 16 May 2008 (Friday). Some respondents think that it started on 15 May 2008 (Thursday). For people who are residents of Ramaphosa the story is consistent – a fight broke amongst a group of gang members and they turned against one of their own. This man was chased by a group of about thirty men through the dusty streets of Ramaphosa on a Sunday morning. The group of thirty were Shangaans from Mozambique (chanting Viva Frelimo slogans) and the deceased a South

African Zulu man<sup>7</sup>. Still, other respondents mentioned that the Shangaans started terrorising the community for two days before they struck – again the Shangaans attacking Zulus and Xhosas.

*I had gone to visit a friend of mine in Dawn Park. He brought me here and when we got here at the robots we found that we could not pass through. We then rolled down the window to ask what was happening and were told that amaShangane have blocked the road they say they want to beat the Zulus...*

*A mob with an assortment of weapons chased this man through the street and he was killed at the bottom at the swamp.*

For others the story is different:

*There were people conducting door to door campaign searching for identity documents – that is verifiable.*

*This started on the Friday at Road Reserve where there was fighting. We thought this was just something that would pass but by the Saturday the fighting was still continuing but we still remained calm until the end of the Saturday.*

*This happened on the Sunday morning. A meeting was called where only men were invited to discuss the death of a South African – that is where everything erupted.*

*We said that if anyone heard about anything they should feed the information to the police. But the other guy from Maputo did not take the information, he decided to call the Shangaans and tell them that they should gather the whole night. That is when we saw the bodies the following morning – the Sunday.*

It is said the fighting and the killings continued into Monday and they were brutal. The interviewed respondents indicated that they had never seen anything like that whilst others said that the fighting was reminiscent of the late eighties and the early nineties. Something that respondents said they never wanted to go back to.

Respondents recounted chilling events of violence and death. Respondents indicate that they did not imagine the extent of the violence. Perhaps what is more chilling is the fact that residents were

<sup>7</sup> The closest I could come to that story was an article in the Sowetan.

trapped inside the small township. People who had gone out to work and visit family or friends could not come into Ramaphosa because the only entrance and exit had been closed off reportedly by the police:

*I could not get out of Ramaphosa. People were taken to shelters and what have you but I was trapped in here. If you went out you could not come in, if you were in you could not go out because the police did not allow anyone to enter or to exit. And people were killed even on that Monday – they were seriously killed.*

*I left for work it was quite and I could go to work but going back was difficult the police would not let anyone in and they would not let anyone out.*

*I was trapped inside my house – I only came out at the end of the second week.*

There is something eerily strange about the events in Ramaphosa. Everyone that I interviewed gave information that trouble started brewing as early as 16 May 2008, the Friday. Although there is no consensus on when the attacks started it is clear that by 15 May 2008, the Thursday, there were clear indications that trouble would happen. Plus taking into account that other areas in Gauteng such as Alexandra had already experienced the violence. The key questions are:

- › Where were the police?
- › Where were the local leaders?
- › Who instigated the violence in Ramaphosa?

Unfortunately the article cannot provide answers to these three questions. The local police in Reiger Park when contacted refused to answer any questions and indicated that any answer will be provided by their Gauteng office in Parktown. When contacting the Gauteng office they informed that they could not give site information but information on how they responded to the outbreak in the Province.

When posing the questions to ward committee members about what or where the local leaders were and if there was anything that could have been done the responses are not clear. It seems there was a meeting held with local leaders and foreign nationals. At this meeting there was an agreement that if any of the representatives heard anything, they should immediately contact the police<sup>8</sup>. Some of the respondents mentioned that the police were phoned but did not respond. Since we could not interview the local police, questions will remain unanswered.

<sup>8</sup> It was not very clear as to when this meeting took place – no amount of probing provided a response.

There is no common response as to who started the violence. For most respondents that I spoke to the foreign nationals particularly Mozambicans were the first to draw blood and South Africans were protecting themselves (deciding that for every fallen South African a foreigner had to die).

From the interviews conducted it is clear that **both South Africans and Mozambican nationals took part in the attacks**<sup>9</sup>.

In any event both foreign nationals and locals lost their family members.

## The affected

The entire community in Ramaphosa was affected by the violence. Respondents who were interviewed for the study have indicated just how intense and brutal the violence was. There are, however, families that were directly affected in that they lost their family members. Other families did not lose loved ones but had to separate during the violence for fear of being attacked. In this section I provide details of three families that I had the privilege to speak to.

The first family is South African. For the purpose of this report I have given them pseudo names. The first time I went around to their house they were suspicious and said they would first want to discuss it as a family (whether they wanted to speak to me or not). They were clearly suspicious. I had to return to the family after establishing from a contact that they were ready to speak to me. The second family is that of a Mozambican man married to a South African woman. The third story is that of a South African woman who was fingered for subletting to Mozambican nationals. All three families have stayed in Ramaphosa for years.

Jako in his early sixties lost two family members, a brother and a son – both of them last year. Jako had gone home to Ntabankulu to bury his uncle during that fateful weekend. He was telephoned by his daughters (on Saturday night) to be told that fighting had broken out in Gauteng. He was told that his brother had been attacked and was in hospital. On the Monday (19 May 2008) he phoned to enquire about his brother and was told that no one had been able to go see him because people were trapped inside the township. On the Tuesday his wife managed to go to the hospital and on the same Tuesday Jako was informed by a neighbour and church member that his brother had passed away. Two months later his son was killed on his way to work allegedly by two Mozambican nationals. The reason for the attack was that his late son's picture had appeared in a Sunday newspaper. His son was first suspended from work at the mine and a few weeks later shot. He later died in hospital<sup>10</sup>.

The Mozambican man (X) had to leave his wife and children for fear of being attacked. During our interview, he recalled that problems had started on the Friday, 16 May 2008. He, like everyone else thought that it was something that would pass but on Sunday morning he saw that things were bad and decided to leave the area. A South African friend phoned him and said he should take

<sup>9</sup> See also, *Sowetan*, 19 May 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jako, 16 September 2009.

refuge at the local police station in Reiger Park<sup>11</sup>. For three months X stayed under a tree, in freezing Gauteng winter weather, a few meters from the Reiger Park police station with other displaced people including children and women.

**Box 3: X and other foreigners slept under the tree captured below.**

*Figure 3: X and other foreigners slept under the tree captured above*



The third victim, Nokulinga had two Mozambican tenants staying in her serviced stand. The first time she saw anything was on the Saturday, 17 May 2008. She had been standing with one of her tenants in her yard when they saw a group of men carrying an assortment of weapons saying they were looking for Shangaans. She had feared for the tenant and told him to hide but he preferred to leave. On the Monday, Nokulinga went to work and was telephoned to be told that the shacks in her yard were burning. Her daughters fifteen year old and a twenty four year old who had a four month baby at the time were all at home at the time of the attack. Nokulinga left work and struggled to gain entry into Ramaphosa but the police eventually took her home. Upon arrival the one shack had been burned, the one was vandalised and some of the Mozambicans' belongings had been looted<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Interview with X and his wife, 18 September 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Nokulinga, 02 October 2009.



**Box 4: A vandalised structure belonging to a foreigner***Figure 4: A vandalised structure belonging to a foreigner*

The three stories related above are complex. All the people who were affected had lived in Ramaphosa for a number of years. X, left Mozambique, his country of birth in 1985. He had been orphaned by the war and when he came here he was in his teens. He lived in different areas of Gauteng mostly around the East Rand. At the time of the violence he had been living in Ramaphosa for about 13 years. He had married the South African woman after his first wife left him. He lived with the South African woman in an RDP house and their three children. Both X and his wife have children from their previous relationships/marriages and share one child a daughter<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The daughter was grazed by a rubber bullet during the violence.

### Box 5: X's daughter showing where she was grazed by a rubber bullet

*Figure 5: X's daughter showing where she was grazed by a rubber bullet*



In the beginning of the interview X had painted a picture of calmness and nonchalance. He mentioned that everyone in Ramaphosa knew him and had no problem with him. When I asked why he had left the area if everyone knew him then his vulnerability showed. On the Sunday he thought it was best to leave the area considering what was happening:

*Well it is tough. A rotten potato can influence everyone. Others do not know me. They can identify me and I could be killed"*

So, although having stayed in Ramaphosa for over ten years, X feared that if he could be fingered then he would be killed. Sentiments raised by X were also raised by a reverend who assisted those that were displaced during the violence. The reverend mentioned how for years foreign nationals had settled in Ramaphosa and around the country and how odd it was now to see them being treated in this manner<sup>14</sup>. The interview with X also revealed that although he has been staying in the country for so long he still did not have legal papers. He had acquired the RDP house but 'to be safe' he had registered it in his wife's name. I asked him if he had tried to apply for an identity document, his response:

*No. It would create problems for me*

X has no intention of going back to Mozambique because he has no house and no family there.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Rev. C. Barends, 29 September 2009.

Jako the South African man who lost two family members also feels that the foreign nationals have treated him badly. During the interview he referred to the years when he used to work in the mines and how he would protect Mozambicans in particular from being victimised by other South African miners. He also related how many a times other South Africans had told him that ‘his African brothers’ would turn against him:

*They used to steal cables and I stood up for them. I said our people were in exile in these’ people’s countries. Let us keep them here.”I have now buried two people killed by them.*

He laments about the manner in which foreigners have been allowed into the country mentioning that in other African countries like Zimbabwe you would ‘not just enter’.

*These people come in here and settle anywhere and they have a chance of doing anything they like to us – there is no control. They stayed just behind my street.*

Other respondents spoken to during the research also have raised similar sentiments around lack of control on foreign nationals entering the country. There were questions raised about policies that ordinary citizens did not understand. Issues around the fact that South Africa has been independent for fifteen years only but has had to share its space with people from other countries. Issues around the fact that when foreign nationals come to this country they have the freedom to stay anywhere.

*Black South Africans see this and frown because they are still trapped in poverty.*

*I mean a guy in Zambia should ask himself – he is a black guy, he’s got two degrees in engineering or three degrees in engineering and he found his counterpart in South Africa with perhaps one degree. He should ask himself that question: what happened.*

*If a South African goes and work in another country, in London and if a South African go work in Germany or Ottawa or in Canada and land up there asking for asylum, asking for refugee status, looking for a job they have got laws in place.*

1. For Nokulinga what happened last year did not make sense then and still does not make sense. For her it was people who went on a rampage hungry to kill. There was nothing to justify the violence, the looting and the killing. What saddens here is that she had been so close to her tenants and this had been broken off by senseless action. She had tried to keep in touch with one of her tenants through phone calls but that also had come to an end.

## Community organising

In Ramaphosa the most dominant political party seems to be the African National Congress (ANC). This was confirmed by the ward committee. Interviews with ward committee members indicate that other parties such as Congress of the People (COPE) and United Democratic Movement (UDM) are present, however, they are only visible during election time. Meetings were held with community members around issues of service delivery but other than that there seemed not to be any active organising around the area.

There are about two community organisations that deal with home based care. Both organisations operate with volunteers and have very limited resources. Other than the two organisations there seemed to be very little community organisation. When asked about this the ward committee members interviewed indicated that after the violence they had tried to revive the street committees – who try and meet once a week. I unfortunately could not meet with the street committee members.

A criticism was labelled amongst local leadership for lack of trying to quell the violence that broke out. Some were of the view that if leadership and the community were organised nothing like what happened last year should have taken place. There are also sentiments about the local community being reluctant to volunteer if there is nothing in it for them such as money.

This finding has also been raised in other research papers where absent leadership and lack of leadership has been seen as a cause for last year's violence<sup>15</sup>. Earlier on I indicated that some have indicated that there were signs that something was to happen. The question to be asked is what did the local leadership do to try and curb the violence?

One could argue that members of the local branch in Ramaphosa could have heard about the rumors of pending trouble and perhaps could have taken action to engage with the community and perhaps the violence could not have erupted. This also leads one to question the functionality of ANC branches<sup>16</sup>

## Social cohesion

There were mixed reactions when those interviewed were asked about their sense of community in Ramaphosa. Some of the community members spoken to were of the view that Ramaphosa was just a collection of many people from different ethnic backgrounds. To this first group, Ramaphosa was just a place where they stayed (and if fortunate were employed) and everyone else looked out for themselves.

Other community members felt that when the informal settlement started there had been a close bond amongst community members. People were closer and there was a sense of community. They mentioned that this had however changed dramatically and more people were individualised.

<sup>15</sup> Center For Policy Studies (2009): Xenophobic violence in South Africa: Reflections on causal factors and implications (Johannesburg), vol. 10 (3).

<sup>16</sup> By way of comparison, see Steven Friedman in this volume.

Other views? One of the ministers that gave assistance to those that were affected by the violence painted a picture of a community that will be always a time bomb. He mentioned that he had done a lot of work in the area and lamented the fact that violence was and will always be part of such communities. He felt that the conditions that residents live under will always fuel jealousy especially between those who can improve their lot and those that continue to struggle on a daily basis.

*“ The streets might be tarred, new buildings come up but in them there is still that hurt and I think for me it is important that even churches must understand why some Black people have low esteem, why would they in a split second take an axe, take a gun and just decide I am gonna kill you I am gonna hurt you. ”*

Surprisingly when the violence broke out and the mob started attacking and looting they could not identify between South Africans and the foreigners. Shops belonging to South Africans were also vandalised, burned and looted.

So, although for some community members they come together during funerals and may do good things with and for their neighbours for some Ramaphosa is viewed as a place where people stay work but go home during holiday seasons.

## Cross-cutting issues

There are three cross cutting issues that I would like to address:

- ▶ Media reporting;
- ▶ The issue of us vs them; and
- ▶ Gender.

First - The media has been highly criticised by the manner in which it reported on Ramaphosa by both the church and residents spoken to. Respondents spoken to felt that no real issues were covered and the focus was on sensationalising what was happening at the site. There was also a feeling that the reporting was biased in that it highlighted the plight of foreigners whilst South Africans had been demonised – at least that is how the Ramaphosa community felt. During interviews respondents would often ask me if I had read or seen anything relating to South Africans that had been killed by Mozambicans in Ramaphosa?

To add salt to the wound resident mentioned that the South African government seemed to believe these media reports and officials who came to the ground were seen to be extremely unsympathetic. I return to this later.

The churches that provided assistance to those displaced also criticised the media. They mentioned that some of the print media had indicated that the Reiger Park community had ignored the plight of foreign nationals. A statement was then drafted by the task team to the press to highlight the assistance that they had been offering to the community of Ramaphosa and other surrounding areas. The statement was never printed in the newspaper.

Second – The issue of us vs them. As earlier indicated, Ramaphosa has been a home to both South Africans from all nine provinces as well as migrant and immigrants. In some cases there have been intermarriages amongst those that are South Africans along the different ethnic groups. There also have been intermarriages amongst the foreign nationals and South Africans. So, at face value it is easy to conclude that the people were living in harmony, side by side. Events that took place during that fateful weekend paint a different picture.

During interviews I was informed that only about ten to fifteen foreign nationals owned RDP houses (something that did not seem to make locals bitter). It appears that the majority had built their own shacks or were renting a shack in someone’s yard. Another observation I made during the research was that the foreigners (particularly) Mozambicans had grouped themselves and assigned a section for themselves along Road Reserve. It appears this could have been the area where there was a door to door campaign searching for people who were non-nationals. Perhaps this is why they were identified easy. This may also indicate that there have always been issues of integration within this community. This also gives one an aura of wanting to be separate.

*“ The Shangaans from South Africa behaved themselves and that is why they did not experience any problems.*

*The Shangaans from South Africa are more civilised.*

### **Box 6: A passage separating foreigner’s and South African homes**

*Figure 6: A passage separating foreigners and South African homes*



The above statements show just how stereo-types still abound. Other views relating to us vs them, whilst most reports indicate that the sentiment has been that most people in Ramaphosa felt that there has been an influx of Mozambicans and they were taking over the area – this research proves otherwise. Some respondents spoken to did not feel that they were being overtaken by foreigners. Nokulinga spoken of earlier had indicated how one of her tenants had been like her own son. The tenant had stayed in her yard for over three years. Whilst we may not generalise it may seem that people stayed together without any problems until that weekend.

X had indicated that when he left home to stay at the open veld in Reiger Park a South African man had phoned to tell him to seek refuge at the police station – so this challenges the premise that in affected areas South Africans both male and females had participated in the attacks.

Third – gender. When asking respondents about who had been mostly active and participated in the attacks most mentioned that men especially ‘young men’ were actively involved in the attacks. In most newspaper pictures taken in Ramaphosa, mostly men were seen to be spearheading the attacks. So, it may appear that mostly it was men who participated.

Interviews conducted with respondents revealed just how traumatised the residents were. For example, people likened the situation to the early eighties and nineties when violence was rife in areas like Soweto and the East Rand (Thokoza) in particular. For both men and women of Ramaphosa they did not want to see a repeat of what had taken place and their quest for programmes to heal the community is just one example of not wanting a repeat of the violence.

## The response

It appears that the response to people who were affected by the violence and particularly those that fled Ramaphosa came from Reiger Park, the Coloured area just a kilometre away from Ramaphosa. It also appears that Khayelisha the home based care organisation based in Ramaphosa had focused its response to the South African families that had been affected in Ramaphosa.

In the next section I focus on the response from the government, the police, the church, community based organisations and ordinary individuals.

## The government

The government has been highly criticised for the manner in which it handled the situation in Ramaphosa. Firstly residents that were interviewed indicated that the government had come down to Ramaphosa with a top-down approach. Officials who had been sent to Ramaphosa to assess the situation had come late at night – stayed for brief moments and only met a few people. This made residents upset.

Secondly, the officials that were sent to engage with the community came and ordered the community to take the foreign nationals back. This only fuelled the situation because residents were still angry.

Thirdly, respondents felt that the government had acted very slowly. Whilst the churches had organised to assist victims of the xenophobic violence there was nothing from the government, no word, just complete silence.

### Box 7: Some of the stalls operating at Ramaphosa taxi rank

*Figure 7: Some of the stalls operating at Ramaphosa taxi rank*



I then asked respondents what they expected from the government. These are some of the responses:

*“ We did not have a chance to express ourselves. They did not want to sit and have negotiations – government did not embark on negotiations.*

*They must not impose. Because when they come and impose the people fume - because I am there on top and I tell people this is what you must do. I am not going to do it – you are not asking me you are telling me.*

*Yes it was their tent. They came to impose and tell the community that they should accept these people, forgive them, and you see, these people were still fuming because it was painful and it was still raw.*

*We as South Africans have been labelled as people who started this whole thing. We have done nothing. The government says we started the whole thing.*

*”*



The above comments clearly indicate the unhappiness on how the government handled the situation. Respondents mentioned that they felt helpless since they expected the government to engage with them not merely order them on what to do. Ward committee members indicated that their hands were tight as they were not allowed any flexibility. For example, up to now, they have been told that there are programmes that would be embarked on to try and integrate the community but all they have been told is that things are still in process.

One could also pick an underlying tone of anger where people felt that a government they had voted into power had left the community in a lurch.

## The police

In the background section I have indicated how respondents mentioned that there were indications that trouble was lurking two days before anyone was killed. Some respondents have mentioned that the police were phoned and there was no adequate response from them.

In any event, by Sunday morning, respondents mentioned that a number of people had been killed. Respondents spoken to felt that the local police had no experience in handling a situation like the one at Ramaphosa. Besides not responding when the groups of people started fighting the police blocked off the only entrance and exit to Ramaphosa. Residents expressed feelings of being trapped in. Residents who had gone to town, to work or to visit found themselves blocked out of Ramaphosa since the police would not allow anyone to go into the settlement or leave the settlement. Respondents mentioned that for those that were wounded the ambulance could not go in. So, for example, a community member who had been seriously injured on the Saturday night could only be picked up by an Inyala on the Sunday morning.

Respondents feel that there was no sufficient response from the local police. Some feel that they were completely unprepared whilst others feel that the police knew what was going to happen.

*I, personally, the police from our station, I think they knew what was going to happen.*

*What I think should have happened on that day they should not have given us the local police. They should have provided the combating unit. They gave us SAPS.*

*It was only when the police from Bloemfontein came that things calmed down.*

The comments from respondents show that the residents of Ramaphosa feel that the police had not offered them any protection. Perhaps this is also an area that the security cluster needs to seriously assess – how to deal with such violence especially since we have seen the escalation of service delivery protests. The impression that one gets with what happened in Ramaphosa is that people were just left to kill one another inside the settlement whilst police stood guard at the entrance.

Attempts to get interviews with the local police from Reiger Park Police Station failed – a pity since one would have gotten a better sense of what took place from them.

**Box 8: The road leading to and out of Ramaphosa reportedly closed off by the police**

*Figure 8: The road leading to and out of Ramaphosa reportedly closed off by the police*



## The response from community based organisations, churches and ordinary citizens

Responses to the xenophobic violence did not come from a single source.

A number of community based organisations, churches and ordinary **citizens offered their resources, time and energy** to assist those that had been affected by the violence.

The majority of help came of course from the churches in Reiger Park but the research findings also indicate that a community based organisation in Ramaphosa assisted South Africans who had lost their family members. First, I will outline the response that was given by the community organisations and churches in Reiger Park and then the response by the community based organisation situated and working in Ramaphosa.

Interviews with church leaders revealed that they only became aware that there was a problem on 17 May 2008, the Saturday night. The Anglican Church, situated a few meters from the police station

was the first one to react when they saw hundreds of people flocking to the police station. The Anglican Church became a safe haven for the night for most of the foreigners<sup>17</sup>. It was at this time that an sms was sent out to church leaders to inform them about the violence that had broken out.

By late Saturday night word to other nearby churches had been spread that the foreigners had been chased out of Ramaphosa. A sms was sent out to other church leaders in the area informing them of an urgent need to meet. On Sunday morning most church leaders announced to their congregants to open their hearts and give donations.

Other community based organisations also came to the assistance by providing food, gas stoves and so on.

More foreigners started coming from other surrounding areas such as Slovo informal settlement, Angelo informal settlement and some people came as far as Boksburg. By the Sunday afternoon the number of those displaced had increased. The church leaders then held a meeting and decided to form a task team. Members of the task team included some community organisations and schools around Reiger Park. The task team was divided into:

- Co-ordinators;
- Feeding scheme ;
- Feeding points;
- Security;
- Health;
- Logistics; and
- Communications

The weekend was mostly used for organising and providing food to those that were displaced. Most community members from Reiger Park volunteered and came around to cook. Some brought blankets and clothes for those that were displaced. A number of foreigners had made the police station their homes whilst others had gone to the Anglican Church. Others simply took refuge under a tree.

On the Monday morning the civic centre in Boksburg was opened up and a number of those displaced were moved to the civic centre. At this stage church leaders decided to arrange that some members of the task team should take responsibility to go to the town and approach businesses such as the chemist and shops like Pick & Pay for food and other supplies. The Catholic Diocese from Johannesburg also brought out more supplies. Other international organisations such as Oxfam and Dorcas Aid provided donations.

Church leaders that we spoke to indicated that the response was short and quick. Good organisation seems to have taken place. The supplies were kept at St Anthony and there was strict management. A person was assigned to handle the stock and things that were taken out were signed for (some

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<sup>17</sup> Statement by Rev. C. Barends – Dean of the Lutheran Church East Rand.

volunteers saw this as too strict and did not like it). This shows accountability. This also prevented supplies disappearing as we heard stories last year. It was also arranged that some of the churches be used solely as feeding points.

The displaced did not only receive shelter and food. **Some needed medical attention and this was also arranged** by the person responsible for health.

A community doctor volunteered and assessed those that were wounded and some were sent to hospital. For those that were sent to the hospital follow ups were made to check on them. Others were offered counselling.

The interviews reveal that by Tuesday, 20 May 2008, word had spread that Reiger Park was offering assistance to outsiders and the number of those displaced had risen to approximately 6000 people. It was then negotiated with the local councillor that the civic centre be opened up. At the end of the first week thousands of those displaced were moved to other shelters around Gauteng.

The churches also arranged for those that wanted to go back to their countries to get assistants. Interviews reveal that most Mozambicans who were at the civic centre and those that had been left in Ramaphosa decided that they would go and so did some Zimbabwe nationals. Arrangements and liaising with other centres in Gauteng took place. The task team then arranged for those that wanted to leave to be transported to where the buses were collecting people. Letters were written for the border control and safe passage particularly for Zimbabweans<sup>18</sup>.

For two weeks the churches and the community of Reiger Park took charge providing food, shelter and addressing other needs for foreigners. Some of the respondents again criticised the government for being slow and unorganised.

*But I'm so disappointed in government that there has been no proper initiative. It is no use you do something at provincial level there where most of the money is spent on whatever campaign or whatever workshop. I think if we want to learn from this we need to get into these communities and bring in the resources.*

In Ramaphosa an organisation called Khayelisha Home Base Care took it upon itself to go and knock on doors to find out if any needed assistance. Although a registered Non Profit Organisation Khayelisha that operates without any funding or networking expertise. They operate from a sparsely furnished shack and unlike the Churches in Reiger Park had no supplies to offer but comfort to families who were affected. They also had no networking experience.

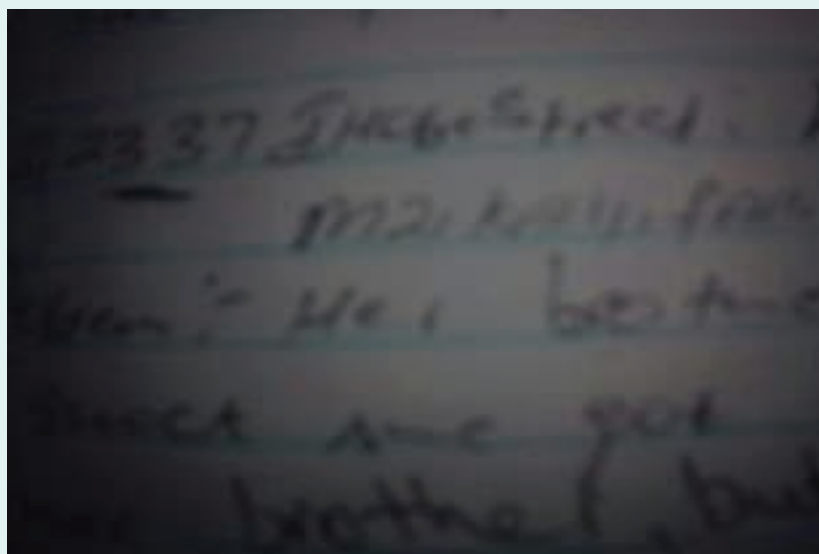
<sup>18</sup> Interview held with Father Gerry at St Anthony's, 25 September 2009.

**Box 9: Khayelisha offices***Figure 9: Khayelisha offices*

Khayelisha members took down names of those that had lost family members and interviews reveal that their records show six South Africans died during the violence in Ramaphosa. They then approached the community development worker to see if there were any donations that they could get. One of the places they approached was St Anthony in Reiger Park where they given 10kg mealie meal. They also received vegetables. The food was passed on to the affected families in Ramaphosa. The deceased were taken to their respective rural homes except for one family that could not afford to transport the corpse.

### Box 10: List of South Africans that died during the violence

Figure 10: List of South Africans that died during the violence



On the surface the response to those affected is excellent but also brings a number of complex issues to the fore. Those that came from Ramaphosa were foreigners and whilst it was acceptable and highly commendable to provide assistance to them a question could be asked about those that had been left in Ramaphosa and who needed the same attention. Respondents from Ramaphosa have questioned how this 'help' was offered. They were left on their own while the Coloured community took in foreign nationals. This implies racial and ethnic connotations. The community development worker mentioned that she had volunteered her services to those that were moved to the Germiston hall and noticed how at this hall foreign nationals treated each other calling each other names and this was quite a surprise to her.

One of the church leaders mentioned that they had been accused of being biased and attending more to the plight of foreigners than South Africans. Some respondents from Ramaphosa have also questioned how civil society rose to the occasion but often ignore South African problems. I asked if they were questioning the response and the reply:

*I do not say it was wrong – I am questioning it. Why if there is a fire or what happened in KwaZulu Natal after the xenophobic attacks the floods there – did those people get as much attention? No they did not*

One gets the sense that Ramaphosa feel that they are alone and isolated. They could not get protection from the police. The government came and told them what to do and now the church had turned a blind eye and was not helping them.

There was also a sense of the inevitable – that this could happen again but people were not sure what preventive measures need to be taken.

## What has changed?

I asked respondents to tell me what has changed in their lives since the violence erupted last year. For many – life still goes on in Ramaphosa. There are still issues of unemployment, issues of poverty and issues of service delivery. There are still incidences of violence and crime even though most Mozambicans and other foreign nationals have left the area. However, respondents have also indicated that the community is now living with fear, mistrust and suspicion.

Underlying that is also a wish of never seeing Ramaphosa go through the violence again. Respondents indicated that they were longing for programmes that would help close the rift and perhaps help them forget what took place. Others felt that this was beyond any human being and that there is a need for divine intervention.

For those that lost their family members (at least those that I interacted with) the pain is still raw. They do not think that they would ever see the perpetrators arrested – mostly because there is lack of evidence. When speaking to Jako he indicated that he was not convinced that his brother and son's killers would be brought to book. If anything, at least, the killers should come out in the open:"

*I am in pain mama. I see these people but what can I do? I am in pain mama – I wish that if someone has done something – a person could talk and say they did a mistake – just like in a family setting – between a woman and a man – the family is called in and you sit down – a decision could be taken that it must pass. We are all human beings.*

X mentioned that he would like to put what happened behind them. Whilst they hope that there is never a repeat again they are still unsettled. I asked him how he felt about South Africa and if he was scared. His response was terse:

*I feel ok.*

His wife, however, felt there was a need for the community to open up and discuss:

*The community never met to discuss whether there would be any reconciliation. I feel unsettled. I think the community should talk.*

There are strong sentiments that talks should be held with government taking the lead. People suggested that there should be programmes such as cultural activities that could be introduced to the community. Ward committee members and church leaders spoke of a need to provide counselling.

The principal from Reiger Park primary school mentioned that he had already started a programme at his school aimed at educating learners about tolerance and accepting others. The programme was aimed at encouraging learners to speak openly about their feelings.

For most, they felt that the violence could erupt again – and again there is fear that people would be caught unawares. Proper integration has not taken place and poses a potential problem. For example, the ward committee members that I spoke to mentioned that some of the foreigners were coming back and had approached them to get their shacks back. If ward committees would go to those that are occupying those shacks that would create problems and violence could erupt again<sup>19</sup>.

Interviews with the church leaders also reveal that they were left exhausted and traumatised. One of the church leaders said that he had been left exhausted and he did not want to deal with such scales of violence and human suffering.

There is a need for proper integration to take place. It is all good to say that people must go back and ask for their shacks – but it is equally good to ensure that the environment allows for people to go back.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with ward committee members in Ramaphosa – 22 August 2009.



The broader research for the paper was to map out response by civic organisation during the violence in May 2008. This, however, could not be done without understanding the background in Ramaphosa. The research threw a mix of complexities as well as interesting information.

There are many stories that have been told regarding to what led to the violence. In any event both South African nationals and foreign nationals lost their lives. A question lingers on how the community can move forward and forget what's happened. During the research many have indicated that they need counselling – especially the children. Some mentioned that it was imperative for the South African government to compensate those that lost property and lives.

Interviews have revealed that **the community is also living in suspicion and fear.**

This does not auger well considering that some foreign nationals are slowly seen coming back to Ramaphosa although a large number have not returned. Proper integration needs to take place. This is where civil society can play a role.

The churches that assisted victims and the displaced acted promptly because they were responding to an urgent need. These churches also had good organisation and networking abilities since they were able to attract donations from international organisations such as Oxfam. It appears that each of the churches has gone back to handling its own matters until the next time? Interviews with different denominations indicated that most were not planning any programmes.

The above points highlight gaps that could be filled by civil society. Amongst the findings was the issue of empowering communities and also providing them with information. Organisations such as the Human Rights Commission and Gender Coalition were mentioned as some of the organisations that could engage with communities. These organisations are seen as operating far from the people.

Ward committees in Ramaphosa are longing for programmes that will help close the rift and heal the pain. Again, space for civil society to facilitate programmes and work with affected communities. Respondents have indicated that there is no need for fancy programmes rather simple activities. A ward committee member cited an example of a cleaning campaign where all members of the community are asked to participate.

Finally, there is a need for closure. For many families the trauma lingers on. **There is real fear that the violence could happen again.** How do we stop this from happening again without pointing fingers?