

Responding to the May 2008 Xenophobic attacks: A CASE STUDY OF THE GIFT OF THE GIVERS

by Ashwin Desai



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Part I: Executive summary	1
Problems and recommendations.....	2
Methodology	3
Part II: The beginnings	4
The Context	6
Life in the Camps.....	8
Part III: Voices from the camps	11
Volunteers	14
Coalitions.....	18
Part IV: Typologies of CSOs	21
Gender.....	22
Part V: Reflections	24
Interviews.....	30

Gift of the Givers (GOG) was one of the first civil society organisations to provide support to the victims of xenophobic attacks of May 2008. The article closely follows GOG's support work once people had been moved to the camps. It seeks to quantify the kind of support GOG provided, and evaluates the effects of this support. What the research reveals is that GOG was very effective in supplying much needed goods like blankets, mattresses, nappies and food and also keeping this support going for a prolonged period. It also was able to draw on its media network to co-ordinate the collection of goods donated by the public, and draw on the work of volunteers to both collect goods and coordinate its distribution. GOG also showed its flexibility in responding to the violence, for example, by diverting blankets collected for its annual "winter warmer campaign" to those living outside police stations and subsequently in the camps. However, what the research reveals is that while GOG supported people who wished to return to their home countries, it did not contemplate support for those who left the camps and who decided to stay on in South Africa. Through interviews with those displaced by the violence and who chose to stay behind, the article illustrates their desperate circumstances. It is suggested that organisations like GOG need to consider ways in which their support work can continue beyond

the barbed wire of the camp. The article also shows through the voice of one of a volunteer, the incredible role that ordinary citizens played, but also how once the crisis was over, organisations like GOG failed to integrate volunteers into their work despite the desire of some to continue to work with GOG.

Problems & recommendations

Funding in a competitive environment

GOG's funding base is overwhelmingly from South African Muslims, primarily in the form of zakaat contributions. The field has become increasingly competitive with the spawning of a number of Muslim organisations in response to both internal and external needs for "relief". These organisations vie with each other for zakaat and television channels like Islam Channel (UK), with a global reach, which are proving to be increasingly popular. The latter has the advantage of bringing into people's homes the suffering of Muslims across the globe. By the standards of satellite television providing a global reach, GOG almost appears quaint, even though its own ability to use the media to profile its work has been impressive. In this changing terrain, GOG needs to look beyond the Muslim community for funding. Its work across religious boundaries will hold it in good stead in this regard though, it will have to be careful that in reaching out for new sources of funding, it does not alienate its core constituency.

Accountability

During the response to the xenophobia attacks, the ability of GOG to procure funding from corporates, albeit limited, became evident. There are problems, though. One senior person from a corporate organisation who wished to remain anonymous, held that his organisation would not give financial donations to GOG because it lacked the kinds of accountability that they required. The problem for GOG is that its effectiveness is linked to its ability to respond quickly to changing needs "on-the-ground", like the R6 million spent on the response to xenophobia. While the corporate world expects GOG to change its accountability procedures, this may well blunt its effectiveness. Clearly, the challenge is to get the corporates to be flexible. Our recommendation is that representatives of GOG visit various corporates with detailed and updated financial statements to keep sponsors and potential sponsors abreast of developments. Some corporates made cash donations to GOG during the xenophobia response, and were impressed with the way GOG conducted its work. This is a good base to build on.

Defining Field of Operations

GOG's field of operations has spread over southern Africa. There is a danger that as it gets bigger and its field of operations widens, its ability to respond quickly to crises like Gaza may be negatively affected. There is a possibility that by stretching its resources, GOG risks failing to deliver. Caught up in day-to-day work, this issue gets insufficient attention within the organisation. It is our recommendation that GOG starts to both debate this issue, and draw lessons from the experiences of other NGOs.

Paid Help vs. Volunteers

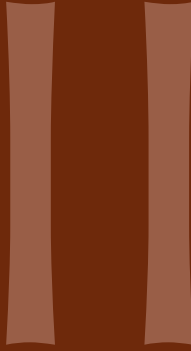
GOG needs to re-think its approach to volunteerism. At present it uses volunteers for limited periods and purposes only. During the xenophobia response it relied on volunteers to collect goods, transport them to camps and distribute them. While Sayed Allauddin, the head of the Johannesburg office, waxed lyrical about the response of volunteers, given GOG's antipathy to volunteerism in general, once the xenophobia response was over, the volunteers disappeared, some because their volunteerism was for a limited period, others because GOG did not create a space for them. As Sayed argues, GOG prefers to work with paid employees and a professional staff. Given that many people do want to volunteer in various capacities, GOG should consider inscribing volunteerism as part of its operations. While this would require a changed mindset from the top officials of GOG, the very nature of GOG's work provides a perfect home for volunteers.

The xenophobia response of GOG was to support people until they left the camps. Where they did intervene, it was to help send people home. Yet, as will be shown, those displaced who remained in the country face tremendous problems.

GOG needs to consider ways of ongoing support to victims of xenophobia, given the remarkable goodwill it usually develops in its campaigns.

Methodology

My first encounter with GOG was in June 2008 at a camp for those displaced by the xenophobic attacks. GOG supplied the camp with food, blankets, and basic goods daily. Its consistent support for the camp stimulated an interest in the organisation. This started a series of conversations with the central figures in GOG, and resulted in my joining the organisation on visits to other projects like the Adelaide Tambo School in Soweto. As the project unfolded, these ongoing conversations were recorded by a research assistant, and this forms the main base of the report. In addition to conversations, the report is also based on participant observation, unstructured in-depth interviews with the leadership of the organisation, publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles.



The head of GOG is Imtiaz Sooliman, a well-known figure in the world of humanitarian missions. The organisation was started in August 1992 and ran its operations from one room in his Pietermaritzburg home.

By the time of the 2008 attacks, it could lay claim to being **the largest private humanitarian disaster relief organisation** headquartered in Africa.¹

GOG was following in the footsteps of organisations that had grown in Europe through the 1970s. These were private organisations as opposed to state sponsored, and were bent on having a global

¹ By 2009 it listed the following projects: Disaster Response and Rehabilitation; Primary Health Care Clinics; Water provision; Hunger Alleviation; Nutrition Supplements; Hospital Interventions; Malaria Prevention; Agricultural Inputs; Skills Development, Entrepreneurship and Job Creation; Bursaries and Scholarships; Education Support; Open Source Computer Labs; Road Safety; Adelaide Tambo School for the Physically Challenged; Winter Warmth; Shoe-ing the Nation; Sports Development; Cultural Projects; Counselling Services; Life Skills; Toy Distribution; Meat Distribution; Wheelchair Distribution; Research and Development; Interfaith Unification

reach. Rony Brauman, one of the founders of Doctors without Borders (*Médecins sans frontières*), points out that the 1970s witnessed the rise of what James Rosenau has called “sovereignty-free actors” who...

... positioned themselves on the international stage that had previously been reserved for states, but without all the problems of state-controlled national sovereignty in the classical sense. Greenpeace, in publicly protesting the first French nuclear tests in the Pacific, is one eloquent example, but also Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Oxfam. It is not as if some ethical force suddenly took hold of the world, though: this phenomenon also applies to terrorist groups, to religious movements, to businesses, to revolutionary movements. With urbanisation, instantaneous communication, and the democratisation of transport (invention of charters), we are witnessing a “revolution in the abilities and aptitudes of the individual”- to borrow Roseneau’s formulation. It is within this context that private organisations of all kinds have been multiplying and developing at a rate that would have been unimaginable at any other time. There has also been a rapid development of television. This new “revolution” allows private groups to begin establishing themselves in areas that up until now have been reserved for states.²

As Brauman points out, the changes in the global environment facilitated private organisations that had a global reach. While not necessarily denying the role of these changes, Sooliman’s explanation for the inspiration of GOG has a different bent:

I went to Turkey in August 1991 and met a Sufi Master. I saw people of all religions, colour, nationality coming to a Muslim place, and he told me that religion doesn’t bring friction nor violence; it teaches love and compassion. The formation of the Gift of the Givers was instructed by the Sufi master Mohammed Saffer Effendi in Turkey a year later on 6 August 1992. It was my second meeting with him. All he said is that we will form an organisation whose name will be the Gift of the Givers in English – Waqful Waqifin – that will be the name. He said, “This will be your job for the rest of your life. Your lesson for the rest of your life will be “The best among people are those who benefit mankind”. And the emphasis is on the word “mankind”; not Muslim. And the emphasis should be on Africa, he insisted. And don’t expect anything in return, not even gratitude (interview, June 2009).

² Brauman, R (2000) Contradictions of Humanitarianism, *Alphabet City*, no. 7.

Sooliman returned to South Africa to fulfil the instructions of his Sufi master³ by folding the spiritual and the humanitarian into an organisational form - the Gift of the Givers.

The organisation was “born” in Sooliman’s Pietermaritzburg home. As operations expanded, Imtiaz gave up his medical practice and Zohra her teaching job and they ran the organisation full-time.

Seventeen years later, the headquarters are still in Pietermaritzburg, but GOG now has offices in Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Malawi.

The Context

The May 2008 xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg saw thousands of African migrants flee their homes. Many congregated outside police stations. Most arrived with just the clothing on their bodies. While the police station offered some sense of security, thousands sat on open ground with little protection against Gauteng’s winter.

One of the first organisations to respond to the basic needs of the refugees was the Gift of the Givers (GOG). **Tents, blankets and food parcels arrived almost immediately in trucks.** It was as if the organisation anticipated the attacks and had prepared for it.

Over the next few months GOG was constantly on the ground providing support and following the refugees as they made their way to camps across the city.

At the onset of the attacks Sooliman landed at O.R. Tambo Airport. He had just been to Malawi to look over projects that the organisation was running in the country. Made aware of the violence, he told the Gauteng head of operations Allauddin Sayed to provide immediate support to the victims of xenophobia. Sayed lives in Bramley which is situated nearby Alexandra township, the scene of some of the very first violent xenophobic attacks. Sayed immediately organised for 400 loaves of bread and 200 blankets to be sent to the Alexandra Police Station. When he got to the police station, Sayed saw firsthand the immensity of the tasks at hand and the urgency for much more resources than first anticipated.

He relayed this information to Sooliman who told him to ‘go for it’. The organisation was in the middle of its winter warmth project in partnership with two popular radio stations, East Coast and Jacaranda, which have large listenership in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng respectively. This was the beginning of three weeks of non-stop action for the 30 staff and some 25 volunteers. Sayed takes up the story:

³ Sufism refers to the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. While some Sufi’s fall outside of Islam and see themselves as constituting a universal movement predating Islam, Sufi’s in South Africa mostly follow one of the orthodox Islamic traditions, but attach themselves to a Shaykh who provides guidance in all aspects of life. He would prescribe certain prayers or *dhikr* (‘remembrance of God’) that would allow the follower to turn his or her heart away from everything other than God. The followers of a Shaykh usually consult him on all major and minor issues and follow the advice given. The Sufi tradition has a long presence in the Cape, but has been spreading over the past two decades among Indian Muslims in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Adherents compare Shaykhs to physicians. While the latter takes care of the body, the Shaykh sees to the maladies of the heart.

That night we came with tents. Immediately we put up 40 tents in Alex, and six at Bramley police station. We gave the displaced food and kept on supplying food. The policewomen themselves were cooking for 160 refugees, mostly babies and children. By then xenophobic attacks were in full force. At 3:00 am Disaster Management gave 3 000 blankets (donated by us) which went to Primrose Park and Germiston. People threw stones at us when we arrived at night at the Germiston Municipal Hall. We were not ready for this. It flared up on 12 May in Alex. Third night, Disaster Management came – Nigel, Springs, Kwa-Tema ... all came for help. Police could not cope. The head of Disaster Management knew to contact Imtiaz. Next day, 2:00 am, we loaded the vehicles we had at hand. Government Disaster Management sent their fire trucks. I've never experienced anything like. It was a war zone. Two friends from Radio 702 helped us a lot. We emptied our stores – mattresses, food, blankets, everything – R1.5 million worth of goods for children. We pre-ordered from AA Wholesalers. They were only making mattresses for us. There were no camps at that stage. We realised that by the time government wakes up it will be too late. We mobilised churches. Groceries were vital. Pritchard Street Bishop Paul Verryn from the Methodist Church ... ah, he was great. Other churches from Primrose Park too. There were 150 women and children cramped in a foetal position on the floor, and a woman gave birth in that position at 2:30am ... just like that. The Methodist Church in Primrose opened up its doors. On the third day, we were the only supplier of foam mattresses to the camps all the way to Midrand. One of our donors was the Reverend Doug of the Anglican Diocese for Johannesburg. We also had these two friends from 702 and I said, "I need to mobilise. ... every school and every child." We started having centres. Village Walk was our most successful collection point. We hired three or four trucks everyday for a month. We had a team of two women, Annie and Ashner at Village Walk. ... Ambassadors from all over made donations in that first week of xenophobia. I got a call from one of the journalists about a girl whose uncle was burnt alive. She ran for miles because they wanted to rape her. She stayed at my place. We got her papers sorted out and sent her back home to Mozambique. It takes Government and other groups up to 15 days to mobilise. Then camps were made – Midrand, Rifle Range, Collett Drive, Springs (near Nigel), Germiston – are the areas where we were involved. Muslim groups wanted halaal food – Azaadville people. This was not working. Many Ethiopians only eat dairy products. ... Lots of Somalis moved to camps in Pretoria who had to be catered for. We sent R2 to R3 million worth of goods to Cape Town. We set up a clinic in Primrose where we provided gloves, bandages and medical supplies to Doctors Without Borders (interview, Allauddin, July 2009).⁴

⁴ The aid package to camps included the following; tents, blankets, sleeping bags, food parcels, new clothes, new shoes, plastic dishes for food, plastic dishes to wash clothes, sanitary pads, disposal nappies, tooth paste, tooth brushes, body soap, bar soap for clothes washing, towels, and face cloths.

Life in the Camps

As the work of GOG grew and word spread of its ability to provide “real” on-the-ground support, for the very first time major corporates gave substantial donations in cash and kind. This included Investec (R300 000) and Momentum (R121 000). Pick n Pay Hyper donated cool drinks. Smaller business houses like A.A. Wholesalers donated foam mattresses; Ossie Tayob of OSGO Wholesalers donated soap and wet wipes. The International Federation of Women Lawyers (South Africa) donated food vouchers and the Deputy Minister of Correctional Services donated R1000. Independent Newspapers made a contribution of R1,5 million to the coffers of GOG. GOG’s Johannesburg office spent R6 million in 2008 on its xenophobia response (interview, Sayed, July 2009).

When people were moved to camps, GOG followed them there. Sayed takes up the story:

Doctors Without Borders, Government Disaster Management; Mustafadin in Cape Town and, locally, we worked alongside the Methodist and Anglican churches and formed a partnership... The South African Police (SAPS), women’s networks; Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) in Thembisa, the UN Development Program – we gave them food parcels up until May 2009. Also Oxfam. In June 2008 the camps were started by Government. That’s where GOG’s biggest involvement came. We worked 24 hours. We never slept as we supplied mattresses ... There were about 50 000 people in total in about 200 camps (interview, Sayed, July 2009).

GOG did more than simply feed, clothe and provide shelter. It also responded to the needs of children:

The various teachers unions got together and gave us R70 000. In the Midrand camp there were children with no education so we hired minibuses to take them to school and bring them back. The managers used to change at the camp, and each time we had to get through new red tape. We told the Education Department to offer education and we would supply tents where children could be taught so the children don’t miss out. We did the same thing in Rifle Range, our largest camp. We gave out food parcels, sweets and presents in July 2008. The children there were traumatised. We took Kung Fu Panda, the movie, and gave presents. Mothers cried that day as they said that throughout this trauma, this was the first time that they were happy. We even brought in child psychologists to comment on offering this kind of entertainment ... like, you know, would it not traumatise them more? We gave the children sweet parcels. That was

my happiest day. We gave books to kids. We made sure the books were light, inspiring, and joyful to raise the spirit – no creepy stories, just fun and entertainment. You can't measure what you achieved in terms of rands and cents when you see the joy. (Interview, Sayed, July 2009).

GOG's approach to work closely with formal government structures during this crisis, including the police, reflected a historical trend. According to Allauddin:

We have a very good relationship. We are not their opposition. We work within the system. Police escorts are waiting for us whenever we take a trip. We complain about a system in the camp or a police station, we get it straightened out. Food used to arrive in certain courier 's' trucks from Disaster Management Fund. I was pleased until I found out that we could have done so with just half what they were being paid. Our courier gave us a 50% discount, and they didn't charge for Sundays. I was involved with the MEC of Safety and Security during this period and got full access – no limitations to the camps. There were 42 Malawians who were surrounded in a farm somewhere. A white lady phoned and said this was happening. We had full cooperation from the police to rescue them. Government knows that when we land, anywhere we land, we land with the South African flag (interview, July 2009).

GOG paid for **over 4 000 meals** over two months.

Sooliman told Allauddin to "empty the supermarket shelves off basic goods". GOG bought supplies for about R1 million and the food sustenance package, Sibusiso, was distributed in its thousands.⁵ GOG provided 50 000 blankets, 5 000 mattresses and R1 million in food parcels.

The organisation also spent a considerable sum of money transporting people back to their home countries:

Just one drop-off at Rosettenville – that's 120 [humans per bus load] times [x's] R350. These people were panicking in the camps. People wanted to go back to their home countries. Not everybody is strong. They really had a phobia! They were thinking "What's gonna happen to our children?!" Family members from there were calling them to come back home. When they said, "We want to go!" we hired five buses. You know the Malawians

⁵ It was in 2004 that GOG introduced the world's first groundnut-soya, high energy and protein food supplement called Sibusiso ("the Blessing"). Sibusiso is indicated in cases of weight loss, muscle wasting, low energy levels, nutritional challenges, weakness, and decreased appetite. The product was the brainchild of Sooliman and is currently used by 230 health facilities in South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho and Botswana

are soft and sensitive. At R48 000 a bus and that's 60 persons in a bus, each one with a food parcel. Two trains left from Park Station (800 people)... Everyone had a blanket and a food parcel to go with. You will always see a green and yellow Gift of the Givers blanket. That was God. He made his mark. We had good relationships with embassies so borders and papers were sorted out. We just said, "Meet us at the border". There was lots of screening – using people from those countries. We even paid for disabled persons to get back home with hired kombis (interview, July 2009). //

GOG spent R300 000 on transport for people to return to their home countries. For GOG, supporting people to return to their countries of origin was the right thing to do once the organisation realised that government was keen to close the camps and repatriate or re-integrate inmates. The other option was to support mobilisations like that of the refugees at Rifle Range camp for greater support and protection from the government. This would have meant *confronting* government rather than working *with* it. Critics may argue that in attempting to alleviate suffering through repatriation, the organisation was inadvertently supporting the intention of the perpetrators who wanted to rid of "foreigners". But Sayed saw it simply as "complying with the victims' wishes," a move, he adds, which their home governments were supporting.

In interviewing people in the camps, there is a mixed reaction to GOGs modus operandi:

“ Takawira Moyo arrived in South Africa from Chegutu, Mashonaland West Province on New Year’s Day 2007. He had been chairperson of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the area while working as a clerk at a local bakery, and was on the run from ZANU youth and intelligence officials of the Mugabe government. ZANU youth had previously frog-marched him out of his house and beaten him, and when he heard that he was to be taken to Harare for questioning, he decided to make for South Africa. After a long trip via Bulawayo, he finally got to the Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg. Already a known figure in Zimbabwean exile circles, Moyo decided to lie low for six months. ”

After six months he made his way to Springs and sought to earn a living doing painting and welding. He secured a shack in Paineville and set about building a home. Soon the business began to expand

and Moyo started employing three other Zimbabweans. He used some money to start a tuckshop alongside the shack.

In 2008 he decided to go back home and bring his wife and two young children to live with him. On the way back to South Africa he was robbed of all his possessions. He left his wife in a village in Venda and walked from the Limpopo River to Polokwane, a distance of over 200 kms. There he worked for R10 a day until he secured R130 to make his way back to Springs. His younger brother Wisdom had looked after things while he was away. It was May 2008.

At mid-night I heard a noise at the door. I had on a t-shirt, shorts and socks. I could only wear socks because the long walk from Limpopo River to Polokwane had left me with sores on my feet. The banging on my door continued. I opened the door. The first thing I got was a hard klap (smack). People rushed in. They ransacked my shack. My fridge and television were the first to go. Then all my clothes and the goods in the tuckshop. My brother was stabbed twice in the back. We just ran for our lives.

Moyo ended up at the local police station. He estimates that some 3 500 mainly Zimbabweans arrived at the police station. After a week of sleeping in the open they were housed in a big hall in the town centre. Moyo was elected chairperson representing by now what he estimates were 4 000 people. He managed to ensure his wife and two children joined him.

From the hall the refugees were transported to the Selcourt Camp. Here a site manager was placed in overall charge. Initially given three meals, this was cut down to two. When outside support arrived the site manager refused them access. Finally when GOG, led by Sayed, arrived with a representative of Oxfam at the beginning of July, Moyo gathered all the people and they met them outside the camp.

The support offered by Sayed and GOG, according to Moyo, came “exactly at the right time.” The food that they had been receiving was often rotten, and many people had got sick. GOG’s food parcels became a lifeline.

Health conditions were terrible. Toilets were overflowing. People avoided the toilets and used the bush, adding to the problems. The children had no nappies. GOG and the local Trinity Methodist Church supplied nappies. A big tent was set up for children and GOG supplied colouring books and toys. **Moyo alleged that a lot of things donated to the camp were stored by the site manager and sold off to local people.**

Moyo participated in a series of meetings with residents of Paineville to re-integrate displaced foreigners. The residents refused them to come back. The Ekurhuleni Municipality decided to build shacks for many of the displaced in Extension 10 Kwa-Thema. Moyo now lives with his family in a one-bedroom outbuilding in Springs. His plan is to resurrect his welding and painting business.

He fears though more xenophobic attacks. According to Moyo, word is out in the Springs area that all foreigners must leave by 2010.

Owen⁶ a Zimbabwean who found refuge in the River Road camp overlooking Alexandra was also a beneficiary of support from GOG. The River Road camp, because it was so close to Alexandra, was designated as an all male camp. Many chose to stay in the camp because they could still access work in the area. Owen left the country of his birth in 2004 because he was starving and jobs had dried up. He was living in Alexandra when a crowd gathered outside his shack on 10 May 2008. He knew some of them as they were his neighbours. They asked him to “vacate the shack immediately.” It was deep into the night but he bundled what he could together and slept with his family in an open veld. This is how Owen arrived at the River Road camp - without documents, family, home, or work.

While expressing his gratefulness for the support of GOG, Owen has a much more critical perspective. Owen was elected to the camp committee by fellow refugees. One of their first battles was with the site manager who acted very harshly. He would not let donors of food and other goods into the camp, for example. Owen felt that GOG could have supported their challenge to the site manager. Instead, the committee was bypassed and GOG dealt directly with the site manager. The committee was left to ensure that people made a line and generally kept order.

When presenting this assessment to Sayed, his reply was that the immediate task was to get access to the camps. By challenging the power structures this would have meant jeopardising their easy access to the camps, and their ability to feed people and provide other basic necessities. Rony Brauman’s words here are apposite:

“He to whom humanitarian action is addressed is not defined by his skills or potential, but above all, by his deficiencies and disempowerment. It is his fundamental vulnerability and dependency, rather than his agency and ability to surmount difficulty that is foregrounded by humanitarianism”⁷

⁶ A pseudonym

⁷ Brauman, R (2000) Contradictions of Humanitarianism, *Alphabet City*, no. 7.

Volunteers

One of the remarkable features of the response to the violence was the outpouring of support in various forms from South Africans. Journalist Justice Malala wrote, ‘an underground movement began to take shape. Men and women began sending email and text messages to organise taking food, clothes and other necessities to shelters set up by the police and churches.’⁸ The response also saw people serving as volunteers to collect goods and take them to camps. One of the foremost places as a collection point was Village Walk. Andie Smith, a mother of three children aged 7, 4, and 2 was one of the most visible faces at Village Walk and worked closely with GOG. She previously worked in the Department of Safety and Security as a researcher.

Andie first heard about the attacks through the media.

702 broke the news. I saw the photo of the guy on fire in the newspaper while I was standing in the queue in Woolworths. I said to my husband, either we do something or we leave the country. I was unbelievably shocked. Ashna (a friend whose children go to the same school) and I were talking at school the next morning. She doesn't read the papers. She just can't do it. She says it depresses her too much. So, we were talking about the incidents, and when she [Ashna] got home she phoned Radio 702. We asked them at 702 if we can start up some kind of collection. The news desk at 702 suggested we get in touch with the Gift of The Givers. We were looking for an avenue to facilitate a fundraiser. When we got hold of GOG, they said a truck will be outside Village Walk the next morning (that was during that first week of the xenophobic attacks) – it was the Tuesday and it was stationed in Noord Street to accept donations. They [the GOG] would finalise it with Village Walk. It was all sorted. They said, “Can you and Ashna send SMSs to other parents to ask them to make donations.” The next morning me and Ashna brought our trailers out and let people know what we are looking for. I was on air with John Robbie for about three or four minutes and gave people an idea of what we were looking for and notified them of collection points. From that Tuesday morning we were overwhelmed here. I have never seen such generosity out of people in my life. People were starting to show up with boot loads of stuff. We ran a rotation. In one day we did nine trips with trailers all loaded up. Rabia, Allauddin's daughter, phoned me. She and I dealt with each other a lot on the phone, coordinating the donations. We never actually met in person. Allauddin told me, and people who wanted to donate, that we were going to be “stationed” at

⁸ Quoted in Lauren Graham, Helene Perold, Rejoice Shumba (2009) Volunteering for social transformation? Understanding the volunteer response to the xenophobic attacks of 2008: Implications for democracy in South Africa, *Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa* (VOSESA), unpublished

Village Walk and that we were going to be there till 5pm. Well, we were there until after 11pm, even though we had planned to end at 5pm in Noord Street. JMPD had marked off the pavement as redistribution points. We were able to tell we needed “X... and Y... and Z...” at Bramley Police Station. Nobody knows how those trucks got there, collecting stuff and taking them to the people who needed them, but they got there. Calls were coming in via Allaiddin to facilitate this whole thing. I don’t think GOG expected this kind of response. They expected just a trickle. JMPD even cordoned off the road to demarcate an entire area for this to take place at Village Walk. The other two things we experienced: (1) Cash (2) Bottled water and bread. We bought out Pick n Pay’s entire stock of tins, bread and bottled water. We cleared their shelves. Collections continued at the Michael Mount Waldorf School in Bryanston (where Andie and her husband, Dr. Steve Smith are parents of learners]. Me and Rabia co-ordinated. We still never met in person. David O’ Sullivan, from Radio 702, did an outside broadcast. He told people that volunteers will be collecting throughout the week.

I asked if GOG could help with an urn. We took urns and pots to the Central Methodist Church – which was an experience on its own! I live in Lonehill in Johannesburg, in Fourways. We have a very active residents association. There’s even a collection point at the school, but we didn’t want all and sundry coming onto to the premises. Well, I had people arriving at my house at 11 o’ clock at night. I took everything [donations] to Village Walk. We were on the go! Lonehill Village Church was also taking donations. I was out every morning at 6am and got home at 6pm every night. After it died down, we went on holiday.

Andie was very clear about her motivation for getting involved:

I was so ashamed of being South African. I couldn’t bear it. The idea... I have 3 small children at home. There are people who came here with nothing because South Africa promised them a better life, and now they have even less. It’s not politically correct to blame the ANC. It’s not right to also keep blaming apartheid. So this was a nice convenient scapegoat. We have all these illegal immigrants who steal our houses and jobs. It was an outpouring of anger and hatred directed against the most vulnerable. Look at the service delivery strikes. There has to be an outlet.

Ashna and her friends were joined by others:

It was the community of parents of Waldorf. They brought things. People's generosity amazed me. It just came in waves. Security guards packed stuff in the parking lot to make sure it didn't get stolen. A lot of people felt helpless and ashamed. It provided an outlet for people to come and help and not get directly involved like having to go to the camps. The LRA (Lonehill Residents Association), sent out emails to people outside of Lonehill. Many companies contributed. Bakkies arrived from companies across Johannesburg. Those bakkies took me two days to offload. There was a national need for some kind of outlet to give.

Andie simply took the kids along:

I have an amazing housekeeper. I made a lot of trips. Most of the times, I took the kids with. I packed them into their car-seats and packed stuff around them – under their feet, behind the backs of their chairs, between them, everywhere. These people who were the victims of the xenophobic attacks are no different from the people on the street, the beggars. The only difference is that the refugees have tents. One day, while I was driving, my daughter saw a woman begging at the robots and she asked me, "Mom, where does that lady live?" And, I said, "That is her home. This road is her home." And, I like that my daughter is shocked by what she sees. And, you know I want her to stay that way. My children must never become okay with this.

Andie was impressed with GOGs work:

I think they were absolutely fantastic. They responded so quickly. There was no other Jewish organisation that could make that effort and commitment to pull off something like that. It was so cleverly and expertly run. They do an excellent job. But, there seemed a lack of enthusiasm for us to remain involved from the GOG side.

Andie is certain she would volunteer again:

Absolutely, yes, I would. It was one of my greatest criticisms. Perhaps it's because I'm Jewish that I haven't been called back. Perhaps it's because I'm white. It's a closed organisation and it is family run. Imtiaz runs it like that. Allauddin talked about taking me to see the operations in Africa. But that is not the same as an actual invitation.

When asked to offer an evaluation of the response to xenophobia, Andie offered this perspective:

What kind of responses? And whose responses? I spent a day in one of those camps. I spent a day registering babies. Checking what do they need, how many, categorising the age groups, you, that sort of thing – just a system to get things done. I walked from tent to tent. Those tents were set up along national lines – you know, like, the first 15 tents were Congolese; the next 45 tents were for Nigerians; the next 25 tents were for Zimbabweans, without exception. I just thought to myself that if that's the best that we can do as a national government, then we failed badly. I was there early – before even the first donations arrived and the tents were properly set up and resourced. No mattresses. There was a national shut down. They didn't want us or the press in the camps. They knew that if they had a full description of the realities of those camps, we would have been exposed to have almost no humanity. If that is the best government could offer under those circumstances, we have failed. And, that is just one example. I know we can change this country brick by brick. The fundamental belief of Islam is charity. You know it's just something that we just don't get – that act of charity. You know when your kids outgrow their toys and clothes and you call Cotlands. We all have our favourite charities – whether it's the Deaf and Blind Society or the SPCA, whatever. Most of us don't even know what those tins are for at the counters of most supermarkets. The thing is people do want to give; they do want to help, but they just don't want to get involved. And when you do want to get involved, the organisations involved do not make it easy. It would appear that they want involvement during the time of crisis but not necessarily afterwards. For me one of the big things is to encourage volunteerism. Ordinary people can make a big difference.

During the response to xenophobia it did use volunteers, but this was really an exceptional time. Sayed indicates that their approach is not to try and mobilise volunteers but rather hire people for short periods of time and pay them:

We don't work with many volunteers. If we do, they have to be in it heart and soul. Especially in Johannesburg we have no time. It's round the clock and that's our biggest problem with volunteers. So what we do, is we pay people. I'll give you a job. I'll give you maybe R1 000 plus food parcels and see that you don't go hungry. After three months I add another R500. Stanley, one of our employees used to drive those big trucks for the police. He became a security guard and eventually had no job. We started him off

with R2 500 plus food parcels, plus groceries for the families when they go home to wherever they live – Zimbabwe, Malawi, DRC. We don't overpay and we don't exploit. And, don't stick with me out of need. "If you get a better offer for a better job, please leave," I tell them (interview, Sayed, July 2009).

Heins argues that NGOs maintain a wall between passionate professionals on the one side, and episodic donors and volunteers on the other side, in order to safeguard both their specific prestige and their professionalism.

Using Weber's definitions, this allows us to establish a distant family resemblance between post-traditional civil associations and 'religious sects', 'groups of warriors', or indeed 'mendicant orders'.⁹ This assessment has some resonance with the way GOG operates. Once the work on xenophobia was over, GOG's Johannesburg office and its work once more became the work of a dedicated band of paid, full-time officials.

Coalitions

The response to the violence saw a number of organisations working together. How did GOG approach the issue of coalitions? While one can label GOG a private humanitarian organisation, it is different from MSF, Greenpeace and Oxfam in a number of ways. Its headquarters are in Africa, its main source of funding is South African and its central focus of operations is Southern Africa. Organisationally it is also run very differently from the aforementioned organisations. While one would be hard-pressed to name a particular leader of these other organisations, GOG is at the opposite spectrum. Simply by perusing the archives of GOG, looking at its publicity material, talking to staff and the man himself, or the public at large, one gets a deep sense that the GOG is Imtiaz Sooliman. In fact, outsiders may find it very difficult to name anybody else in the organisation. This is a carefully nurtured image. Sooliman runs things from the top. He is almost always the sole originator of projects, makes the major decisions and leads from the front. This has important implications.

First, GOG is able to make rapid decisions about interventions. **There is no long process of consultation** with different parts of the organisation.

⁹ Heins, V (2008) *Nongovernmental Organisations in International Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Sooliman has acknowledged this publicly: "I can't work in government. I don't like bureaucratic systems. I need a decision in five seconds, not five weeks."¹⁰ This is an issue backed up by Sayed, head of the Johannesburg office: "I pick up the phone, call Imtiaz and say I want to start something costing R250 000. There's no papers, no proofing. He just says, "Allauddin go ahead!" (interview, July 2009). The ability to respond quickly has not gone unnoticed. In January 2009, for example, the St. George's Cathedral made a small donation to the GOG. In his letter, The Very Reverend Rowan Smith wrote: "On behalf of our congregation we would like to make a donation of R5 000 (Five Thousand) towards your humanitarian fund and in particular towards Zimbabwe. We admire your rapid response to the need of the people there and want to encourage your being able to move in before the government has made a decision"

Notwithstanding this, in response to the xenophobic violence, GOG did develop relations with various civil society organisations and United Nations agencies. GOG took people from a UN Development Programme on a tour of the camps and highlighted conditions in the camps to a delegation from the UN Children's Fund. It also joined with the UN Human Settlements Programme and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) to discuss the future of people in the camps. GOG though refused to support a proposal to house people in blocks of flats. Sooliman thought that it was a proposal that they would not be able to sustain, and the working relationship broke down. They remained committed to providing transport and food parcels for people to return to their home countries. (interview, Sayed).

GOG had a longer and more fruitful relationship with Oxfam. One staff member of Oxfam was basically seconded to work with GOG. GOG on behalf of Oxfam, developed a comprehensive database on how many adults and children were at the Glen Vista camp so that Oxfam could make an assessment on what was needed in terms of food parcels in the camp. Oxfam also paid GOG to provide food parcels to people in the camps (interview, Sayed).

This relationship points to two important things, that **GOG could not continue to operate in a vacuum in the face of a massive crisis**, and that organisations like Oxfam often lack the **feel for what is happening on the ground.**

A relationship with organisations like GOG becomes a mutually symbiotic one, since local organisations already have developed contacts and networks. It is clear though that GOG is the dominant partner.

GOG's most intense and most fruitful relationship was with Gauteng Disaster Management (GDM). It first developed when GDM stopped 'outsiders' from entering the camps. GDM, according to Sayed, was worried that people bringing in food might try to poison people in the camps. While GOG provided food, GDM often saw to its distribution. They also provided a R100 000 to GDM to cook and deliver food to some camps. GDM also facilitated GOG's access to camps, when volunteers and donors were denied access by camp managers appointed by the state.

¹⁰ Stephan Hofstatter, The Weekender, 'Determined to save the world', February 7-8, 2009.

Given the nature of GOG, as described above, the question of coalitions with other civil-society groups was always going to be a difficult one. Seen in a generous light, the organisational focus of GOG is towards achieving the immediate goal of relief to identified beneficiaries. As a result, coalitions are more likely to involve those agencies which are able to facilitate delivery and not focused on building long-term alliances based on a common ideological outlook. Indeed, there is a case to be made that GOG would undermine its ability, for example, to have a humanitarian corridor opened between Syria and Israel for the delivery of food and medicine if it were in South Africa in order to share a platform with the Palestinian Support Committee. Coalitions would tend to be highly instrumental, ad-hoc and, barring certain enduring logistical relationships, lasting for the duration of a particular project. This allows GOG the flexibility to operate as and where it desires.

A less generous reading of GOG's ability approach to coalitions is that the organisation is entirely under the sway of a charismatic leader. Their connection to other players in civil society with whom it may have programmatic affinities is often over-determined by its need to market itself, thus ensuring new avenues for funding, and just as often subordinated to the dictates of its leader who wishes to remain in control of the agenda. Since GOG has predetermined that delivery of humanitarian aid to beneficiaries is the *raison d'être* (reason for involvement) of the organisation, the scope for coalitions is limited. One of the advantages of this, according to Sayed, is that GOG remains flexible and is able to make alliances as and when the occasion demands it.

Beyond Sooliman, GOG is an organisation in which the influence of family is strong. Both Sooliman's wives are involved in the organisation. Zohra is Director of Careline in Pietermaritzburg, while Ayesha works in the Durban office. Allauddin Sayed runs the Johannesburg office. His wife Gawa is head of the recently opened Cape Town office. Other members of his immediate family are also involved in GOG.

GOG is different from organisations like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). **TAC also played a significant role in the response to the xenophobic attacks, especially in Cape Town.** The difference is that **GOG is not about organising a collective response to confront those in power**; it is not intent on building a constituency with branch structures that elect people into positions of authority and seek to be transparent and democratic nor is it trying to give voice or win hegemony for a subaltern sector of society.

Like TAC, though, while maintaining its autonomy, GOG does join with those who have political power to roll out services. But unlike TAC, it does not challenge government policy, but rather seeks to find ways to get the co-operation of those in authority: 'The government has always supported us 100% - even pre-1994... At the time I was attacked by my own community for wanting to work with the apartheid regime. But I will work with anyone to deliver humanitarian aid'.¹¹

How does one then classify GOG? NGOs can be classified in several ways. The World Bank among others separates Operational from Advocacy groups. Operational NGOs, under which GOG would fall, focus on the design and implementation of development or relief projects and work. Holding a development versus a relief orientation, serves as a further distinction within the group of Operational NGOs, and GOG lies within the latter.

The work done by an Advocacy NGO is to defend or promote a specific cause, the TAC being a good example of this. Unlike operational NGOs these organisations strive to raise awareness, to indirectly affect political outcomes through lobbying, media work and even demonstrations and other activist tactics. Ironically, the focus of these NGOs which have often developed a somewhat radical ideological outlook is to engage the state or other agents of authority in some way for the desired relief to be delivered. Operational NGOs, such as GOG, which seek to be ideologically neutral, often succeed in by-passing the state as far as the provision of the relief they have in mind is concerned. The content of their politics is often conservative, but its autonomous form may seem quite radical, whereas things are the other way around with many advocacy NGOs.

Another basis of categorisation of NGOs, which applies equally to operational and advocacy groups, is whether they can be classified as primarily evincing service delivery or participation in their engagement with society at large. There is no doubt that internal democratic practices take a back seat within GOG with the imperative to get a container of medicine to where it is required. Other binaries are less helpful. Are NGOs religious or secular; progressive or conservative, local, national or international in scope, and more public or private-oriented? If one were forced to clothe GOG in this garb, it can be categorised as a secular, progressive, *international* NGO with a public orientation, despite its religious roots.

Gender

GOG's response to xenophobia did see somebody like Gawa Sayed whose work was mainly at the Johannesburg office, get into the field to do relief work. Gawa networked with the UN and Oxfam and was very involved in providing counselling to women displaced by the violence. Gawa Sayed found it difficult to countenance the horror of some of the migrants' experiences: 'the sheer desperation, the questioning of, "is there a tomorrow?"' She took into her home a 14-year girl from Mozambique who had come to visit her uncle. He was literally 'butchered' in front of her in the Primrose Park area of Johannesburg. The attackers then beat and raped the young girl. Gawa nursed her, contacted her family in Mozambique and made arrangements for her passage home. For Gawa this was the lowest point of her life as a member of GOG.

¹¹ Stephan Hofstatter, *The Weekender*, February 7-8, 2009, Determined to save the world.

When asked though what she remembered most about the period, she said it was “the big hearts South Africans had. We were overwhelmed by the goods that people delivered to Village Walk. They literally came out in droves.” (interview Gawa Sayed).

Gawa came to the fore during the response to xenophobia, and it helped catapult her into a leadership role in the Cape Town office. But this does not signal a shift in power relations in the organisation. It has been remarked that civil society organisations, even very radical ones, lack an internal gender critique. Many remain, in their style, organisational practices and leadership profile, stubbornly patriarchal. Rebecca Pointer, for example, narrates an episode where an anti-eviction community leader accused of beating his own girlfriend, defied calls to have these actions sanctioned on the basis the “democracy stops at my front door.”¹²

However, while decisions after consultation, lay almost exclusively in Sooliman’s hands, women play a central role in GOGs work. Zohara effectively runs the Pietermaritzburg office, Ayesha the Durban office and Gawa Sayed the Cape Town office. This participation of women has grown in recent years. In an environment where there is debate within Islam about the role of Muslim women in public life, GOG has clearly supported the position of Muslim women making their presence felt in the public sphere.¹³

Gender activists though might see in the way Suleiman presides over GOG, a quite literal blurring of the line between chairperson and pater familias. Without attempting an apologia for this, the obvious benefit is that the power relations within GOG are quite plain for everyone to see. Gender and power relations are often a blind spot in civil society. Even in many civil society formations where substantive equality and radical democratic practices are claimed, we see the *de facto* existence of male presidents-for-life, with a suitably subordinate female vice-president perpetually in the wings.

¹² Pointer, R (2004) Questioning the Representation of South Africa’s ‘New Social Movements’: A Case Study of the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 39, 4, pp. 271-291.

¹³ It would require longer and deeper ethnographic work to moving beyond simply “finding” women in the structures of GOG to discern the extent to which the structures of the organisation and ways of working either empowers or marginalises women.

One of the stark realisations in reflecting on GOG's response to the xenophobic violence, is how little was done by organisations to support those once they left the camps. In GOG's case, they supported those who wanted to go home. There were limited attempts to get people to be reintegrated. But for many leaving the camps, they arrived having lost documents, their homes and livelihoods. They left the camps in the same situation as the following two testimonies indicate.

Thembi¹⁴ arrived in Johannesburg on the 2nd of May 2007 from Zimbabwe. She made her way to Nigel. Her mother had once lived and worked in the area she and knew a few people with whom she could get some temporary accommodation. She shared a garage in Duduza township with 2 other Zimbabweans and got a job doing hair braiding. She has a young daughter back in Zimbabwe, as well as an elderly mother. Whatever spare cash she had, Thembi sent back home.

¹⁴ A pseudonym

In May 2008 she heard of attacks in nearby Tsakani. All three occupants of the garage decided to flee that night. They went directly to the police station. From there they were taken to the Nigel town hall. That night there were no blankets and nothing to eat. By the morning there were some 300 people in the hall, a mix of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and a small contingent of Ethiopians. Thembi was anxious to get to try and secure her belongings. However, by the time she got back to the garage the place had been ransacked. By now volunteers from Duduza had helped distribute blankets and food once a day. After a month they were transferred to the Springs camp. There Thembi became head of the camp's health committee.

Food was delivered by DHL and they were fed twice a day. But, Thembi claims that often the food 'was rotten' and they had to deal with people who got sick as a result. The other problem was that the Ehkurleni Municipality was practically non-existent. She was put in charge of getting them to sort out the over-flowing toilets, but there was a complete lack of response. She helped set up a crèche and distributed nappies donated by GOG. For Thembi, this made a big difference in terms of the health of the children.

But Thembi's problems really began once she left the camp. She had lost all her belongings and could not re-start her braiding business. She eventually found a job as a guard in Brakpan. It is guarding repossessed houses, working seven days a week for R850 a month. When she was in the camp they were asked to apply for asylum. Everyone was refused. Her passport that gave her permission to stay in the country for three months has expired. The card that they were given by Home Affairs had also expired. For her to get her passport stamped for a further period, means going back to the border and paying R800. She does not have the money. She 'lives in pain and fear'. She has not seen her daughter now aged five for two years. On the streets word is out that after the 2010 World Cup there will be a 'gnashing of teeth'-all foreigners will be chased out of South Africa.

Spiwe¹⁵ 24, also finds her herself in incredible difficulties because of papers. She jumped the border in May 2008 to join her husband. Spiwe almost immediately found herself in the Springs camp. She has three children who cannot get birth certificates because Spiwe does not have an I.D. or passport. For her to get a passport, she has to go back to Zimbabwe. For an emergency passport she needs R2 000, and for a long term one she will have to pay the equivalent of R1 500. The eldest child is due to start school, but to register him she needs to have a birth certificate.

Both Thembi and Spiwe say that there is no organisation helping in this regard. Many of their fellow Zimbabweans are living in bushes one year after the attack. Both were appreciative of the food parcels and other support they got in the camp from organisations like GOG, but feel let down that once they were forced to leave the camp, they got absolutely no support.

The response to the May 2008 xenophobia reveals some of the challenges facing GOG.

Despite increased support from corporates and non-Muslims, the organisation continues to **rely heavily on goodwill within the Muslim community, and especially on zakaat contributions.**

¹⁵ A pseudonym

The obligation of zakaat is a mandatory tax of 2.5% on all Muslims, men, women and children, who possess a certain minimum wealth (R3 000 in September 2009). According to the Quran (9: 103), 'of their goods take alms, so that thou might purify and sanctify them.' While Muslims are permitted to give charity to non-Muslims, the issue of whether zakaat is to be confined to Muslims has not been settled among scholars.¹⁶ The giving of zakaat to an intermediary involves both trust and accountability, as the onus remains on the giver to ensure that his / her obligation has been fulfilled.

The fact that so many people give their zakaat contribution to GOG reflects their faith and trust in the organisation. But GOG faces strong competition for funds from the fact that with many Muslims dealing with poverty and inequality on their doorsteps, among family, friends, and neighbours in the context of increasing inequality in South Africa, many Muslims are disposing off zakaat to persons that they know personally, as well as organisations like the South African National Zakaat Fund, Al-Imdaad, Crescent of Hope, Darul Yatama, and the Women's Cultural Group. The continued occupation of Palestine, the devastation in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan read in the context of Islamophobia, has also created an urgent sense among Muslims of supporting Muslim countries, while simultaneously forging a local inwardness.

Will the secular stance of GOG hurt its ability to continue to raise substantial sums within the Muslim community? Conversely, will the focus on "Muslim crises" impact on GOG's ability to continue to forge relations across faiths, colour, and class? **This is a tightrope that GOG will have to tread carefully.**

There is good reason for couching the appeal in religious terms. As Sayed pointed out, Muslims believe that there is special virtue in feeding the fasting person. He related a saying of the Prophet Muhammad to his followers that 'whoever feeds a fasting person has the same reward as him (the fasting person), and that on a blessed night during the month, the angel Gabriel will shake hands with that person. While Infaaq (spending in the way of God) is a basic Islamic value and the destitute are the direct responsibility of society, Sayed explained that because of these special virtues during the fasting month, Muslims tend to be especially generous and most organisations seek to take advantage of this through 'Ramadaan appeals'. This continues to be a critical source of funding.

A second concern is whether the organisation is getting too large and unwieldy. Sylvie Brunel of 'Action Against Hunger', for example, has written that "humanitarian organisations artificially swollen by the massive amounts of public funds made available to them become enormous machines, difficult to manage and slower to react."¹⁷ This is not the case with GOG at the present time. The response to the May 2008 xenophobic attacks showed that it can react with speed and in a sustained and effective manner. A mission to Gaza in (month) 20 that took along doctors and vital medical

¹⁶ See 'Living Shariah,' at http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544900 for the range of views on this subject.

¹⁷ Brunel, S (2001) 'Twenty Years of Struggle Against Hunger: From Voluntarism to the Reality Principle,' in *The Geopolitics of Hunger 2000-2001...Action Against Hunger...* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 333-338.

supplies, proved that GOG has the ability to be effective in difficult circumstances and far from its home base. It is also able to attract the support of South African volunteers as shown by the fact that the response included a 25-member medical team and 84 tons of aid.

Humanitarian organisations are confronted with issues of impartiality and neutrality. GOG is insistent that its approach is both impartial and neutral, and that it is driven solely by a determination to get aid to those who need it. Carole Dubrulle of 'Action Against Hunger' holds that ...

Impartiality is the real Hippocratic oath of a humanitarian organisation. This is an operational principle that seeks to match relief to need, in situations in which available resources are always limited... Providing assistance to populations (and to governments or heads of factions, of course) on both sides of a front line does not mean mathematical equality. The "beneficiaries" are identifiable from evaluations that are objective and not imposed by governments.¹⁸

On neutrality, she argues that in its most 'pure and simple' form it would mean that 'remaining silent about a crime being committed ... would amount to connivance with the oppressor, to being an accomplice to the injustice committed'. Dubrulle adds¹⁹:

The debate over whether testimony is irreconcilable with access to victims is an old one, which sometimes poses intractable dilemmas within humanitarian organisations. Particularly so as this type of debate inevitably focuses on the security of the humanitarian personnel on missions in the field and on the situation of the victim populations. Our presence in the field is thus in itself a form of protection, and yet, in the absence of any means of coercion inherent in the term protect, we must accept with all the required humility our status as "disposable" humanitarian workers. But this is not the only form of protection: Bearing witness in order to more effectively prevent crises, by resolutely refusing to let humanitarianism be used merely as dressing for gaping wounds and sometimes to complete the dirty work in situations of an unacceptable status quo, illustrates our vocation to never remain neutral in the face of violations, especially when these are massive violations of human rights.

How does GOG match these sentiments? The organisation 'bears witness' not through its public statements on xenophobia, for example, but through its very public work in responding to xenophobia. This was exemplified in its mission to Gaza. The crisis at the Rafah crossing, according

¹⁸ Dubrulle, C (2001) 'Humanitarianism and the International Criminal Justice System: Abandoning Neutrality and Impartiality?' in *The Geopolitics of Hunger 2000-2001...Action Against Hunger...* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 215-225.

¹⁹ Ibid.:12

to the booklet explaining its work in Gaza, and the media reports from ‘embedded’ journalists, all served to focus on the devastation wrought in Gaza without the organisation saying anything about the roots of the conflict or commenting directly on the Israeli incursion.

However, while GOG may claim to be apolitical, this does not imply that they have no sense of the political. In the aftermath of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks, the organisation made sure it not only fed those in the camp near Alexandra, but continued with its weekly feeding programme in Alexandra which catered in the main to South Africans. Once it was faced with demands for halaal food in one of the camps by mainly Somali’s, GOG realised this could create divisions and decided to feed the whole camp with halaal food. Its approach in both South Africa and Malawi is to have a close working relationship with governments and get their endorsements for the projects being run.

What are the lesson that we can draw from this study of GOG regarding the nature of leadership, the relationship between NGOs and the state, the relationship between the secular and the religious, and the impact on NGOs of their transnational activities?

Max Weber has arguably written the most influential analysis of charismatic leadership in which he defined charisma as ...

“ A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional power or qualities. These as such are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.”²⁰

For Weber, as societies become increasingly bureaucratised and routinised, the opportunities for charisma lessen. For Weber charismatic authority ‘is sharply opposed both to rational, and particularly bureaucratic authority...bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analysable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules.’²¹ However, into the twenty-first century, we continue to see the persistence of charismatic leadership tied to a technically rational bureaucratic organisation that is professional and efficient. GOG is an example of this. Žižek has for example written how effective the relationship between a technocratic effective administration tied to a charismatic leadership is, using the example of Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi: ‘If our political choice is between permissive-liberal technocracy and fundamentalist populism, Berlusconi’s great achievement has been to reconcile the two, to embody both at the same time’ (2009). The lesson for GOG is that a charismatic leader is not an anomaly, but can be effective notwithstanding the dangers inherent in such an arrangement.

²⁰ Weber, M (1947) *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, Oxford University Press, New York.

²¹ Eisenstadt, S (ed) (1968) *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago

Sooliman's reason for the setting up of GOG, as inspired by his Sufi master, does give his mission a divine quality. The name of the organisation derived from a saying from the Quran, adds to this. The way the work of Sooliman has been written up has given him the status of someone with 'exceptional qualities'. Sooliman is a charismatic leader. Underlying this is a well-oiled machine that is rationalised and technically efficient. It is this combination that has made GOG effective. Sooliman's much published missions and name recognition (branding) is important in fundraising. This has become especially so inside of the Muslim community, as there are a number of organisations vying for the limited funding in what is a competitive environment.

It may be argued given that GOG is an organisation geared to raising funds and responding to humanitarian crisis in the most effective way on the ground, creates the conditions for a single figure to be associated with the organisation. But organisations in civil society that take up issues with government through collective action and mass mobilisation, that choose to represent a constituency, often in a confrontational way, just as often end up with a person coming to symbolise the organisation. One has to only think of the TAC and Zackie Achmat or Trevor Ngwane and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) as examples of this. This is despite an avowedly democratic and non-hierarchical organisational culture in both TAC and SECC. It goes beyond the leaders in these organisations assuming prominence simply because they were given such a profile by others outside, such as the media. Interpersonal power, charisma and centrality to decision making inside democratic organisations just as often attach themselves to an individual or a clique.

GOG, with its reliance on zakaat money, the Islamic injunctions that guide its work and its leadership, indicate its religious roots. But it has managed to ensure that its work has gone beyond the Muslim community. There are dangers that Muslims might opt to donate to organisations with a narrower focus. However GOG with the effectiveness of its work, media savvy and the name recognition of its founder has been able to maintain an effective Muslim funding base, while, as the xenophobia support work has shown, it has also drawn on financial support from major corporates. While GOG still relies mainly on funding from within the South African Muslim community, this is an important development in both showing GOG's acceptance countrywide as an honest and effective organisation able to deliver, while it also shows that GOG does not have to restrict its work within a religious community or national boundaries. It also shows that into the first decade of the twenty-first century, an organisation led by a single charismatic leader stitched to a well-oiled professional coterie of officials, can be highly effective.

The work of GOG suggests that organisations with religious underpinnings can generate support for those in need. The response to xenophobia indicates that organisations like GOG can motivate people to participate in actions for the collective good where otherwise they would have remained in cocoons.

Participation in charitable and voluntary work can be **a catalyst of a consciousness of community spirit**, and despite GOG's hesitance on this issue, it is something they seriously need to consider.

The response (albeit limited) also illustrated GOG's potential to work across communal and organisational boundaries in larger civic spaces, while retaining its independence.

Barrington Moore reflecting on the use of the media in the United States to present abuses across the world wrote:

Sorting through the day's mail one can decide whether or not to express moral outrage about political prisoners in Chile or the Soviet Union, black or Spanish-speaking victims of racial injustice in American cities, the plight of farm labourers in California or that of whales in the Pacific Ocean. It is even possible to gauge very nicely the intensity of one's moral outrage by the sign of one's check... The system allocates society's store of moral outrage in exactly the same way as the market allocates the supply of fruit juices or canned potatoes.²²

Heins argues that Barrington-Moore 'was certainly correct in pointing to the paradox of the creation of a moral public of spectators that is more interested in the display of moral excellence than in political effectiveness. NGOs in international society have often proved to be brilliant, Hermes-like players who move ably between places and geographical scales to dispatch their messages. But they are not good at involving the public in more than superficial ways.'²³

GOG's response to xenophobia was effective in getting the basic necessities to those in dire need. Its approach, though, of treating those in need as people without agency and not taking seriously the mobilising of volunteers, lends credence to Heins²⁴ critique.

Interviews:

Takawira Moyo, October 2009

Allauddin Sayed, June and July 2009

Imtiaz Sooliman, June 2009

Zohra Sooliman, August 2009

Gawa Sayed, October 2009

Thembi, October 2009

Spiwe, October 2009

Owen, July and October 2009

Andie Smith, November 2009

²² Barrington-Moore (1978) *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, New York, M.E. Sharpe.

²³ Heins, V (2008) *Nongovernmental Organisations in International Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

²⁴ Ibid.:24