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Displaced: Stories of Struggle in South Africa

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In June 2008, a group from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln — two advisers, seven student photographers, two student reporters and one student videographer — traveled to South Africa for 18 days. Their project, which had been in the making for the previous six months, focused on documenting immigration issues in South Africa.

Howard Buffett, a documentary photographer, funded the trip, which was a partnership involving UNL, Arizona State University and the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

The group arrived in South Africa amidst the aftermath of xenophobic violence that tore through the country in the several weeks leading up to the visit.

To understand the violent history of the country, the UNL students spent the first three days touring Johannesburg and Soweto, the Black township where some of apartheid’s watershed moments of political uprisings and hostilities took place. They also visited the Apartheid Museum.

Working with their ASU and South African student partners, the students wrote stories and shot video and photographs in Johannesburg and nearby townships and at the Zimbabwean border.

What these student journalists found were stories of extreme suffering like none of them had ever known or witnessed. This book offers just a glimpse of the countless heartbreaking and inspiring stories the group discovered in South Africa.

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**South Africa: Displaced**

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Johannesburg, South Africa — During several weeks in May 2008, South Africa became swept up in a frightening xenophobic rage. Wielding clubs, knives, hammers, bricks and anything else they could use as weapons, South Africans beat and killed emigrants from other African countries. But worse still, some of the victims were set on fire.

South Africans were angry because they felt the emigrants were taking away their own jobs and housing opportunities.

Less than a month after the xenophobic violence had subsided, our University of Nebraska-Lincoln group—two advisers, seven student photographers, two student reporters and one student videographer—traveled there for 18 days to document immigration issues. Our project, which had been in the making for the previous six months, focused on the aftermath of the violence.

Howard Buffett, a documentary photographer, funded the trip, which was a partnership involving UNL, Arizona State University and the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

We were nervous for the long journey when we departed from Lincoln on June 13, but our anxiety only increased when we landed in Minneapolis and had only 15 minutes to get from one end of the terminal to the other to catch the next leg of our flight.

And getting there was going to be no small feat with a group of 12. So we ran. The airline staff person at the gate held the door open, shouting, “Hurry, hurry. We’re holding the flight for you.”

Hours later, at the end of the long journey—almost a day and a half of travel—we emerged in Johannesburg, where it soon became clear that the scars had yet to heal from the mayhem that took

Stories of struggle in South Africa

By Bruce Thorson, associate professor, UNL CoJMC
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6 place the previous month.

Leading up to the violence was the fact that South Africa had virtually no border control. Emigrants poured into the country, unrestricted and unregulated; some legal and some not.

South African officials made attempts to round up the illegals, putting them on buses and trains and sending them back. But the neighboring countries had no means to deal with them once they were returned. So the emigrants simply picked up their belongings and headed back. This cycle repeated itself — over and over.

Some, however, found ways to stay in South Africa, fashioning makeshift homes out of cardboard, plastic and corrugated sheet metal. Some were no bigger than than 4 by 8 feet.

But soon angry South Africans descended upon the emigrant communities built in Johannesburg — and violence raged.

Sitting on his knees and covered by a mattress and duvet, a dazed Ernesto Nhamuave from Mozambique was set on fire and burned alive. Five photographers, including Shayne Robinson and Halden Krog of Johannesburg and Kim Ludbrook of the European Pressphoto Agency, photographed the burning victim as onlookers laughed.

Police arrived and put out the flames, but it was too late. One of the photographers scooped the emigrants for such a barbarous act. Still they laughed.

Days later, Robinson and several of the photographers who witnessed Nhamuave’s death joined a procession that followed a truck carrying his body several hundred miles back to his native village in Mozambique. The funeral, Robinson thought, would bring closure to the death and horrifying violence he had witnessed in the previous week’s time.

En route to the village, the truck broke down. The casket was loaded onto the bed of a small pickup driven by another photographer who had been following the procession. The final mile of Ernesto’s journey home was made possible by one of the photographers who had photographed his final moments. The funeral was emotional for the photographers.

“Photographed the funeral ceremony and events leading up to the burial. As the casket was being lowered into the ground, I stopped taking photographs, and I wept,” Robinson said. “Myself and several other photographers put down our cameras and each took turns throwing a few shovelfuls of dirt into the grave.”

While Nhamuave’s death was horrifying, the photographers said other scenes of violence were equally appalling. Ludbrook described how a police officer stood guard over a man who had been beaten and burned the night before.

“The officer, who had been there for several hours, though the man was dead,” Ludbrook said. “Then, he heard a groan.”

Medics soon arrived and wheeled the victim away while bystanders laughed, Ludbrook said.

After the weeks of violence ended, more than 60 people had died, including 20 South Africans. The inhuman treatment of the emigrants was shocking for many South Africans, who themselves endured decades of segregation, discrimination, violence and torture under apartheid rule.

A POLICE OFFICER stands guard while a young girl and her mother escape xenophobic attacks in a squatter camp in May 2008. Photo by Kim Ludbrook

POLICE SUBDUED a man who had been attacking foreign nationals in an informal settlement in Ramaphosa during xenophobic clashes in the area. Photo by Shayne Robinson
country, our UNL group spent the first three days touring Johannesburg and Soweto, the Black township where some of apartheid’s watershed moments of political uprisings and hostilities took place. We also visited the Apartheid Museum.

Working with our ASU and South African student partners, the UNL students wrote stories and shot video and photographs in Johannesburg and nearby townships and at the Zimbabwean border.

One of the places our students visited was the Rifle Range Camp, an area surrounded by chain-link fences and filled with white Quonset-hut style tents that housed more than 2,500 people displaced by the xenophobic violence. These were residents who were chased out of their homes, some in the middle of the night, trying to escape beatings, torture and death. The camp residents set up their temporary community according to nationality—Congolese were in one section, Mozambicans in another, Zimbabweans in another and so on.

Every morning a group of about 100 people would gather in the middle of the camp. There, with their breath visible in the cold winter air, they would sing, pray and read verses from the Bible.

After hearing about life in the camp, two women came from Zimbabwe to help. They would roam the camp picking up laundry, which they would later wash by hand.

Everything the emigrants once owned—homes, furnishings, appliances, cars and anything else—was gone. Everywhere the student journalists went inside the camp, people would approach them and ask for help—help in getting out, help in finding relatives, help with money.

The students found other poignant stories about the people and places of Johannesburg, including:

- Veterinarians who treated displaced pets.
- Families who had taken refuge in an abandoned tire shop.
- A place called “Prayer Hill,” where Christians went to pray, sing and gather because it was safe.
- A group of teenagers who lived in a sewer.

Everywhere we turned we were faced with stories of extreme suffering like none of us had ever known or witnessed.

One evening, on the wooden deck of a Johannesburg African restaurant, photo student Vanessa Shaw and I were entertained by a group of thumb piano players. Dressed in white linen pants and shirts, their heads festooned with a headdress of feathers, the trio, with wires on their thumb and first finger, plucked away on their instruments made from hollowed-out gourds.

The lead singer told us he was from Zimbabwe. I asked him why he was in Johannesburg.

“We are tired of the robot Mugabe,” he replied. “He’s killing people. He’s beating people. He’s burning houses. If you want to raise up your head to say something, you die. If you go to another party to be a member of that party you die for that.

“My uncle, my aunt, my cousins they were supporting the opposition party. So they died from that. Their house was burnt; the kids were burnt to death.”

He, like so many others, came to Johannesburg for a better life and to find his dream. Instead he, like so many others, woke to angry mobs who beat and burned people to death.
THE AFTERMATH
Jean Marie Kolonda and his family are one of the last tenants at Ponte to leave and are reluctant to move into housing elsewhere in Johannesburg, a city stricken by xenophobic violence.

Once a residential building for Johannesburg’s elite, Africa’s tallest residential building transformed into an overcrowded refuge for foreigners from many African nations and those escaping Johannesburg’s townships. Ponte City was a place where residents were unified as Africans, and geographic lines no longer separated them. In preparation for the 2010 World Cup, Ponte underwent renovation. Many of the residents were forced to leave the safety of its gates to find housing elsewhere.

Jean Marie Kolonda and his family are one of the last tenants at Ponte to leave and are reluctant to move into housing elsewhere in Johannesburg, a city stricken by xenophobic violence.
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A Shadow created by the midday sun hits the freshly swept floor as Jean Marie’s wife looks out of the window. while The men move their belongings out of the building, Jean Marie’s sister, left, and sister-in-law, right, braid the hair of his niece. JeAn mArie’S Sons and nephews play inside the bunk bed turned fort while the move happens around them. Ponte City towers over dozens of other apartment buildings and residential homes in Hillbrow, the inner-city residential neighborhood of Johannesburg.
from The Top of Ponte City, the sun sets behind the Hillbrow Tower, one of Johannesburg’s two telecommunications towers.

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The view from the top of Ponte City overlooks Hillbrow and much of the central business district.

The Sun provides all of the light to the inner walls of Ponte City.

From the 54th and highest floor of Ponte City, the sun casts its final rays of the day on much of Hillbrow and the central business district of Johannesburg.
A Sunday worship service takes place on Prayer Hill, which overlooks Johannesburg.

A woman and her child rest on the hill while the woman prays for help finding a job.

A man opens himself to God as he is blessed during a Sunday worship service.

This Zimbabwean woman left her five children in the country so she could find a job and send money home to them. “I worry about them too much. That’s why I pray. I want God to be with them. I am praying for my problems. I get many problems.”

Hundreds of people visit the hill each day for help finding employment.

The Yeoville Hill, known to area locals as Prayer Hill, overlooks all of Johannesburg, South Africa. Every day, hundreds of people flock to the hill to pray atop its majestic point. A sign stating absolutely no church gatherings goes unnoticed or simply ignored as groups of people join for a prayer service. Singing and chanting can be heard off in the distance, the wind carrying voices of hope and longing up to the heavens.

Most of the prayers are sung by displaced Zimbabweans who come to the hill because they feel closer to God there. Many of them pray for family members they left at home in Zimbabwe. Many pray for help in tough times. But most come to the hill to pray for help finding employment.
A man is blessed during a worship service at the hill.

Holy water is splashed on a man receiving the cleansing. He shouts out prayers to God while the group sings and chants.
Minister J. Sibanda holds a worship service every Sunday for anyone who wants to pray. The group sings praises to God as Sibanda cleanses each individual. The service lasts as long as it takes each person to be cleansed.

Group members look on as a man receives an individual worship cleansing.

A man prays atop Prayer Hill on a Sunday afternoon.

A group of men pray together during a worship service at Prayer Hill. Many go to Prayer Hill to escape the tension in Johannesburg and worship together in peace.

South Africa: Displaced
A boy has brought his puppy (far left) to be vaccinated by Bailey and her team on one of their visits to the townships.

Sascha Karu (top), a Claw veterinarian, prepares for surgery with Jennifer Gerse, a Canadian volunteer, at the Claw clinic.

Bailey helps a man who was paralyzed in a car accident. She was able to find him a wheelchair, transportation and a job.

Dozens of animals are treated and prepared for adoption at the Claw clinic.

Bailey inspects medicine for a child’s ear infection before showing the family how to administer the medication.

Community Led Animal Welfare provides care for pets and stray animals in the poorest areas of Johannesburg, South Africa. Veterinarians from around the world volunteer at CLAW and have helped thousands of animals live healthier lives.

Cora Bailey, the founder of CLAW, visits townships and settlements surrounding Johannesburg almost daily. The residents of these impoverished areas are in great need. “Our mandate is to treat the animals, but it’s really very hard to ignore the plight of the people,” Bailey said. “I think you would have to have a heart of steel to go out there and reprimand someone about how their dog looks if they’ve hardly got anything to eat.” Bailey helps the people she meets by giving out foodstuffs, helping the unemployed find jobs and finding medical help for the ill.

To those who need

Photography by Sarah Bryant & Maximus Landes
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Karezi removes the testicle of a dog during a neutering procedure.

When the staff leaves the shelter for the night, the dogs stay comfortable with their own beds and blankets.

Karezi performs a routine neuter on a local dog. CLAW sprays or neuters any stray animals that are taken in or have been left at the clinic.

Bailey examines a litter of malnourished puppies in need of immediate treatment. One of the puppies was in such bad condition it had to be euthanized at the clinic later that day.

To those who need...
A Veterinarian for Claws, who is an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo, administers a vaccination to a dog in the Lawley township with help from the animal’s owner.

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To those who need

AN AUSTRALIAN COUPLE HELPS
Bailey deliver a food parcel to a family in which both parents have died from AIDS.

AN AUSTRALIAN COUPLE HELPS
Bailey deliver a food parcel to a family in which both parents have died from AIDS.

IT IS COMMON for Bailey to encounter chickens running loose in the impoverished townships she visits.

IT IS COMMON for Bailey to encounter chickens running loose in the impoverished townships she visits.

AN AUSTRALIAN COUPLE HELPS
Bailey fulfill an earlier promise to deliver treats to several children. The children stuffed their pockets with as many bags of crisps as they could hide.

An Australian couple helps
Bailey deliver a food parcel to a family in which both parents have died from AIDS.

It is common for Bailey to encounter chickens running loose in the impoverished townships she visits.

Baily fulfills an earlier promise to deliver treats to several children. The children stuffed their pockets with as many bags of crisps as they could hide.

INNOCENT SIGOLA, who is Dying of AIDS, is one of many who receives help from Bailey. Sigola’s family had shunned him because of his condition, and he had nowhere else to turn.

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CLAW NOT ONLY WORKS TO BRING FREE and low-cost spay/neuter services and veterinary treatment to impoverished areas but they also educate pet owners. Children are taught how to properly feed, house and maintain the overall health of their pets.

A VETERINARIAN looks for dryness of the mucous membrane that is often a symptom of dehydration. Although the dog was slightly underweight, it was otherwise healthy.

A WOMAN AND HER DAUGHTER bring their dogs to Bailey and her staff for a check-up. Dogs are the most common pet Bailey treats in the townships.

There is an overwhelming amount of poverty in South Africa’s townships. The latest estimates state that 50 percent of South Africans live below the poverty line and 22.9 percent are unemployed.

A woman and her daughter bring their dogs to Bailey and her staff for a check-up in South Africa.
A ZimbAbweAn womAn hangs washed clothes to dry. After an attack on their community near Pretoria, South Africa, a group of Zimbabweans sought refuge in an abandoned tire shop.

TAleS of hArDshiP wash over the faces of the women living in the tire warehouse. The warehouse community consists of mostly women, their children and single males. The group had been living in Atteridgeville, a community near Pretoria, when the violence broke out in the spring of 2008. Gangs of South Africans, angry with high unemployment and the influx of immigrants from Zimbabwe, took to the streets in May. Two weeks later, 50 people were killed.

The old tire warehouse

A few years ago, the old Malas building in the capital city of Pretoria, South Africa, was a tire and repair shop with offices, storage rooms, a cafeteria and a lobby with an ornamental pond.

Now the building has been converted into a home for nearly 100 displaced Zimbabweans who were driven from their homeland and settled in South Africa, only to have their new homes destroyed.

Photography by Anna Mostek & Kate Veik

Story by Jenna Gibson

A STRING of vicious xenophobic attacks swept across South Africa in May 2008, leaving many Zimbabweans scared and without homes.
dead and tens of thousands, most of them immi-
grants, were left homeless.

The people now living in the Malas shop tried to hide on their own at first, but then the vio-

lence escalated, said Farai Kureuawabva, who is the ap-

pointed chairman of the group. The group ran to a near-by police camp, but they were not sup-

posed to stay for more than a few days. Nearly four months later, their future remains uncertain.

Kureuawabva said most of the people living in the shop came from Zimbabwe to escape political violence and economic repression.

“We came here, we never asked for any assis-
tance from any organizations in South Africa. The only thing we wanted was the refugee sta-
tus,” Kureuawabva said. “After some time, the South Afri-
cans just decided to attack us, saying we were taking their jobs and their women and we were not com-
fortable with us.”

Like many of the Zimbabweans in South Africa, Spelile Rwizi left her home in search of a better life away from the economic hardships there. She saved up money, and in the summer of 2007, she bought a small shack in Atteridgeville.

“My prayer is that God can forgive those people because they don’t know what they are doing,” she said. “After some time, the South Africans feel jealous about my property. I buy a lot of property I put in my house, so they are jealous for me.”

Rwizi said most of the people living in the shop were hard workers. “We work for our families. So (the South Africans) feel jealous about my property. They were no hints at anger or hostility from his neigh-
bors. Then the situation changed. Suddenly his neigh-
bors, people he knew, attacked him and other foreigners in his neighborhood, burning down shacks and threat-
ening violence.

“I felt bad but what was in my mind was that what the guys did was in their own interest. I think there were some other interests beyond the whole prob-
lem at hand,” Gwati said. The South Africans who became violent do not understand the refugees’ situation, he explained, and therefore wrongly blame refugees for economic problems in South Africa.

“People here have portrayed that we (are) tak-
ing jobs, taking women and so forth. We came here just like anybody else, like a refugee,” Gwati said. “The job loss is not our problem, just that the economy’s not growing and there’s lack of job creation within the South African economy.”

“We are not responsible for that,” he said.

On this day, a group of about a half-dozen children jump, dance and run through the aban-
donated tire building, dodging holes where floorboards are rotted, climbing on a discarded shelf, playing tug-of-war with tangled electrical cables and sliding down a ramp on a tricycle missing one of its wheels.

Although the place is far from a five-star hotel, it had come a long way from when the refugees first arrived. Originally tires and dirt littered the floor, and until recently the homeless immigrants had no access to water, electricity, blankets or clothing.

Nearby four months later, the shop sports makeshift shelters with metal roofs and plastic siding. Tires are mostly stowed or used for furni-
ture, and a hose runs through the open space to provide water. Residents use piles of extra blan-
kets and clothing to separate living areas.

On the other hand, they have lost the govern-
ment-provided security personnel who once stood guard outside the building. The group has to se-
cure the area on their own in what Kureuawabva describes as a high-crime area of the city.

Because of the uncertainty of their situation, the displaced people cannot secure steady jobs, and many end up sitting around the tire shop, watch-
ing the children chase each other or cooking what little food they may have. Meals often consist of pap, a porridge-like staple for the South African diet, or meat with flatbread and a salad. Many end up sitting around the tire shop, watch-
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As the sun begins to set, a group of about a half-dozen children jump, dance and run through the aban-
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ing the children chase each other or cooking what little food they may have. Meals often consist of pap, a porridge-like staple for the South African diet, or meat with flatbread and a salad.
new makeshift dinner around South Africa: Displaced a fire in her home. A woman laughs over a fire in the open-air area of the tire shop where she makes "cookies." A little girl now lives. A large part of the community's food is provided by local charities. Transportation was gone. The kids still fill their days by running around the abandoned warehouse, chasing each other through the open area or helping with laundry and cooking. Despite visits from various organizations and government officials, many other problems remain. Kureuawabva said, including sporadic delivery of food, unsatisfactory care of sick residents and a lack of communication from government officials, including the Ministry of Health and police. Unsure of their safety and unsure about the future, the residents of the old tire shop simply live day to day, waiting for help from outside. "We don't have anyone that we can say, 'You are responsible,' because they are all running away from us. They don't want to take responsibility of our stay here," Kureuawabva said. "It seems like nobody knows what to do. It's only us who are suffering, and I don't know how long we are going to suffer." When the group first arrived at the tire shop, the South African government encouraged them to consider repatriation to Zimbabwe. After the xenophobic attacks, thousands of Zimbabweans were going to suffer. "We don't have anyone that we can say, 'You are responsible,' because they are all running away from us. They don't want to take responsibility of our stay here," Kureuawabva said. "It seems like nobody knows what to do. It's only us who are suffering, and I don't know how long we are going to suffer." When the group first arrived at the tire shop, the South African government encouraged them to consider repatriation to Zimbabwe. After the xenophobic attacks, thousands of Zimbabweans accepted the offer to return home. However, Kureuawabva does not consider that an option. "We could not take up the idea of going back," she said. "If we had other options of life, then maybe we could consider. But as we are, standing here, we can't talk about Zimbabwe now. Going back to Zimbabwe is just like committing suicide. Right? And sometimes we only say, this place can be a little bit better as we are comparatively getting it with Zimbabwe. But not that we are comfortable, not at all." When repatriation didn't work, the government's next solution was to reintegrate the displaced people into South African communities. But Kureuawabva doesn't like the idea of having the group return to Atteridgeville. "The government is talking about reintegrating us in the community, but they are also failing to convince the community to accept us," she said. And Kureuawabva is wary of returning to the place where he became a victim of xenophobia. Kureuawabva said the government is now expecting the displaced people to take the initiative toward reintegration. But he thinks only the government would be able to organize and initiate such a large-scale move. He said the group would like to relocate, but emphasized that it would be easy for them to go back into South African society. For one thing, he would have tables and work beside the people who attacked him and burned his home, he said. "Also, there is the situation where when these people attacked us, they took all of our belongings. We don't know what kind of life it will be for me to be seated in this room and somebody is watching my TV in the next room, and somebody is enjoying my furniture in the next room, and somebody is sleeping on my bed in the next room, and I am sleeping on the floor." Underlying the outbreak of xenophobic violence the issues of poverty, unemployment and displacement faded by promises made during the end of apartheid in 1994. Many political figures, including then-president Thabo Mbeki, swiftly condemned the attacks. Mohammed Valli Moosa, former South African minister for environmental affairs and tourism, agreed. "There is no excuse for xenophobia," he said. "We must be unambiguous about it. It is a fundamentally evil that there is no excuse for it." Possible solutions include putting more pressure on Zimbabwe's leadership to improve the situation there, beefing up border patrol to discourage illegal immigration, working to solve the fundamental problems in South Africa and working to educate people and build a better relationship between nations and foreigners. The solution will not come easily, Moosa said, but he is optimistic. "We need to accept that just below the surface, we have a terrible problem of intolerance, and we had better, as a society, not lose momentum in this movement against xenophobia and racism," he said. "We must be working at all times, chang-
South Africa: Displaced

The children of this tire shop community play in the old garage of the Malas tire warehouse.

Despite hunger and oppression, the children still find energy to play tug-of-war and other games.

A woman kisses her child while sitting by the fire in the abandoned Malas tire shop where she and many other Zimbabweans temporarily live.

No matter where people of the tire shop end up, residents like Gwati simply want some sense of normalcy.

“We will be more happy to get back to our normal lives, given the chance,” he said. “What we used to do before, how we used to live our lives. That’s what we endeavor to have.”

Meanwhile, those who live at the tire shop are trying to look to the future.

Ruwizi is doing odd jobs, getting 50 or 80 rand (around $10) for washing people’s clothes, so she can save up to buy a flat in Pretoria and get her children back into school.

“The greatest glory lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

As Nelson Mandela said, “The children of the world are watching.”

Despite hunger and oppression, the children still find energy to play tug-of-war and other games.

Residents are trying to look to the future.

The South African government is working toward reintegration, but it is going to be a very slow process.

No matter where people of the tire shop end up, residents like Gwati simply want some sense of normalcy.

“We will be more happy to get back to our normal lives, given the chance,” he said. “What we used to do before, how we used to live our lives. That’s what we endeavor to have.”

Meanwhile, those who live at the tire shop are trying to look to the future.

Ruwizi is doing odd jobs, getting 50 or 80 rand (around $10) for washing people’s clothes, so she can save up to buy a flat in Pretoria and get her children back into school.

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South Africa: Displaced

brian and his sister Brenda escaped from Zimbabwe with their mother and hope to go to school someday in South Africa.

Brenda helps her mother and the other women in the community by cleaning and helping watch the younger children.

Piles and piles of tires make up the walls and beds for the community.

God is the central focus of the community. A bible study group meets each evening after dinner is finished.

The leader of the warehouse community goes each day to find food and help the members find homes and jobs. He acts as a liaison between the group and the city.
South Africa: Displaced

A little girl carries a stuffed animal to show her mother. On a typical day, the women tend to the children and make a meal of “pap.”

The kids in the community escape to the abandoned tire warehouse to play in the boards and dirt.

Brenda loves to sing. She wants to be a soccer player when she grows up.

The old tire warehouse

A young man pushes his sister down a ramp in the garage of the abandoned Malas tire shop where they temporarily live.
mobS of Angry SouTh Afric AnS
assaulted Thembeka Jucu, destroyed her
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xenophobic attacks. The scars on her arm are a
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Thembek A Jucu AnD her Son give their
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A womAn fries chicken  for a celebration of
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SikumbuZ o ncube immigr ATeD to South
Africa from mozambique in 2004. Struggling
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with her daughter, Princess.

GROUP of TeenAge girlS talk on the
shelter’s front stoop. The shelter dedicated its
fourth floor to teenage girls and strives to keep
them off of Johannesburg’s dangerous streets.

Open since 2007, Usindiso Ministries provides
a place of refuge for 120 homeless and abused
women and their children in downtown Johan-
nesburg. The shelter welcomed 30 displaced
women and their children following the xeno-
phobic attacks that occurred on May 11, 2008.
The shelter is a place where foreigners and South
Africans live under one roof.

“We obviously said yes we would open our
doors to women and children who need a safe
place,” said secretary and CEO of Usindiso Min-
istries, Jean Bradley. “This ministry is not just for
South Africans; it’s for women no matter where
they come from.”

WORDS OF ANGRY SOUTH AFRICANS
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Photography by Shannon Lauber
& Sarah Bryant
South Africa: Displaced

Displaced women serve a lunch of fried chicken, pumpkin, pap (traditional corn porridge) and a chili-based sauce. Pap is a staple food for many South Africans because it is inexpensive, but it can lead to malnutrition if eaten without protein or vegetables.

Nqobani NiSimangwe Swallows Medicine that was provided free by the public health care system. South Africa’s public health care system consumes 11% of the government’s total budget.

Rhoda Bundu and her two-year-old twin sons, Roy and Royce, sought refuge at Alexandra’s overpopulated police station the night their home was attacked. Rhoda moved her babies to the shelter when UN dentist Ministries opened their doors to the xenophobia victims.
South Africa’s Phumla Makhunga and her son Yamkela Makhunga, age 1, sit in the cafeteria after lunch. Phumla said the xenophobia victims should receive help with their basic needs even if they are not South African citizens. “We are all people,” she said.

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The safe hiding place

Women gather in the hallway on the second floor, while their children run in the hallways.

The floors of the shelter accommodate different groups of women separated for their different experiences and needs. The second floor was opened specifically for the xenophobia victims.

Constance Mabena volunteers her time by providing free daycare for other women at the shelter, allowing them to save money. Each woman living in the shelter contributes her services to keep it running smoothly.
South Africa: Displaced

With little else to occupy the children’s attention, playing tag and other games is popular in the stairways.

Becky Bomboro of the Congo teaches women at the shelter how to sew. Sewing is a useful skill that helps the women find jobs outside the shelter. One woman is designing clothing for a fashion show that will feature the residents as models.

Many of the children have been unable to attend school since the attacks occurred more than five weeks ago.

A few of the teen-age girls stand outside the shelter on a sunny winter afternoon. By nightfall, the corner is very dangerous, and the women are strongly discouraged from being outside the shelter’s protection.

A safe hiding place

Lungisan Jukul, age 8, right, and his friend play in the commons area before dinner is served. Many of the children have been unable to attend school since the attacks occurred more than five weeks ago.
Two Sisters walk in one of the nearly identical alleyways that run through the township. South African girls pause in between shacks to catch a glimpse of an unusual sight, two white students walking through their squatter camp on the edge of Alexandra.

A young South African man stops to offer conversation about the plight of the township’s residents.

Waiting outside one of Alexandra’s shops sits one of Johannesburg’s many unemployed citizens.

A curious young boy peers over the counter at a rare outsider visiting Alexandra.

Poverty in Alexandra

The poverty and despair of South Africa cannot be seen more clearly than in the Township of Alexandra, the oldest of the black townships in Johannesburg. Here, from one rim of the valley to the other, lie an endless maze of tattered shacks and numerous decaying hostels. This is the void many of South Africa’s forgotten fill, waiting for the change that had been promised after the fall of apartheid in 1994.

On the edges of the township stand potent symbols of the hope to which many residents cling. A smattering of new houses exist among thousands that sit incomplete, waiting to be filled with families that desperately need them. Nearly 2.5 million families in South Africa still have no real homes, and they continue to blame government corruption for the lack of change.
South Africa: Displaced

Amidst the poverty and severity of the situation across the country, this South African man musters a smile for the camera.

Four children embrace the rare opportunity to have their picture taken.

A Resident of the township begins a tour of her home on the outskirts of Alexandra.

A Proud Resident stands outside her new two-room home that sits along the outskirts of Alexandra.
A woman washes clothes while her children play in the trash-filled corridor that serves as their road and drainage way.

A woman living in a squatter camp within Alexandra describes the corruption surrounding the new homes being built. Her paperwork to move into one of the houses has been in limbo for more than two years.

Yelling about the mistreatment of foreigners, this Zambian immigrant described his recent encounter with his neighbors in the squatter camp. He had been beaten and chased out of his shack in Alexandra.

A shop owner within Alexandra props up a doll to display for a photograph.
Inadequate housing: Alexandra's hostels

Many factors—including poverty—most likely contributed to the May violence. Poverty in pervasive in Alexandra and is at the root of the housing crisis, said Julian Baksin, the director of the Alexandra Redevelopment Project. Alexandra’s high unemployment forces many residents to become trapped in substandard housing.

Further adding to the tension is the politics. Many who live in Beirut have political ties to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which has a history of violent conflict with the African National Congress (ANC), the current ruling party. When the ANC took control of the South African Parliament in first free elections after the Apartheid in 1994, major IFP supporters settled in Beirut.

“This [Beirut area] is the only power base that IFP has in the city,” Baksin said. “It’s not enough to win this war. They need more people, and where are you going to put them?”

The government’s efforts to redevelop Alexandra also have triggered tensions, even though the goal of the ARP is to bring stability to the area and increase the quality of life for the residents of Alexandra. The ARP began in 2001, with a plan to use nearly 1.3 billion Rand—or $20 million—to rebuild housing in Alexandra and create a better infrastructure. Since the project began, a police station was built, 18 schools have been upgraded, water mains have been improved, London Road has been widened and nearly 9,000 families have been moved from substandard housing into housing provided by the ARP.

Overcrowding is not the only problem in Alexandra. Parts of the township are below the flood level of the Jukskei River, putting some of the shacks in danger of being swept away. Poor infrastructure and pollution, including sewage overflow, exacerbate the living conditions in the town.

The violence in Beirut erupted on May 11, 2008. The result, according to an Alexandra police report: three dead, 114 injured, a building burned, 50 people arrested for public violence, countless incidents of stolen property and rape and hundreds of people displaced from their homes. For three days, the mayhem continued throughout the township. According to a police report, the attacks began after people living in Beirut threatened to cross London Road and into the area where thousands lived in new housing developed by the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP).

There is simmering resentment among some native South Africans who have lived for years in substandard conditions thinking illegal immigrants are being given new housing. In Beirut, some residents also are upset because one of the three hostels has been renovated, while the others remain in disrepair.

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“I think there is a very strong sense within Alex that Alex is full, so it’s pretty hard to build a new shack,” Baskin said. “So you start to say, well, in order to develop Alex you have to relocate the new arrivals, and then by South African law you can’t relocate without free housing. Which means immediately then they become first on the housing ladder.”

Some native South Africans are angry because they think the government is ignoring the needs of long-time residents while giving new housing to people they believe to be in the country illegally.

For some, the debate seems to center on the definition of residency. The ARP housing code defines a resident as someone who is either a South African citizen or who has government documents classifying them as a permanent resident.

“The whole was song and dance about somehow these people were immigrants, which assumes somehow that they were illegal,” Baskin said. “But South Africa was born, was bred, was developed on the backs of immigrants. There have always been immigrants in this country.”

Baskin thinks the reason for the violence in Beirut was not xenophobia, but was the taking of housing for the political gain of the IFP. An ARP report made after the attacks noted that people in 36 households were driven out by the mob in May. While the report said the mob’s objectives were unclear, it implied the mob wanted the homes for its own use because groups within Alexandria had historically claimed the right to allocate homes for its own use because groups within Alexandria had historically claimed the right to allocate homes for its own use.

Meanwhile, throughout Alexandria, there are signs of a gradual progress. New brick homes with front yards north of Beirut stand in stark contrast to the shacks of scrap metal and wood crowded together on narrow streets to the west. Here homes, shacks and businesses seem to battle one another for space. On the side of one street, a spray-painted sign on a blue portable toilet announces: “Beauty shop, open for business.”

“Let’s get the facts straight about Alex,” Baskin said. “The idea that Alex was ablaze was not true.” He said only one section of Alex experienced fires and violence — and more than half of the victims were South Africans. The violence in Alexandria occurred in an area where 50,000 to 60,000 people lived; 1,000 of those people were displaced from their homes, he said. Beirut resident Jerome Musawenkosi, 32, was not displaced from his home nor was he a part of the mob taking to the streets of Alexandria in May 2008. The violence in Alexandria, he said, was a result of:${\textit{THE HOSTEL}}$ lies a dirt field overlooking an adjacent township. This is the only open area for children to play in the entire township.

He lives in new ARP housing in politically charged Beirut. While he’s benefited from the ARPs efforts, he remains affected by the political tension. Musawenkosi lives in the hostel that has been renovated by the ARP. For more than 10 years before the hostel was renovated, he shared a room with his brother. Now he lives alone. Despite sharing the hostel with immigrants from across the African continent, Musawenkosi dislikes foreigners. He thinks the immigrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique who live nearby are always being courted by the ANC. The ANC is taking advantage of its power, he said, adding that South Africans should change the government at the next election.

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“To resolve all the problems here, that’s a lifetime’s worth,” Baskin said. But, he added, “there isn’t any urban renewal project in the world that’s done more than this project.”
Zinhle Ncube works a late afternoon shift at a bar in “Little Nigeria” in Johannesburg, South Africa. Ncube came from Zimbabwe a year ago to live with her sister’s family.

Ncube’s 2-year-old nephew, Mzwandile, plays in his home in Hillbrow, a neighborhood in Johannesburg, as his uncle looks on from the other room.

Ncube flips through a photo album of life growing up in Zimbabwe. Ncube’s family is still in Zimbabwe.

A friend helped Ncube get a job, even with no paperwork, after coming from Zimbabwe. Many Zimbabweans have trouble finding jobs in South Africa.

Ncube is one of many Zimbabweans who live in South Africa after fleeing to escape an economic and political crisis in their home country. In Zimbabwe...
Displaced

Far away from home

South Africa:  Displaced

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Zinhle ncube’s brother-in-law looks toward the window in the family’s cramped apartment in Hillbrow, a neighborhood in South Africa. ncube is living with them in the apartment while in South Africa but she hopes to return to Zimbabwe soon.

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Far away from home

When I was leaving I said to God, ‘I don’t know where I’m going, but guide me,’” said Ncube, who lives with her sister, nephew, brother-in-law and his brother in Johannesburg, more than 400 miles from home.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

She was attending college in Zimbabwe, but the situation became so dire that she had to leave, she said. She misses her home and wishes she could return to finish school.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

Ncube’s sister, who declined to be named because of issues with her paperwork, also wants to go back to Zimbabwe.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

“Things are much better at home, in your own home. You know where to go when you want to,” said the sister, who has lived in South Africa since 2003. “When you are here, you know, it’s not your home. You don’t know a lot of places. But when you are home you know where to go, whatever you want, wherever. You know the right places and opportunities.”

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

When she first came to Johannesburg, Ncube’s sister was planning to apply for college, but could not enroll because she had no paperwork. She found a job as a waitress at a local mall, but once she became pregnant, she had to quit. Now she stays home and takes care of Mzwandile.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

Ncube had a passport when she crossed into South Africa in May 2008, but the paperwork has long expired, so she is in danger of being deported at any time.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

She was able to get a job in a bar thanks to a friend who didn’t care that she lacked proper documentation. She spends her days tending the small bar, which is at the back of a Nigerian restaurant. It’s usually quiet during the day, Ncube said, and ever since the attacks, business at the bar has gone down. People are scared to go out, she said, especially the Nigerians, who make up a large chunk of the bar’s customers.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

The sisters live in one of the most dangerous parts of Johannesburg, where police reported 106 murders, 233 rapes and thousands of assaults and robberies in 2006. But Ncube is normally not worried about walking the 10 or so blocks to the bar. The only time she took off work was during the riots, when bitter South Africans started attacking foreigners for allegedly taking jobs and women from them. A man was killed near her apartment during the attacks, she said.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

Now she makes her way to work every day but Tuesday, her day off, when she spends time with her family and takes care of her nephew.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

But she longs for the day when her home will be safe enough for her to return, so she can finish her schooling.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

After cholera outbreaks earlier this year and the continued slide of its economy, Zimbabwe has yet to show significant improvement.

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

“How can people live without food? There are small kids – babies, let me say so. It’s hard to survive. There is no salt. Actually there is nothing. It is hard to survive,” the sister said. “Life is very bad that side.”

South Africa:  Displaced

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Far away from home

While their family is fine for now, the sisters are frightened for those still in Zimbabwe. “There is no other way,” the sister said. “You just have to try and cope. We’re just hoping it will come and pass. But I don’t know if it’s going to be soon or it’s just the beginning of the worst part.”

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Far away from home

Zinhle ncube looks through old photos with her 2-year-old nephew, Mzwandile. His mother, and ncube’s sister, came to South Africa to get a job. She wound up giving birth to a pregnant and now stays home to take care of her son, husband and brother-in-law in her home. She moved in with them just a year ago.
According to a report from the United Nations, South Africa is home to the most AIDS orphans in the world. Many of these children run the dangerous city streets, frequent crowded homeless shelters and even live in filthy sewers below the city.

A group of boys have found themselves calling the Johannesburg sewers home for almost as long as they can remember. They live in the most dire conditions, begging at stoplights and rummaging through dumpsters just to survive each day.

ThomPSon, 18, looks on at his friends in the drainage ditch they call home.

Living in the sewers was something the boys never thought they’d be doing for so long. Thompson (pictured) wants to be a pilot someday.

When they’re not scrounging for food and begging at the robots (stoplights), the boys hang out in their sewer, hiding from nearby security guards whose not-so-empty threats often keep them from leaving the underground shelter where they live.

The boys scrounge dumpsters at a nearby shopping mall and await every day for old popcorn to be thrown out at the movie theater.

Begging at the robots is a dangerous way to earn some spare change. The boys are constantly hearing threats and getting guns pointed in their faces.

Sewer boys

Photography by Anna Mostek
when The boyS Aren' T hiDing from intolerant security guards, who wait for them to leave their main drainage entrance, they use this ladder that leads up to the city streets.

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Sewer boys

APART FROM THE BEGGING and the hiding, the boys are regular kids who love to play tricks on each other and make jokes.

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IN AND OUT of their tunnel all day, the boys navigate the underground system only by candlelight or a lighter. They crawl or hunch over through the standing water to make their way through the dark tunnels.

SOMETIMES the boys get lucky with Slave findings on robot stops. This time they spent their morning earnings on a batch of Clementine oranges.

SOMETIMES THE BOYS can find nothing to eat, so they will grab from a paper bag to forget the hunger pains.

After a rainstorm, when the sewers and drainage ditch are full, the boys will get high so they won’t feel the cold.
The boys have acquired a few friends who help them from time to time. This man was checking in on the group to see if they needed anything.

Thompson and another boy look out from the sewer entrance. The boys frequent the shopping area around the drainage basin to look for food and thrown out goods.

The Tunnel has become home to a group of about six young men. Thompson (left) is the oldest of the group and is the unspoken leader.

Cigarettes are a beloved rarity among the group and are often exchanged for other items such as food or clothing.
Homelessness is a huge issue for Johannesburg. The average life expectancy for males is 53.5 years.

Shelter and care are what the boys need most. Many have tried to go back to school, but the freedom of the streets was far better than the rules of school.

Taking advantage of an absence of security guards that day, the boys enjoy the warm Johannesburg sunshine.

South Africa: Displaced

The boys don’t want to be on the streets or living in the sewers forever, but the sewers have become home to them, and they don’t want to give up the freedom they love.
Peter Webb resides in Bethlehem, a religious community for poor whites located 30 minutes outside of Pretoria, South Africa. Residents of the community range from 30 to 70 years in age. For fear of their health and safety, children are not permitted to live in the community, which is poorly lit and has only cold water for baths.

In order to live in Bethlehem, residents do chores in exchange for rent. The men take care of food grown on the farm while the women clean the kitchen and cook the meals. If a resident doesn’t work for at least five days, he or she must pay 150 rand (U.S. $19) of monthly rent. Many stay here because they have nowhere else to go.

Webb, 42, moved to this community in January of 2008 and helps take care of the plants and agricultural needs of the farm.
South Africa: Displaced

THE RESIDENTS of Bethlehem wait for lunch to be prepared so they can eat and finish their work before daylight is gone.

GREEN ONIONS are picked daily from the field by the residents of the poor community.
Peter Pulls Weeds from a greenhouse containing spinach plants. The greenhouses provide nutrition for the residents of the community.

South Africa: Displaced

Peter calls for his girlfriend, Mariette, in the kitchen. She is helping prepare lunch for the day. Peter stops soaking potatoes in containers of water until they are ready to be cooked for dinner. Buttered bread is broken and divided for the residents to eat for lunch before going back to their chores.

Peter’s cabin is big enough for a bed for him and his girlfriend. He keeps a table and chairs on the porch, where he eats breakfast every morning. A bath tub is located outside the house. Cold baths are usually the only option for the couple.
African witch doctors, called Sangomas, have been around as long as South Africa has existed. Sangomas provide traditional healing for South African townships, and, many times, people prefer treatment from Sangomas over common medicine. Each new Sangoma is trained by the elder Sangomas of the community and then initiated through a sacrificial ceremony during which an animal is usually slaughtered.

In addition to holding initiation ceremonies, Sangomas gather in townships on many other occasions, usually just for the sake of having a good time. Music, food and dance almost always accompany such gatherings. The Sangomas of Soweto, South Africa, said they gather together for no other reason than to celebrate life.
SPECIATIORS BLESS the chicken that will be slaughtered at the celebration by swinging it over each shoulder and passing it around the circle.

South Africa: Displaced

Displaced

A SANGOMA IN TRAINING wears traditional Sangoma attire but not to the full extent until he has completed his training and is initiated.

A cause for celebration

A mother and her daughter enjoy the music and dancing at the celebration.

A mother enjoys the music and dancing at the celebration.

When performing, Sangomas attach anklets made from the tops of aluminum soda cans. These provide extra noise as they move their feet.
The leader of the Sangoma celebration yells out chants during the ceremony as well as with the music.

South Africa: Displaced

Participants blow whistles during a dance line at the Sangoma celebration ceremony.

Peeling vegetables, two women prepare for the celebration’s meal. The vegetables will be cooked with the chicken, once it has been slaughtered.

Homemade milk beer is passed around to the spectators.
Three men braved the cold to sing songs of worship at Rifle Range camp. Rifle Range is a camp for displaced people in Johannesburg. Residents of Rifle Range live fenced-in in a valley near a middle class Johannesburg suburb.

Two women join a group singing and worshipping god directly outside their tent. A boy leafs through a bible written in French during a religious service at the camp.

A young girl and her brother huddle close together as those around them offer up songs of worship and praise.

Jon Lelebika Jean takes off his shoes when he enters the refugee tent he now calls home. His bare feet are calloused. The white tarp walls of his home hold no photos of his family or of African sunsets. Instead, they are printed with the light blue United Nations High Commission of Refugees logo. The thin tarp flaps in the wind. The bed he sleeps on every night triples as a couch and a dining table. He is one of nearly 2,000 people in the Rifle Range Displacement Camp in Glenanda, South Africa, left with nothing.

Jean, an immigrant from Cameroon, has been in the camp since it was established in late May. Those living in the camp fled their homes or were forcibly removed after pockets of xenophobic violence spread through streets of South Africa in May 2008. The people in the camp mirror the camp name: displaced.

Jean wears a bright orange crossing guard vest.
that signifies he is a peace marshal in the displacement camp. The tents in the camp are divided into sections based on where the people living in the camp came from: Mozambique, Ghana, Zambia, Ethiopia, The Dominican Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. His job is to keep order among the section of people from Cameroon.

Jean’s coming to Rifle Range camp was not by chance. According to Jean, the communities of foreigners were being harassed, chased out of their jobs, and some were refused services because they were not native South Africans.

In March 2008, Jean sent letters of concern to South Africa’s parliament and the U.S. government warning of impending danger he and his fellow foreigners faced. He received no reply.

“They are killing us,” Jean said. “Many people have been assaulted and chased away when they were doing their business. When they were trying to get something to survive, you know? Especially in Africa everybody has to try and get something to try and be alive.”

On April 24, 2008, Jean said he and more than 30 other people went to the United Nations office in South Africa to deliver the warning by hand.

“At the front of the building, the group, which Jean says had grown to nearly a hundred people, was confronted by police officers and told to leave. If they chose not to leave, they would be jailed. According to Jean, 34 men and women spent the next two weeks in jail.

Three weeks later, on May 11, 2008, a wave of xenophobic violence erupted in Alexandra, a township in Johannesburg, South Africa. Emotions boiled over throughout the city. Homes were burned. People were beaten. A man was set on fire. Sixty-three people died.

Jean got his answer: He was not welcome.

“We don’t know where to go,” Jean said. “It’s why we are here. They [the South African government] can never take care of us because the immigrant in South Africa is the poverty, we know. If you can never take care to your son, you can never take care to your neighbor.”

Jo Mdhlela’s tailored brown, striped suit looks out of place against a background of people dressed in donated clothes: jackets that are too small and shoes that slip off the heels of sockless feet. Mdhlela works for South African Human Rights Commission. He has spent time in the Rifle Range Displacement camp to observe the effects of the xenophobic attacks.

“I think they are hurting,” Mdhlela said. “They’re angry, and they’re also scared.” As South Africans, Mdhlela said, people should sympathize with the position the people in the camp are in because they, too, have experienced periods of major transitions.

“I don’t think you can justify the kind of action that has befallen our brothers from Africa,” Mdhlela said. “I think it’s a shame. It’s really a great shame. We as South Africans should be feeling that shame. We should be saying, well we’re sorry that it happened... I just think that we, as South Africans, need to be more welcoming. We should apologize, actually. We should also try to integrate our brothers and sisters from Africa in an orderly way.”

By August 2009 the Glenanda camp had been closed for nearly a year.

In July of 2008, the South African government gave the people living in the Glenanda camp a choice to sign up for new ID cards. The cards allowed those displaced after the attacks to stay in the country for another six months. According to the Mail & Guardian, a South African newspaper based in Johannesburg, 850 of the 1,800 camp residents signed up for ID cards. After the program started, the Mail & Guardian also reported the number of people at the camp increased. Some said people who were not victims of the xenophobic attacks but were in South Africa without the proper documents were sneaking into camp to sign up for the ID cards.
In the last two weeks of July 2008, police trucks came to gather those who did not sign up for new ID cards or proper documentation and took them to the Lindela Reparation Centre. Lindela is a station in South Africa where people are kept before they are deported. The Mail & Guardian reported that 798 people were sent to Lindela, and 900 remained in the camp.

Three months later, in October 2008, the Glenanda camp was closed. The field that once housed nearly 2,000 refugees was empty. The lines of porta-potties, tents and office trailers were all cleared away. Although some reports say a number of camp residents returned to their previous homes in South Africa, many were too scared even to leave camp on their own.

The Glenanda camp for the residents who were there was a dead end. Children were not educated there. People could not look for work while they were there. Their freedom as immigrants in a new country ended there.

For some, the hope of a new beginning in South Africa came to an end at the camp because they were among those sent to Lindela to be deported. For others, the camp gave them one more shot at outsmarting the dead end they had been led to.

The ID card, good for six months, offered a chance to become legally registered with the Home Affairs department of South Africa, regardless of a person’s legal status prior to the attacks. The stories of the journeys of each resident are now scattered all over South Africa and for some in their previous countries.

Aruna Zakwani, an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo and once a resident of the camp, will never forget Glenanda or the situation that forced him there: “The thing that I can tell you about the xenophobia ... is that it stays in the heart.”
As the Sun peeks over the horizon, it warms a man standing in worship.

South Africa: Displaced

IN THE MIDDLE of Rifle Range, two children hold hands as they walk through a crowd of people.
Max Kazembe, 43, wants to clean toilets. If cleaning toilets means giving his family a future, he says he’d do it. As a father of eight, providing for his family is his first priority.

Since mid-May, his family has become a small group in the thousands of displaced people in South Africa. The Kazembes are from Zambia; they are foreigners. For many South Africans, the term “foreigner” implies more than an immigrant, migrant or refugee. Foreigner implies a decline in employment opportunities and a loss of housing.

For the past four years the Kazembe family had
South Africa: Displaced

When Max Kazembe returned home from his children’s school that evening, he was forced into his rented room by neighbors brandishing weapons. A mob of angry South Africans gathered outside. To the mob outside, the Kazembes were kwere-kwere, a derogatory term for foreigners. A wave of xenophobic violence had ignited nearly a week earlier in a township outside of Johannesburg. Smaller incidents of violence were happening all over the nation. The violence was now at their doorstep. Early in the evening, chaos had erupted. He had joined the mob and gathered his family together. It was this room. The family dialed the local police, pleading for help. Concrete blocks were hurled through the front windows of the house. Petrol bombs shattered windows. Max Kazembe threw some back into the crowd. The family retreated into another room in the back of the house, away from all the windows. As his children sobbed, Max Kazembe prayed. If God were going to take us, he told his family, we would go now.

“We sat in our house for hours, screaming,” John said. “They [the police] never did anything to us. We are staying in a state of fear.”

Police finally arrived at 9 p.m., three hours after the violence began. Officers told the family to put their cell phones, all forms of identification and money in a small bag. The small bag was snatched by the mob as the family was escorted out of their house. In three hours, the Kazembe family’s future had vanished: education for their eight children, diplomas, steady income and a place to call their own. Police took the family to the local Jeppe police station where they were told to sleep on the floor. The food they were given was rotten. Max Kazembe said. The family waited. Waited for directions. Waited for the government to give them answers. Waited for solace.

Max Kazembe threw some petrol bombs into his rented room by neighbors brandishing weapons.

That day is not easy for me to forget because it happened on my special day, the day I was born,” John Kazembe said. “It was the day when it reached our place.”

When Max Kazembe reached his family’s home in the evening, chaos had erupted. He pushed his way through the crowd around the house where his family stayed. He kicked the door and gathered his family together. It was 6 p.m.

The family dialed the local police, pleading for help. Concrete blocks were hurled through the front windows of the house. Petrol bombs shattered windows. Max Kazembe threw some back into the crowd. The family retreated into another room in the back of the house, away from all the windows. As his children sobbed, Max Kazembe prayed. If God were going to take us, he told his family, we would go now.

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The Kazembes were not alone. Thousands of people all over South Africa were also forced out of their homes in mid-May. Thousands found their homes to seek shelter in police stations, churches and hospitals.

At the end of May, the family was moved to the Rifle Range Displacement camp. The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees erected camps around the nation. While tents lined miles of dry fields. Each area was separated by nation: Zambia, Malawi, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Ghana. Like all the other families there, the 10 Kazembes shared one tent. At first their new beds consisted of a blue tarp on top of pebbles and dirt. Food followed, twice a day. A few slices of bread per person, an apple and an orange. Matze, ground corn, was passed out in large bags. The Red Cross came to the camp, to dispitate clothing, bedding and more food. In June, nearly a month after they were attacked, the family was still at the displacement camp.

In mid-June, Kazembe and his two eldest children returned to their home for the first time since the night of the attack. They found an entire house destroyed. Glass popped under their feet as they trampled through the house. Doors were missing. The pieces that once made up a house were gone: beds, furniture, family photos.

Instead, magazine scraps, old school work, clothing, checkbooks and bricks that broke windows lay scattered around the house. Charred shoes and a staircase lined with ash, missing the rail, led to more ramshackle rooms. Mary found her biology book, a copy of her father’s passport, a sibling’s English book and two candles -- treasures among ashes.

“We were expecting something for tomorrow, me and my brother,” Mary said. “We were expecting a better future for tomorrow, but that future has been destroyed.”

The displacement camp they returned to housed their uncertain futures. Whispers ran through the camp of reintigration back to their homes, or what was left of them. Max said he couldn’t go back; he wasn’t afraid, but there was nothing left.

“We have been trying for a better future, but they have destroyed it,” he said. “My last wish is please don’t leave me here.”

The displacement camp they returned to housed their uncertain futures.

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KAZEMBE S had been chased from their home; their attacker took everything including the personal locks and bath tub that used to be in this room.
SouTh AfricA TeAm: (from left) vanessa Skocz, christina Devries, Jenna gibson, Anna mostek, Jaime Sullivan, logan meier, Shannon lauber, kate veik, Sarah bryant and chris Slaughter.

unl’S bruce ThorSon and Anton harber confer outside the Apartheid museum in Soweto, South Africa. harber is director of the Journalism and media Studies Program at wits university in Johannesburg.

chriS  SlAughTer visits with South African children.

JennA gibSon AnD kATe veik interview a refugee from Zimbabwe at a processing center and encampment in Pretoria, South Africa.

logAn meier logan meier maintains watch on an elephant on a ride through the Pilanesburg wildlife refuge.
In June 2008, the Rifle Range Displacement camp in Glenanda, South Africa, was home to hundreds of stories: stories of hatred unleashed, of resentment and anger, stories of survival, perseverance and healing. A journalist’s paradise.

Lungile Dlamini was a college-age student journalist at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, South Africa. She came to the camp eager to gather stories, to get a better understanding of the xenophobic violence that disrupted the lives of thousands. She was also my partner during my first trip abroad, as a student and as a journalist.

While she was there, she met a young boy and his mother. Their story was like many of the rest; they’d been chased from their home, forced to leave everything behind. The mother pleaded with Dlamini: “On your next visit please bring us something — anything.”

After Dlamini left the camp that day, she kept thinking about the boy and his pleading mother. “Maybe I’ll bring them just some canned fish, canned foodstuffs, something small,” she thought.

“Bias,” I warned. “A journalist can’t get involved.” “Still,” she said, “they have nothing.”

Later in the week we stopped by Dlamini’s mother’s house in Soweto. Inside, her mother and older sister were cooking. Dlamini stopped by to pick up clothes the family wanted to donate to those displaced from their homes.

If I remember correctly, Dlamini went back to the camp and found the boy, canned fish in tow. Journalists can’t get involved. Emotions can lead to bias.

Lungile Dlamini was killed in a car accident in late April of 2009. She was heading out to an assignment.

I don’t consider Lungile a mere journalist or colleague. I don’t consider her a mere partner in this reporting project. I considered Lungile a kindred spirit, a close friend.

She was my extended eyes and ears on this trip. She became my understanding of the place I only dropped in on. She translated conversations from Zulu to English, so I could translate experiences into stories.

Without her, I would not have understood the feelings of abandonment by the government that many of the people felt or the implied political overtones of multiple conversations. Lungile was the one who got a man outside the rundown hostel in Alexandra to tell her how, when he returned from work one morning in May 2008, he saw a mob gathering soon before the xenophobic violence began. These were surface level facts, descriptions and explanations. Over the scope of two weeks, Lungile’s quiet explanations of nuances and cultural undertones that take a lifetime to learn helped me go below the surface of the interview and gave me a brighter picture of South Africa and the person she was.

Bias is smeared all over my words and deep down into my core when I speak or write about Lungile. I always thought I would be able to see her again. Maybe it was ignorance of life’s unyielding surprises. Maybe it was a longing to go back to the country that so quickly developed a deep place in my heart. Maybe it is something I don’t understand quite yet.

Now, I hope to see her in the everyday. In the moments I share with those I love. In the moments of exploration and curiosities explained. In my work as a journalist and as a combatant in the human experience. While I don’t believe photos or words can bring justice to a short-lived life, I pray our compilation of work honors her. Honors her spirit, honors who she was and who she was trying to be. Honors her greatness.

Story by Christina DeVries