

---

# **XENOPHOBIA IN BOTTLEBRUSH: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE REASONS BEHIND THE ATTACKS ON AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT IN DURBAN**

## **PART 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The response is for each and every stratum in society to use whatever powers of domination it can command (money, political influence, even violence) to try to seal itself off (or seal off others judged undesirable) in fragments of space within which processes of reproduction of social distinctions can be jealously protected.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation from David Harvey's seminal work on capitalist urbanization and struggles around the built form epitomizes the approach adopted in this study of xenophobic violence that erupted in an informal settlement in Durban. My basic argument is that the exclusion of the working class from access to adequate and secure living space gives rise to tensions and conflicts which express themselves in different ways and sometimes as xenophobic attacks on African immigrants. My corollary argument is that, while capitalism has introduced a dichotomy between living and working spaces, this is an artificial division which the xenophobic attacks traverse by allowing resentments born and kept alive at the workplace to be expressed in the place of residence.<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, blame for the xenophobic attacks should be placed squarely on the door of capital and the capitalist state.<sup>3</sup> However, the research findings lead me to also conclude that working class people have a choice on how to respond to the problems capitalism visits on them. Xenophobia is a response that can and should be eschewed because it does not address the basic contradiction between capital and labour, but rather pits parts of the working class against each other and undermines the working class struggle in the short and long-term. This raises questions around working class leadership, politics, organization, ideology and struggle in South Africa and the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1985, pp. 13-14

<sup>2</sup> "The split between the place of work and the place of residence means that the struggle of labour to control the social conditions of its own existence splits into two seemingly independent struggles." Harvey, *op. cit.* p.38.

<sup>3</sup> This contradicts, for example, Daryl Glaser's conclusion that, "This xenophobia really is coming up from below...Xenophobic violence is not coming from the elites". (Disconnections: Elite and Popular 'Common Sense' on the Matter of Foreigners" in S. Hassim, T. Kupe and E. Worby, *Go Home Or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008, p.53)

Problem/issue/context	Recommendation
Bottlebrush people live under squalid conditions that are fertile ground for the growth xenophobia and other anti-social attitudes	The government needs to improve the social and living conditions in working class areas such as Bottlebrush.
The building of subsidized housing at Bottlebrush is done <i>in situ</i> and with a policy to remove tenants. This is creating a crisis which led, during the course of this research, to a land invasion which was violently suppressed by the eThekweni Municipal Council	Provision for tenants or those who lose out during housing development must be organized. Failure to do so leads to tension and desperate actions by the affected which can easily feed into existing immigrant and South African “borners” tensions leading to xenophobic attitudes and even attacks.
Landlords/adies are exploiting the shortage of housing in Bottlebrush by increasing rentals and sometimes use xenophobic arguments to put pressure on tenants to cough up more money	Research is needed into the “shack housing market”. Need to explore the desirability of government regulation and community control of rentals in informal settlements too. There is a need to counter the tendency of local elites to use xenophobic arguments for pecuniary gain
There is ongoing verbal and physical harassment of African immigrants in Bottlebrush’s everyday life. In this way xenophobic consciousness is being nurtured and developed on an ongoing basis	Government and community programmes are necessary to educate people against xenophobia and to foster solidarity, promote respect for human rights and encourage tolerance of people irrespective of race, gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation and country of origin. Deterrents and sanctions against harassment of immigrants and other vulnerable groups must be put in place
African immigrant workers are exploited and oppressed more than South African born workers at the workplace, viz. they are paid less, made to work harder and robbed of worker rights. This is done by employers and sometimes with the connivance of South African born fellow workers	The government must make a law that bars employers from paying immigrant workers lower wages and affording them lesser rights. Inspectors must be sent into workplaces to monitor. Trade unions need to fight for equal rights and equal-pay-for-equal-work for all workers irrespective of country of origin. Education and consciousness-raising programmes must be developed to foster a sense of solidarity between South African born workers and immigrants

<p>There is an apparent political vacuum in Bottlebrush community politics partly due to neglect by elected representatives and the dysfunctional operation of the local committees which are failing to address community problems and contribute to building a feeling of solidarity</p>	<p>The government must ensure that elected public representatives actively service their communities including encouraging the existence of local democratic community structures that work with the community on a day-to-day basis. Government and local structures must keep in touch with the feelings of the masses and address problems in the area concerned. Progressive movements are needed</p>
<p>The historical intersection of race and class produced Durban city 's spatial configuration that is characterized by a form of residential segregation that marginalizes Bottlebrush from its location in Chatsworth with negative social, political and economic consequences for the community.</p>	<p>Political intervention is necessary to reintegrate urban "ghettoes" such as Bottlebrush into the mainstream fabric of society so as to overcome the marginalization of the community. Such intervention should seek to create a socially caring, politically united and economically viable community in Bottlebrush-Chatsworth-Durban that stops the reproduction of the racial, ethnic and class divisions of the past</p>

## PART 2: INTRODUCTION

Why is it that xenophobic attacks in South Africa were prevalent in informal settlements and overcrowded slum-like areas such as Alexandra? This is a question I asked myself when I discovered that there were xenophobic attacks in the Bottlebrush informal settlement but none or very little in Chatsworth and other formal townships around Durban. Research done into the prevalence of xenophobic attitudes in Southern African indicates that South Africa has the highest rate of anti-immigrant feeling.<sup>4</sup> The research also indicates that xenophobic attitudes exist across class lines and thus presumably geographic area. But, under what circumstances are xenophobic attitudes activated into violent attacks and, why does this happen mostly in informal settlements? This study sets out to answer these related questions.

This research report begins by laying out the theoretical framework that informed this study, it then describes the research site and its social, political and

<sup>4</sup> J. Crush *Immigration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa*, Southern African Migration Project/ South African Human Rights Commission, Cape Town, 2001.

---

economic dynamics. This is followed by a recount of what happened during the attacks together with an attempt at explaining the factors that led to the attacks. Finally, the report offers some suggestions about how we can fight xenophobia and, even more importantly, eradicate the conditions that give rise to this cancer.

### **Terms of Reference**

The mandate and general approach of this research is the Durban xenophobia project conducted under the auspices of the Centre for Civil Society. The particular focus of this study is Bottlebrush, an informal settlement located in Unit 9, Chatsworth. The researcher was informed that there were xenophobic attacks in the area and that the victims of xenophobia were being integrated into the community with the intervention of local community leaders.

This research set out to investigate the way of life of the people in Bottlebrush with a view to exploring and identifying the possible causes of the xenophobic attacks possibly arising out of the everyday strains, tensions and struggles to survive in this economically depressed area. The research sought to relate xenophobic attitudes to the material situation faced by the people in order to establish the structural and contingent factors that might have sparked off the violence.

The Durban research project set out the general framework for this particular investigation in the form of a matrix of structural forces consisting of: Jobs, Housing / Services, Retail services, Crime and Socio-cultural factors. Within this framework specific questions were asked for the Bottlebrush area such as exploring the suggestion that some victims of the attacks were African immigrants who are refugees from violence in their countries of origin and that their economic desperation led to their being perceived as posing a threat to the locals in the competition for scarce jobs in the area.

The research sought in particular to capture the views and voices of Bottlebrush residents, both those of the immigrants and those born in the country. It also sought to arrive at a theoretical explanation of the problem which could be applicable in other areas and situations. Interviews with key informants were to be conducted to collect the necessary data.

Some specific questions which the research sought to answer were the following:

1. What happened in Bottlebrush? [the story]
2. Why did it happen? [causes]
3. What kind of people attacked? What kind of people tried to stop the attacks? [social and political dynamics]
4. What did people feel? What did they do? [personal involvement and outlook]
5. What did the local organisations do? Did they support or oppose the attacks? Did they help the victims? Did they work with other organisations e.g. Community Policing Forums? [community organisation and mobilisation]

- 
6. What was the role of government? What was the role of local business? [state and business]
  5. How can we stop xenophobic attacks? [solutions]
  6. What does the future hold? [vision]

As will be apparent below, the content of the report follows the questions asked above and relates the findings to the matrix of structural forces identified by the Durban research team. However, time and logistical constraints prevented the research answering in full all the questions posed above.

## Methodology

About 22 open-ended interviews were conducted with residents of Bottlebrush and, in addition, 6 key informants from the nearby Ekupholeni (Crossmore) informal settlement were interviewed, 4 of whom previously lived in Bottlebrush. There were no attacks in Ekupholeni thus potentially providing a basis for comparison between the 2 areas. It was also important to establish how people who don't live in Bottlebrush viewed the area and the events in question.

It is important to note that I also attended 2 meetings called by Bottlebrush residents, one organizing a land invasion and the other at the site of the failed land invasion. The latter took place as people's building material was burning and the council's Police Protection Services officers were standing guard with their big shotguns and pump action rifles. I also hung around the Bottlebrush and Ekupholeni areas for about a week or so trying to get the feel of the place without being too obtrusive.

The main method of collecting data was the interview. Almost all the interviews were taped and transcriptions made. The researcher analysed the interview content by firstly establishing the history and nature of the place, looking at what actually happened with the attacks and then at what is the situation today. Information from different respondents, including a few documentary sources, was used in order to ensure veracity and accuracy. This also helped to ascertain how the events were remembered and viewed by each respondent.

A few key questions were asked of each respondent but otherwise the interview was allowed to be shaped by the respondent. This was done to lessen the researcher influencing the respondents through the structure of the interviews. But it should be noted that some respondents needed more prompting than others.

Gaining access to Bottlebrush was a challenge but was achieved through linking up with activists who have worked in the area who introduced this researcher to

---

an Ekupholeni local leader who, in turn, introduced me to at least 5 informants.<sup>5</sup> After that I targeted informants according to availability and relevance for the research. It should be noted that xenophobia is a thorny and sensitive issue but I am confident from the interviews that I was able to get the most important information from the point of view of this research. Without doubt, given more time, the research would have yielded more information.

There was a problem of language especially when interviewing Bottlebrush residents who are immigrants. Some of them come from Mozambique and a few do not understand English and have a poor grasp of Zulu. But this was not too much of a problem because I could get the gist of what they were saying. But I think I would have got more if they were speaking their own languages.

I interviewed people at their homes and sometimes at a pre-arranged place away from Bottlebrush. This was necessary to break the ice and later, when I visited people in their homes some had heard about the research project and were more comfortable talking to a stranger. Some respondents were keen to talk. The two council police officers interviewed could not be taped and their interviews were relatively short in duration.

Some respondents assumed that “we” are all “South Africans” and “they” were a problem. I avoided any arguments but tried to stick to the issue at hand trying to get them to answer the questions posed by the research. But I suspect many South African born respondents relaxed when I spoke in Zulu and presumed my good intentions and bona fides. Some immigrants could not be interviewed because they were a bit scared, but this only happened on the very first day of the field work. They literally ran away.

It was interesting to note that some immigrants seemed to agree that there were real reasons for the xenophobia even being prepared to criticize fellow immigrants. On the other hand, some South African born people who were xenophobic were ready to admit that “it is not their (immigrants’) fault”. The point here is that the research revealed some nuances in people’s consciousness which made the whole exercise worthwhile and generated new knowledge rather than repeating old shibboleths, stereotypes and platitudes.

---

<sup>5</sup> In this respect I must thank Orlean Naidoo of the Westcliff Ratepayers’ Association and Centre for Civil Society whose knowledge of the area and contacts provided me with the crucial foot in the door into the area.

---

## Structure of this report / Table of contents

### Part 1

Executive summary

### Part 2

Introduction

Terms of reference

Methodology

### Part 3

Theoretical framework

### Part 4

An informal settlement named Bottlebrush: Description of the research site

### Part 5

The xenophobic attacks at Bottlebrush

### Part 6

Factors and reasons behind the xenophobic attacks and attitudes

### Part 7

Bottlebrush today: The aftermath of the attacks

### Part 8

An assessment: Working class life and xenophobia

### Part 9

Going forward in the struggle against xenophobia: Recommendations

### Part 10

Appendices

## **PART 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Karl Marx wrote that the fundamental contradiction under capitalism is that between labour and capital.<sup>6</sup> This research adopts this assertion as a starting point in trying to understand the behavior and thinking of ordinary people in South Africa. This is because with the demise of apartheid, it is clear that the problems facing the masses have not gone away, indeed some people say they have multiplied. This belies the point of view put forward by liberal thinkers such as Merle Lipton who seemed to suggest that the end of apartheid would usher in

---

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, the Marx-Engels internet archive

a period of social harmony, prosperity and racial tolerance.<sup>7</sup> Instead, what we have seen are the rich getting richer and the poor poorer. South Africa in September 2009, it is now generally agreed, is possibly the most unequal society in the world with a Gini co-efficient of index of 0.679.<sup>8</sup> This underlines the point that the demise of apartheid left capitalism very much alive and kicking and it is this method of organizing the production and distribution of social goods – the mode of production – that must be interrogated if we want to explain and eradicate the poverty and suffering that beset the masses.

David Harvey is a Marxist scholar who has pioneered a field of scholarship that integrates the study of space with that of time, of geography and history.<sup>9</sup> What is the relevance of this work in this research study? I think it is important because the xenophobic attacks in South Africa have tended to take place in informal settlements. Many researchers have noted this and tried to explain it as a function of the poorest of the poor living in such areas and hence escalating the perceived competition over scarce social goods such as housing.<sup>10</sup> But it must be noted that the poorest of the poor are also to be found in areas with brick and cement houses, for example, in areas made up of government-built subsidized (“RDP”) houses. Other researchers have pointed out that many African immigrants end up living in informal settlements because of their economic circumstances and also because many of them do not have the necessary documents but can access a shack and perhaps reckon that they are less likely to be found out and arrested as “aliens” in a labyrinth of shacks.<sup>11</sup> However, this line of research sometimes tends to be descriptive and to explain the problem at a superficial level of analysis. For example, what are the underlying processes that govern the creation and existence of informal settlements under the capitalist system? What are the political, social and economic dynamics that sometimes lead to xenophobic attacks in some informal settlements and not in others? How are xenophobic attitudes and actions related to the class struggle? I contend that

---

<sup>7</sup> Merle Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa 1920 – 1986*, David Philip, Claremont.

<sup>8</sup> Donwald Pressly, ‘South Africa has widest gap between rich and poor’, *Business Report*, 28 September, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> David Harvey *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, op.cit. Please see also *The Urbanization of Capital*, David Blackwell, Oxford, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> “The xenophobic attacks that took place at the end of May in Johannesburg were located in particular spaces in the city: in shack settlements, in the vicinity of hostels, and in inner city suburbs. These are housing environments that have been neglected by the state. They are characterized by severe overcrowding, deteriorating services, high levels of poverty, rampant unemployment, ongoing racial segregation and the daily struggles of poor people forced to compete with one another for increasingly scarce resource.” (Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack, ‘Housing Delivery, The Urban Crisis and Xenophobia’ in *Go Home or Die: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> “Access to this [RDP subsidized] housing is severely circumscribed. Beneficiaries must have South African residency...But again [with social housing] there are restrictive conditions of access: South African residency... [whereas] In theory almost anyone can occupy a shack. Shack settlements are often the key reception points for most new migrants to the cities, particularly foreign-born residents”. (Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack, op. cit. pp.148-150).

the work of David Harvey can go a long way in helping us answer some of these questions in the South African context.

The problem of the existence of informal settlements, or squatter camps, is a whole field of study in itself.<sup>12</sup> In South Africa it is estimated that 6 million live in shacks.<sup>13</sup> Often this is blamed on the government's failure to "deliver" enough houses and fast enough to accommodate everyone in need.<sup>14</sup> But the bigger question is whether the shortage of housing for the working class, as is the shortage of jobs, is an aberration or part and parcel of how the capitalist system works.<sup>15</sup> Harvey quotes Marx where the latter suggests that capital functions in such a way as to "practically [expel] them [workers] from the earth as a dwelling place".<sup>16</sup> Why is this so? Because:

The system of private property that excludes labour from land as a condition of production also serves to exclude labour from the land as a condition of living.<sup>17</sup>

What this suggests is that for the working class acquiring adequate and affordable accommodation will always constitute a struggle as long as society is governed by the law of capital. This is an important point in the South African context because at some point in the history of the country the idea developed that the end of apartheid would solve all the problems faced by the masses and there would be a better life for all.<sup>18</sup> In spite of, some would say because of, the South African Communist Party (SACP) being influential in the ANC, the idea took root that somehow the interests of the working class would be realizable while capital continued its economic hegemony in South Africa. Recently, the idea of a "developmental state" is being propounded as the solution to the problems of poverty besetting the country. But Patrick Bond has argued that this is a fiction so long as it leaves the power of capital more or less untouched.<sup>19</sup> From this we can conclude that struggles over housing, and the existence of

<sup>12</sup> See for example Michael Davis's *Planet of Slums*, a seminal Marxist work on the subject.

<sup>13</sup> Angela Brown, *Environmental Health Interventions in Informal Settlements*, Ethekwini Health Unit, Ethekwini Municipality, 21 May 2009.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack, op.cit. They question the type and method of housing provision.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx coined the term "the reserve army of labour" to explain the existence of the unemployed showing that unemployment is a necessary, functional and inevitable phenomenon under capitalism. See *Capital, Volume 1*, Marx-Engels internet archive. Engels's *The Housing Question* argues along the same lines for housing as for jobs, internet archive.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume 3, International Publishers, New York 1967, 3:773)

<sup>17</sup> Harvey, op. cit. p.38

<sup>18</sup> Nelson Mandela, as key figurehead of the ANC and even of the national liberation movement as a whole, popularized the progressive slogan of "a better life for all". This was often broken down into its component aspects, namely, "houses for all", "jobs for all", "education for all", etc. In retrospect I would argue that what was left unclear was whether these aspirations were realizable if the power of capital was left intact.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Bond 'Response to RW Johnson', *New Left Review*, September, 2009.

---

informal settlements, will continue into the future so long as capitalism rules the roost in South Africa.

But why is it that xenophobic attitudes escalate into attacks especially in informal settlements? And how can this be avoided? Part of the answer, I want to suggest, lies with the political, social and economic dynamics in informal settlements around the production and use of housing. Many informal settlements start off as land invasions.<sup>20</sup> Working class people, constrained and excluded by capital from access to land and housing, are compelled to take matters into their own hands and commit a grievous sin under capitalism, namely, trample upon the sanctity of private property. This defiant collective action no doubt leaves its mark on the consciousness of the people concerned. My research into Bottlebrush reveals that when people invade land the general plan is to resist eviction or removal from the invaded land until the authorities tacitly recognize the new settlement and hopefully include them in future housing development. This is how Bottlebrush was born, this is how Ekupholeni (Crossmore), an offshoot of Bottlebrush, was born.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, the people of Ekupholeni were very proud of their accomplishment, establishing a new settlement, and they were very hopeful that in the near future subsidized housing would be built for them. My point here is that many informal settlements are born out of class struggle, the struggle between the principle of private property which is premised on production for profit, and the principle of public ownership or municipalisation where land is appropriated to satisfy human needs. In other words, the same dynamic behind the struggle of labour against its domination by capital is in operation. Harvey argues that “the relation between labour and the built environment can be understood only in terms of it”.<sup>22</sup>

The question is how does it happen that a working class community born of class struggle, such as Bottlebrush, down the line turns against other members of the working class even if they originate from other countries? This is an important question which I suspect can only be asked by analysts who respect and recognize the power of the working class as a “rational” force under capitalism. What I mean is, workers are quite capable of figuring out what is what, who their enemies are and what is in their best interest. They should be able, after “socializing” or “communing” the land, to extend that principle to other arenas of life including their relations with immigrants who happen to live in the

---

<sup>20</sup> “In the absence of appropriate housing provision by the state, the poor have taken on the task of housing themselves in a variety of creative ways including shacks, backyard accommodation and inner city rooms...By occupying space illegally, informally or in other unregulated ways, the urban poor have succeeded in gaining a foothold in places that would otherwise be denied them.” Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack, *op.cit.* pp.153.and 158

<sup>21</sup> This is as much as I could gather from the failed land invasion that took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2009 at Bottlebrush. Interviews with the invaders and my attendance of t 2 meetings held to prepare and afterwards assess the invasion yielded this insight.

<sup>22</sup> Harvey, *ibid.* p.37

same area they invaded.<sup>23</sup> What militates against this? I think at this point politics, ideology, organization and leadership become decisive in the equation we are trying to solve. And again, Marx and Harvey provide the basic framework for the explanation needed. Harvey, following Marx and other Marxist thinkers, suggests that “homeownership for labour” is a crucial ideological bulwark for the survival of capitalism and its hallowed private property principle.

Extended individualized homeownership is therefore seen as advantageous to the capitalist class because it promotes the allegiance of at least a segment of the working class to the principle of private property, promotes an ethic of ‘possessive individualism’.<sup>24</sup>

My research suggests that as soon as the land invaders take over the land, build their shacks and manage to ward off attacks and attempts to remove them by the state, the tendency is to slide into individualized private ownership of the shacks and the land upon which they are erected. The attack on private property represented by the invasion and the raising of the principle of public collective ownership implied by the collective act of invading and defending against state attempts to dislodge the invaders soon gives way to the parceling out of more or less privately owned pieces of land which, after sometimes, congeals into a “lumpen” form of landlordism.<sup>25</sup> This is exactly what happened in Bottlebrush. Today, many “homeowners” in this informal settlement are landlords and landladies who rent out shacks to other community members including immigrants from African countries.<sup>26</sup> It is fascinating to see how, in the context of an informal settlement:

Homeownership, in short, invites a faction of the working class to wage its inevitable fight over the appropriation of value in capitalist society in a very

---

<sup>23</sup> The notion of “communing” derives from the notion of “common goods” or the “commons”, that is, goods that are held in common by all members of a community or society. Please see, for example, K. Bekker, ‘The Commons versus the Commodity: Alter-globalisation, Anti-Privatisation and the Human Right to Water in the Global South’, *Antipode*, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey, *ibid.* p.42

<sup>25</sup> I only use the word “lumpen” to underline the difference in the form that the process of the privatization of land takes place vis-à-vis what happens in the “formal” capitalist sphere. This provides an opportunity for me to make the point that in the course of the research I surmised that people living in Bottlebrush are members of the working class rather than forming a distinct “lumpenproletariat” class. However, it is possible that many of them, because of pervasive unemployment and/or precarious employment, have never experienced working class life in the same way that, say, a blue collar worker permanently employed in a factory has. This might give rise to a consciousness that does not exactly follow the one abstractly conceptualized by Marx. Greg Ruiters first alerted me to this theoretical nuance in a conversation on the affinity of working class communities to socialist versus anarcho-autonomist ideologies of struggle. Trotsky’s “law of uneven and combined development” might be useful in explaining these differences, a point made by Patrick Bond also in a personal communication.

<sup>26</sup> Felakhe Mhlongo, interview respondent and member of the Bottlebrush ANC Branch Executive Committee. The latter is “in charge” of the place. Mhlongo lives in Ekupholeni, a nearby informal settlement.

different way. It puts them on the side of the principle of private property and frequently leads them to appropriate values at the expense of other factions of the working class.<sup>27</sup>

The ethic and practice of self-management and self-government which develops during the period of invasion and initial settlement, I want to suggest, instead of being extended and developed into a struggle against capital is turned into its opposite whereby the “people’s committees” which lead the community end up being arbiters and managers of value extraction by landlords from tenants, many of whom, in Bottlebrush at least, are immigrants. People born in South Africa are not immune from such exploitation. The invasion of land in Crossmore was effected by Bottlebrush tenants who “got tired” of paying exorbitant rents in the settlement. The worst part, according to the leader of the Crossmore invaders, was that as tenants they were not allowed any say in Bottlebrush community affairs.<sup>28</sup> No one will be surprised to hear that the most exploited and ill-treated tenants in Bottlebrush are African immigrants.<sup>29</sup> An interesting angle is the fact that the Bottlebrush committee consists of the leadership of the local ANC branch. On face value this seems like “political ineptness”, “opportunism” or even “corruption” because many respondents accused some committee members of benefiting financially and in other ways from the situation.<sup>30</sup> But I want to suggest that the issue goes deeper than that. Petit landlordism is tolerated by capital, according to Harvey, because it is “a glorious tool to divide and rule” and, further:

[Capital] preserves the principle of private property intact in the context of class struggle by permitting labour to return to the face of the earth [after being disposed by landed property] as a partial owner of land and property as a condition of consumption.<sup>31</sup>

Hence the ruling party, the ANC, runs local branches that appear to strengthen capitalist processes.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, when the invaders are left alone by the state after successfully taking over the land, their hope is to be given “umxhaso” (isiZulu for subsidy) housing and this is premised on the orderly existence of individual households or people who qualify.<sup>33</sup> This, in my opinion, further pushes the community towards acceptance of the private property principle in land and house ownership because it is a condition set by the state for you to get a house. At the same time, African immigrants without documents are

<sup>27</sup> Harvey, op. cit. p.43

<sup>28</sup> Felakhe Mhlongo, respondent.

<sup>29</sup> Respondents, Bottlebrush immigrants.

<sup>30</sup> Respondent, Bottlebrush landlady.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey, *ibid.* p.43

<sup>32</sup> The ANC in government is in charge of the South African capitalist system and therefore, at the end of the day, strives to maintain the capitalist status quo rather than undermine or subvert it.

<sup>33</sup>“The underlying assumptions of this modernist [government housing provision] paradigm are full employment, social stability, aspirations to orderliness, impermeable nation states, nuclear family arrangements, and homogeneity.” (Melinda Silverman and Tanya Zack op. cit. p.148)

automatically excluded.<sup>34</sup> This is exactly what is happening today in Bottlebrush even as you read this report. There is a house building project underway by the government which is designed to benefit only the “stand owners” (*omastende*). And, as happened with the Crossmore invaders, tenants feel compelled to invade land especially because government policy requires that shacks be demolished in the household yard where an RDP house is being built.<sup>35</sup> If the tenants don't find accommodation soon many of them will soon find themselves homeless. The new housing project has introduced turmoil and uncertainty in the Bottlebrush “housing market”. This, together with the overcrowding in the area, is resulting in a sharp increase in rentals which many tenants simply cannot afford. So, in order to avoid impending homelessness, greedy petit landlordism and to position themselves to get subsidized houses sometime in the future, something they cannot do as long as they are tenants in someone's yard, tenants invade land in Bottlebrush.<sup>36</sup>

What is the relevance of all this to the xenophobic attacks? I have already mentioned that the most exploited tenants appear to be the immigrants. I have also alluded to the disadvantage of being an immigrant because you are condemned to the status of a permanent tenant as you are excluded from ever owning a house in South Africa especially if you don't have papers. During the xenophobic attacks in Alexandra one issue raised by the attackers was that immigrants acquire houses corruptly and thus jump the queue. I imagine that many South African born people, tired of waiting on the waiting list, will bribe an official to get a house. Immigrants need a house as much as South African citizens and they are not immune to bribing someone to secure it. There is more to say about the possible interaction between xenophobia and the struggle of the working class to access adequate and affordable housing. But I want to tentatively suggest, and this is likely a controversial point, that the problem of xenophobia is but a small aspect of a much bigger problem in South Africa. If the problem of xenophobia is wrested out of context, in this case the struggle by working class people for decent homes, and is elevated above such struggle, in the same way that for example crime sometimes is, we will never find lasting solutions for this cancer.<sup>37</sup> With crime, we hear ANC government leaders spewing fire and brimstone, calling on the police to shoot to kill, but how will this approach solve the underlying processes that create crime such as poverty, inequality, individualism and more generally the continued domination of capital over labour? I think it is the same with xenophobia, it is cancer that must be eradicated, it keeps the working class divided because it pits one section of the class against another, but in addressing it we should take care to locate it firmly

<sup>34</sup> See footnote no. 11 above.

<sup>35</sup> Demolition of the shacks in the yards of the beneficiaries is informed by the government's grand plan to eradicate all shacks by 2014 and Durban city's Slum Act.

<sup>36</sup> Respondents, Bottlebrush land invaders (invasion took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2009).

<sup>37</sup> “But once xenophobia is accepted to be a secondary symptom rather than a primary cause of violence, responsibility and accountability must necessarily be more widely distributed.” (S. Hassim, T. Kupe and E. Worby, *Go Home or Die Here*, op. cit. p.6.

within the class struggle between labour and capital. This must involve an understanding of the relationship between struggles in the workplace and the place of living.

With respect to the workplace, the investigation into Bottlebrush reveals that almost all the African immigrants living there are employed, especially the men. But they are mostly precariously employed. One respondent, for example, complained that he travelled to work about 3 times the previous week and each time only to be told there was no job for the day. The employer insists that he reports for duty and only decides when he is there whether his services will be needed or not.<sup>38</sup> There are many such stories of ill-treatment with the most common one being workers paid low wages. Apparently immigrants are, as a rule, paid much less than South Africans. Some South African born workers recognize this injustice and blame the employers, while others want to blame the immigrants for accepting low wages. Why do immigrants accept low wages? I asked. Because they are desperate; because they can save; because when they get back home they can change the money into the local currency and make a fortune. I will not spend a lot of time trying to theorise the exploitation of immigrants in the workplace because this is a well-trodden path by Marxists, trade unionists and progressive scholars. But I do want to make the point that what goes on at the workplace finds its way back to working class communities and some of the frustrations of South African born workers add fuel to the fire of xenophobic attitudes. The findings also indicate that immigrant workers are not only ill-treated by the employers but also by fellow workers. They work harder, longer and are given the most difficult tasks. In at least one case, the employer docks immigrant workers' pay at the behest of other (South African born) workers and such money is used to buy *braaivleis* (barbecue meat).<sup>39</sup> Immigrant workers appear to provide cheap labour to the South African economy and also serve as a kind of underclass labour force that is pushed around by both employer and fellow employee at the workplace.

After making the theoretical points above around housing, its location in the capital-labour power relation and how this could be related to xenophobia, I will now present the main findings of my investigation.

## **Part 4**

### **AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT CALLED BOTTLEBRUSH: DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE**

It is estimated that about 6 million people live in shacks in South Africa; in Durban, there are 650 000 shack dwellers out of a total population of 3.5 million,

<sup>38</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>39</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

about 20%.<sup>40</sup> There have been many heart-wrenching descriptions, lamentations and condemnations of life in a shack settlement.<sup>41</sup> Bottlebrush is no exception with the inevitable trademark overcrowding, inadequate water and sanitation services, “shacks [that] dangle off steep, refuse strewn, slopes...[and] are a colourful mishmash of materials, shapes and sizes.”<sup>42</sup> “Social life in the settlement consists of rowdy and energetic Friday and Saturday parties” with the attendant overindulgence, violence and dangerous sexual liaisons.<sup>43</sup> Environmental pollution and related health problems abound. With respect to the latter, Bottlebrush was one of the test cases in a project by the eThekweni municipality to address environmental problems. It was found to have “severe pollution problems impacting on community health [and] low level or poor existing infrastructures and services”.<sup>44</sup> During my field visits there was no sign of the benefits of this project. The place was as filthy and squalor-ridden as ever.

Bottlebrush consists of hundreds of shacks built around two hills sloping sharply down into a small dirty stream. The place is teeming with people and, when you stand on one side of the hill, you can see and hear people busy in their shacks across the stream giving an eerie claustrophobic sensation as if everything is happening inside a fishbowl. This feeling is accentuated over the weekend when everyone is home, then you can hear the noise of the place, people talking, radios blaring, children shouting, dogs barking and the odd car driving through the extremely narrow, precarious, concrete roads. Rough looking young men sit in street corners or in *shebeens* (drinking houses) that are strategically located at key points in the settlement. Groomed, confident young women walk in pairs along the streets chatting away. There is the inevitable drunk zigzagging in the street. Older women go about their washing in the few water taps placed at unexpected points in the street, often not a real tap but a thin plastic pipe sticking out of the ground and kept closed by bending it against itself and tying it with a piece of string.

The Bottlebrush community is a recent beneficiary of a government housing project. A total of 964 houses are being built *in situ*, that is, in your current yard

<sup>40</sup> Angela Brown, Environmental Health Interventions in Informal Settlements, Ethekewini Health Unit, Ethekewini Municipality, 21 May 2009.

<sup>41</sup> “Our bodies itch every day because of the insects. If it is raining everything is wet - blankets and floors. If it is hot the mosquitoes and flies are always there. There is no holiday in the shacks. When the evening comes - it is always a challenge. The night is supposed to be for relaxing and getting rest. But it doesn't happen like that in the *jondolos*. People stay awake worrying about their lives. You must see how big the rats are that will run across the small babies in the night”. (S'bu Zikode, “The Third Force”, *Cape Argus*, 9 November 2005. See also Shannon Walsh ‘If you don't die first’: Fire, Water and Women in the Shack Settlements in Durban’ and Evan Mantzaris and Elias Cebekhulu ‘Life and Death in Banana City’ both articles in Rob Pattman and Sultan Khan *Undressing Durban*, Madiba Publishers, Durban, 2007.

(*Undressing Durban*), Evan Mantzaris (*Undressing Durban*)

<sup>42</sup> Shannon, *op.cit.* p.161

<sup>43</sup> Evan Mantzaris, *op. cit.* p.170. Also, Angela Brown, *op. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Angela Brown, *op.cit.*

where you have your shack. But it is hard to distinguish the new houses from the old brick houses some people built for themselves, everything appears drab and sub-standard. The local hall, a big ramshackle building that looks like it was built by a fly-by-night bricklayer, boasts a big sign stating that it has been closed because it was damaged when pipes were being laid to service the area. There is no other local community facility besides this dead white elephant hall. Electricity has been installed at Bottlebrush and one can see wires confusedly crisscrossing the street poles intent on finding their way into each yard. Most shacks are made of planks or wooden boards pinned together with rusty nails. Each yard can squeeze in as many as 13 shacks.

Bottlebrush got its name from the street that takes you from Crossmore Street, Chatsworth Unit 9, through some "Indian" houses into the shack settlement. Ironically the almost obscure green sign put by the municipality to indicate where the area is reads "Bottlebrush Community Hall". Some respondents told me the history of the area. Apparently the settlement was born about 20 years ago when people running away from political violence in KwaNdengezi, a township bordering Chatsworth, sought refuge in the hilly bushes and built plastic shelters. The first settlers, actually land invaders, at Bottlebrush must have been ANC supporters running away from IFP warlords. The area continues to be an ANC stronghold although COPE found a footing in the build-up to the last national elections. At the moment the only local civic and political structure in operation is the ANC Branch Executive Committee. The latter is the authority that runs Bottlebrush. Almost every respondent who commented on the issue held this committee in disgust because of their poor and allegedly corrupt leadership of the area.

Bottlebrush is big but the problem is the leadership. The people there put their hopes on me because they are not good leaders. The committees have spent 15 years in power and even if it is time to vote then there are shenanigans with membership cards. It is people who are working for their pockets.<sup>45</sup>

No development. Nothing happens here. Even if there is a little development then they eat the money, there is corruption and then that development ends up getting nowhere. It is exactly the local leaders and committees, everything ends up with them. It is just them who get everything, they block things and we get nothing.<sup>46</sup>

Bottlebrush is notorious for being a rough, crime-ridden place. Indeed, things have improved because there was a time when gangsters ran amok terrorizing the residents. This was brought somewhat under control when the community,

---

<sup>45</sup> Felakhe Mhlongo, ex-Bottlebrush resident, leader of Ekupholeni shack settlement, near Bottlebrush.

<sup>46</sup> Youth, MaSithole's first daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

led by the local ANC, organized a vigilante group which literally killed the gangsters.<sup>47</sup> According to one respondent other forms of civic organization were banished from the area because these ended up ill-treating people in the name of maintaining law and order. That left the ANC BEC. However, there is an apparent big leadership vacuum in the area leading to a sense of insecurity by residents who feel that the area is lawless. Matters are made worse by the fact that Ward 71, which incorporates Bottlebrush, was won by the Minority Front with the ANC losing out because of the “Indian vote”.<sup>48</sup> The ANC has allocated a proportional representative councilor to work in the area but it does not seem as if she is very active in local affairs.<sup>49</sup>

Bottlebrush is still known as a crime-infested, lawless place.

But in Bottlebrush there are no rules.<sup>50</sup>

In Bottlebrush there is no law. It is a place where the buck eats grass during the day. If you meet someone who hates you, he beats you up.<sup>51</sup>

Bottlebrush? It is not alright. It used to have a lot of crime but it is better now. It is not a great place. There are criminals.<sup>52</sup>

I did not come across a single person who lives in Bottlebrush, or one who once lived there, who had a positive thing to say about the area. The biggest complaint is that it is an area with a leadership without vision, a place where there is no development, a divided or anomic community.

Bottlebrush is a *skomplaas* [rough shantytown]. It is a place with many different people. You can't have law because there are many different people. That's why I say it is a *skomplaas*. I am not insulting them. There is no law and order there. On Friday they get drunk. Everyone is pulling their own way. It is about being someone's homeboy and even if he does something wrong they will say leave him alone it is my homeboy. So there is no order.<sup>53</sup>

I don't want to live here, I want to leave. The people here can strangle you in broad daylight.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Two ANC branch office bearers applied and were that operated in the area. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, amnesty application no. 2790/96, 19-20 October 1998)

<sup>48</sup> Respondent, Bottlebrush community member.

<sup>49</sup> Her name is Nokuthula Judith Makhanya, I wrote this report before we could meet. .

<sup>50</sup> Prema and Helen, Ekupholeni shack settlement resident, the only Indian couple living there.

<sup>51</sup> Mhlongo, respondent.

<sup>52</sup> MaSithole's 1<sup>st</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>53</sup> Khambule, ex-Bottlebrush resident, now lives at Ekupholeni.

<sup>54</sup> MaSithole's 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

Bottlebrush. It is mostly people from the farms but most carry themselves as *jondolo*. You respect the one who respects you. I saw this for myself when my sister died. I was alone with the boys who live here. You can't expect help from anyone. There are different ethnic groups or tribes here, Zulus, Xhosa. People say I will never be friends with that Zulu. If it was up to me I would leave this place.<sup>55</sup>

## **Part 5**

### **THE XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS AT BOTTLEBRUSH**

In May 2008 there were xenophobic attacks against African immigrants in the area. They lasted only a few days but their effects still reverberate in the area. A few people were beaten, almost all the immigrants fled the area, some timely before the attacks, others afterwards. I interviewed 2 brothers from Mozambique, one of them anticipated the attacks and started sleeping at his employer's place while the other made the mistake of not fleeing when the attacks started. He paid dearly but lived to tell the tale; he still lives in Bottlebrush:

I was beaten up with a stick last year. They beat me up badly. They wanted to take my phone but they couldn't find it because I had buried it in the ground. My brother had run away hiding at his boss's place. They told me that these people are going to come. They even came at night looking for us. We pretended we are not here. But they knew we were here. Some of us ran away but I slipped, fell down. I got badly injured.<sup>56</sup>

They attacked my brother when I was absent. I left to live at my workplace after I heard that there were going to be attacks. I went to live with my boss. I heard and left. They attacked him in my absence because he was left behind.<sup>57</sup>

There were attacks. I was here. They came and Carlito's brother was beaten up badly. Some of them went back to Mozambique some were taken by my brother to Umlazi. He took Carlito's brother to his house in Umlazi until it was okay. He likes them because they lived at his sister's place.<sup>58</sup>

Most if not all the African immigrants had to wait until the attacks subsided and the police had made clear that they would arrest anyone attacking people before

<sup>55</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>56</sup> Aguillo, immigrant from Mozambique, brother to Carlito, both live in Bottlebrush.

<sup>57</sup> Carlito, immigrant from Mozambique, Aguillo's brother.

<sup>58</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident

they came back. It is likely that those who went back “home” were away for a month or longer while those who remained in Durban came back sooner.

Some slept outside, many went back home, others went to relatives, those without money. .. Then they came back after the thing subsided after it was said this thing must end. If you beat someone you will be arrested. Others were saved by the police.<sup>59</sup>

What I saw were people being beaten. I heard that *makwerekwere* will be beaten. Some boys came with sticks beating up people. They started here because they know that they are many here. Someone who lives close by with his girlfriend got beaten up. Many were beaten up. We had to take someone to the bus stop at about 8 p.m. He was running away. One died. Some had their stuff stolen from them. It was a few days.<sup>60</sup>

The attackers were mostly young men who live in the area.

It was boys who beat up not girls. It was men, and young men, no women<sup>61</sup>.

They seemed to have gone from shack to shack looking for “makwerekwere”. They knew which shacks their targets occupied, just as happened to a respondent who got beaten up in Germiston:

They were choosing houses, they knew this one belongs to a Zulu, this one to a Shangaan. They had many weapons, all sorts of weapons. They came into the room I was in.<sup>62</sup>

The beating was merciless and terrifying. You were lucky to come out alive:

They came into the room I was in. This one guy hid under the bed and they couldn’t find him. I felt it wouldn’t be good to join him because they would be suspicious and find us. So I thought it is better that my brother is saved and he can tell my people how I died. They beat me up, hey, they beat me up. They beat me and beat me and beat me.<sup>63</sup>

The trauma stays with you, it is hard to forget. Yet still, because of economic reasons, the migrant workers had no choice but to come back to South Africa after their beating:

<sup>59</sup> MaSithole, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>60</sup> MaSithole’s 1<sup>st</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>61</sup> MaSithole, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>62</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>63</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

I wanted to go but my body said, don't go back to Johannesburg. I was scared, I wanted to go there but my heart said don't go there. So on fourteen January I came back but I didn't want to go back to Johannesburg. I went to Durban. I said I will see what happens. Anything can happen, if I die my brothers will remain.<sup>64</sup>

For some, because of the pressure to earn a living there is a need for rationalization and a defeatist if courageous fatalism takes over:

I want them to kill me here in South Africa, I will die here. If I hear it is now in Mariannhill and it's coming here, they must kill me. I am tired of running. I ran from Johannesburg, I can't run again. People die and others remain. They can kill me.<sup>65</sup>

Some of the perpetrators were apprehended:

The man who beat me was arrested, he stayed 2 months in the police station after that he was released. He is around. I am scared of him because I don't know what he is thinking about me.<sup>66</sup>

Police came and said whoever beat *makwerekwere* must be arrested. Landladies were asked to identify those who beat up *makwerekwere*. Some did, some did not.<sup>67</sup>

All in all it is a sad, sorry affair:

What can I do? It's too hard because some people just can't understand. It's too hard. Can they attack me? Yes, but they are scared of the police.<sup>68</sup>

They don't want Mozambicans. But others want us. They say we (South Africans) and Shangaans must be one, but others don't want us.<sup>69</sup>

I don't know, at work they say we must go back home, yes we can go back home, because it is your South Africa not ours, we will go back.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>65</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>66</sup> Aguillo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>67</sup> MaSithole's 1<sup>st</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>68</sup> Respondent, immigrant from Malawi, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>69</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>70</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

---

## **Part 6**

### **FACTORS AND REASONS BEHIND THE XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS AND ATTITUDES**

There are structural and ideological factors that are related to the development of xenophobic attitudes. These should be viewed as a kind of backdrop or providing fertile ground for the attacks. This is an important point of distinction because it is one thing to dislike immigrants and quite another to attack them physically even though the two are closely related. I say this because the study of Bottlebrush seems to indicate a few, significant factors that fuel xenophobic attitudes but these do not necessarily lead to attacks. Something specific must have happened in May 2009 to spark off the violence. In general, I would say the sorry and despicable condition of life in Bottlebrush is a breeding ground for all sorts of anti-social behavior such as alcoholism, crime and prostitution. The socioeconomic situation in this shack area is truly somber for the vast majority of the residents except perhaps for a few local elites; but they too cannot escape the depressing built environment and landscape. The place is an eyesore although one can perhaps find beauty here and there because of the sheer resilience of the human spirit and one's munificent imagination. Marx famously wrote that it is not the consciousness but rather social existence that has a determining influence. He was of course correct although in a place like Bottlebrush the wonder is how human beings are able to continue being human, to be compassionate, to love, to raise children and so on, in such squalid conditions. But it happens. But other things happen too. Such as the build-up of anger and frustration which more often than not is suppressed, the desire to shut out an ugly world through alcohol or drugs, the impatience and irritation with fellow human beings, the irrational desire to lash out and hurt something or someone, etc. This is the backdrop to the sowing and growth of xenophobic attitudes: conditions that undermine the development of feelings of hope, generosity and well-being.<sup>71</sup>

As if the physical environment was not bad enough, in Bottlebrush there is also the problem of a distorted sense of community. As David Harvey has argued, community is the milieu within which important socialization processes take place.<sup>72</sup> The *zeitgeist* of the place contains some confusing and disorienting elements. Because Bottlebrush consists of people who come from different places, who speak different languages, there is a need to process and bring together all these into a unique and more or less coherent community "spirit" or outlook. This requires mechanisms and spaces where people can come together, learn about each other, share views, and thus knock into existence a

---

<sup>71</sup>"There can be little question, after May 2008, that the supposedly slain beast of ethnic nationalism has been resurrected in the fertile terrain of poverty and inequality." S.Hassim, et. al. Op. cit. p.14.

<sup>72</sup>David Harvey *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanisation*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1985.

Bottlebrush ethos. It also requires symbols and activities that unite the people because living together is more than just sharing the same four walls or using the same roads. In Bottlebrush there seems to be a dearth of collective community activities, there is no community hall, no community meetings, no community newspaper, indeed, no real community leadership. Respondents' descriptions of the place from this point of view invoked in my mind the notion of anomie.<sup>73</sup>

I stay at 1104 [a section in Bottlebrush] it's okay but it is *jondolo* [shack area], life is not good at *jondolo*. There is *is'gebengu* [criminals] and over the weekend they say *kwerekwere*, so you are frightened, they want to take your things. I won't stay in *jondolo* for a long time because I am frightened.<sup>74</sup>

In a situation like it is likely that if someone comes along with an anti-social idea there won't be mechanisms or responsible figures of authority to question, challenge and denounce such an idea. I think that is what must have happened with the xenophobia attacks. Due to certain structural problems in the community there must have been resentments and tensions such as between those who work and those who don't, between landlords and tenants, between those who speak one language and those who speak another. Acrimony could possibly also be "imported" such as the divisions which originate in the workplace where, it emerged from the research findings, that there is a lot of ill-treatment, looking down upon and discrimination of immigrants. Capitalist society itself, because it is a class society, breeds competition and rivalry between people. In this respect it should be noted that class struggle consists of fights both between and within classes.<sup>75</sup>

According to some reports an anonymous pamphlet circulated in Bottlebrush just before the attacks.<sup>76</sup> There is also another report which alleges that there were meetings held to discuss the issue.<sup>77</sup> It is such incidents that could have served as catalysts and sparks that set off the conflagration. There is not enough evidence nor enough time to follow up properly and verify these reports. What is certain is that the attacks in Bottlebrush were part of the national phenomenon and were influenced by the attacks which started off in Alexandra. Indeed, there is ground to believe that the media played some role in helping spread the fire:

I heard people say on TV that they must beat up *makwerekwere* because they take jobs and women, in Alexandra. People here were talking about

<sup>73</sup> This concept coined by Emile Durkheim, the French 19<sup>th</sup> century sociologist, seems to accurately describe the feeling the respondents were conveying even if one is wary of the limitations of functionalist approaches to the study of society.

<sup>74</sup> Respondent, immigrant from Malawi, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>75</sup> Karl Marx and Frederic Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, the Marx-Engels internet archive.

<sup>76</sup> Respondent.

<sup>77</sup> Respondent.

it all the time. Even when going to school. People saying they take our jobs, we get fired.<sup>78</sup>

I heard on radio that it is happening in Jo'burg that they are being beaten up. Then it was here and I heard they are being beaten up. So I think a group of people hearing they are being beaten up in Jozi said let's beat them up too.<sup>79</sup>

It seems the attacks started in one place then spread to other areas such as Bottlebrush in a process of diffusion. I would say it might not exactly have been a conspiracy but there were agents in every area who took forward and promoted what initially happened in Alexander. Who were these people and what did they want? This question was not answered by this research and it seems to me more research must be done. Indeed, it might require a criminal investigation to pin down the "agitators" and "ringleaders". At the same time the burning match found a tinder box ready to explode rather than the match harmlessly falling onto a damp place.

During the course of the investigation I managed to unearth some positively xenophobic people in Bottlebrush. Due to the fact that some of the attackers were arrested and charged it was not easy to find someone who would say "I was part of the attacks". But xenophobic respondents spoke in a way that to some extent provided an idea of how an attacker would think. A fascinating respondent was a respectful and responsible family man not quite yet middle-aged. This is important because there is ground to believe that some of the attackers were simply youthful hooligans or criminals. But this man was neither, he was a respected member of the Ekupholeni community, right next to Bottlebrush, and he had lived there before moving to the new area. He might not have been involved in the attacks but the vehemence of his views point to the possibility that given the chance he would do it "out of necessity". He expressed his fear and hatred of immigrants. To him they were a real problem which had to be solved. What is worse is that the problem was getting worse all the time.

We will end up becoming like them because they are so many now. There are small ones. It is really scary because they will be all over the show. And they are multiplying. People used to say there are some here but now there are many, many more. Before it was only men, but now it is also women and children. If you go over there you will see them there. It is scary, that whole section [of Bottlebrush] it is just them.<sup>80</sup>

He was worried about jobs, a common theme for most respondents whether potential perpetrator or victim

<sup>78</sup> MaSithole's 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>79</sup> Khambule, Ekupholeni resident.

<sup>80</sup> Respondent.

We work hard but we get little. So the *mlungu* [white boss] can see that the best is to remove the one getting more money and hire the one getting less. That is where the problem starts.<sup>81</sup>

They are the ones who cause a problem. They are the ones who harm us a lot. They have no passport, no papers then they are willing to work for peanuts.<sup>82</sup>

They say you take our wives, you take our jobs. We say how is that? We agree to work for seventy rands, we agree to work hard and come in early. What must we do? They say don't take that money. Now if you are working and getting paid seventy rands, and you get someone else, who gets hundred and eighty. The seventy rands is a lot for me. After a few months, the boss thinks: I pay this one eighty and there is someone else getting forty rand a week, then I will get rid of this one and get the forty rand a week workers. That is what they don't like.<sup>83</sup>

They hate us. I think the problem is the work. They work little but get lots of money. We work hard but we get little. So the *mlungu* can see that the best thing is to remove the one getting more money and hire the one getting less. That is where the problem starts.<sup>84</sup>

Many people complain that these people who have just arrived work for little pay. For example, you will make an agreement with an Indian on hundred and then they come and say fifty rands.<sup>85</sup>

The truth is that there are many people coming in from other countries, they don't have papers. Now you find that South African citizens can't get a job because they need lots of money. But people from other countries, you pay them R50 and they agree because they suffer; like me I came here because there is no job at home.<sup>86</sup>

The other problem is that immigrants "multiply" at the workplace and displace South African born workers:

He will come on one day to work and then the next day he comes with another one, until they are in the majority. The only obstacle will be that

<sup>81</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>82</sup> Respondent.

<sup>83</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique.

<sup>84</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>85</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>86</sup> Respondent, immigrant from Malawi.

they don't know the whole job otherwise it would be them alone. The reason is because they are cheap. They are very cheap.<sup>87</sup>

Immigrants are also accused of behaving in a wrong way at work, undermining worker rights or breaking cultural norms:

They are cheap also in the sense that we have teatime and lunch, not them. You will see him working and busy eating. He is got a spanner in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other. Now, if you want to enjoy food you must sit down properly and eat. Also, before you eat you need to thank the Lord.<sup>88</sup>

There is a suggestion that bosses play divide and rule at work and that South African "borners" connive with the boss to ill-treat immigrants from African countries.

We work with Zulus but we are violated. They are more in number. They treat us badly. As Mozambicans we can't say anything, you can't tell the boss the problem. It is the *umlungu* who is the problem. Also the Zulus are also violating us. They can sit down and tell us to work. We ask them why they are sitting down and we work, they say, no, you must go back and work in Mozambique. But if the *mlungu* comes they work. But the *mlungu* also speaks the same language.<sup>89</sup>

The *mlungu* allocates the South African to be the boss boy. The *mlungu* docks your pay because the Zulus say this one is not working, and then they take your money and make a *braai*.<sup>90</sup>

In fact it is the bosses who often promote xenophobia by paying "borners" more than immigrants. They also find many ways of making money by shortchanging the immigrant workers, for example, making them work short time all the time, say 2 days a week.<sup>91</sup> On the whole immigrants felt that there was a bigger problem at work than at home. But after work, going home, you encounter the problem of the landlord or landlady.

The cause of the problem at home, according to the immigrants, was exploitation and discrimination. The main culprits are the landlords:

We are okay where we live but not so well. There is difference in rentals, some pay R150, some R170, it differs. Even me I pay R160 because they

<sup>87</sup> Respondent.

<sup>88</sup> Respondent.

<sup>89</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique.

<sup>90</sup> Respondent, immigrant.

<sup>91</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique.

add electricity. Others pay R140. They want us to suffer, to have hardship and pain while the people of here [South African born] they pay differently, they pay less.<sup>92</sup>

At home our landlady is violating us. We who use the electric stove we pay 190 [rands] and those using paraffin they use 130, but before the month is over the electricity is cut. But how can it be that before the twelfth of the month the electricity is finished? Some say, to hell, keep your electricity and they use paraffin. She rents out eleven or twelve rooms in this one yard; in fact, thirteen. There are three or four of us using the electric stove. This means she collects about 400 for electricity if I count all of us. It is not possible that the electricity can be finish [that early].<sup>93</sup>

We pay for electricity, others pay little, in some shacks electricity is expensive but it gets cut off. We don't know how to deal with this problem of the landlord because we pay but we are being violated. You can't say anything because she will say *makwerekwere*. You can't talk anything, you will go and they will put in someone else.<sup>94</sup>

The landlords and landladies seem to be exploiting the situation of shortage of houses in Bottlebrush and also using xenophobia as a vehicle to effect the exploitation. One landlady's responses corroborated the accusations:

Some of them [immigrant tenants] we are on good terms, others not because they don't want to pay. As you can see there is light here [in my shack] but I have cut their lights. So I have taken a decision to kick them out and get others to be tenants. They also don't pay on time.<sup>95</sup>

She admitted, without prompting, that she sometimes uses xenophobic language to get her way with her tenants:

I just frighten them and say you will go back home; but it is not easy because they are like part of the family.<sup>96</sup>

There is a lot of exploitation in the Bottlebrush housing market:

The landlords make the immigrants pay R120 each sharing one shack or room, three or four of them. The normal thing is for someone to pay R120 for the use of the shack being alone.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Carlito, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>93</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>94</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>95</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>96</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

Indeed, the power relations in Bottlebrush seem to be skewed sharply in favour of the landlords given the housing situation and unregulated housing market:

There is no law in Bottlebrush. The only law is that of the landlord.<sup>98</sup>

The local community leadership is accused of representing the interests of the landlord stratum at the expense of the tenants who form the majority of residents in the area. As a result there is huge dissatisfaction among both immigrant and South African born tenants. Apparently if you are a tenant you have no say in Bottlebrush :

Even I [an ANC committee member] couldn't speak because I was a tenant. I could only speak once I came here [at Ekupholeni]. If you are there [in Bottlebrush] you have no say.<sup>99</sup>

It is worse when you are an immigrant:

Sometimes if there are community meetings we attend. But they don't allow us to speak because we don't have ID. They don't say we must not talk but we can see that we can't talk. It is no use to talk, you need rights, for that you need an ID. We don't have rights.<sup>100</sup>

There is a suggestion that the committee exploits the situation for self-enrichment purposes:

There are many people there who are being thrown out of their shacks because of the new housing development. Some landlords don't live there in the houses, they just rent out. The committee is busy building houses where there are no landlords so that they can sell them off. I have evidence of this; these people should already have been jailed because I took the papers to the council. There is corruption.<sup>101</sup>

The machinations of the landlords are seen as having the potential of stoking up xenophobic feeling:

But the new thing is that the landlords are raising rentals, for example, the women [you saw] who came here were complaining that their rent was

<sup>97</sup> Mhlongo, Ekupholeni resident and community leader.

<sup>98</sup> Mhlongo, Ekupholeni resident and community leader.

<sup>99</sup> Mhlongo, Ekupholeni resident and community leader. He moved out of Bottlebrush about 3 years ago and set up the new shack settlement in a well-documented struggle. Please see Shameshni Govender 'Chatsworth land invasion turns violent', *Daily News*, 5 March, 2005; Annie Dorasamy Council firm on Chats shacks', *Sunday Tribune* 22 July 2007.

<sup>100</sup> Carlito, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>101</sup> Respondent.

raised to R430. They are told that if they cannot afford they must leave and the landlord will get Shangaans. Because Shangaans are easy to exploit since they pay per person not per room. I see the same problem we see at work where Shangaans are paid starvation wages, the same will happen with respect to housing and people will attack Shangaans.<sup>102</sup>

Another form of pecuniary interest is also a factor that might be related to the growth of xenophobic attitudes and behavior. This is crime.

We get violated especially when we get paid, they want money. They will grab you and want to take your money. But they won't get it [from me because I hide it well]. When they find nothing they say, run away *kwerekwere*, we will beat you. On payday I don't carry a phone. They once took my phone. We are suffering as Shangaans.<sup>103</sup>

Bottlebrush was once notorious for its high crime rate, for some it still is. Criminal and xenophobic intent combine to make life hard for immigrants:

They were attacking because they want your stuff, they want to take your property. They get a chance through xenophobia to take people's goods. It is crime.<sup>104</sup>

There are also matters of the heart but this seems related to economic competition. These are viewed from a male perspective.<sup>105</sup>

The people's talk is that we take their women. I don't think it is a good reason. For example, with women you propose to a woman and if she loves you she will say yes. I don't propose to a man.<sup>106</sup>

I want to look at it from both sides. If I got a girl and someone, say from Nigeria, takes my girl, I will complain. Because the girl needs more money and me I can't give her a lot of money because I support my mother and family and the other guy gives the girl more money.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Mhlongo, Ekupholeni resident and community leader.

<sup>103</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>104</sup> Carlito, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>105</sup> "Negrophobic xenophobic sentiment is often couched as a battle between two sets of men... Specific masculine entitlement and 'threat' are clearly encoded in this resentful articulation: Black South African women and jobs are the entitlement of Black South African men." (Pumla Gqola 'Brutal inheritances: Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence' in S.Hassim et. al. *Go Home or Die Here*, op. cit. p.218)

<sup>106</sup> Carlito, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>107</sup> Respondent, immigrant from Malawi, Bottlebrush resident.

I was not able to establish the role of the local ANC committee during the attacks but there are no grounds to believe that it promoted the attacks. But this requires further research. There seems to have been some meetings before the attacks but it is unclear who called the meetings and what was discussed exactly.

There was a meeting. At first we thought it was just talk.<sup>108</sup>

Lack of strong local leadership espousing the anti-xenophobic cause might be a contributing factor.

Those living in Ekupholeni didn't get beaten up. Over there in Bottlebrush they got beaten at night. Not this side. This side I don't think our leader [Mhlongo] would agree [to xenophobic attacks] but I don't know really.<sup>109</sup>

So far I am the only Indian staying here. No problem with the people here; the African people. We live as a family. I don't know too much about Bottlebrush. It is not like the way we are living there. So far we live under Mhlongo, he has got his rules, he makes his rules, and so far we are happy. But in Bottlebrush there are no rules. For example, no liquor accepted here. If there was then there would be noise and fighting.<sup>110</sup>

Ending on this note underlines the need for political leadership to avert xenophobic attacks.

## **Part 7**

### **BOTTLEBRUSH TODAY: THE AFTERMATH OF THE ATTACKS**

It is now more than a year after the attacks yet immigrants, understandably, are still apprehensive. Some respondents felt that there was no danger of other attacks because everything was back to normal. But others warned that certain social problems and tensions might spark off more attacks. I think the structural factors behind the attacks should keep us worried, there is also continuing harassment of the immigrants through verbal abuse and even low key physical attacks. Some of the physical confrontations seem linked to crime but it is undeniable that xenophobia forms a large component of such attacks. Some respondents pointed out that the structural factors behind the attacks have not been dealt with some suggesting that they might be compounding. Others

<sup>108</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>109</sup> Khambule, resident of Ekupholeni shack settlement.

<sup>110</sup> Prema and Helen, Ekupholeni residents.

emphasized that no real political mechanism, as opposed to the threat of legal sanction against attackers, has been introduced to deal with the matter. Indeed, the feeling was just as the attacks started abruptly and without much warning or discussion, they suddenly ended and now it is business as usual without dealing with the issue properly. There is no sense of closure which might have been created by a collective reflection through a community discussion of the matter. From this point of view the suggestions by the Centre for Civil Society for workshops and community activities around xenophobia in this area seem to be a good idea.<sup>111</sup>

The attacks are over but the uneasiness lingers on:

It won't start again because people were reprimanded and told not to do it. It's over.<sup>112</sup>

Today it is quiet, nothing is happening. What makes me angry is what is going on at work.<sup>113</sup>

There were no meetings here about xenophobia. Nothing. This matter has never been discussed. I am not sure whether it is really over because there was no meeting called to tell us that you can now live in peace and you will not be beaten up. So I am scared that I can be beaten up anytime. To end xenophobia we need a meeting, where all of us, people from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zulus, Xhosa can talk about this matter.<sup>114</sup>

No xenophobic attacks these days. It is just at work they say damn *makwerekwere* work hard if you don't want you go back to Mozambique. Here no problem the only problem is with the landlord. At work it looks as if they are joking but they are serious.<sup>115</sup>

Me too, I am a *kwerekwere* but I don't know what that is. Here in Durban that is what they call us. Even if you don't like it, you have to like it. There is nothing you can do.<sup>116</sup>

The committees are not against the foreigners, it is just the people. For example, another one got killed recently [a Zimbabwe national]. It was not known who killed him. They are still insulting each other. The problem is

---

<sup>111</sup> There is plan to conduct discussion on xenophobia in the research sites covered by the research project.

<sup>112</sup> MaSithole 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>113</sup> Aguiilo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>114</sup> Aguiilo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>115</sup> Marcellino, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>116</sup> Aguiilo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

with the community, the xenophobia is underground. But once they get drunk it comes out.<sup>117</sup>

The xenophobia is kept alive at work and at public places where people access government services:

This is a problem. I had a cold and went to the clinic. The Zulus said you can't get pills because you are from Mozambique. When we were sitting in a queue the Zulus say go back you can't get the pills, go back in the line. This is a big problem.<sup>118</sup>

There is a warning that the housing crisis is stoking xenophobia in Bottlebrush. This is because of unscrupulous landlords who take advantage of both the shortage of housing and the vulnerable status of African immigrants. Parallels between the workplace and living space were pointed out by some respondents in this respect. We should not see what goes on at work as too separate or distinct from what is going on at the level of the community. The xenophobic attitudes and ill-treatment at work is carried home as thought and experience both by the victims and the perpetrators. As a result many immigrants live in fear and generally don't feel at home in the country especially those living in an area like Bottlebrush. They have negative views of South Africa. I met 2 young women from Zimbabwe walking the street and I asked them casually how life was in Bottlebrush. They were vehement saying life is bad, it is always better to be in your own country. Other immigrants emphasise their temporary sojourner migrant status:

I am here in South Africa only to work. I will go back to Mozambique. I am not going to have children here. I will work and go back, work and go back. Get money, go to Mozambique.<sup>119</sup>

This legitimate attitude feeds into the xenophobes' fears:

During December you can see their buses and cars full of stuff from here, it is the money from here being taken away. Then they leave it home and come back for more. Also our money becomes big on the other side [because of currency conversion].<sup>120</sup>

The xenophobic attacks are over but the issue has not gone away. This means the threat of further attacks remain unless something is done to reduce this possibility.

<sup>117</sup> Nana, landlady, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>118</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>119</sup> Ronaldo, immigrant from Mozambique, Bottlebrush resident.

<sup>120</sup> Respondent.

---

## **Part 8**

### **A POLITICAL ASSESSMENT: WORKING CLASS LIFE IN BOTTLEBRUSH**

In this section we are going to take stock of all that has been said and observed in Bottlebrush in a synthesis that will lay the basis for solutions to the problem. My main argument and assessment is that xenophobia is a serious problem in this area but the bigger problem is how the working class is facing hardships and suffering in post-apartheid South Africa. And, since there seems no real solution in sight, the ground is fertile for anti-social, self-defeating and reactionary responses such as xenophobia. Not only is Bottlebrush, like many other shack settlements, a depressing place, but political processes in the country suggest that this state of affairs is not about to end soon. For example, unemployment is very high in the area and is behind many of the socioeconomic and political problems besetting Bottlebrush, but with the South African economy relentlessly shedding jobs, there seems no hope that this problem is going to be addressed let alone be solved in the very near future. On the political front, most respondents pointed to the weaknesses of the community leadership in the form of the ANC branch executive committee in addressing the problems of Bottlebrush. This problem is not going to go away because, as one respondent pointed out, this leadership has been in power for more many years and has found ways of avoiding being voted out of office through manipulating elections during annual general meetings. Residents have no way of influencing the committee with a view to improving things because they rarely call community meetings. They also seemed to take a hands-off approach to the recent mini-crisis involving the invasion of land by tenants. There is also reason to believe that besides them being accused of manipulation and corruption, the committee members are characterized by ineptness and lack of vision.

To crown it all, during the last general election there seems to have been a split in the local ANC with some members joining COPE. While this might represent a change in the alignment of political forces, the problem is that COPE at the national level seems to be coming with positions to the right of the ANC and, in Bottlebrush, up to so far has not called a single meeting.<sup>121</sup> A man to watch in Bottlebrush politics is Felakhe Mhlongo, an ANC committee member with considerable support in the area who seems to have credibility, enthusiasm and political skill. He recently resigned from the ANC committee after he came to the conclusion that the committee is irredeemable and felt a need to free himself from its control in order the better to “fight for the people”. The problem is that he moved out of Bottlebrush about 3 years ago to found the Ekupholeni informal settlement, a stone’s throw away. While many residents come to him with their problems, the fact that he does not live in Bottlebrush proper will certainly be used against him in future power struggles.

---

<sup>121</sup> COPE took the position that labour brokers create jobs while the ANC said they need to be regulated. COSATU’s position is that they should be abolished.

My research trips into Bottlebrush ended on a high note when I witnessed a land invasion. This event encapsulates all the problems and possibilities for this area. What happened is that with the building of RDP houses *in situ*, tenants are being kicked out of their shacks by landlords. Since they have no place to stay many took a decision, following Mhlongo's lead when he led an invasion that founded the Ekupholeni settlement a few years ago, to invade land lying vacant nearby. Some of this land is government owned and some is privately owned. After a week of organizing, calling meetings using a loudhailer they borrow from Ekupholeni, a decision was taken to invade the land and set up shacks on Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup> October in the early evening. Mhlongo supported the move but refused to be part of the action on the grounds that he didn't want to be seen to be instigating land invasions in the area. But there is no doubt that the invaders see him as the leader or inspirer. In the event the invasion failed. The shacks erected on the invaded land were razed down by fire by the municipal police in what must be a new method of evicting people off the land by the eThekweni municipality. At least one invader was injured because of police action.<sup>122</sup> In their desperation the residents turned to Mhlongo who addressed and told them to call off the invasion. He suggested that they organize a march to demand houses from the municipality because it is their policy that is pushing people to invade the land by building the RDP houses in situ.

This struggle is still going on but it brings out clearly the major problems and challenges facing Bottlebrush. The ANC local leadership was reported by respondents to have said they adopt a neutral attitude to the invasion and they were nowhere to be seen during the drama. No council leader or official came to address the crisis, the council spoke through its police.<sup>123</sup> Mhlongo, apparently the reluctant leader, now faces the challenge of leading this movement which consists largely of young working class adults who are desperate for houses. I tried to find out the attitude of the invaders to immigrants and it seemed positive, they are interested in getting land and not in fighting immigrants. One respondent said some immigrants were among the crowd who wanted to invade land and they were not going to say because you are not South African don't invade with us. However, the major constraint is that as immigrants they are more vulnerable to arrest and even if the government eventually gives them the land they would not qualify for housing. Meanwhile they are as desperate as the South African "borners" for new homes given the housing problem in Bottlebrush.

In this situation it is hard to see solutions. It is a tinder box and it can pan out in many different ways. If leaders like Mhlongo are at the forefront, perhaps a satisfactory solution will be found down the road in the form of a successful land invasion, or applying enough pressure to get the municipality to change its policy

---

<sup>122</sup> Isolezwe, 5 October 2009.

<sup>123</sup> Pumla Gqoza writes about "throw away people", that is, people who don't matter in South African polite society. (ibid.) The Bottlebrush people seemed, to me, to fall under this category.

and find a way of meeting the housing needs of Bottlebrush residents. If matters are left in the hands of leaders like the current ANC local leadership then there is great danger that, given their apparent abrogation of responsibility, programmatic paralysis and suspect morality, immigrants can be made scapegoats for the housing shortage leading to xenophobic attacks.

Mhlongo believes that committees are no good and it is better to have a single good leader like himself representing and guiding the community. To prove this he points to the peace and order at Ekupholeni as opposed to the rowdiness and lack of direction that characterizes Bottlebrush. Indeed, the people I interviewed at Ekupholeni seemed to have only praises for Mhlongo's rule. His rules are the following, from the horse' mouth:

My law. Here at Ekupholeni we agreed to have one leader [unlike the dysfunctional committee system at Bottlebrush] and I am the one. The laws are not mine but we discussed and agreed. No liquor must be sold at Ekupholeni. You can drink somewhere else and come home and sleep. Also, we don't allow a man to beat up his wife because there will be screams and in future we won't know whether it is criminals or domestic violence. Also, we want people to report a visitor because we might be chasing a criminal and then mistake that person for one because we don't know him or her. They can get wrongly beaten. Also, we don't agree to the selling of stolen goods because when you buy stolen goods you are encouraging the thief to steal from you in future. And if we find stolen goods we confiscate them and say bring the receipt. We also say there must no dumping. Also, we don't want people dirtying the place especially where people get water. These are just laws to make life better. If you break the law you are given 3 warnings and then you can be sent away from this area.<sup>124</sup>

While the one-man committee system is problematic one can appreciate the community's attempt to organize a semblance of a decent life for themselves. To conclude, a political solution is needed in Bottlebrush otherwise there is a danger that xenophobia and other anti-social non-solutions to problems can take over. A major part of the solution is a programme to develop the area.

## **Part 9**

### **GOING FORWARD IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST XENOPHOBIA: RECOMMENDATIONS**

Strategies to fight against xenophobia need to traverse and cover many areas of social, political and economic life. There is a need to address certain structural problems that provide fertile ground for the growth of xenophobic attitudes.

---

<sup>124</sup> Mhlongo, community leader of Ekupholeni shack settlement.

There is also a need to address the “subjective factor”, that is, to affirm those ideologies, politics and actions that encourage the subaltern classes to search and find solutions that don’t include xenophobia. From the study of Bottlebrush, an informal settlement, it emerges that structural conditions appear to pit sections of the working class against others, for example, the competition for jobs and for dwelling places. But this is not automatic both in design and in effect. It is granted that there is a lot of unemployment in South Africa and that this is increasing given the global economic meltdown but it does not follow that employers must pay African immigrants less than South African born workers. This is a choice they make ostensibly to lower wages and no doubt to keep the working class divided. It is the same with the shortage of housing and overcrowding in places like Bottlebrush, it seems it is greed and thoughtlessness that leads landlords to use xenophobia as an excuse to exploit and get more money from their tenants. The same can be said about crime, criminals will probably steal from anyone because that is what they do, but in some instances some of them consciously target African immigrants either because of their vulnerability or the belief that they are less likely to be found out and punished if they do so.

In Bottlebrush, unlike in other informal settlements, there does not seem to be any conflict around local trading and ownership of spaza shops.<sup>125</sup> Nor is there any suggestion that there is political competition or a struggle for power or control between immigrants and “borners”. Some xenophobes will refer to crime as something that can be blamed on immigrants and indeed some respondents, including one xenophobe and one immigrant, raised this issue, but on the whole this did not seem to be an issue in Bottlebrush.<sup>126</sup> In fact, to the contrary, many respondents saw immigrants as the victims rather than perpetrators of crime. The role of the Home Affairs Department was tangentially mentioned and criticized by the immigrants. Many of them saw the policy of issuing 3-month permits useful in so far as it allowed them to be legally in the country but this was seen as a burden on themselves having to constantly queue to get this short-term permit; the logic behind this short-term permit system could not be discerned. There was no strong indication that socio-cultural issues were a major factor in Bottlebrush although no doubt xenophobes like to emphasise differences in order to substantiate their animosity and to label immigrants as “the other”.<sup>127</sup> With respect to regional economic issues, this is an important factor in that some South African born respondent pointed out or implied that

---

<sup>125</sup> Research findings into the Thembelihle shack settlement in Johannesburg pointed to competition over pricing of goods among immigrant and South African “borners” as a factor that was used to fuel xenophobic attacks. Please see my report on the SECC, APF and CAX written for the same research project.

<sup>126</sup> Respondents.

<sup>127</sup> One respondent, a xenophobe, emphasized eating and working at the same time as something which underscored the strangeness of immigrants. He gave it a religious twist saying such behavior did not allow for praying before one eats. The impression sought was that these people are “uncultured”, “barbaric” or at least not like “us”.

---

immigrants came to get wealth out of South Africa and they did not contribute anything to the economy of the country. Couched in simplistic terms the argument is that they have no jobs, no money and then they come to our country to take what is ours. Another way in which this is implied is when some respondents spoke about how many of “them” now lived in South Africa.

Going forward I would suggest that the interests of the working class as a whole need to be promoted in South Africa. In a place like Bottlebrush people need development, they need jobs, they need hope, they need something to live for rather than just surviving. The most pressing need at the moment is housing. The ANC government needs to take rapid and massive steps to provide houses. In Bottlebrush the government must change its policy of forcing tenants out of their rented shacks as part of its housing development project and, no doubt, its policy of eradicating shacks by 2014.<sup>128</sup> It is important to realize that whatever development is planned for the area, it is unlikely to solve problems properly if is not accompanied by some kind of democratic political process. The Bottlebrush community is confused about where to go and who to speak to when it needs something. The local leadership appears to be abrogating its responsibility and many people believe their leader is Mhlongo, a man who lives across the road in Ekupholeni. There is a need to set up community structures to allow residents to discuss their problems and find appropriate solutions. The Minority Front ward councilor hardly sets foot in Bottlebrush and it is doubtful whether he feels obliged to service this community. The ANC PR councilor is also acting AWOL. The political vacuum needs to be filled. The ward councilor could include representatives from Bottlebrush in his ward committee. But such representation should be premised on the reps calling regular community meetings, keeping residents informed of decisions and developments, and getting their views and preferences. Since the area is said to be an ANC stronghold and PR councilors are legally allowed to participate in ward committees, the ANC PR councilor should also join the party.

Local vested interests must be challenged and regulated in so far as it leads to the exploitation of Bottlebrush residents. As one respondent put it:

There is no law in Bottlebrush, the only law is that of the landlords.<sup>129</sup>

Power without accountability leads to abuse and often the most vulnerable suffer the most, in this instance, African immigrants who end up paying exorbitant rents on pain of being kicked out of their shacks and possibly even out of the country. But South African “borners” suffer the same fate to some extent. There is a need for the authorities to intervene in this business of renting out shacks, there is also

---

<sup>128</sup> Some respondents understood the demolition of shacks as part of the ANC programme of getting rid of all shacks by 2014. One respondent specifically mentioned the Slum Act. People are not opposed to getting rid of shacks but their problem is that unless they are catered for this move will render some people homeless. (Mhlongo interview)

<sup>129</sup> Respondent.

---

a need for the community to unite as “non-borners” and “borner” to fight this evil and assert the rights of tenants and the right of all to decent housing. As matters stand the landlords are getting their way partly because of playing up divisions between these two groups. A related issue is to unite the Bottlebrush community, overcome the anomie which seems to characterize the place due to the influx of people from different areas (inside and outside South Africa) and different languages because united they will stand but divided they are falling. A principle needs to be found that will provide a basis for unity and I think a demand for decent houses for all, provided with community participation, could be one plank of such a platform of unity. Part of this platform could be the equal participation of all irrespective of gender, race and country of origin. I am making these suggestions not as a blueprint but as examples of the kind of political process needed in a dysfunctional area like Bottlebrush.

Although the terms of reference of this research were to investigate what goes on at the level of the community, it emerged that what goes on at the workplace traverses the boundary between work and home. So I will make a few comments about the way immigrants are treated at work. A handful of respondents suggested that the solution to the accusation that immigrants undermine wages is to pay them the same as South Africans. Since this also came from the immigrants themselves it suggests that it is not true that they “want” lower wages, rather it is the bosses who pay them lower wages to the extent of having a discriminatory wage system where South African “borner” are paid more and immigrants less, where the latter have less rights and are made to work harder and even allowed to be abused by their fellow local workers. I think the Department of Labour, probably together with the Department of Home Affairs, should address this issue through barring employers from paying immigrants less wages. Labour inspectors should be sent into workplaces to monitor this. Fines should be issued for bosses who transgress, they could also, as a minimum, be named and shamed. This is not at all far-fetched because many immigrant workers are not “illegal” as they are issued with the 3-month permits. They are simply being discriminated against and taken advantage of. South African born workers should eschew falling into the trap set by the bosses of looking down upon immigrant workers and condoning their ill-treatment because in the long run it is they who pay the price with the reduction in wages and jobs. Trade unions such as COSATU must take up this issue and organize specifically around protecting the rights of immigrant workers.<sup>130</sup>

Ultimately it is ordinary working class people who pay the price for the ill-treatment of and discrimination against immigrants. They pay through being kept divided as a working class thus leaving the business class in a stronger

---

<sup>130</sup> NALEDI published research conducted by Rob Rees about 8 years ago who came to the same conclusion on this matter. A demand for a living wage and minimum standards for all protects everyone. (*Undocumented workers in South Africa*, Naledi booklet, date?)

position.<sup>131</sup> South African born workers know this when they accuse immigrants of undercutting wages. They should know that the fault is less that of the immigrants, who are victims, than of the bosses who benefit from this perverse arrangement. Hence, the work of getting rid of xenophobia requires raising the awareness of ordinary people about the negative consequences of xenophobia. Political education and leadership are crucial in carrying out this work of raising awareness, of developing a “working class consciousness”. I have tried to show that positive or negative responses to the situation do not automatically spring spontaneously from given conditions. How the issue is approached politically is decisive. In Bottlebrush the problem is that there is a leadership vacuum and it is this which I think needs to be filled. At the moment it is the work of local leaders like Mhlongo and progressive organisations which seems promising but they too need a lot of strengthening.<sup>132</sup> To me it seems pretty obvious that if Bottlebrush does not develop such a leadership we should not be surprised if not just xenophobia against African immigrants but even tribalism and provincialism could become problems.<sup>133</sup> I say this because Bottlebrush is a polyglot of people from all over Africa and the regions of South Africa. It would be a tragic if this happened as it would take the struggle for a unified democratic South Africa back many steps.

People get violated, you violate people in a democratic country, a country of freedom. If this violation happens, it means there is no freedom.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Karl Marx made a compelling argument showing how workers need unity above all in order to protect their interests vis-à-vis the capitalist class in a capitalist system which seeks to increase profits at the expense of wages. Hence his famous dictum: “Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!”

<sup>132</sup> “It is perhaps here, in a reconfiguration of progressive and anti-systemic movements, that a solution lies to xenophobia.” (Noor Nieftagodien ‘Xenophobia in Alexandra’ in S. Hassim et. al. *Go Home or Die Here*, op.cit. p.77)

<sup>133</sup> “Class interests (often of a myopic and nonrevolutionary sort) could and did crystallize around forces other than the fundamental power relation between capital and labour.” (David Harvey *The Urban Experience*, Basic Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p.112)

<sup>134</sup> Mhlongo, Ekupholeni community leader.

---

## **Part 10** **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1** **List of respondents interviewed**

Fundis Mhlongo, Ekupholeni resident  
Khambule, Ekupholeni resident  
Prema, Ekupholeni resident  
Susan, Ekupholeni resident  
Anonymous female, Ekupholeni resident  
Anonymous male, Ekupholeni resident  
Aguillar, immigrant, Bottlebrush resident, Mozambique origin  
Carlito, immigrant, Bottlebrush resident, Mozambique  
Marcellino, immigrant, Bottlebrush resident, Mozambique  
Ronaldo, immigrant, Bottlebrush resident, Mozambique  
Anonymous, immigrant, Bottlebrush, Malawi  
Anonymous female, immigrant, Bottlebrush, Zimbabwe  
Anonymous female, immigrant, Bottlebrush, Zimbabwe  
Nana, Bottlebrush resident (South African born)  
MaSithole, Bottlebrush resident  
MaSithole's 1<sup>st</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident  
MaSithole's 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter, Bottlebrush resident  
Anonymous female, Bottlebrush resident  
Anonymous female, Bottlebrush resident  
Anonymous male, Bottlebrush resident  
Anonymous male council law enforcement officer  
Anonymous male council law enforcement officer