Non-Governmental Organisations and Xenophobia in South Africa: A Case study of the Gift of the Givers (GOTG)[1]

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Abstract

This article examines the response of a Non-Governmental Organisation (GOTG) to the 2008 xenophobic attacks and more broadly reflects on the role of NGOs in confronting xenophobia in South Africa and in conflict situations more broadly. NGO responses to emergencies transcend the nation-state in many instances and they need to be sophisticated in their operations as they are required to deal with donors, governments, and ordinary people, as well as protagonists. This study is based on interviews with key officials of GOTG, visits to refugee camps, and an analysis of publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles on GOTG. While state institutions must take primary responsibility for counteracting

[1] An earlier report was published by Ashwin Desai, 'Responding to the May 2008 Xenophobic attacks: A Case study of the Gift of the Givers.' The report can be accessed at: http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/all/modules/filemanager/files/12_Gift_of_the_givers_c.pdf. This case study was part of a larger project on xenophobia in South Africa, which resulted in the publication of a 500 page report titled *South African Civil Society and Xenophobia. Strategies and Tactics*, which was published in July 2010 and can be accessed at http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/report-south-african-civil-society-and-xenophobia.

ISSN 1023-1757

xenophobia, this study shows that NGOs such as GOTG are playing an important role by providing material help to victims. One of the criticisms of NGOs is that they respond to crises without engaging in long term strategic planning. We show that the ability to respond effectively at short notice is important because many crises require urgent intervention in a context where Government is unable to do so. NGOs also provide a channel for ordinary individuals to contribute in various ways to a crisis. This article does argues though that NGOs can do more by helping to raise awareness of xenophobia and mobilizing civil society to prevent attacks, pushing government to confront xenophobia through clearer policies and stricter laws, and being more vocal in exposing those who indulge in xenophobic discourse. GOTG's position of 'not taking sides' makes it hesitant to become a critical voice of conscience but this has not diminished its contribution.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organisations, xenophobic attacks, refugee camps, humanitarian aid

> As long as your stomach is full, you will know nothing about the condition of the starving; as long as your house is warm, you will not understand the actions of those who live without heat; as long as your own feet are well shod, as long as you have thick clothes to wear, you will have no idea of the state of those who go barefoot and unclad. Satisfy the hungry, so that Paradise may love you. Clothe the naked, so that you may not be bare on the coming day of Resurrection, when all the rest are naked. Become aware of the condition of all those paupers and orphans, for your own wife may become a pauper and your own children orphans. The wheel of fate turns. None of us knows what is to be: what great wealth may be doomed to extinction or how many, now despised, may rise to heights of dignity and honour (Muzaffer Ozak 1992: 233 – 'Inspiration' behind Sooliman's Gift of the Givers organisation).

In May 2008, xenophobic attacks in South Africa left more than 60 African migrants and refugees dead and thousands homeless. Many of the displaced congregated outside police stations, arriving with just the clothing on their backs. It was the middle of Gauteng's winter. One of the first organisations to respond to the crisis was the Gift of the Givers (GOTG). Within a week of the attacks, GOTG moved over R1 million worth of goods to refugee centres in Alexandra, Cleveland, Primrose and other parts of Gauteng. This included tents, blankets and food parcels. Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who founded GOTG, was emphatic: 'To me, the real spirit of South Africans has been shown. We are not a xenophobic nation.' It appeared as if GOTG had anticipated the attacks and was prepared for them. Over the next few months, GOTG constantly provided support and followed the refugees as they made their way to camps across Johannesburg, the ironically named eGoli (City of Gold).

Sooliman had landed at Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo Airport just as the first attacks commenced. He was returning from Malawi where he had gone to inspect projects that GOTG was running in that country. As soon as he was informed of the attacks, he told the GOTG Gauteng head of operations, Allauddin Sayed, to prioritise support to the victims. Sayed lives in Bramley, which is situated quite close to Alexandra Township, the scene of some of the very first and most violent attacks. Sayed immediately arranged for bread and blankets to be sent to the Alexandra Police Station. When he got to the police station, Sayed realised the enormity of the task at hand and the need for far more resources than was initially anticipated.

This article examines GOTG's response to the attacks and more broadly reflects on the role that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can play and are playing in confronting xenophobia in South Africa and their role in conflict situations. This is an important area of investigation given that responding to emergencies has for many organisations gone beyond the nation-state; many NGOs perceive their role as a global one. As we write various NGOs, including GOTG, are involved in countries like Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Mauritania. NGOs need to be sophisticated in their conduct and operations as they are required to deal with donors, governments, and ordinary people, as well as protagonists in a conflict. They are also required to display high levels of project management skills, target setting, monitoring, and accountability. GOTG makes a compelling case study in this context (Duffeild 2001: 46).

This article is largely based on interviews with key members of GOTG following a visit to a camp in June 2008 where those displaced by the xenophobic attacks were accommodated and provided with food, blankets, and basic goods. Field work included visits to various camps and other projects run by GOTG. Publicity documents, media releases and newspaper articles on GOTG and Sooliman were also analysed.

GOTG: The Beginnings

Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, founder and present head of GOTG, is a well-known figure in the world of humanitarian missions. He started GOTG in August 1992 as a one-room operation in his Pietermaritzburg home. By the time of the 2008 attacks, GOTG laid claim to being the largest private humanitarian disaster relief organisation in Africa[2]. GOTG followed in the footsteps of private, as opposed to state-sponsored, organisations that have been sprouting since the 1970s and have a global reach. Rony Brauman, one of the founders of Doctors without Borders (Médecins sans Frontierès), observes that the 1970s witnessed the rise of what James Rosenau has called 'sovereignty-free actors' who 'positioned themselves on the international stage that previously had been reserved for states, but without all the problems of state-controlled national sovereignty in the classical sense.' Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders / Médecins sans Frontierès (MSF), and Oxfam are examples of this kind of organisation. As Brauman points out, there is a dark side to this development:

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

> It is not as if some ethical force suddenly took hold of the world, though: this phenomenon also applies to terrorist groups, to religious movements, to businesses, to revolutionary movements. With urbanisation, instantaneous communication, and the democratisation of transport (invention of charters), we are witnessing a 'revolution in the abilities and aptitudes of the individual'- to borrow Roseneau's formulation. It is within this context that private organisations of all kinds have been multiplying and developing at a rate that would have been unimaginable at any other time. This new 'revolution' allows private groups to begin establishing themselves in areas that up until now have been reserved for states (Brauman 2004: 406).

NGOs have played an important role in the development field as well as humanitarian assistance since the 1970s. While northern NGOs grew from the 1970s, those in the South emerged from the 1990s. According to one estimate, even omitting food aid, the assistance that NGOs provide to the South exceeds that spent by UN agencies (Duffeild 2001: 53). The importance of NGOs can be gauged from the fact that by the end of the 1980s, many donor governments channelled aid through these organisations. In fact, NGOs are implementers of UN programmes in many instances, including in conflict areas (Duffeild 2001: 55). As NGOs are usually politically neutral, they have an edge in that they are able to gain access to information and certain areas which are no-go zones for many governments (Duffeild 2001: 57).

The immediate inspiration for the formation of GOTG came during a trip Sooliman made to Turkey, but his past experience suggests a natural progression. Sooliman and his wife Zohra were both members of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and the Muslim Youth Movement in the 1970s and 1980s and were involved in community projects aimed at socio-economic redress. After qualifying as a medical doctor, Sooliman opened a practice in Berg Street, Pietermaritzburg, adjacent to the city's bus rank, catering almost exclusively for the city's poor African working class population. He subsequently opened a practice in an underprivileged 'Coloured' township and juggled his time between these sites. Sooliman was also a member of the Islamic Medical Association (IMA), formed in the late

1970s to provide free medical services in African townships (such as mobile clinics run by volunteer doctors).

The Gulf War in 1990 shaped Sooliman's life in important ways. He was an outspoken critic of the war because of its humanitarian consequences and channelled aid to that country through the Gulf War Relief Fund. Shortly thereafter he got involved in providing relief in Mozambique, where the Kuwaitis were funding a hospital in Nkala in the northern part of the country. When war broke out, the Kuwaitis discontinued their funding and a single Sudanese doctor was left to run the entire hospital. The African Muslim Agency stepped in and asked Sooliman to head a relief project. When a cyclone struck Bangladesh in April 1991 (leaving 135,000 people dead), Sooliman responded, this time under the banner of the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA).

On a whim, Sooliman contacted the South African Foreign Affairs Department for assistance. He persuaded the department that the mission presented an opportunity for South Africa, an international pariah for decades, to change its image in the midst of sensitive political negotiations with the majority African population (non-racial democracy would come in 1994). It was, according to Zohra Sooliman, a 'shot in the dark but the response was unbelievable. They told us that it would be too expensive to provide the three aeroplanes that were required but that they would instead provide a ship. We were overjoyed and accepted the offer.' Sooliman recalled what transpired at his meeting with the South African Navy top brass, as Bangladesh did not have diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa.

> I was a bit nervous because here was all these admirals and stuff and I was by myself, this lone Indian. But within fifteen minutes, I tell you, we were like old friends. They said 'What do you want?' and whatever I asked, they said 'OK'. I was amazed. But the Bangladeshis … sent me a long list of what we couldn't do - plus a few things we could. I simply cut out the bits I didn't like, pasted them together, tipp-exed (glued) it to clean it up a bit and showed the navy: 'Here, we're got authorization!' (Schmidt 2006).

This was followed by Sooliman's life changing visit to Turkey:

> I went to Turkey in August 1991 and met a Sufi Master. I saw people of all religions, colour, nationality coming to a Muslim place, and he told me that religion doesn't bring friction nor violence; it teaches love and compassion. The formation of the Gift of the Givers was instructed by the Sufi master Mohammed Saffer Effendi in Turkey a year later on 6 August 1992. It was my second meeting with him. All he said is that we will form an organisation whose name will be the Gift of the Givers in English – *Waqful Waqifin*. He said, 'This will be your job for the rest of your life. Your lesson for the rest of your life will be "The best among people are those who benefit mankind"' And he said that the emphasis was on the word 'mankind', not Muslim. And the emphasis should be on Africa, he insisted. 'They need it most. You will not be judgemental, you will honour the difficulty of every human being, no matter what their circumstances, and you will serve mankind unconditionally – it doesn't matter if a person is Hindu, Jew, Muslim, or Christian, what his political affiliation or social station is. And don't expect anything in the return, not even gratitude'.

Sooliman returned to South Africa to fulfil the instructions of his Sufi master[3] by combining his spiritual and humanitarian commitment in an organisational form - GOTG.

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

Sooliman and Zohra had three children when Gift of the Givers (GOTG) was formed. He was running three medical practices and she was a pre-school teacher who was completing a degree in Social Work and Psychology via correspondence through the University of South Africa (UNISA). They subsequently had two more children and Zohra fondly refers to GOTG as her sixth child since it was 'born' in their Pietermaritzburg home. As GOTG's operations expanded and required their full-time attention, Sooliman gave up his medical practice and Zohra her teaching job. For Zohra, this was not a difficult decision, as she grew up in a household where her parents were always involved in philanthropic work and the lesson she absorbed from them was that philanthropy was an extension of her religious conviction.

More than two decades later, GOTG's headquarters is still in Pietermaritzburg, but the organisation now has offices in Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Malawi, and the Republic of Yemen. According to GOTG's website, its work has broadened to include 25 categories of projects, ranging from bursaries to humanitarian aid in more than 20 countries across the globe, delivering hundreds of millions of rands in aid. According to Zohra Sooliman, GOTG underwent an important transition around 1998 when a decision was made to be proactive rather than reactive to crises. Innovations included the world's first containerised mobile hospital and primary health care unit, the high energy protein supplement, Subisiso, and establishing the largest Open Source Computer Lab in Africa. At the time of writing in October 2013, GOTG and Sooliman had received more than 80 national and international awards for their humanitarian work, including awards from the presidents of four countries. In 2010, Sooliman received the Order of the Grand Counsellor of the Baobab: Silver award from President Jacob Zuma for his contribution through GOTG to humanitarian aid nationally and internationally.

While one can label GOTG a private humanitarian organisation, it is different from organisations such as Greenpeace and Oxfam in important respects. GOTG is Africa-based, its main source of funding is South African, and its central focus of operations is Southern Africa. In contrast, most of the NGOs that provide assistance to the South originate in the North and raise their monies in the North (Duffeild 2001: 53).

GOTG's Immediate Response

When the xenophobic attacks started, GOTG was in the middle of its winter warmth project in partnership with two popular radio stations, East Coast Radio and Jacaranda Radio, which are based in and have large audiences in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng respectively. This was the beginning of three weeks of non-stop action. Sayed describes what happened:

> That night we came with tents. We put up 40 in Alex and six at Bramley police station. We gave the displaced food. By then xenophobic attacks were in full force. At 3:00 am Disaster Management gave 3,000 blankets (donated by us) to Primrose Park and Germiston. People threw stones at us when we arrived at night at the Germiston Municipal Hall. We were not ready for this. It flared up on 12 May in Alex. Third night, Disaster Management came - Nigel, Springs, Kwa-Tema … all came for help. Germiston district and the police could not cope and the head of Disaster Management contacted Imtiaz. Next day, 2:00 am, we loaded the vehicles we had at hand. Government Disaster Management sent their fire trucks. I've never experienced anything like that. It was a war zone. We emptied our stores – mattresses, food, blankets, everything. There were no camps at that stage. We realised that by the time government wakes up it will be too late. We mobilised churches. Pritchard Street Bishop Paul Verryn from the Methodist Church was great. There were 150 women and children cramped in a foetal position on the floor, and a woman gave birth in that position at 2:30am … just like that. The Methodist Church in Primrose opened up its doors.
>
> We started having centres. Village Walk was our most successful collection point. Ambassadors from all over made donations in that first week of xenophobia. I got a call from one of the journalists about a girl whose uncle was burnt alive. She ran for miles because they wanted to rape her. She stayed at my place. We got her papers sorted out and sent her back home to Mozambique. Then camps were made – Midrand, Rifle Range, Collett Drive, Springs (near Nigel), Germiston– are the areas where we were involved. Muslim groups wanted halaal (kosher) food – Azaadville people. This was not

> working. Many Ethiopians only eat dairy products… Lots of Somalis, who had to be catered for, moved to camps in Pretoria. We sent two to three million rands worth of goods to Cape Town. We set up a clinic in Primrose where we provided gloves, bandages and medical supplies to Doctors without Borders.

Aid packages to camps included tents, blankets, sleeping bags, food parcels, new clothes and shoes, plastic dishes for food, plastic dishes to wash clothes, sanitary pads, disposable nappies, tooth paste, tooth brushes, body soap, soap for washing clothes, towels, and face cloths.

According to Zohra Sooliman, Director of GOTG's Careline, the dangers that could result from local anger against foreign Africans did not enter the equation when they offered assistance:

> During the struggle [against apartheid] many of our people got shelter in neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe and Zambia. They gave us refuge and how could we do this? It is not in the character of South Africans to turn on people who helped us. It was not good for the image of our country for the world to see us killing innocent people. As an NGO we had no choice but to act. We know that some locals were unhappy but we did not look at the politics. We only saw that these were people were in distress. We are only interested in the humanitarian aspects.

As the work of GOTG grew and word spread of its ability to provide on-the-ground support, major corporates became involved for the first time. Some, like Investec (R300,000) and Momentum (R121,000) offered cash**.** Pick n' Pay Hyper donated cool drinks; A.A. Wholesalers donated foam mattresses; Ossie Tayob of OSGO Wholesalers donated soap and wet wipes; the International Federation of Women Lawyers (South Africa) donated food vouchers; and Independent Newspapers made a contribution of R1.5 million to GOTG's coffers. GOTG's Johannesburg office spent more than R6 million in 2008 in its response to xenophobia.

When people were moved to the camps, GOTG followed them and this soon resulted in cooperation with other organisations and sharing of resources. According to Sayed, GOTG worked with a number of

organisations, such as Doctors without Borders, Government Disaster Management, the Methodist and Anglican churches, the South African Police Service (SAPS), and various women's networks. International partnerships included the United Nations (UN) Development Programme and Oxfam, to whom GOTG provided food parcels until May 2009.

The Government's Response

Government opened its camps in June 2008. According to Sayed, 'that's where GOTG's biggest involvement came. We worked for 24 hours. We never slept as we supplied mattresses and other things.' There were about 50,000 people in total in 200 camps. GOTG did more than simply feed, clothe and provide shelter. According to Sayed, they also got involved in education:

> In the Midrand camp there were children with no education so we hired minibuses to transport them to school. We told the Education Department to offer education and we supplied tents where children could be taught. We did the same thing in Rifle Range, our largest camp. The children there were traumatised. We took Kung Fu Panda, the movie, and gave presents. Mothers cried that day as they said that throughout this trauma, this was the first time they were happy. We even brought in child psychologists. We gave the children sweet parcels. We gave books to kids. We made sure the books were inspiring and joyful to raise the spirit – no creepy stories, just fun and entertainment. You can't measure what we achieved in terms of rands and cents when you see the joy.

Perceiving a symbiotic relationship, GOTG's strategy was to work closely with government. According to Sayed:

> We are not their opposition. We work within the system. Police escorts are waiting for us whenever we take a trip. We complain about a system in the camp or a police station, we get it straightened out. I was involved with the MEC of Safety and Security during this period and got full access – no limitations to the camps. There were

> 42 Malawians who were surrounded on a farm somewhere. A White lady phoned and said this was happening. We had full cooperation from the police to rescue them. Government knows that when we land anywhere we land with the South African flag.

GOTG paid for more than 4,000 meals over two months. They bought supplies worth R1 million and thousands of parcels of their food sustenance package, known as Subisiso, were distributed to camp inmates. In 2004, GOTG introduced Sibusiso ('the Blessing'), the world's first groundnut-soya, high energy protein food supplement which is used as a nutrient to tackle debilitating conditions such as malnutrition, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. According to GOTG's website, the product, Sooliman's brain child, is currently used by 230 health facilities in South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho, and Botswana.

GOTG was faced with a difficult moral decision – whether or not to assist victims of the attacks to return home (see Jost 2012 on the difficulties migrants face in integrating because of xenophobia). Eventually, GOTG spent a considerable sum of money transporting people back to their home countries. According to Sayed:

> The people were panicking in the camps. They wanted to go back to their home countries. They were thinking 'What's gonna happen to our children?' Family members from there were calling them to come back. When they said, 'We want to go!' we hired five buses. You know the Malawians are soft and sensitive. At R48,000 a bus trip, and that's 60 persons in a bus, each one with a food parcel. Two trains left from Park Station (800 people) … Everyone had a blanket and a food parcel to go with. You will always see a green and yellow Gift of the Givers blanket. That was God. He made his mark. We had good relationships with embassies so borders and papers were sorted out. We even paid for disabled persons to get back home with hired kombis.

For GOTG, helping people to return to their countries of origin was the correct thing to do once it became clear that the government intended closing down the camps. Refugees had two options - repatriate or reintegrate. Critics

may argue that by assisting with repatriation GOTG was inadvertently supporting the intention of the perpetrators who wanted to get rid of 'foreigners'. Sayed, however, disagrees with this point of view as he believes that providing such assistance was 'complying with the victims' wishes'. It was also something that their home governments and families supported.

Moyo: Story of an Inmate

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

Already a recognised figure in Zimbabwean exile circles, Moyo decided to lie low for six months before making his way to Springs in Mpumalanga Province where he secured a shack in Paineville, earning a living by painting and welding. Moyo's business flourished and he employed three other Zimbabweans. He also opened a tuckshop alongside the shack. Moyo returned to Zimbabwe in early 2008 to bring his wife and two young children to South Africa. On the way back to Springs Moyo was robbed of his possessions. He left his wife in a village in Venda and walked from the Limpopo River to Polokwane, a distance of 200 kilometres. He did a few odd jobs until he secured enough money to make his way back to Springs where his younger brother Wisdom had looked after things while he was away. He recounts the events of May 2008:

> At midnight I heard a noise at the door. I had on a t-shirt, shorts and socks. I could only wear socks because the long walk from Limpopo River to Polokwane left me with sores on my feet. The banging on my door continued. I opened the door. The first thing I got was a hard *klap* (smack). People rushed in. They ransacked my shack. My fridge and television were the first to go, then my clothes and the

> goods in the tuckshop. My brother was stabbed twice in the back. We just ran for our lives.

Moyo went to the local police station where he found around 4,000 people, mainly Zimbabweans. After a week of sleeping in the open, they were housed in a big hall in the town centre. Moyo was elected chairperson of this group of dislocated persons who were transported from the town hall to the Selcourt Camp under the care of a 'site manager'. They were initially given three meals a day, but this was reduced to two. The site manager refused access to outside help. When Sayed arrived with a representative from Oxfam at the beginning of July 2008, Moyo gathered inmates and met them outside the camp. The support offered by Sayed and GOTG, according to Moyo, came 'exactly at the right time'. The food that they had been receiving was sometimes rotten and several refugees had fallen sick. GOTG's food parcels were a lifeline for many inmates.

According to Moyo, health conditions were terrible. Inmates avoided the overflowing toilets and instead used the bush, compounding the health hazard. As children had no nappies, GOTG and the local Trinity Methodist Church supplied these. A big tent was set up for the children's 'school' and GOTG supplied colouring books and toys. Moyo alleged that site manager sold some of the supplies provided by relief agencies to locals. Moyo participated in a series of meetings with Paineville residents to reintegrate displaced foreigners into the community. When residents refused to allow them back, the Ekurhuleni Municipality built shacks for many of the displaced in Extension 10 Kwa-Thema. Moyo moved with his family into a one-bedroom outbuilding in Springs. While his plan was to resurrect his welding and painting business, Moyo understood that the fear of African migrants and refugees were perennial as xenophobic attacks can occur at any time.

On the streets, Moyo and his fellow refugees received the message that after the 2010 World Cup there would be a 'gnashing of teeth', that is, all foreigners would be chased out of South Africa. The Somalis in the Cape and Bangladeshis in the Free State, amongst many others, who are continually subject to xenophobic attacks, can attest to this.

Life after the Camps: Thembi and Spiwe

In reflecting on GOTG's response to xenophobic violence one of the starkest

realisations is how little relief organisations did to support people once they left the camps. While GOTG supported those who wanted to go home, it could do little to reintegrate people into local communities. Many inmates had lost their identity documents, their homes and livelihoods and were leaving the camps in the same situation, as the following two testimonies indicate.

Thembi arrived in Johannesburg on 2 May 2007 from Zimbabwe. She made her way to Nigel where her mother had once lived and worked and obtained temporary accommodation through these networks. She shared a garage in Duduza township with two other Zimbabweans and got a job doing hair braiding. She has a young daughter and elderly mother in Zimbabwe to whom all spare cash is remitted. When Thembi heard of the attacks in nearby Tsakani in May 2008, she and the two people she shared accommodation with, took flight. They went directly to the police station and from there they were taken to the Nigel town hall. Although it was very cold, they were not given blankets or food. There were over 300 people in the hall by the morning, comprising a mix of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and a small contingent of Ethiopians. Thembi was anxious to secure her belongings and went to the garage to collect her stuff but found that it had been ransacked. Volunteers from nearby Duduza township helped to distribute blankets and one meal per day.

They were transferred to the Springs camp after a month. It was there that Thembi became head of the camp's health committee and attended to a host of problems. They were provided with two meals per day but Thembi claims that the food was often 'rotten' and many inmates got sick as a result. The Ekurhuleni Municipality did not provide any support. Her request to the municipality to sort out the over-flowing toilets was ignored. She helped to set up a crèche and distributed nappies donated by GOTG. For Thembi, this made a big difference in terms of the health of the children. Thembi's problems really began once she left the camp. She had lost all her belongings and could not restart her braiding business. She eventually found a job as a security guard in Brakpan, guarding repossessed houses. She worked seven days a week for R850 a month. While she was in the camp, inmates had been asked by Home Affairs officials to apply for asylum. All the applications were turned down. Her passport, which gave her permission to stay in the country for three months, had expired as had the card given to her by Home

Affairs. Thembi was required to go back to the Zimbabwean border and pay R800 to get her passport stamped for an extension. She did not have the money to do this and 'lived in pain and fear'. She had not seen her daughter, now aged five, for two years.

Spiwe, aged 24 at the time of the interview in 2008, also finds herself in incredible difficulties because of her lack of 'papers' (identification documents). She jumped the border in May 2008 to join her husband in South Africa and almost immediately found herself in the Springs camp. Her three children cannot get birth certificates because of Spiwe's lack of proper documentation. Spiwe has to return to Zimbabwe for a passport, which she cannot risk doing, and she does not have the money to pay for an emergency or long-term passport. Spiwe's children cannot access formal schooling without proper documentation. Both Thembi and Spiwe said that there were no organisations that could assist in this regard. Both were appreciative of the food parcels and other material support that they received in the camps from organisations like GOTG, but stressed that once they were forced to leave the camp, there was absolutely no support and without documentation it was difficult to restart their lives.

GOTG: Bureaucracy and Responses to Xenophobia

GOTG is run differently from most of the organisations mentioned in this article in that it is associated very closely with one individual. In examining GOTG's publicity material and talking to its staff, or the public at large, it is clear that GOTG *is* Dr Imtiaz Sooliman who appears to be the originator of projects, makes the major decisions, and leads from the front. This has several implications. One is that without bureaucratic obstacles, GOTG is able to make rapid decisions. Sooliman is open about this. 'I don't like bureaucratic systems. I need a decision in five seconds, not five weeks' (Hofstatter, *The Weekender* 7-8 February 2009). Sayed confirmed this: 'I pick up the phone, call Imtiaz and say I want to start something costing R250,000. There's no papers, no proofing. He just says, "Allauddin, go ahead!"'

In his influential analysis of charismatic leadership, Max Weber defined charisma as:

> a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional power or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (Weber 1947: 358-359).

For Weber, opportunities for charisma lessen as societies become more bureaucratised and routinised. However, charismatic leadership tied to an efficient, professional structure persists into the twenty first century. GOTG is, arguably, an example of this. Sooliman's reason for setting up GOTG as inspired by his Sufi master gives his mission a divine quality. The name of the organisation, derived from a saying from the Quran, adds to this. Furthermore, his mission to 'build bridges between people of different cultures and religions' is also derived from a Qur'anic injunction:

> O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Almighty is (he who is) the most righteous of you (Sura Hujurat/the Inner Apartments, Chapter 49, Verse 13.)

Sooliman's work is written up in a way that gives him the status of one possessing 'exceptional' qualities. He is undoubtedly a charismatic leader and underlying this is well-oiled, rationalised and technically efficient machinery. This combination makes GOTG extremely effective. Some may argue that GOTG's mission to raise funds and respond to crises in the most effective way on the ground allows a single figure to be associated with the organisation and to dominate decision-making. Civil society organisations, on the other hand, cannot be dominated by individual figures because they represent a constituency and take up issues through collective action and mass mobilisation, often in a confrontational way. This dichotomy does not hold when one considers that organisations like the Treatment Action Committee (TAC) and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) are associated with larger than life leaders who have come to symbolise the

organisation, namely Zackie Achmat and Trevor Ngwane. This demonstrates that leaders don't become prominent simply because they are given importance or a high profile by others, such as the media. Interpersonal power, charisma and centrality to decision-making inside democratic organisations attach themselves to an individual or clique just as often (see Adair 2002; Andreoni 2006; James 2005 for discussions on leaders and leadership in an NGO context).

NGOs can become too large and unwieldy. Sylvie Brunel from Action against Hunger wrote that 'humanitarian organizations artificially swollen by the massive amounts of public funds made available to them become enormous machines, difficult to manage and slower to react' (2001: 337). The response to the May 2008 xenophobic attacks showed that GOTG was able to react with speed and in a sustained and effective manner. This is viewed favourably by other stakeholders. For example, in January 2009, when the St. George's Cathedral made a small donation to GOTG, the Very Reverend Rowan Smith wrote: 'We admire your rapid response to the needs of the people there and want to encourage your being able to move in before the government has made a decision.'

Sooliman is not cavalier just because he is decisive. According to Zohra, he relies on information from a network of people whose judgement he trusts, including community leaders, business persons, local councillors, and other NGOs whose information and input is valued and valuable. He also monitors the news and follows crises that may be developing.

Sooliman usually chooses the target, conceptualises the project and determines the logistics, a point captured by journalist Michael Schmidt:

> To watch Sooliman in operation is to watch a force of nature, a good natured *djinn*, whirling dervish-like around stroppy officials until they give him what he wants. And what he wants is usually super-sized: from fleets of trucks and tons of aid to air force transport planes and naval ships. He is constantly on the phone, wrangling some deal or other that would be the pride of the underworld if it were in any way shady, charming military brass from a range of starched collar regimes and twisting their arms until they simply gave in…. Sooliman's benign demeanour disguises his steel spine. He won't take no for an answer from officials, believing Allah will

> make a way through any obstacle… Watching him, I'm tempted to believe that Allah truly does make a way for the faithful (*Sunday Times* 2 September 2006).

According to Zohra Sooliman, the decision to publicise the work of Sooliman and GOTG is a tactical one to 'demonstrate to ordinary members of the public that there is a relationship between their giving and the outcome. When they see something tangible happening, it makes sense to them to contribute.' Speaking to both Zohra and Imtiaz Sooliman, it is clear that media exposure is not sought after for self-aggrandisement. Sooliman sees his work as a divine mission and sees no reason to be reticent. Name recognition, for him, is one way of creating 'brand GOTG' which has opened doors with corporates, suppliers and ordinary members of the public who are willing to contribute to the organisation because of this trust. 'Brand GOTG' provides the organisation with protection in conflict zones while allowing it to highlight humanitarian tragedies globally. This strategy has worked well, as GOTG's budget and reputation have grown enormously over the past two decades.

Sayed, who runs the Johannesburg office, comes from a family with a long history of community and political involvement in the Western Cape. He describes himself as a person who 'loves to work on the ground.' While Imtiaz is somewhat withdrawn, Sayed is effusive and full of boundless energy. Now around 70, almost two decades older than Imtiaz, he appears the perfect foil. When Imtiaz wants to visit a project, such as a school in Soweto, Sayed makes the logistical arrangements. As much as the hierarchy is apparent, there is mutual respect and a strong working relationship (see Howell and Shamir 2005).

Sayed was at the centre of GOTG's response to xenophobia in 2008. The attacks brought back sad memories for him. He studied in Pakistan in the late 1950s when Muslims from India were still arriving in Pakistan, 'shivering, having lost everything, still with fear in their eyes'. He says that the 2008 attacks he says were like 'deja vu, people of the same colour attacking and killing one another.' Sayed is clear as to the recipe for GOTG's effectiveness: minimal red tape; having a surplus of supplies; going in 'with the heart, no politics, no taking of sides'; 'credibility' which comes from providing aid across racial and religious barriers; careful planning, which

'means having a well thought out system'; recruiting the 'kinds of people where a hundred people can do the job of 300'; and being humble rather than 'seeing yourself as "The Man"'. Sayed explains that when people are in dire need, it is easy to believe that one's intervention is that of a 'saviour' (see the growing literature on why people give to particular organisations, Verterland 2006; Piferi *et al.* 2006; Ostrower 1997).

GOTG's Impartiality

Like many other humanitarian organisations, GOTG insists that its approach is both impartial and neutral and that it is driven solely by the determination to get aid to those in need. Carole Dubrulle of 'Action against Hunger' believes that 'impartiality is the real Hippocratic oath of a humanitarian organisation. This is an operational principle that seeks to match relief to need, in situations in which available resources are always limited.' This does not mean providing equal assistance to all protagonists in a crisis. Humanitarian organisations carry out an evaluation that is 'objective and not imposed by governments' before deciding on who to assist and how much assistance to provide (2001: 224). Dubrulle argues that silence 'would amount to connivance with the oppressor, to being an accomplice to the injustice committed' (2001: 225). Humanitarian organisations have a 'vocation to never remain neutral in the face of violations, especially when these are massive violations of human rights' (2001: 225).

How does GOTG match these principles? It subscribes to this idea not through its public statements on xenophobia but through its public work in responding to xenophobia. GOTG's claim to be apolitical does not imply that it has no sense of the political. In the aftermath of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks, the organisation not only fed refugees in the camp near Alexandra but continued its weekly feeding programme in the township which catered in the main to South Africans. GOTG's approach in both South Africa and Malawi is to have a close working relationship with the respective governments and get their endorsement for the projects being run.

GOTG differs from organisations such as the TAC which played a significant role in responding to the xenophobic attacks in Cape Town. Unlike the TAC, GOTG is not seeking to organise a collective response to confront those in power, build a constituency with branch structures that

elect people to positions of authority, be transparent and democratic, or even give voice to the subalterns in society. Like the TAC, GOTG does join those who have political power to roll out services but unlike the TAC, it co-operates with rather than challenges government. Sooliman insists, 'I will work with anyone to deliver humanitarian aid' (Hofstatter *The Weekender* 7-8 February 2009).

GOTG is clearly a major player in the South African humanitarian landscape. Its relationship with the government is important to its work. The 18th of July, the birthday of former South Africa President Nelson Mandela, was endorsed by South African President Jacob Zuma as a day on which the world should spend 67 minutes doing something useful to support humanity. GOTG marked the occasion in 2009 by co-hosting a function with The Presidency (Social Development) in Ivory Park, Johannesburg. In the collage of photographs, Sooliman is placed between photographs of Mandela and Zuma. In the blurb on the invitation, GOTG laid out its organisational imperatives:

> Our assistance is purely humanitarian and unconditional. We assist irrespective of race, religion, colour, class, political affiliation or geographical boundary. We are entirely neutral in our approach to mankind in need, are non-judgemental and have an open-minded approach to all situations. We work with governments to get our assistance delivered but do not align ourselves politically to any party. We have an excellent partnership relationship with the South African government for the delivery of our local projects, as well as foreign aid delivery.

There is global debate on the nature of humanitarian aid. Is it enough to provide short term relief, important as it is? Larry Minear and Thomas Weiss argue that humanitarian relief should involve a long commitment to projects that promote people's self-respect. This requires moving from immediate humanitarian assistance to providing material and psychological succour to those who are affected to help them reconstruct their lives (in Smillie 1998). While this was difficult in the case of the 2008 xenophobic attacks, an examination of GOTG's projects suggests that it is very much part of their thinking. Since its inception, GOTG has established around 20 Primary

Health Care Clinics, invested in education programmes from early childhood to adult learning in all parts of the country, and is involved in sports development, entrepreneurship, agricultural sustainability, water provision, and a host of other initiatives in South Africa as well as other countries, suggesting that it has a long-term commitment to development and to improving the condition of people's lives. Both Sayed and Zohra Sooliman emphasised that they did not see a difference between humanitarian and developmental work. They are equipped for short term action during disasters but want to have a longer-term impact on the development of the countries where they are involved and in improving people's lives.

Conclusion

Violent acts of xenophobia and hostile attitudes towards foreign nationals are a constant feature of post-apartheid South Africa. Many reasons have been postulated for these attacks, which are discussed by other articles in this volume. Rising anti-immigrant tendencies in South Africa are a worrying trend. Constant vigilance and opposition to xenophobia and racism in South Africa are more than ever a political imperative, as they present a threat to democracy and a challenge to human dignity.

While state institutions must take primary responsibility for counteracting xenophobia, NGOs such as GOTG are playing an important role in this struggle by providing assistance and material help to its victims. While this is appreciated by beneficiaries, NGOs can do much more. For example, GOTG could help to raise awareness of increased xenophobia and mobilise civil society to prevent attacks; it could push government to confront xenophobia through stricter laws and clearer policies and ensure that these are implemented; and it could be more vocal in exposing politicians and others in society who indulge in xenophobic discourse. However, as Heins (2008: 166) argues, while NGOs may heighten moral feelings and even outrage, this often leads to:

> the paradox of the creation of a moral public of spectators that is more interested in the display of moral excellence than in political effectiveness. NGOs in international society have often proved to be brilliant, Hermes-like players who move ably between places and

> geographical scales to dispatch their messages. But they are not good in involving the public in more than superficial ways.

One of the criticisms of organisations such as GOTG is that they are 'CNNish', meaning that they respond to crises but do not engage in long term strategic planning. This has been described as having the 'single-mindedness and problem solving orientation of a fire fighter [rather] than … the cunning calculations of an experienced military strategist in war zones' (Hoffman & Weiss 2006: 197). There is a degree of truth in this in GOTG's case. While Hoffman and Weiss see the absence of careful research and strategising as a weakness, we would argue that the fact that GOTG can move from crisis to crisis at short notice and with such effectiveness, is important because many crises are of short-term duration and require urgent intervention. GOTG does publish regular reports and analysis of how crises were handled and the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted.

GOTG has a clear position of 'not taking sides.' Working closely with government, means that the organisation is hesitant to become a critical voice of conscience. However, this does not diminish its contribution. The immediate material support provided to thousands of victims of the xenophobic attacks was critical in assisting them to make sense of their lives. Government bureaucracy means that it is often slow to react to crises and it should continue to support the role of NGOs such as GOTG who have proven their ability to respond swiftly. Ideally, governments and NGOs such as GOTG should be striving to prevent conflict rather than providing humanitarian aid. But neither the NGOs nor government have any meaningful short or long-term programme to address the problem of xenophobia in South Africa, whose core causes are complex, with no readymade solutions in sight.

NGOs have been criticised for mitigating contradictions, acting as the proverbial band aid. There is some plausibility to these claims. But as GOTG's response to xenophobic attacks in 2008 indicates, whatever their limitations, NGOs have a critical role to play, especially in terms of their impact on ordinary citizens who may care but do not have the time to get involved in such crises. NGOs provide a channel for such individuals to contribute and get the task done (for debates about why people give, see Osili & Du 2005; Lindahl & Conley 2002; Lyons & Nivison-Smith 2006: and

Marcuello & Salas 2001). Given that governments and global agencies such as the United Nations have less and less to give, this alone points to the vital role of NGOs and their continued efficacy in the twentieth first century where the nation-state finds its powers to act independently increasingly eroded, while NGOs with a global perspective are able to cut across red-tape and borders to support those in the frontlines of disaster.

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