

# DYING TO TELL A STORY

**DAILY DISPATCH JOURNALIST  
THANDUXOLO JIKA AND  
PHOTOGRAPHER THEO  
JEPHTHA SPENT MONTHS  
TRYING TO UNDERSTAND  
WHY SOMALIS LIVING IN EAST  
LONDON WERE CONSTANTLY  
BEING TARGETED, ABUSED  
AND ATTACKED. THE RESULT  
WAS DYING TO LIVE, A  
POWERFUL PRINT AND  
MULTIMEDIA PACKAGE**



**W**hen South Africa suddenly turned into a battle-zone with waves of xenophobic attacks in May last year, many journalists tried to answer the questions of what lay behind the violence and why was it happening.

In the *Daily Dispatch* newsroom, we began talking about a special investigation into why South Africans were killing fellow Africans. Soon photographer Theo Jephtha and I were roped in by Editor Andrew Trench to be part of the investigation. I was especially keen to participate, having already established an anti-xenophobic group on Facebook which has about 2 000 members.

It was decided that this investigation would not simply be about print supplying content to online platforms, but rather a “print-online project”. As a journalist recently graduated from Rhodes University, I was excited as I knew this project would test my multimedia skills. The *Dispatch* is in the fortunate position of having a converged newsroom – as well as the support of an editor who believes journalists need to be multiskilled in the 21st century.

Attacks on Somalis in the Eastern Cape began in 2005 but, with time, the murders have become more brutal and frequent.

Our entry point into the investigation was Andile Tunzana, a self-confessed Somali multiple murderer in the East London area, who had since converted to Islam and adopted the name Ismal Junaid while awaiting

trial. In 2006, he was sentenced to double-life imprisonment in the East London High Court after he confessed to killing Somalis in Duncan Village, a low-income residential area.

Trench said if we wanted to know why foreigners were being killed, we had to ask the killer. In a series of interviews conducted in jail with Junaid, I began to understand that South Africans do not care about the refugees in their communities. Instead, there was prejudice and hate – even in our institutions as South African government policy makes refugees vulnerable by not giving them any real rights.

As the interviews took shape, and through the constant feedback I had from Andrew, I began to realise that only by living with Somalis in East London would I begin to understand the reality in which they lived. I had to find a place to live with Somalis in this vulnerable community.

I was armed with a notebook, pen, voice recorder, small video camera and a laptop with an internet connection to file material to the custom-built website, powered by the open-source tools such as WordPress, YouTube and Dippity.

This was an opportunity for me, as a journalist, to document the lives of those living in fear, the lives of their attackers, and the lives of their sympathisers.

Theo and I went to live in Mdantsane’s NU 1 with two Somali “brothers” who were working as shopkeepers in this hostile environment. We were welcomed at a

## THE REACTION

**T**he Dying to Live project enabled the *Dispatch* to engage readers way beyond their traditional audience, including Somalis living in the Eastern Cape as well as South Africans overseas. Here is a selection of comments off the website:

For all is worth I’m truly sorry for all the suffering my people have caused to our brothers and sisters who ascend our shores under the auspices of refugees. If it means anything at all “You are all welcome here. It is as much your home as it is mine.” – Prince Legodi

I personally am tired of them coz we expected to respect them while bona are doing the direct opposite. No its unfair, come to King Williams Town and you will see what I’m talking about ... these journalists must also interview us the citizenry of this country and hear how we feel about the matter. – Zukie

One of the things that we often forget is the fact that we do not know what tomorrow brings. If tomorrow I find myself in the townships of Somali how will I expect them to treat me? Just

house surrounded by burglar proofing and a place we could not leave at night for fear of attack.

In the three weeks we spent living with Abdirizak Mahdi and Adam Malow, I kept a daily diary which I filed for the site. Theo’s photographs accompanied the daily diary. This became a routine that helped me when





yesterday our freedom fighters took refuge from other African Countries and we seem to have forgotten all about this. Let us be good and show compassion to our fellow brothers remembering that they did not ask to be in this situation that they are in. – Apiwe

i m very, very sorry what happening on my country fallow (somali people) we helped s'afrika at the time of colony period, and stood along them but but now the situation is inverse, we dying in s.africa, and every day i hear horrendous number of somali death, you s.african people that is not fair. – Ahmed

I'm Somali. I don't live in South Africa. I'm so appreciative of the country that has afforded me sanctuary and prosperity. Here in America, we really dont face remotely close to the same hardship my fellow brethrens do. Now I know and already knew not to take things for granted. What I actually dont understand is the same people that we helped at their time of need are right now slaughtering us in our time of need. This proves how much the black SA is ignorant of their past history. – *Abdifatah*

Well done Guys for bringing this story to our society, I must say It brings sadness in my heart and tears to my eyes, to see how cruel we have become as humans. Whatever happened to the spirit of Ubuntu to our Brothers and Sisters? – Sibulele

it came to writing for print. It was a totally different way of note-taking for me, but an excellent way to tell a story both for print and online. Each day, I wrote two to three diary entries about my observations and interviews I had had during the course of the day.

The video camera became my extended notepad too, as

I used it to capture some moving moments that could not be captured by using only a pen, camera or a voice recorder. Like the story of wheelchair-bound 17-year-old Abdulahi Haji Gaan, who was paralysed by a bullet after being shot at by armed robbers at a spaza shop in Mdantsane's NU 11. I wrote about this story in print, but also captured it on video to show viewers the pain Gaan suffers as he exercises every day, hoping his legs will be strong so that he can walk again.

While this could be described in print, the video was more powerful as it shows people the reality faced by the young man.

Another emotionally moving video interview was with Abdulahi Abdi Sheikh, whose life was shattered when his younger brother and only family member in South Africa was gunned down by Tunzana during an armed robbery in Duncan Village in 2005. Sheikh became very emotional during the interview when he spoke about his brother's death and his anger. I believe the video gave audiences an idea of the extent of the pain felt by a refugee who had escaped his war-torn country to start a new life, but landed up losing a sibling.

As a journalist, I had to use these tools to tell a complete story in a modern news environment. I could not only rely on pen and paper and still visuals. I was conscious of the fact that I had to take the audience to where I was, into people's lives and minds.

The more I got to use these tools, the more convinced I became that this was the key to telling a story in a different and unconventional way in our constantly changing environ-

ment – and to our constantly changing audiences.

After completing our stay in Mdantsane, it came down to writing. With Trench's guidance and the help of my daily diary, the processes became simple. But what was more exciting was how well the project was coming together, with the online team interacting more and more with us as the final product was put together.

The team did not simply lift print content and place it online, but created a unique online entity to go beyond the age-old print story telling.

Over a period of four months, the *Dispatch* team put together a package which included a blog, an online diary, news stories, photographs, video, audio, interactive maps and a timeline. The website recorded more than 35 000 unique users.

In the end, the amount of feedback generated online was amazing as audiences – including those living overseas – had the space to give their views on xenophobia. The website became a ground for debate, with some intolerant South Africans raising anti-foreign views while others who care about humanity argued strongly against the killings. Also Somalis across the country and internationally gave their views about the killings against other Africans.

The online Dying to Live project also made it easy for the newspaper to attract media attention throughout the world and showed that an investigative piece could be done online with different elements added to it.

*The Dying to Live project can be viewed at <http://blogs.dispatch.co.za/dying/>*