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Leroy Maisiri
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Grahamstown, South Africa
November 9, 2015

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Anarchist poetry against the anti-foreigner pogroms in Grahamstown, South Africa

Leroy Maisiri

November 9, 2015

The poem below was written by Zimbabwean Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front comrade Leroy Maisiri, against the backdrop of the a wave of riots against African and Asian 'foreigners' that started to sweep Grahamstown, South Africa, from Wednesday 21 October 2015. By Saturday, around 300 shops, mostly small businesses, owned by people from countries like Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Somalia, had been targeted, many burnedand looted. Perhaps 500 people have been displaced, many are in hiding. While university and college student protests across town faced down the state in the fight against high fees in a heroic struggle, mobs provoked by rumours of murders and mutilations by 'foreigners,'spurred on by malicious forces including local taxi drivers, attacked the 'foreigners.' Heroic efforts by the local Unemployed Peoples Movement (UPM) and some other township residents were not enough to halt the carnage. Working class, see this divide-and-rule for what it is! You have nothing to gain from this. As the UPM says, "We are all the victims of colonialism and capitalism. We all need to stand together for justice. If unemployed young men chase

a man from Pakistan out of Grahamstown they will still be unemployed and poor the next day. The students have shown us what unity can do." The students have shown us the way forward.

Dear Mama

36 whatsapp messages, 16 missed calls later and mama still wants to know how I am. I try and tell her:
I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again. I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again.

42 whatsapp messages later, 23 missed calls and mama still wants to know how I am.

In the midst of loudness have you ever experienced days without sound, in the midst of feet stomping, drum beating, spear handling, have you ever felt the weight of silence.

As the mobs approached, with the snitch of hatred, intention to kill, to end a life based on difference, I have to imagine that type of fear is paralyzing.

I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again. I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again.

To fall in love, marry have children, watch them grow in a foreign land long enough to watch them, get to watch you being beaten to death. To have your 8 year old first born son get pinned down as the crowds does whatsoever they please with his mother.

I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again. I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again.

I have always thought there is nothing more industrious than a "foreigner". The ability to begin again against all odds in another land.

To never look back at what was, with no understanding of what will be, but to be brave enough to assert themselves in new communities.

The story of a foreigner brings backs remnants of Abraham's story, Moses story, Josephs story. Even Jesus as an infant had to flee into Egypt and become a foreigner. You would think by now the story of the foreigner is one to uplift and uphold.

62 whatsapp messages, 30 missed calls, mama desperately needs to know how I am, the quivering fear in her voice, her insistence for me to distance myself, to abandon heroism. To "Just stay put", "It is well, but stay put".

Mama wants to know how I am

I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again. I am okay, I am alive, I am indoors, I won't go outside again.

Mama wants to know how I feel.

Dear Mama for the first time today, I woke up a makwerekwere [a despised 'foreigner']