



# **The Diepsloot 7 Report**

**Issued by the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change**

## Introduction

Between 7 and 8 April 2022, The Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change was alerted to an online narrative that surfaced following the death of a Zimbabwean man named Elvis Nyathi in Diepsloot on 6 April 2022. News of Nyathi's death was revealed as tensions continue to build about the work of an organisation called Operation Dudula. Operation Dudula is a self-appointed watchdog on the issue of illegal immigrants. Some claim that they play an alleged role in the sale of drugs and the perpetuation of violent crime in South Africa. This narrative is reminiscent of the Trumpean campaign tactics that were used ahead of the 2016 US elections, in which Mexicans, neighbours to the United States of America, were portrayed as a scourge to US citizens and scapegoated as criminals who were not only said to be stealing the jobs of US citizens, but also raping and killing their women and children and flooding communities with drugs. Understanding these previously used tactics for narrative manipulation online, this report dives into the conversation that took place on Twitter between 5 and 10 April 2022 to make sense of the information that was being shared.

## Elvis Nyathi

Conversation about Elvis Nyathi was present on multiple digital platforms like Youtube, news sites and forums. However, the largest volume of conversation within our data set was found on Twitter. Twitter posts that contained the name "Elvis Nyathi" reached a peak on 8 April 2022, closing in on 6 000 mentions (Figure 1).

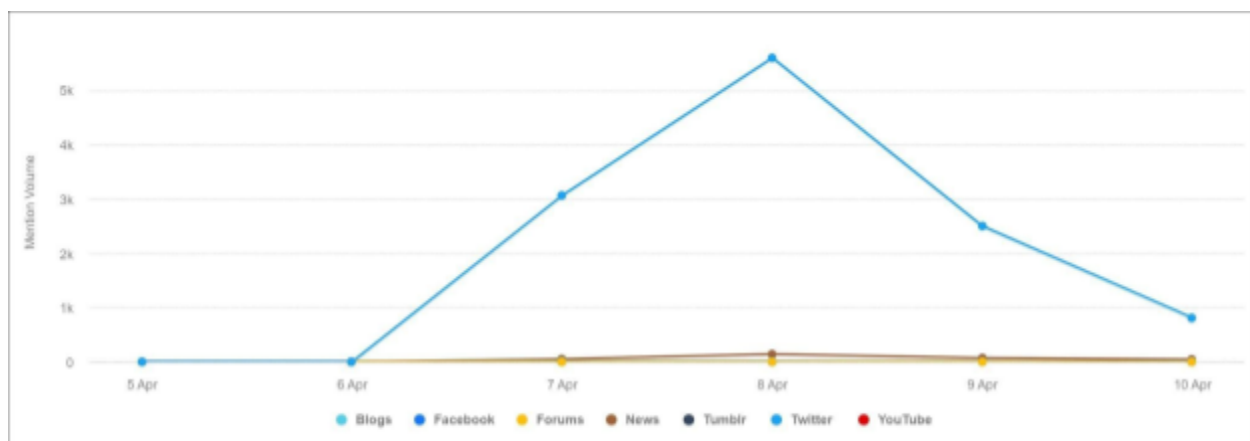


Figure 1: Conversation volume growth for the name Elvis Nyathi

The earliest reference to the name on Twitter that was available to us was at 07:50 on 7 April 2022. It was found in a [post](#) that claimed Nyathi is a clan name used in both South Africa and Zimbabwe (Figure 2). This information was shared along with #operationdudula #dudulamovement and #putsouthaficansfirst.



Figure 2: Post claiming that Nyathi is a clan name

Early in the conversation, one of the trending topics within the Elvis Nyathi conversation was "Tembisa10". This can be seen in Figure 3 below where the phrase Tembisa 10 appeared amongst the red trending topics to the right of the graph.

We took a closer look at these words to understand how a topic that seemed unrelated to the death of Elvis Nyathi could appear as a trend in the conversation about his name. The phrase appears to have been primarily used as a keyword that was posted to amplify specific content (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

People should think about the damage  
boost education According to Phaahla

killed 7 women  
raped and killed  
Elvis Nyathi was killed  
Elvis Nyathi a Zimbabwean  
7 South Africans  
EFF issued a statement  
Tembisa 10  
ZANU PF

Fading  Trending

Figure 3: Tembisa 10 appears in trending topics about Elvis Nyathi

 Alpha101  
@2471HaveAlpha

Why ENCA Didn't interview this women who's husband  
was killed broad daylight?  
[#OperationDudula](#) Boity Elvis Nyathi GO HOME Action  
SA | Tembisa 10 | [#Senzomeyiwa](#)  
they must Go with their skills.



2:42 PM · Apr 7, 2022 · Twitter Web App

341 Retweets 22 Quote Tweets 1,025 Likes

Figure 4: Post containing Tembisa 10. a





Figure 5: Post containing Tembisa 10. b

Using open source research techniques, we were able to see that the Tembisa 10 trend appeared on the day that SANEF [labelled](#) the story of the Tembisa 10 as ludicrous and an embarrassment to South African journalism. From Figure 4 and Figure 5 it is clear that the keywords were not used like hashtags #OperationDudula or #Senzomeyiwa. This may be done to manipulate the Twitter algorithm that groups content based on the keywords.

Graphic content was shared on various media platforms as South Africans and foreigners tried to understand how such a violent hate crime could have taken place toward a person that was living in South Africa. The blue ticked, verified account of Professor Jonathan Moyo [posted](#) an

image of the graphic content that was shared on SABC news about Nyathi's death and referred to the act as Afrophobia. Professor Jonathan Moyo is Zimbabwe's former Minister of Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology Development. Reflecting this thought, the Project Director of social advocacy group [Content Hub NG](#) [tweeted](#) "South Africans are not angry at immigrants. They are only angry at African immigrants" (Figure 6). This post shown in Figure 6 post received more than 7 000 likes and over 1 600 retweets. These figures are far higher than the posts that were used to amplify hashtags like #operationdudula and #putsouthaficansfirst (misspelt in the data). If one bears in mind that one account can only like or retweet a post once, it would imply that more unique Twitter account holders resonated with the type of message in Figure 6 than they did with the content that was being amplified in a more coordinated way about Operation Dudula and Elvis Nyathi.



Figure 6: Post claiming South Africans are only angry at African immigrants

An account that displays an Italian flag and goes by the handle @AndreaBastoni demonstrates that the death of Elvis Nyathi was considered to be an act carried out by members of Operation Dudula. [Responding](#) to the Content Hub project director with a particularly nefarious comment, @AndreaBastoni tweeted "I hope Operation Dudula soldiers find you and deal with you the way they did with Mr. Nyathi" (Figure 7). This was counter to the information that another account that regularly tweets content relating to the Put South Africans First movement put out, stating that "there is no link between OD and the incident at Diepsloot" (Figure 8).

Looking closer at the @AndreaBastoni account, which is open to the public on Twitter (Figure 9) the account mostly retweets obscure South African content that is in English or one of the official South African languages (Figure 10). Furthermore, the location on the account has been listed as Polokwane.



Signore\_Bastoni  
@AndreaBastoni\_

...

Replying to @sirpeeworld and @SavvyRinu

If you tweeting this nonsense from SA, I hope  
Operation Dudula soldiers find you and deal with you  
the way they did with Mr Nyathi ❤️

10:27 AM · Apr 8, 2022 · Twitter for Android

2 Quote Tweets 6 Likes

Figure 7: Post claiming Operation Dudula killed Nyathi



Top Dog!!!  
@TopTheatre

...

PSAF/Operation Dudula has been marching for over 2  
years now peacefully, there has never been any  
violence on our marches.

But SA media never fails to call us name invalidating  
our concerns, there is no link between OD and the  
incident in Diepsloot!!!

#VoetsekSAMedia



8:04 PM · Apr 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

Figure 8: Claim of no link between Dudula and Nyathi



Figure 9: Account with Italian flag that tweets mainly SA content



Figure 10: Bastoni account posting South African content



Among the graphic content that was shared, a video was [posted](#) of a man being beaten with sticks and set alight as community members stood around in a circle and watched the torture (Figure 11). The person posting the video asked “Is this the guy?” so, it is not clear if this is really a video of Elvis Nyathi or a video of another incident. If this video is really of Nyathi, it could help the police and other investigative bodies identify the perpetrators of the hate crime. If this is the video of another incident, material like this could delay investigations.



Figure 11: Comment with the video of a man set alight and beaten.

Another [tweet](#) about Elvis Nyathi that received more than 2 000 likes, and was retweeted by South African author and political analyst Eusebius McKaiser, explains that Elvis and his nephew Felix specialised in smart gardening in their spare time (Figure 12).



4:47 PM · Apr 8, 2022 · Twitter for Android

683 Retweets 43 Quote Tweets 2,079 Likes

Figure 12: Claim that Nyathi and nephew taught community about gardening

This information runs counter to the narrative that Elvis Nyathi was a drug dealer in the community of Diepsloot who was attacked because citizens were tired that nothing was being done to stop his alleged criminal activities.

#### **4, no, 6, no, 7 people murdered in or around Diepsloot?**

A topic that also trended within the Elvis Nyathi conversation on Twitter was that of 7 people who lost their lives. Based on the trending topics shown in Figure 3 above, phrases like "7 south africans" and "killed 7 women" were driven in posts that claimed that the 7 lives that were lost belonged to South Africans and that this was carried out by foreigners (Figure 13, 14 and 15).



ChrisExcel  
@ChrisExcel102

EFF said nothing on 7 South Africans killed by foreigners over the weekend

But released a statement when Elvis Nyathi a Zimbabwean is killed

EFF is for foreigners!!

GO HOME Motsoaledi Zimbos [#OperationDudula](#)  
Gayton DJ Tira Seshego Diepsloot  
[#PutSouthAfricansFirst](#) Malema



4:20 PM · Apr 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

662 Retweets 31 Quote Tweets 2,262 Likes

Figure 13: Post claiming 7 South Africans were killed



Yenza Okuhle  
@inkingayodwa

The only time some people can't breathe is when an American is killed, but when 7 South Africans get killed by Zimbabweans, they decide to go and hug trees there by Rupert's farms.

[#PutSouthAfricaFirst](#)  
[#OperationDudula](#)



8:51 AM · Apr 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

145 Retweets 7 Quote Tweets 549 Likes

Figure 14: Post claiming that 7 South Africans were killed by Zimbabweans



Figure 15: Post claiming that 7 South Africans were killed by foreigners

As there was a distinct anti-EFF and anti-foreigner sentiment to these posts, we decided to turn to news media sites to determine what was being reported about 7 lives that were allegedly lost.

News reports presented conflicting information about the killings.

On 6 April 2022, News24 [reported](#) that seven locals were murdered over the weekend beginning on 1 April 2022. On the same day Sowetan Live [reported](#) that allegedly seven people (no nationalities given) were murdered over the same weekend. The article states that 200 protestors then gathered outside Diepsloot police station to address Police Minister Bheki Cele about these and other criminal incidents that were plaguing the community. During an address at the protest, Police Minister Bheki Cele said: “For the past weekend, approximately seven

people were killed in the area, which then prompted the unrest”. In the aftermath of the protest, Elvis Nyathi was burnt alive.

On 7 April 2022, The Citizen [reported](#) that four people were murdered over the weekend beginning on 1 April 2022. Newly elected National Police Commissioner Fannie Masemola stated “...we are aware that there are four people murdered”. On 10 April 2022, Daily Maverick [reported](#) that six people had been killed in Diepsloot over the past few weeks, including Elvis Nyathi.

The conflicting number and nationalities of people murdered in Diepsloot over the weekend beginning on 1 April 2022 by media and SAPS has naturally lead to confusion on the matter as the exact number is yet to be confirmed. The exact timelines and locations for when and where these murders took place appear to be uncertain, with sources reporting them to have occurred over the 1st weekend of April and others over the past few weeks.

It is also not clear if all of the murders occurred within Diepsloot itself or if surrounding areas were included.

A digital [response](#) to these claims from an account associated with the EFF asked for an investigation into the news to ensure that the story hasn’t been cooked up (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Call from online EFF supporter requesting an investigation into the alleged death of 7 South Africans at the hands of foreigners in Diepsloot.

## Broad socio-divisive themes



Having tried to make sense of the news about the 4 to 7 people that lost their lives in the weekend leading up to protest action in Diepsloot, we took a step back to look through some of the broad themes that were running between 05 and 10 April 2022 to help us better understand the incident or incidents that took place. To do so, we inspected the hashtags that were trending within posts about xenophobia, foreigners and immigrants. Figure 17 below shows the top 10 hashtags that were analysed. The size of the word in the image indicates its volume relative to the surrounding hashtags.



Figure 17: Word cloud showing the top 10 hashtags in conversations about Xenophobia, immigrants and foreigners in South Africa.

The first theme that stood out was an attack on both the media and opposition party, the EFF. Raking in thousands of likes and retweets, tweets like those seen in Figures 18, 19 and 20 below tried to paint the picture that South African media can't be trusted because they are not covering events that appeared to be of concern to those tweeting #operationdudula.



LesegoM   
@LesegoM16825790

...

Funny how media goes to the that lady who lost her husband, but never cared to go to the families of 7 South Africans who lost their lives.

[#Southafricanlivesmatter](#)

[#PutSouthAfricansFirst](#)

[#OperationDudula](#)

8:56 AM · Apr 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

501 Retweets 20 Quote Tweets 1,820 Likes

Figure 17: Media criticism. a



Marie Joubert  
@OstrichStrategy

...

[#VoetsekSAMedia](#), many South Africans are attacked daily by Zimbabweans, you say nothing. 1 Zimbabwean die same week 7 SouthAfricans die yet you ignore death of South Africans and headline Zimbabwean. Are South Africans not human enough? Everything in SA is about welfare of Zimbos

7:42 PM · Apr 7, 2022 · Twitter for Android

363 Retweets 11 Quote Tweets 1,442 Likes

Figure 19: Media criticism. b



Figure 20: Media criticism. c

This criticism toward the media that claims certain media houses are not covering important stories as they unfold is something that we have seen take place during the July unrest period in KwaZulu-Natal. Messages like those shown in Figures 21 and 22 below are examples of such posts from July 2021.



Figure 21: Media criticism during July unrest. a



Figure 22: Media criticism during July unrest. b

A free and unbiased media is one of the hallmarks of a democratic society. While it is important to remain critical of the media and how it reports the news, deliberately undermining the media as dishonest or engaged in deliberate conspiracies to mislead the citizenry is detrimental to

democracy. It also creates a delay in the juristic process because the police services, who are constantly being labelled as incompetent and lacking in the performance of their duties, are also confronted with the influx of information. They then have to sift through all the information to get to the crux of the matter.

Another theme that emerged from the hashtags were individual stories that don't appear to have been confirmed by any official body. These posts reported on incidents of crime that were allegedly carried out by foreigners. The topics that they covered focus on some existing weaknesses in society like [drugs](#) (Figure 23) the [murder](#) (Figure 24) of a police official, [fraud](#) with using South African ID numbers to access SASSA grants (Figure 25), A [hijacking](#) (Figure 26), the recovery of a [stolen](#) toyota hilux (Figure 27) by someone allegedly driving toward the Zimbabwean border and gender based violence (Figures 28 and 29).

No evidence was offered to prove any of the accusations made in these posts.



Figure 23: Post about foreigners and drugs





Bophutatswana  
@katlegoktee1998

...

The media doesn't want to tell the nation that  
Zimbabweans have killed a police officer as well  
[#PutSouthAfricansFirst](#) [#OperationDudula](#)  
[#OperationFiela](#) [#Dudulamovement](#) [#nhlanhlalux](#)

1:00 PM · Apr 6, 2022 · Twitter for Android

236 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 641 Likes

Figure 24: Post that claims foreigners killed a police officer



Jonathan 🇳🇮 🇧🇼  
@Jonathank38

...

How many fraudulent ID documents are being used by  
foreigners to access our SASSA money? 100, a  
million??? [#PutSouthAfricanFirst](#) [#OperationDudula](#)

11:38 AM · Apr 4, 2022 · Twitter for Android

136 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 360 Likes

Figure 25: Post that claims foreigners use fake IDs to access SASSA money.



I Stand With South Africa 🇳🇮 🇧🇼  
@Kee91492014

...

Waking up to the news that my friend was shot and  
killed in an attempted hijacking 🙏🙏🙏🙏 May your  
soul rest in peace Wynand 🙏🙏

[#PutSouthAfricansFirst](#) [#OperationDudula](#)  
[#Dudulamovement](#) [#OnsBaizaNie](#) [#OperationFiela](#)

7:40 AM · Apr 9, 2022 · Twitter Web App

202 Retweets 9 Quote Tweets 692 Likes

Figure 26: post driven with #operationdudula that claims Wynand (a common Afrikaans name) was killed in a botched hijacking



Figure 27: Recovery of stolen vehicle allegedly on its way to Zimbabwe



Figure 28: Post claiming that 7 women were raped by foreigners

<https://twitter.com/Ayandi07684809/status/1512024855318872069>

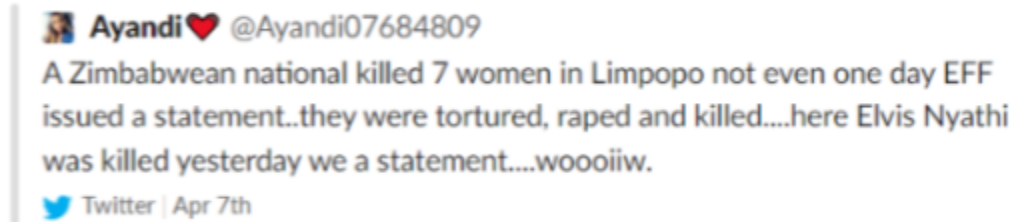


Figure 29: A deleted post claiming that a foreigner killed 7 women

## Conclusion

The examples and trends assessed in this report were analysed to help shed light on the events that unfolded in Diepsloot. As uncertainty around the message of the death of 7 people prevailed, this lack of knowledge was likely used to manipulate online discourse surrounding the death of Elvis Nyathi and potentially present a justification for his killing by an angry mob of protestors outside the police station at Diepsloot. While the protestors are said to have gathered to address service delivery issues in the area, online the protest and its fall out was driven within hashtags like #OperationDudula and #PutSouthAfricansFirst.