

Muslim community horrified at desecration of graves

By Tessa Knight • 1 November 2019

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Most of the desecrated tombstones have been claimed after headstones from fresh graves in the Mowbray Muslim cemetery in Cape Town ...

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22 Reactions

On 30 October, workers at the Mowbray Muslim Cemetery came to work on a normal day, with seven burials scheduled to take place. Instead, they found approximately 70 headstones removed from fresh graves and placed into the shape of a cross, while others were placed into dug-out holes in the shape of a triangle.



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For the last three days, relatives with loved ones buried in the Mowbray Muslim Cemetery have travelled there to see if the tombstones of their deceased relative was desecrated.

Some time on Tuesday night, vandals broke into the cemetery and moved tombstones from site X at the top of the hill and out of sight of anyone walking by. At night, the cemetery is pitch black – there are no lights on the land, no street lights nearby, and no security staff to look after the area.

“This cemetery is old, maybe 130 years old now, and nothing like this has happened before. Nothing, ever,” said Neematola Hendricks, treasurer of the Mowbray Muslim cemetery board.

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(https://www.daily... knight/)

DISPLAY ADVEF

On Thursday there were family members milling around, looking at the tombstones resting against the cemetery walls. (The original scene was documented before workers moved the headstones so family members would not see them laid out).



📷 Approximately 70 tombstones from the Mowbray Muslim cemetery in Cape Town were desecrated on 30 October, with some placed in the shape of a cross. Photo: Voice of the Cape Radio on Facebook

In one of the seven pre-dug graves a used condom wrapper had blown into the open hole. Adam Tenda, who lives in Gansbaai and drove to Cape Town to find out if his father-in-law's grave had been desecrated, stood above the grave for some time, distressed by the symbolism.

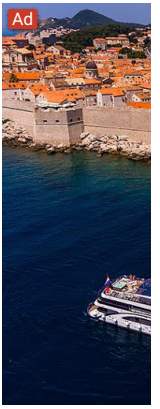
“This is emotional terrorism. It’s disgusting. For whatever reason it was done, there can never be any justification for it. It’s not as if people are buried with jewellery, it’s not as if they are put into expensive caskets. So this is not treasure hunting, it is something else. It is malicious,” said Tenda.

According to City of Cape Town by-laws, no person is permitted to “in any way damage, deface or desecrate any part of a cemetery or anything therein”. Anyone caught and convicted of desecrating a grave or graveyard can be liable to a R50,000 fine, six months jail time or both.

But according to Hendricks, there is little that can be done. So far, there are no witnesses. No person or group has come forward to take responsibility for the act, or explain why it was committed.

“We went to the police in the morning, but they told us there was nothing they could do. Then we went back later and they were more helpful, they opened a case of vandalism for us. But what can we do?”

Woodstock police are investigating a malicious damage to property case relating the damages caused to graves at the Mowbray cemetery.



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All Ihsaan Moses could do was find his recently deceased father's tombstone. His hands were dirty from digging in the ground trying to replace his father's tombstone, after spending hours trying to locate the correct grave site.

"I'm sad, obviously. But as well with the sadness I'm disgusted that my fellow South African citizens could do this. It's heartbreaking. We are still dealing with the loss of my father, we are mourning, and then to wake up one day and find out his grave had been desecrated. It is disgusting," Moses said.

The Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) echoed Moses' feelings. MJC's cemetery management committee head, Sheikh Riad Fataar, told *Daily Maverick* that the situation was very distressing for the council. Fataar said it is not known if the symbols are the work of a religious group, a cult or simply the result of religious intolerance.

At a press briefing on Friday, held at the cemetery, political party Al Jama-ah called on the national government to ban satanism in schools.

"We believe this was part of a Halloween expedition," said the party's Ganief Hendricks. The party has condemned the act, and is calling on the community to exercise restraint against the "target".

According to Fataar, the MJC "definitely sees the act as an Islamophobic attack". But the council has also called for the community not to blame others without any evidence, particularly other religious groups.

"People are sad, but I am glad to see that people are not reacting in anger. We must not blame Christians just because there was a cross there," said Fataar.

"It's not a matter of different religions fighting each other. We respect each other. We've got that respect, whether you're Jewish, whether you're Christian or what, at the end of the day we're all human beings. But even though this was a cross, it wasn't Christians who did it. No real Christian would do this. Never," said Moses. **DM**

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Helen Zille, Carte Blanche, 3 November 2019

Dear Helen

Richard Poplak, since you ask, is Editor-at-Large for Daily Maverick. He is also a contributor to the Financial Times, Atlantic Monthly, The Guardian, The National Post and the Globe and Mail. He regularly appears as a political commentator for Al Jazeera and the BBC amongst others as one of the most respected (and colourful) voices on South African politics.

He also happens to be South Africa's greatest wordsmith, sort of our own Hunter S Thompson, but with facts. And that's what makes him so deadly – so much so that you cannot contain your hatred for Poplak and for what he represents – a team of deeply competent journalists that cannot be bought, intimidated or fooled.

He's the recipient of the Bookmark Award for the best digital journalist in South Africa, a former Rockefeller Fellow and is a contributor to the global investigative collective – Deca stories.

Poplak was an integral member of the #GuptaLeaks team– arguably one of the biggest stories of political corruption anywhere on the planet, with our friends from amaBhungane and News24. The #GuptaLeaks team won the Taco Kuiper Investigative award, the Vodacom Journalist of the Year award and was cited for a Nat Nakasa 'Bravery in Journalism' award. Oh, and they have just won the most prestigious award in the world for investigative journalism: The Global Shining Light Award, 2019.

Helen, Richard Poplak was part of the team that broke #GuptaLeaks. You broke the DA.

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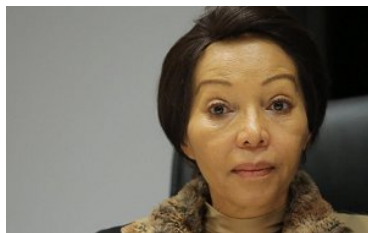
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