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Facebook racist opens wounds

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Katherine Shaddock was shocked when she logged on to Facebook to find that plans were being made to celebrate the death of her half-sister in the Westdene Dam disaster 28 years ago.



A 1985 photograph of the Westdene Dam in Johannesburg after a school bus plunged into its waters Picture: JUHAN KUUS

Zama Khumalo had told his 493 Facebook friends he would be sending out invitations to a "Big Black Braai" to celebrate that 42 white children died when their school bus plunged into the Johannesburg dam in 1985.

Khumalo, 24, who claims to be promoting a "black superiority complex", said the braai would be on the anniversary of the disaster, March 27, and that there would be DJs and fireworks .

"It was terrible," Shaddock said of the post yesterday. Her half-sister, Mary-Ann Miles, who was in Grade 11 at the time, was one of the victims of the bus disaster.

The post had also upset Shaddock's brother Michael.

"They grew up together - they were like twins. It is just shocking to think that in this day and age, when we're living in a democracy, somebody could be grateful for the death of anybody."

Khumalo had posted the names of 24 of the 42 victims with the comment that their deaths were "much appreciated, my Lord!".

Yesterday, the Daily Sun distanced itself from Khumalo, who describes himself on Facebook as a journalist for the paper. Publisher Jeremy Gordin said Khumalo had not worked there since the beginning of last year.

"I don't want to get into a debate [about Khumalo] because he is not employed by us. I repeat, he is not employed by us in any way, shape or form," said Gordin.

"We are trying to find out what we can do about having his Facebook page changed. I believe there is some kind of legal recourse."

SA Human Rights Commission spokesman Isaac Mangena said yesterday that the watchdog had not received a formal complaint about Khumalo. But he agreed that "on the face of it the posting is full of hatred for another race".

Hate speech is prohibited by the constitution.

By Saturday, Khumalo had changed his tune somewhat. He posted: "I have taken time to consider and reflect on the Westdene Facebook post that I made earlier this week . The matter has been such a huge personal pressure . I received inbox threats.

"I heartily apologise and deeply regret the post, and the pains [sic] that I have caused to the parties touched [sic]. I'm sorry."

Another look at his page suggests he enjoys making provocative statements.

A day after his apology, Khumalo posted that the DA-run suburb of Brixton, where he lives, was strewn with dying trees, uncollected refuse bags and weedy pathways, which he said, was "part of a white hollow belief that black people are starving 'cretins' who must live in a [sic] filth".

One of his Facebook friends, Hendryck Matjaola Nkoana, replied: "Zama man if u got nothing better to post man just keep it into urself the blame game wont help us SA citizens both black en white we are all Africans [sic]."

Mangena said the Human Rights Commission was considering contacting Khumalo "with the view to initiating a proper investigation".

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