

Towards Delivery and Dignity

Community Struggle from Kennedy Road¹

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Abstract

This article explores the rise of one of South Africa's largest and most sustained post-apartheid social movements, *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, Zulu for 'the people who live in the shacks'. The *Abahlali* movement began with protests from Durban's Kennedy Road settlement against their local councillor, and has since grown into a densely networked, formal social movement. This article traces through an ethnographic account the decision to first protest at Kennedy Road and the process by which this protest spawned a larger movement.

Keywords *Abahlali baseMjondolo* • development • local politics • shackdwellers' movement • social movement • South Africa

Now that we're protesting, our voice is heard ... our struggle is the voice of silent victims ... we hadn't been able to talk before. (System Cele)

Introduction

When it assumed leadership in 1994, the African National Congress and its ruling alliance partners encouraged a policy of demobilization for the very organizations that, via mass mobilization, had helped bring them into power. After a period of relative quiet, many of the same people who had fought against apartheid took to the streets again in the mass movements that have emerged post-apartheid, protesting the policies of the new, African-led government. The grievances of these movements range from frustration with government inaction on HIV/AIDS to the evictions of the poor who cannot pay rent, but all express frustration with how little the circumstances of the poor have changed with the 'new dispensation',² and bring their frustrations to the State (Ballard, 2003).³ One of the more recent 'movements' began with large protests from Durban's Kennedy Road settlement against their local councillor,

which then grew into *Abahlali baseMjondolo*⁴ (AbM), an organization of shack dwellers. Through AbM, the scope and participation of the movement have increased dramatically over the past year, garnering significant media attention and winning small concessions from the Durban municipal government. The topic of Kennedy Road is important beyond the demands this movement makes or the tactics it employs, however, for what it represents: a thrust for 'bottom-up democracy'⁵ in a country whose leaders are being criticized increasingly for highly centralized control (Mbeki, 2005) and a directed, public articulation of the grievances of the poor.

This article explores how the people of the Kennedy Road settlement understand themselves, their movement, its goals and tactics, and its relationship to the State and to the struggle against apartheid. To understand these connections, this project also explores the origins of the *Abahlali* movement (and how these origins are remembered) and the sustaining culture and networks that the movement has spawned. Thus, the guiding questions to be answered are simply 'why did a movement arise from Kennedy Road?' and 'how has this movement been sustained?' But because this movement, like most, is sustained by many of the same things that produced it, particular focus will be made on its beginnings.

At Kennedy Road, the movement began with a convergence of people's frustration over a series of events, which they saw as broken promises from the Durban municipal government. These frustrations then converged through the mass meetings the community holds, and were mobilized through the elected formal leadership structure as well as through the informal friendship and kinship networks within and beyond the settlement. The movement has also been sustained by a democratic, consultative culture that involves as many people as possible in its decisions – what some call 'bottom-up democracy'. Interestingly, this bottom-up democracy couples with a strong culture of leadership, and some 20 or 30 committed leader-activists work hard to preserve the consultative culture of the community and of the movement. Additionally, important in the movement's beginnings and maintenance is the 'framing process' (Snow and Benford, 1992) through which the settlement has movingly voiced its grievances in contrast to the State's promises. These framings have consolidated support for the movement within the Kennedy Road settlement, attracted the solidarity and partnership of other settlements, and have fueled sympathetic media coverage, taking the movement to a national and international audience. Critically, the movement has also linked productively with academics and professionals, whose media skills, legal interventions and strategic advice have kept the movement alive and have brought it broader audiences and access to networks of resources.

In this article, I will retrace a history of the AbM movement through the accounts people gave in their interviews and through a collection of newspaper articles written as the protests began. The body of this article will then present my findings from interviews and observation, sketching a 'geography' of the

movement. In a section on movement origins, we re-examine the events charted in the background section through the eyes of the people living at Kennedy Road, to understand how and why they 'broke with authority' (Fanon, quoted in Gibson, 2003) and took their grievances to the streets. Here too we begin to see the structures or 'mobilizing mechanisms' that initially 'got people out of their shacks' (Cele, personal interview, 11 November 2005) and have brought sustained, broad-based support. As with their mobilizing structures, the ways that the movement framed their frustrations and cause has been important in gathering support from other shack dwellers, from academics, and from the media, and this article will examine the language of the movement and the support it has attracted. As language and culture are intimately intertwined, examining language will build to an evaluation of the 'culture of struggle', the operating norms of the *Abahlali* movement and this culture's implications for the movement's future. The article will conclude by exploring the direction of the movement and its members' views of institutional politics, including recent negotiations with the municipality around toilets and housing. And because movements are eminently contextual and AbM's context is South Africa, engaging with institutional politics also asks the question of engagement with South Africa's 'first struggle', and the article will thus explore people's understanding of the connections between the fight against apartheid and the shack dwellers' movement.

A Brief History of the Kennedy Road Struggle

Kennedy Road first vaulted into the public eye when approximately 700 people from the settlement blocked Umgeni Road for four hours on a Saturday morning, 21 March. People burned tyres they had brought with them and chanted and sang until the police dispersed them with tear gas and dogs, arresting 14 on charges of public violence. Newspapers and television carried news of the protests and the arrests through the weekend, and for some, this was when Kennedy Road began, or at least when it came into view. In fact, the settlement has existed for at least 30 years, an entirely African settlement in the Indian neighborhood of Clare Estate, but most of this history is not documented anywhere outside of people's memories and the few newspaper articles⁶ that have been written about it since the protests.

As with most informal settlements, many of the residents of Kennedy Road come from more rural areas to the city, building a shack (on which there are no taxes) or renting one that someone else has built. This feature would paint the settlement as a transitional space, where people come in hopes of getting a job and then a formal house to which they bring their family from more rural areas. But even a quick visit reveals that this settlement is full of families and thousands of children, not just adult migrant labourers. Many of these families talk of having come to look for better schools, and because their children can now attend schools in this (mostly Indian) neighbourhood that have opened up to African children

with the end of school segregation, some residents suggest that this precipitated the demographic shift in the settlement from mostly migrant labourers to entire families. The settlement is a hopeful place: near to town and to employment, near schools where children can learn English, and in a middle-class neighborhood where even casual employment outpays anything available in most rural areas.

But the settlement is also visibly filled with material deprivation (Pithouse, 2006). People do not have real houses, but cardboard and mud shacks built onto a hillside next to a dump that smells, they said, and when it rains the floors of the shacks are wet and muddy, and they slip inside of their own homes. Neither do they have water, or adequate toilets, they wrote, but most of all they wrote about electricity. Because few of the shacks are connected to electricity, the residents use paraffin lamps and candles to study and to see at night, but because their house are made of cardboard and are built so close together, when one candle tips over 15 shacks can burn.

Over the years, the municipality has extended all variety of promises to the community, to improve the conditions here – from promising to clean the toilets to promising to build formal houses. One ANC bulletin from just after its first victory in the province in 1999 (ANC, 4 June 1999) names Kennedy Road as a target for housing upgrades, and a 1993 announcement invites Kennedy Road residents specifically to come to a meeting to talk to Nelson Mandela in 1993 about their housing problem – ‘your problem is my problem, your solution is my solution’ (ANC, 9 November 1993). So the hope for and expectation of housing here are not new. The stories people tell of this hope for housing and their relationship with the Government are laced with words like ‘broken promises’ and with feelings of betrayal, and these stories as motivation for their protests will be examined thoroughly in the body of this article. Whether Nelson Mandela’s meeting planned to build houses where the shacks are now or anywhere in Clare Estate, the neighbourhood the settlement is located in, is unclear. More recently, the municipality has told the settlement that ‘this place has been identified and prioritised for relocation. It is ringfenced for slum clearance ... the city’s plan is to move you to the periphery’ (Deputy City Manager Derek Naidoo, quoted in Pithouse, 2005b), as a part of a new slum-clearance policy they appear to have embraced in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup. That policy (Grimmet, 2004) is essentially to build current shack dwellers’ housing in the more rural periphery of the city, but has enjoyed little popularity among the residents of the shacks themselves. The chronology as to when they have been promised the land that they occupy or pieces of adjacent land for the construction of houses versus when they have been threatened with forced relocation is unclear. Likely there have been both at different times. In short, though, residents said that they took to the road to protest when they found out that land along Elf Road, a nearby road, which they had been promised in meetings with their local councillor and with the department of housing as recently as February 2005, was instead leased to a company to build a brickyard on⁷ with no warning given or consultation

made with the settlement community. After scheduling a meeting with the councillor and the owner of the company only for them not to come, the community met and decided to block the road.

After the road was blocked and the 14 protesters were arrested, about 1200 people from the community marched again on the Sydenham police station, demanding that 'if they are criminal we are all criminal' (quoted in Pithouse, 2005b) – the police should either release the 14 or arrest all of them. In Cosmos Ngcobo's account (personal interview, 4 December 2005), the police met the marchers at the petrol station on Clare Road, the main road that Kennedy Road turns off of, and blocked them from going any further. A delegation of five were allowed to continue to the police station, of which he was one, but to no avail: the 14 would not be released. After 10 days in Durban's Westville prison and the *pro bono* intervention of a lawyer, the bail for the 14 was reduced to zero and they were released to celebrations in the community hall. With the intervention of a second lawyer, the charges were dropped.

Two weeks later, on 13 May, around 3000 people from Kennedy Road together with members of five other settlements marched on their councillor, Yacoob Baig, to 'demand land, housing, and his immediate resignation' (Pithouse, 2006). This march was granted a permit, and no one was arrested. The leaders from Foreman Road whom I interviewed did report suspicious tactics leading up the event, though – on the morning of the march they received pamphlets that claimed the march had been organized by the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party) from people they knew were ANC members. Kennedy Road leaders also reported a large, armed military presence at their settlement the night before they marched. Nonetheless, the march went off successfully, and newspapers and billboards that afternoon read 'Massive Protest Rocks Durban' (Pithouse, 2006). From there, *Abahlali baseMjonodolo*, a movement of shack dwellers, coalesced as representatives of other settlements began meeting together.

Several months later, on 14 September, 5000 people – some estimated as many as 8000 – from Kennedy Road and its recently aligned partner settlements marched again on their councillor, Yakoob Baig, enacting a mock funeral to say, in Nonhlanhla Mzobe's words, '[Councillor] Baig, you are dead to us' (personal interview, 10 November 2005). Like the marches before it, this insurgence won attention from and access to the municipal leadership, a phenomenon explored in depth in the section on 'Movement Directions'. In a sign of the way that Kennedy Road has influenced other settlements, on 4 October 2005, Quarry Road, an informal settlement in an adjacent local ward, staged a mock funeral for their councillor as well (Khan and Pithouse, 2005).

Of course, Kennedy Road and AbM are not alone among post-apartheid social movements, and many of the grievances that they bring to the State mirror those of their counterparts around the country. As they describe themselves, it is not that they are dissatisfied with the proposition of democracy but rather with the policies where the government seems *not* to represent their interests, what they

see as the *undemocratic* workings of some state organs of policy. And, when examined carefully, part of what gives rise to these movements is the unfinished business of democratization. Because though they vote and follow politics religiously, in their words, it never ceases to feel to them as though few in the municipal, provincial or national government actually have their interests at heart or are willing to engage with them with openness and respect. So while their causes differ and they draw their support from townships as far apart as Cape Town and Durban, South Africa's new social movements represent a thrust to continue democratization (beyond the regime change), putting the interests of the majority – who also happen to be the poorest – back on the table.

When they talk of why they first took to the road in protest, the people at Kennedy Road tell first of the years that they have lived at the settlement and the ways their frustrations have grown, and then of a desire to bring their conditions into public view. The point at which they place the beginning of the community's anger with the municipality and the reasons they give for turning this anger to action are varied, but together they give a strong sense that, in the eyes of its members, this movement is driven by grievances – with years of promises unfulfilled, with the material deprivation of life in the settlement, and by the indignity of being relocated to a rural periphery away from all the things that they need and want. But the 'frame' that they have employed, as S'bu Zikode reminded me (personal interview, 6 November 2005), is simply one of trying to tell the truth – that their councillor Baig has lied, that this is what it is like to live in a shack, and that land, housing, basic services and respect are what they want and will demand.

Mounting Frustration and the Beginnings of Action

Words like 'promises' and 'betrayal' from the councillors and from other members of the municipal government became themes in all of the narratives of my interviewees, while the number and the scope of these promises and disappointments depended on how long the person had been at Kennedy Road and how much he/she wanted to talk about it. As the people of Kennedy Road tell it, these promises, especially around the time of elections, have been a theme in the life and hopes of their community, but after votes were tallied, the promises remained unfulfilled and hope gave way to disillusionment and then frustration.

Importantly, many of the interviewees remember the names and affiliations of each of the people who had promised them each thing and often remember the exact dates that these things were promised, even five or six years later. This shows the direction of their frustration – towards each of these individuals, and not to a system as a whole.

While such promises left unfulfilled were nothing new to the community, people often said to me, disillusionment gradually gave way to frustration and then to anger until, this past March, everything changed. Frustration spilled into anger over a piece of land along Elf Road which the community had been promised for

the construction of homes, when it became clear to them that their local councillor was not only slow to fulfill his promises, but that he had lied to them outright.

A few weeks before, their elected councillor, Yakoob Baig had promised them in a meeting with the development committee and with officials from the municipality that the adjacent land would be used for developing land. So, says Mzobe, 'when we saw the *ganda ganda*⁸ working down there, we were first happy, but then we thought "if they were building houses for us, why wouldn't they tell us?"' (personal interview, 10 November 2005).

In interviews I questioned people on what exactly had happened in the days leading up to when they burned tyres and blocked the road, and what it was that they were hoping this would accomplish. Where other events in the history of the settlement were described differently and even in contradictory terms by different interviewees, it was striking how completely similar their recollection and descriptors were for that week in March. In the recollection of Derrick Gwala (personal interview, 24 November 2005),⁹ S'bu Zikode (personal interview, 1 December 2005)¹⁰ and of Mondli Mbiko (personal interview, 25 November 2005),¹¹ and nearly every other person I interviewed, the week went exactly this way: seeing the men working down on their 'promised land',¹² just one month after it had been promised to them, they were initially excited but then suspicious – as Nonhlanhla Mzobe put it, 'why would they build us houses without telling us anything?'. After walking down to talk to the men operating the bulldozers and finding out that the men were building a brickyard for the Greystone Company, the community became outraged at what they saw as a complete betrayal. After the committee met to discuss things, they decided to hold a mass meeting, and announced with a loudspeaker that there would be a meeting in the hall. In Mbiko's words, 'we [the leadership committee] asked the people, "what are you thinking about the councillor?" and the community said "we must march!" The committee then held a caucus meeting and gave the go-ahead for the march'. When I pressed him, Zikode said that the people most strongly in favour of the march were the youth, but that the community had reached the decision together, and that it was the voice of the community that was being followed. Putting the same question to others that I interviewed, no one could remember who had originally suggested that they demonstrate, instead saying that the community had decided together. Committee members emphasize that this decision was taken only after their councillor, municipal officials and the owner of the company building the brickyard did not come to a meeting they had scheduled, after they called them repeatedly.

Mobilizing Structures: Legitimacy through Democracy

The community represents itself as thoroughly democratic, at several levels. These democratic organs brought people's frustrations together for a unified action, and served to mobilize the community towards a common goal.

Most conventionally democratic is the way in which the community elects their development committee every year, calling anyone in the community who would come for what they call a 'mass meeting', to nominate people for different positions on the committee and then to vote. Hundreds of people gather in the community hall, voice their opinions of the old leadership and nominate new potential members of the development committee, who can then decline or accept. Community members are nominated for the key leadership positions – chairperson, secretary and seconds to each of these posts – and the community votes on them. People are then nominated to at-large positions, and those receiving the most votes receive positions on the committee.

Mzobe said the committee began years ago, with 'my granny and the old *babas* (fathers) calling a meeting under the tree to talk about things' (personal interview, 10 November 2005), but has adopted its current form only under the leadership of S'bu Zikode. Without fail, everyone I talked to in the community held the committee in deep respect, and admired individually the people on it – especially its main three leaders, Zikode, Mzobe and M'du Ngqulunga.

The internal workings of the committee also have a formal, consultative, participatory character. The meetings I observed usually began with a report from the chairperson, but on any given point, the floor would be opened up to questions and feedback from every person who had something he or she wanted to say. People would give reports back on their 'portfolios' – health, safety and security, and others – and no decision I saw was ever put to a vote, as they usually arrived at a consensus. Asked what they have learned from being on the committee, members talked about the importance of listening to others' ideas, about leadership, and about the importance of 'being together'.

But in the 1990s, people joked that the committee was run by an *induna*, or unelected headman, who would make people pay him 20 rand before he listened to their problems. Those who remember the time said that the committee was timid and poorly run – that they made no protest when the municipality told them they would have to be relocated, that they would never go to meet with the department of housing or anyone in government and that they never consulted with the broader community or called for new elections (which they now do every year). Mzobe's explanation of the period is more forgiving – that these leaders were old, and that they were still operating on the apartheid-era mindset of not talking to the Government because the Government's position was that the settlement was illegal. Few people thought that this committee had really served the community well, and they talk about now versus then in terms of day and night. Anton Zamisa (personal interview, 1 December 2005) speaks of when Zikode was first elected to the committee in 2001¹³ in glowing terms:

I started to see S'bu Zikode, and I thought 'this is a man who knows what he's talking about, I can fight [together] with this guy' ... S'bu opened our eyes. The committee was not so powerful [before], but this one ... we talk about straight things, land, housing, electricity.

The committee also talks to the community more than it ever did before, says System Cele, holding mass meetings where they use a loudspeaker to invite everyone to come. Because the committee holds such legitimacy, decisions that they make and actions that they choose to take enjoy broad popular support. Zikode confirms: 'I've learned the importance of support – the committee would not be democratic unless the entire community has given us complete support' (personal interview, 2 December 2005).

T.N. Lembede (personal interview, 11 November 2005) says that on the morning of the day when they blocked the road, people went around knocking on each other's doors as early as 4 o'clock in the morning, saying, in System Cele's recollection, 'we all need houses, we all must go' (personal interview, 24 November 2005). Referring not specifically to this march but to all of the marches they have initiated, Lembede talked about cajoling people that they must not go to work that day – 'only the grannies, pregnant women and disabled can stay behind'.

Thus people locate the movement's beginning not only in frustrations or anger, but also in a legitimate leadership that promoted the whole community's involvement in decision making. They locate the advent of this culture in Zikode's election to chairperson, which coincided with the turning points that people point to in the history of the community. So while the stories of promises and betrayal are critically important, as are the ways that people moved from feelings of betrayal to anger and action, this action most probably would not have been so calculated or widely participated in without the leadership structure that brought people's feelings together and directed them towards one goal.

Protest Goals

Asked what their goal was when they blocked Umgeni road, most interviewees spoke about trying to make their voice heard, and about trying to bring attention to the ways their councillor had failed them. M'du Ngqulunga put it plainly: 'The idea was trying to create something visible, because the councillor had been hiding this thing, we wanted to show the whole world what was going on' (personal interview, 23 November 2005). Zanele Mbatha agreed: 'We had all these meetings and they didn't listen to us. We wanted to show our anger, so we blocked the road' (personal interview, 24 November 2005). Others mentioned how people could drive by their settlement without really looking at the conditions in which they live, but when the road was blocked and the news cameras came, people across the country saw that 'this is who we are. This is what we want'.¹⁴ System Cele confirms: 'Before, S'bu [Zikode's] committee had several meetings but their voice was not heard ... now that we're protesting, our voice is heard ... our struggle is the voice of silent victims ... we hadn't been able to talk [before]' (personal interview, 11 November 2005). Reflecting on that and other protests, S'bu Zikode says that 'we have been encouraged by our

municipality that the Zulu language cannot be understood by our officials, Xhosa cannot be understood, Sotho cannot be understood – even English cannot be understood. The only language that they understand is us getting into the street. We have seen the result and we have been encouraged’ (personal interview, 6 November 2005).¹⁵

In meetings now they talk about mass demonstrations as one of several tools that they possess to deal with the authorities, and this reflects in part how the movement has become more strategic over time. Some even say that they thought this way at the time of the protest, but most report that they initially demonstrated out of anger and a desire to give themselves a voice.

From a Protest to a Movement

Asked how they felt after the demonstration, people at Kennedy Road expressed initial feelings of confusion over the arrested 14, but emphasized that they also felt as though they had power, and that they could be brave. Anton Zamisa simply said that ‘before we were afraid, and then we were not afraid’ (personal interview, 1 December 2005). This was basically the refrain of everyone that I spoke with – that the march had been a big success, and in Zikode’s words, that it was the foundation of the struggle that has followed, because it brought people together and showed them that they could take matters into their own hands. This excitement mounted after the charges against the 14 imprisoned community members were dropped. Nonhlanhla Mzobe said that as soon as they returned, planning began for the next march as they celebrated their return, almost as if to say that as soon as the 14 returned, they knew they must protest again. In all of my interviews, people spoke of the first protest as the turning point in the community – when they ceased to be afraid, or more pragmatically, when conditions started to change.

While their goal of housing was not immediately met, direct results were seen: the department of sanitation did clean out several dozen toilets, partially renovated the community hall, including its office and crèche, and promised to come back to finish the job. These actions marked a change in policy from the municipality – where before, as the people at Kennedy Road saw it, the municipality had been making conditions unbearable so as to force people to relocate, they were now making concessions that made the place more livable.

Movement Linkages: Growing beyond Kennedy Road

Other Informal Settlements

Members of other informal settlements said that seeing Kennedy Road’s protest had emboldened them and that Kennedy Road’s grievances had resonated with them. Bheki Mncwango, chairperson of the Jadhu Place committee, also in

Councillor Baig's ward, said that he had learned so much from Kennedy Road; that while the councillor was telling lies, he saw that Zikode and the people at Kennedy Road 'were telling the truth' (personal interview, 22 November 2005).¹⁶ People at Kennedy Road now seem conscious of this too: System Cele said that 'first it was Kennedy Road, now it's all the informal settlements. People are learning from here, it's given them a lesson: You must stand up for what you want' (personal interview, 11 November 2005).

Residents in other settlements tell similar stories of broken promises and frustration with the councillor, the department of housing and the ANC. Mnikelo Ndabankulu, a young leader at Foreman Road, often references the Freedom Charter and the ANC election slogans when he speaks:

The ANC said 'a better life for all', but I don't know, it's not a better life for all, especially if you live in the shacks. We waited for the promises from 1994, up to 2004, that's 10 years of waiting for the promises from the government. If we just sit and wait we'll be waiting forever. We got tired of that, so we started *toy toy*. (Personal interview, 5 November 2005)

But exactly how was this message communicated? A few people mentioned hearing word of the first protest on the news, or hearing stories of it during bus rides or at their work. Others, like those from Foreman Road, said that they had always known about Kennedy Road (they are about 2km apart), because the same bus had taken them for ANC rallies. Equally ironic, Bheki Mncwango of Jadhoo Place said that he had met Zikode at a class held at the municipality for development committee chairpersons that Zikode was teaching. Most of the settlements that have since joined mentioned receiving pamphlets about Kennedy Road's next march after hearing news of it through other channels.

William Bogege remembers a film about Kennedy Road that was shown at Foreman in the week leading up to the march in May as a turning point for the settlement's support. Until then, many in his community had been unsure of what was going on at Kennedy Road, but when they saw the film, they wanted to join with Kennedy Road. These settlements' joining would allow them to bring common demands to the municipality as one unified body. For the May march, there were five settlements marching together; when I first started researching Kennedy Road, there were 12; now people report as many as 24.

Nobody I spoke to could remember exactly when it had started or when it had adopted its name, but everyone said that the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (AbM) leadership committee had come out of meetings between the leaders of different settlements in 2005. These meetings bore strong resemblance to the committee meetings at Kennedy Road and if anything, they were more participatory (Pithouse, personal interview, 4 November 2005).¹⁷ Representatives of each settlement attended and were told to give reports back to the leadership committees of each of their respective settlements, and then to bring back the feelings of their settlement to the AbM meetings. Meetings were

formal, and people were often told – usually jokingly – that they were ‘out of order’ if they spoke of something not being addressed or they spoke over someone else. Here too, while the chair and deputy chair spoke often, usually giving updates and summarizing what others had said, everyone was given the chance to speak. And speak they did – the meetings would often last more than four hours – but people seemed to enjoy being there, and the many that I spoke with were very proud to be on the committee and involved in the decision-making process. It was clear too that friendships had formed between the representatives of the different settlements and that they had a strong sense of common cause: Senzo, speaking again, said, ‘All who are working are here for development, whether you’re ANC or IFP or whatever, what unites us is housing’.¹⁸ And as with the Kennedy Road Development Committee, in the seven or eight meetings I attended I never witnessed a decision come to a vote, because people kept talking until consensus was reached.

People interviewed at Kennedy Road expected that, as their struggling won concessions from the Government, other settlements would want to join. As with many phrases, ‘the most important thing we have is our unity’ has now become a part of the common vocabulary of the people involved in AbM. With this, the most frequent answers I received to the question of what people had learned from the struggle were, ‘I’ve learned that we must be together’ and ‘we are strongest together’. When people answered this way, they were usually referencing the spiritual-psychological assurance of togetherness, but some also said explicitly that they saw the strategic advantage: 6000 marchers, and even more voters, wielded a lot more bargaining power than would fewer.

Nearly everyone whom I spoke with at Kennedy Road was pleased with the expansion of their protests and negotiations with the municipality to include other settlements, and they voiced faith in the representatives who were designated to go to these meetings. A few suggested that Kennedy Road should continue to meet with the municipality independently, though, not to fast-track housing but to address concerns specific to Kennedy Road – cleaning the pitlatrines and renovating the community hall.

In general, people were still extremely positive about *Abahlali baseMjondolo* and the work that the settlements were doing together. People seemed proud to live at Kennedy Road, the place where the protests had begun, and they joke that when the police hear that they are from Kennedy Road, they worry and accuse them of inciting everyone else. They also speak of meeting people in taxis and on the streets who have seen them on TV, and sometimes ask them how their settlement can join. I asked most everyone I interviewed whether people at Kennedy Road feared that it would take longer to get houses if they were working with all these other settlements, but no one expressed worry about this. Instead they said that these linkages with other settlements had built feelings of unity and of strength, had been an opportunity to share in each other’s suffering, as System Cele put it, and to capture a strategic advantage via numbers.

Involving the Middle Class

In their descriptions of linkages with other settlements, stories of pamphlets and films about Kennedy Road, along with meetings all over the ward, reveal access to resources that has come through another linkage – with sympathetic academics, a filmmaker and briefly, with two lawyers. These people who have brought advice and skills, (including media-savvy), have made strategic interventions and have connected the movement to networks of resources that have helped it grow. People at Kennedy Road also held uniformly positive views of this involvement.

Some remembered that their scepticism about involving outsiders had eased when they read an article that Richard Pithouse had written about the Kennedy Road protest and about the settlement in the newspaper, the first sympathetic article after several that rehashed the police report of accusing them of inciting violence. Through Pithouse, the 14 arrested settlement members connected with *pro bono* legal counsel from two lawyers, the first reducing their bail to zero – effectively releasing them – and the second getting all charges dropped.¹⁹ Around the same time Aoibheann O’Sullivan made a film titled *Kennedy Road and the Councillor*, giving a short overview of the Kennedy Road struggle from March to June 2005 (Pithouse, 2006). People mentioned her less than the lawyers, but some from other settlements remembered the film as an important mobilizing tool.

Asked how these relationships had benefited the struggle, people usually began with mention of support with accessing t-shirts and sound equipment, and knowledge of ‘how to do *toyi toying* in the right way [without getting people arrested]’. Mondli Mbiko went on to say ‘they’re good people. They’re teaching us about leadership ... [they] take us to the university, [they’re] willing to teach us lots of skills’. He added that they ‘help expose the Government for what they’ve done to the poor’ with radio interviews and newspaper articles (personal interview, 25 November 2005).

Linking to the Media

Beginning with Pithouse’s aforementioned article, he with others have written a series of pieces driven mostly by interviews with people in Kennedy Road that have been published in Durban’s *Mercury*, the national *Mail and Guardian* and the *Sunday Tribune*. These initial articles seem to have won over the sympathies of other journalists, who regularly called Zikode and other AbM activists for comment in a series of articles covering the announcements of the municipality’s plans for a housing development in Phoenix East, a township in Durban. A more recent article titled ‘We Are the Third Force’ (1 December 2005) by S’bu Zikode, was reprinted in the celebrity and pop-culture magazines *Drum*, *Huisgenooit* and *YOU*, with a combined circulation of 5 million readers. Thus through media sympathy, people in Kennedy Road are increasingly able to tell their story in their own words.

When they tell their story, comments Raj Patel, referencing Zikode's recent article in particular, it appeals to people for its narrative coherence and its direct appeal to human experience. He likened it to Desmond Tutu's writing and to a sermon in the school of Christian humanism, using 'experience as the necessary grounds for action because the experience is so appalling' (personal interview, 29 November 2005).

The people at Kennedy Road whom I interviewed speak positively about this coverage, and, as noted before, mentioned with pride meeting people who recognized them (or at least their t-shirts) from television. I tried to explore why they thought the media coverage had been largely sympathetic to their cause, but this did not lead to many responses. Most people did not seem to expect anything other than sympathetic media coverage. Zikode did mention that he thought it was because 'people can now see our suffering', implying something of a snowball effect – the media coverage is sympathetic because the initial coverage showed their suffering sympathetically. But people were very aware of the power that the media holds, and the power that they now hold with the force of the media on their side. System Cele, like many others, remarked about how embarrassed the councillors must be for the whole country to see mock-funerals performed for them by their own constituencies.

Movement Directions

More recent marches have produced a series of negotiations with the municipality over housing, and the mayor recently announced a partnership with the private real estate developer Moreland for building mixed-income housing in Phoenix East. Not surprisingly, this has been met with annoyance and anger from people at Kennedy Road and other informal settlements. Here again, they say that it feels like the municipality is making decisions for them without consulting them, and that there is perfectly good land in Clare Estate that could be developed which the municipality will not give them because they are not wealthy: 'All the municipality does is talk politics, not about bringing development' has become a part of the common language that people use. Even if it only 'talking politics', the municipality has taken much greater interest in Kennedy Road and in AbM these past few months, and this section will chart the trajectory of the movement and gauge people's views of the government.

Engaging Institutional Politics: Views and Opportunities

For all the disillusionment with politicians and what movement members see as their empty words, the movement will always be tied to these politics. Most everything that the movement is demanding – land, housing, electricity, water and sanitation – must come directly from the government or at least be funded by it. In any analysis of the direction of the movement, then, gauging people's

attitudes towards institutional politics and the movement's engagement with them proves crucial. Theorists of social movements concur: the notion of 'political opportunities' as shaping social movements is as old as the discipline of social movement theory. An honest appraisal of Kennedy Road and of *Abahlali base-Mjondolo* would critique conventional theories of political opportunities, though, as Kennedy Road's struggle has not been passively shaped by these opportunities but has created many of its own.

Even a quick glance at the shacks or at the community hall covered with and sometimes held together by faded ANC stickers and posters reveals the settlement's political leanings. Each person whom I interviewed said that he or she is a committed member of the ANC, and mentioned that most of the other people in the settlement were as well – some even expressed surprised that I would ask such a question. Some said that they had been members of the ANC, the ANC Youth League or the UDF (United Democratic Front) during the 1980s and early 1990s, and one cited the political violence then as the reason he had moved to the settlement. Accordingly, the settlement has voted solidly ANC in all the elections before the emergence of their struggle.²⁰

Asked why they supported the ANC when their conditions had remained largely unchanged, most people emphasized that they were not protesting against the ANC or the government, but that they were protesting against the councillor and the 'laziness' and unresponsiveness of people in the eThekweni municipality. Nonhlanhla Mzobe said, 'The ANC is good, it's the people', but went on to say that the most local part of the ANC, of which she had been a part, was 'all politics ... they don't care about development' (personal interview, 10 November 2005).

People seemed to accept that delivery would be slow – Mondli Mbiko is a realist, emphasizing that 'we have been oppressed for 300 years ... things are not going to change overnight' (personal interview, 25 November 2005). What was most frustrating to S'bu Zikode was the *way* that the municipality operated, not its slow delivery. 'We are not aiming at opposing the Government', he said, 'but aiming at providing a *real* platform of togetherness – business, the Government, and the poor. We are not expecting the Government to feed us like children, we are willing to contribute whatever we can, but we need to demand that platform', expressing the settlement's desire to be consulted and informed (personal interview, 6 November 2005).

While many people's frustrations were directed entirely towards the councillor, others had a sense of broader forces at work. Thembisio Bhengu said that the settlement lowered the real estate prices for the people living in formal houses in the neighborhood, and because they paid taxes, the councillors would work to serve these people more.²¹ Because the residents of these houses are mostly Indian, more people cited racism – the councillor did not care about black people. System Cele and S'bu Zikode talk often of how the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer, which Zikode credits to the government's economic policy. Cele attributes it to governments' general

neglect of their citizens, particularly their poorest citizens, and talks of how this is happening all over South Africa and all over the world. But even those who speak of broader forces at work do not forget the view that everyone shares of the councillor: that he is a liar.

Since they have begun marching, people say, they have both exposed the councillor and circumvented him. Several people noted that where before they had meetings with the councillor (and that he often would not come), they now meet directly with city managers, with the mayor and with the heads of departments – including housing. Thus far, most people said that these meetings had been a far better experience. Derrick Gwala said that while he thought the councillor would never keep his promises, the mayor was not the same (Wines, 2005).²² Others noted that these people were obviously more powerful and would be able to get things moving, and bring development, more quickly.

Negotiating the Road Ahead

Though no one suggested this explicitly, it became clear that they had learned lessons from their interaction with the councillor that are now useful in their meetings with the mayor, Mlaba, and with other city managers. The movement now demands every promise in writing, along with a timeline for these projects to hold the city accountable. And though in the current series of meetings with the municipality they have yet to do so, they hold the threat of protest out if the officials do not stay accountable to the promises that they make. In addition, the relationships they have forged with members of the media leave them other channels to hold the municipality to do what it says.

In this way, the movement creates ‘political opportunities’, rather than only being shaped by them, and has done so more effectively as its leaders have gained experience. Each protest that they have mounted has won some concessions – even if small – from the government. After the first protest, the city cleaned several dozen toilets; after the September march, the city agreed to remove the settlement’s waste and provide repairs and chairs for its community hall; as I concluded the researching of this article the Department of Health had commissioned a crew of settlement residents to clean the remaining toilets for moderate pay. And while conditions are still bad, these concessions represent a fundamental shift from forcibly removing residents to allowing them to stay. The protests have also given the movement new access to the eThekweni political establishment. The extent to which these connections will lead to development is as yet unclear. What is clear, though, is the individual resolve of the people in the movement. Every single person I spoke to said something like, ‘we will not stop struggling till we get what we need’, and a few even said that they would never stop struggling – that there will always be more people who need houses, and that even when they get houses, they will demand of the government ‘the better life for all’²³ that they have been promised.

Looking Back: Connections with the 'First Struggle'

Perhaps the biggest political opportunity that people noted was the right to march in relative freedom and safety, which they often contrast thankfully with the marches a few of them participated in against apartheid. Any talk of struggle in South Africa immediately recalls the struggle against apartheid, and I was interested to see how people saw apartheid – and the struggle against it – as informing the movement that they have catalysed now. The consensus from my interviews was that the struggle from Kennedy Road roots itself deeply in the struggle against apartheid, both in the way that people conceive its goals and the culture that they bring to it.

When asked how the struggles were connected, people most often refer to the similarity in goals: 'We are fighting for our rights, for human rights'. Among those who said this, there was not agreement as to whether they were even different struggles. Some thought that struggle had been ongoing, others thought that it had been renewed or that this movement from Kennedy Road was completely new. The people most involved in the leadership of Kennedy Road's protests and negotiations have the deepest sense of history – where others laughed at my question or said that they did not think about apartheid or the UDF any more, those more involved seemed to remember it often. Many cited a 'partial victory' over apartheid, some to mean that the struggle against apartheid had not been fully won, and that they needed to 'win' houses and land for people; others to say that the outcome of the negotiated settlement had not been fully satisfactory. Sibusiso Mzimela (personal interview, 29 November 2005) put this most eloquently:

The struggle versus apartheid has been a little bit achieved, though not yet, not in the right way. That's why we're still in the struggle, to make sure things are done right. We're still on the road, we're still grieving for something to be achieved, we're still struggling for more.

Of those I interviewed, most saw the struggle against apartheid as critical to their current fight. Implicitly, people pointed to the struggle against apartheid as a necessary prerequisite to the work that they are doing now. For some this was as simple as the right to protest and the right to basically fair legal proceedings if they were arrested; others understood that the realization of constitutional socioeconomic rights which they are now pushing for could not have been demanded under the old regime. On this point, T.N. Lembede is careful to note that the target of the current struggle is different as well. They are not fighting against the whole government, but against members of the municipality who 'are lazy' and have not served them well (Zikode, quoted in Patel and Pithouse, 2005b).²⁴

The current movement has also connected powerfully to the culture of the struggle against apartheid. Many of the songs that they sing in protest are songs

from the 'first struggle', with their lyrics reworked as necessary to fit the day and the message. Mnikelo Ndabankulu informed me that the song sung in a video that I took of the Foreman Road rally was directly from the UDF: '*yonkindawo umzabalazo uyasivumela*', or 'everywhere we have the right to struggle'. Even the tactic of blocking a road with burning tyres, people acknowledged, was borrowed directly from the anti-apartheid protest tactics. Anton Zamisa said, 'when I was out there on the road, I thought to myself, hey, this is like UDF' (personal interview, 1 December 2005). Others did not think of it that way specifically – for many, living in KwaZulu-Natal, the struggle against apartheid had been more characterized by violence with Inkatha. For these people, they were quick to differentiate that apartheid had been fought against with violence and that they are fighting now for land, housing and basic services by peaceful means.

Conclusion

As this analogy with the struggle against apartheid reveals, the struggle at Kennedy Road has been as much for dignity and respect as it has been for the delivery of housing, land and basic services. Sometimes they make this push for dignity explicit, in calls for municipal officials to come and meet with them in the settlement, where they live, instead of at City Hall and with analogies of the rising of the third Nelson Mandela – themselves. In other places it is less explicit, but the demand is no less strong. For as they march, they say they are marching for housing, for land and against forced removals, but they are also marching to be seen – not only by curious tourists photographing them, but to be seen on their own terms. And though the settlement, and likely most of the people living there, has suffered great indignity, time spent observing one of the settlement's meetings reveals the lives of people who still respect one another deeply.

And perhaps this respect is the deepest critique that the movement from Kennedy Road offers to theorists of social movements. Most social movement theory emphasizes social struggle as somehow apart from the struggle that people wage in their day-to-day lives: at Kennedy Road, to get one's laundry to hang on the line without falling into the mud, to eke out an income to feed a family and to fall asleep at night in a damp shack filled with insects. But these small, daily struggles animate the broader struggle that the settlement, with its partners, has mounted. Because it should not be a struggle to fall asleep at night, people wake up early the next morning to march; because people do not want their children to suffer the indignities that they have in order to find employment, they say that they will not stop struggling when they have got houses, or land, but only when their children can learn freely and meaningfully, when their lives feel full.

Both the politics of the Kennedy Road settlement and now the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* movement embody, in their communities, much of the way that they want to see the world work. At Kennedy Road, they create the space for even their poorest and least educated neighbours to offer their opinions, in

hopes that the municipality will, in turn, create a space for the settlement's voice to be heard. In *Abahlali baseMjondolo* meetings, they consult together and arrive at decisions in collaboration, in hopes that the municipality will consult with them over the future of their community and its surroundings. Most of all, the community organizes itself to respond with concrete action to address the glaring desperation its most vulnerable face, perhaps in hope that the government will respond to the desperate conditions of these settlements.

Notes

1. This article was researched between 5 November and 12 December 2005. Since its completion *Abahlali* has grown significantly in terms of its support within more settlements, its expansion into rural areas, the inner city and various townships and its local, national and international media presence. All commentators seem to agree that it is now the largest social movement in the country.
2. South Africans use this phrase to describe the period since 1994.
3. These movements bring their grievances primarily to the State, instead of some other party. For contrast, take many labour movements, whose primary target is factory owners or company executive boards.
4. Literally, 'the people who live in the shacks'.
5. In Habermas's sense of a broad, participatory forum whereby those at the 'bottom' are able to give their input and a decision is reached on which those in authority act.
6. Richard Pithouse's (2005a) *Coffin for the Councillor* reviews the key events in the settlement in the year since the road blockade.
7. In fact the motivations and events surrounding the road blockade are more complex, and are examined at length in the 'Mounting Frustration and the Beginnings of Action' section.
8. Zulu for bulldozers.
9. A shopkeeper, gospel singer and committee member. Interviewed through System Cele.
10. Chairperson of the Kennedy Road Development Committee.
11. A print-maker and development committee treasurer (though he jokes that this isn't a difficult job as they don't have any money).
12. Members of the community also use this phrase consistently, referring to the land on Elf Road.
13. Zikode recounted that he was elected for chairperson in 2001 and 2002, but in 2003 when he was elected he declined the position because 'there was too much competition around the position' (personal interview, 6 December 2005).
14. It seems like this phrase was originally Zikode's but is now used widely.
15. He now repeats it in many of the speeches he makes.
16. Interviewed through Thembisio Bhengu and System Cele.
17. Interestingly, it seems that interaction with Kennedy Road and other *Abahlali baseMjondolo* settlements is producing a wave of democratization across other settlements. At Foreman Road, the area committee, which had been supporting the councillor because of small patronage that he gave them, is being challenged by a younger leadership doing more work to consult with community members and, with Kennedy Road, are protesting for land and housing.
18. Meeting, 15 November 2005 at Juba Place.
19. Though it did not come up in interviews as often as I expected, this intervention was clearly critical to the resolve of the movement. Around the same time, members of another Durban informal settlement in Cato Manor also mounted protests, but the leaders were arrested and detained and no follow-up demonstrations have been reported.

20. However, all the settlements affiliated to *Abahlali baseMjondolo* boycotted the 1 March 2006 local government elections.
21. He also talked about the privatization of state-owned industries as making it harder to get employment.
22. This could be because he has not had as much interaction with him. Mnikelo Ndabankulu said that Mayor Mlaba had come to Foreman Road and promised them land in the previous election (five years ago) that has yet to be acted on. The march at Foreman Road – which was banned by the city – was to be on Mlaba's office, but this time not to demand his resignation but that he hear the people's demands and respond himself. Some Foreman Road residents took a far more negative view of Mlaba, however. After the march was banned by City Manager Mike Sutcliffe and the police had forcibly quarantined people in the settlement an effigy of Mayor Mlaba was burnt to great enthusiasm under the 'meeting tree'.
23. A perennial ANC campaign slogan.
24. Powerfully, they even liken Nelson Mandela to Jesus Christ, but put the poor people of the world as the next messiah – one who both points to the truth and redeems.

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