After a schoolgirl died in a shack dwellers' protest in Cato Crest, Nathi Olifant and Ayanda Mhlanga look at Abahlali baseMjondolo — its power base, funders, philosophy and leaders.

Two years from now Abahlali baseMjondolo — shack dwellers, loosely translated — will turn 10.

The movement has been waging a social war that has grabbed the attention of local and international media and boasts it represents about 500,000 homeless people.

The movement was started in early 2006 and its leader, Sibu Zikode, announced its arrival with a paper. "We are the Third Force."

The widely published paper described how the shack dwellers' movement had given hope to thousands in Durban while accused of being part of the Third Force, a label for those deemed to have betrayed the Struggle in the apartheid era — particularly in the years between 1990 and 1994.

Zikode's paper was published in November 2005, rapidly translated into Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu and widely republished in newspapers and popular magazines.

Abahlali claims its newspapers are probably the most widely republished piece of journalism in post-apartheid South Africa.

With most of its members in Durban, Abahlali says it is the largest organisation of the militant poor in post-1994 South Africa.

Its original event was a road blockade organised from the Kennedy Road settlement in protest against the sale of land to a local industrialist.

The local councillor had long promised the land would be developed for houses for shack dwellers.

The movement grew rapidly and now has tens of thousands of supporters from more than 30 settlements.

Since they're often at loggerheads with the municipality and law enforcement agencies, arrests are common.

Abahlali says it has developed a sustained voice for shack dwellers in public spaces and occupied and marched to the offices of local councillors, police stations, municipal offices, newspaper offices and city hall in actions that have put thousands of people on the streets.

The movement refuses to engage in party politics and boycotts elections.

It has been attacked by both the ANC and the DA, with both trying to woo Abahlali into their ranks, to no avail.

City authorities have accused the movement of being ultra-leftist, a DA plot and being underwritten by foreign right-wingers.

Abahlali organised a highly successful boycott of the March 2006 local government elections under the slogan "no land, no house, no vote."

Among the victories notched up, it has democratised the governance of many settlements, stopped evictions in a number of them, won access to schools, stopped the industrial development of the land promised to Kennedy Road, forced officials, offices and projects to "come down to the people" and mounted vigorous social challenges.

The key demand is for "land and housing in the city" but it has also successfully politicised and fought for an end to forced evictions and for access to education and the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, health care and refuse removal as well as bottom-up popular democracy.

In some settlements, the movement has succeeded in establishing creches, gardens, and sewing collectives.

It has also provided support for people living with or made orphans by AIDS.

It has also organised a 16-team football league and puts on quarterly all-night multi-genre music competitions.

Sibu Zikode... leading the militant poor.

WHAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES SAY

DA: Check on housing allocation

IN THE wake of unrest in the Cato Crest area, the DA said it had written to Premier Senzo Mchunu requesting the establishment of a commission of inquiry to look into all housing delivery matters within Durban's Cato Crest informal settlement.

Buoyed by Western Cape developments, where Premier Helen Zille got Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa to establish a commission of enquiry into alleged police inefficiency in Khayelitsha, the DA in KZN said the commission should cover ongoing allegations of unlawful evictions, illegal contractors, unfair allocations and any corrupt activity.

DA MPL George Marais said the request comes after the fatal shooting of a teenage girl, Nqobile Nkuto, early this week, amid a violent protest at the informal settlement after a standoff between police and protesters.

"Events at Cato Crest have gone beyond the control of the eThekwini Municipality and metro police. The premier must intervene if further unrest and death are to be prevented."

"The situation at Cato Crest is the result of the collapse of the municipality's housing department. The DA in eThekwini previously submitted two notices of motion to the council, calling for a new, transparent housing allocation policy."

Marais said the DA had requested investigations into allegedly dodgy housing allocations and had marched to city hall to call on the mayor to answer for illegal evictions.

ANC: Poor used to fund social war

THE ANC has accused Abahlali baseMjondolo of "using the poor" to further its own agenda.

Although the ANC did not name Abahlali, merely because the party does not recognise the movement, provincial secretary Sihle Zikalala said this week they had noted the recent spate of so-called public protests.

The party said some organisations mobilised to create social instability so that they could emerge as community leaders.

"We are certain that the ANC government has delivered a lot for our people in creating a better life for all, but we are aware a backlog still needs to be addressed urgently," said Zikalala.

He said the challenges did not mean protesters were justified in undermining basic service delivery that had been achieved so far in their areas, resorting to violence or property damage.

"It is very difficult to maintain the gains if social unrest comes to the fore. Policing the townships is a difficult mission that needs to be attended to," he said.

Zikalala said the ANC was "very concerned that a category of people are using the social unrest and political marginalisation as a ploy to impose themselves on the community and establish themselves."

"We say these are people who used to fund the social war," he said.

"Some of these community leaders who used to fund the social war are now trying to come in and benefit from people's misfortunes."

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The fight for...\\n
Cato Crest informal settlement. Some of the people living here say they have been waiting for an RDP house for up to 10 years. Picture: DOCTOR NGCOBO

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He said the challenges did not mean people's emotions should be manipulated to prompt people to go on violent protests that sometimes compromised the lives of others.

"It is the government's responsibility to maintain law and order without taking the lives of protesters. Two wrongs do not make a right. The ANC provincial executive committee welcomes the investigation by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate into the Cato Crest killing of a 17-year-old girl. Trigger-happy policeundermine the integrity of the service and need to be isolated."

Zikalala said the ANC wanted to warn opportunistic individuals who used bread and butter issues to manipulate people's emotions.

"We also call on eThekwini Municipality and other municipal leaders to speedily resolve issues of service delivery as they become a rallying point for social upheaval," he said.

### Who pays the bills and bailouts

IT'S not known how much the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement has in bank accounts or who audits the books, but a number of donors are listed on its website.

The main source of funding is the South African Development Fund: contributors include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Broadway Cares, Equity Fights AIDS, Calamus Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Cobble Creek Foundation and European Climate Foundation.

Abahlali says it has "gratefully" accepted small donations for projects from Emante et Fraternite, The Church Land Programme, X-Y, Anarchist Black Cross, ecumenical church organisations and War on Want.

Amnesty International has helped with legal costs and Mute Magazine, People's House and the Omyx Foundation have invested books, journals and films in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library.

Friends of Workers' Education in South Africa have also made literary donations.

Other known donors include Pietermaritzburg's Gift of the Givers, St Elizabeth's Church in New Jersey, the US, Bishop Rubin Phillip and the Ota Benga Alliance.

Anonymous donations from Italy, US and San Francisco have helped with the aftermath of fires.

The website says it has rejected "breyani money" – intended to cost-opt or with strings attached.

Abahlali claims its annual budget has always been significantly less than the modest annual budget of one RDI employee.

"The movement has been careful to organise in a way that is not dependent on donor support. It remains entirely unprofessionalised."

Abahlali says all decisions about money are taken collectively, publicly and democratically in open weekly meetings and all donations should be channelled through its official structures.

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**The fight for housing allocation in Cato Crest informal settlement.**

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**WHAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES SAY**

- **DA:** Check on housing allocation
- **ANC:** Poor used to further agenda

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Leader ‘knows pain’ in shacks

Y DAY Sbu Zikode toyi-toys with the poor, the homeless, the landless and the displaced, demanding housing and basic services. At night he goes home to a warm bed in a solid roof, electricity and running water.

The leader of Abahlali baseMjondolo sees nothing wrong with this. Zikode, 38, said he and his family were able to move into the house in Clare Estate because of a “slight improvement” in his life. He would not be drawn on how much rent he pays.

“IT’s true I no longer live in a shack, but what they forgot to tell you is how I was chased from Kennedy Road in 2009 and escaped an assassination by the ANC in 2009 that resulted in the death of two people. Everything has its place: the pots, pans and plates stacked neatly in shelves with no doors, the hats and bags hung on the wall and stacked buckets with stored water.

She rent a shack for a while but had to move out because of the constant threats.

“She was to be buried at Nongoma outside KwaZulu-Natal. Her one-bedroom shack is the only permanent space for her in our hearts,” said Tati.

Everybody knew that Nzuza loved to sing, she was known for always singing gospel songs.

Richard Pithouse

Richard Pithouse, Rhodes University, and Abahlali baseMjondolo member

“The with two people dead and another two in hospital, we face a serious crisis, where activists are assassinated.” said Richard Pithouse, a political lecturer at Rhodes University, referring to the assassinations of Abahlali activists earlier this year.

“We are in the midst of a slow Marikana. No one should be assassinated.”

Pitouse said Abahlali had a lot of support from communities and achieved its aims by presenting many forced evictions from shack settlements around the

Advocate Ishmael Semenya SC

General Council of the Bar

The proscribed eviction battles between members of Abahlali baseMjondolo and eThekwini Municipality in Cato Crest area have raised the ire of one of the most powerful legal bodies in the country, the General Council of the Bar.

While the chairman, advocate Ishmael Semenya SC, would not say if the Bar considered any legal action against those seen to be persecuting Cato Crest residents, the council stressed section 26 of the constitution entrenches the right of access to advocate housing and the right of access to

Mary de Haas

violence monitor, sociologist

ABAHALI is quite powerful in that it has supporters all over the country and internationally and enjoys support from faith-based groups and a number of academics.

What drives the unrest is the lack of transparency on the allocation of houses, said Mary de Haas, adding that political interference was a big factor.

We want justice, says the aunt of slain schoolgirl

AYANDA MHLANGA

THREE women sat on a matress in the single-room shack where Nqobile Nzuza lived in the Cato Crest informal settlement where the 17-year-old was shot during a protest over land.

The chairs were set out in the room for her memorial service. She was to be buried at KwaMaphumulo outside KwaDukuza (Stanger). Some of her school friends sang songs, while the women sat, draped in black, mourning.

Nqobile’s stepmother, Cabangile Nzuza, and brother, Zethu Nzuza, with protests because she had been saved. We want justice. We were very upset when we saw the that the police officer who did this was still free.”

Philphe said she would miss Nzuza’s singing, especially while she cooked.

Nzuza’s school closed at 11.30am on Friday for pupils to attend her memorial service.

Nqobile Nzuza’s father, Dumisani, knows a photograph of his daughter who was allegedly shot dead by police at Cato Crest.

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Police are out in force after Bellair Road was blocked by litter during Cato Crest housing protests by members of Abahlali baseMjondolo.

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Everybody knew that Nzuza loved to sing, she was known for always singing gospel songs.

Silindile Tati, a fellow pupil at Bonela Secondary School, said she still could not believe her friend was dead.

"We still go into her class­room and expect to see her there," said Tati.

She said Nzuza had not encouraged her friends to visit her, saying that there was vio­lence in the area.

She last saw her friend dur­ing school holidays when she and her mother were in the area.

"We talked about going back to school. She was supposed to go to a church event with us on the 27th but she ended up not being able to make it.

"There will always be a space for her in our hearts," said Tati.

Nqobile Nzuza’s father, Dumisani, holds a photograph of his daughter who was allegedly shot dead by police at Cato Crest.

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"We felt we were being undermined because the centre wanted to represent us, instead of allowing us to participate, so we cut ties with them," said Zikode.

Police officers and municipal law enforcement officials have also been accused of causing tension.

Because many of the Abahlali members are recent settlers especi­ally in eThekwini, disgruntled for regulations is often the cause of friction between shack dwellers and the authorities.

The tensions are fueled mostly by the following:

• Regular eviction battles between members of the Bar and the authorities.

• Lack of transparency on the allocation of houses.

• Perceived unfair allocation of houses.

• Demolition of shacks.

• Political tensions.

• Police violence.

• Unauthorised marches and protests.

• Regular road blockades.

• Removal of councillors.

The flashpoints

WHILE both the eThekwini Munici­pality and Abahlali baseMjondolo have found themselves on the wrong side of the law, the struggle to get rid of informal settlements and land grab has been fuelled by several factors.

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The links

ABAHALALI baseMjondolo has a few organisations that fall under its umbrella.

According to its website, the movement is in solidarity with the Rural Network, Unemployed People’s Move­ment, Church Land Pro­gramme and Landless Peo­ple’s Movement.

These groups all advo­cate rights for the poor, including access to hous­ing, accommodation, land, basic and social services.

Almost all claim not to be politically aligned.

In December 2006 Abahlali severed ties with the Centre for Civil Society, an entity of the University of Natal-Zululand.

The reason for this, S’bu Zikode said, was due to exclusion from the Social Movement Indaba.

We felt we were being undermined because the centre wanted to represent us, instead of allowing us to participate, so we cut ties with them," said Zikode.

A mobile phone with the number 073 890 1245 was left at the scene of the shooting, with the message "Nqobile’s life orientation teacher, Thobile Binyela, described her as a pleasant pupil. "She always had a smile on her face. Even though she had problems, she came to school and was always positive. I never saw her sad or depressed. She was never rude to her educators."

"Nqobile was never part of protests because she had been saved. We want justice. We were very upset when we saw the that the police officer who did this was still free."

\[Nqobile’s stepmother, Zethu Nzuza, and her grandmother, pictures: BONGANI MBATHA\]
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Nzuza’s aunt Philile, with
whom she lived since she was
nine months old, said her niece
had been gone from the house
for less than 30 minutes to
watch the protest when she
received a call that Nzuza had
been shot.

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the protest — she would always
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