

Abahlali baseMjondolo

Speeches and Writings

Volume One

2005–2009





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4 October 2005 – 4 October 2026 · Twenty-one years of struggle

This is one of eight volumes that together collect the statements, memoranda, speeches and writings of Abahlali baseMjondolo, from the struggles that led to its founding on 4 October 2005 to its twenty-first anniversary on 4 October 2026.

This volume collects speeches, lectures, essays, interviews and other writings by members of Abahlali baseMjondolo, compiled from the archive at abahlali.org and from other publications. They are reproduced as they were given or first published, in the order of their dates.

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NOVEMBER 2005

Essay · S'bu Zikode

We are the Third Force

First published in November 2005

The shack dwellers' movement that has given hope to thousands of people in Durban is always being accused of being part of the Third Force. In newspapers and in all kinds of meetings this is said over and over again. They even waste money investigating the Third Force. We need to address this question of the Third Force so that people don't become confused.

I must warn those comrades, government officials, politicians and intellectuals who speak about the Third Force that they have no idea what they are talking about. They are too high to really feel what we feel. They always want to talk for us and about us but they must allow us to talk about our lives and our struggles.

We need to get things clear. There definitely is a Third Force. The question is what is it and who is part of the Third Force? Well, I am Third Force myself. The Third Force is all the pain and the suffering that the poor are subjected to every second in our lives. The shack dwellers have many things to say about the Third Force. It is time for us to speak out and to say this is who we are, this is where we are and this how we live. The life that we are living makes our communities the Third Force. Most of us are not working and have to spend all day struggling for small money. AIDS is worse in the shack settlements than anywhere else. Without proper houses, water, electricity, refuse removal and toilets all kinds of diseases breed. The causes are clearly visible and every Dick, Tom and Harry can understand. Our bodies itch every day because of the insects. If it is raining everything is wet – blankets and floors. If it is hot the mosquitoes and flies are always there. There is no holiday in the shacks. When the evening comes – it is always a challenge. The night is supposed to be for relaxing and getting rest. But it doesn't happen like that in the jondolos. People stay awake worrying about their lives. You must see how big the rats are that will run across the small babies in the night. You must see how people have to sleep under the

bridges when it rains because their floors are so wet. The rain comes right inside people's houses. Some people just stand up all night.

But poverty is not just suffering. It threatens us with death every day. We have seen how dangerous being poor is. In the Kennedy Road settlement we have seen how Mhlengi Khumalo, a one year old child, died in a shack fire last month. Seven others have died in fires since the eThekweni Metro decided to stop providing electricity to informal settlements. There are many Mhlengis all over our country. Poverty even threatens people in flats. In Bayview, in Chatsworth, a woman died of hunger earlier this year – she was fearing to tell the neighbours that she had no food and she died, alone.

Those in power are blind to our suffering. This is because they have not seen what we see, they have not felt what we are feeling every second, every day. My appeal is that leaders who are concerned about peoples' lives must come and stay at least one week in the jondolos. They must feel the mud. They must share 6 toilets with 6 000 people. They must dispose of their own refuse while living next to the dump. They must come with us while we look for work. They must chase away the rats and keep the children from knocking the candles. They must care for the sick when there are long queues for the tap. They must have a turn to explain to the children why they can't attend the Technical College down the hill. They must be there when we bury our children who have passed on in the fires, from diarrhoea or AIDS.

For us the most important struggle is to be recognised as human beings. During the struggle prior to 1994 there were only two levels, two classes – the rich and the poor. Now after the election there are three classes – the poor, the middle class and the rich. The poor have been isolated from the middle class. We are becoming more poor and the rest are becoming more rich. We are on our own. We are completely on our own.

Our President Mbeki speaks politics – our Premier Ndebele, and Shilowa in Gauteng and Rasool in the Western Cape, our Mayor Mlaba and mayors all over the country speak politics. But who will speak about the genuine issues that affect the people every day – water, electricity, education, land, housing? We thought local government would minimise politics and focus on what people need but it all becomes politics.

We discovered that our municipality does not listen to us when we speak to them in Zulu. We tried English. Now we realise that they won't understand

Xhosa or Sotho either. The only language that they understand is when we put thousands of people on the street. We have seen the results of this and we have been encouraged. It works very well. It is the only tool that we have to emancipate our people. Why should we stop it?

We have matured in our suffering. We had a programme to find a way forward. Our programme was to continue with the peaceful negotiations with the authorities that first started ten years ago. But our first plan was undermined. We were lied to. We had to come up with an alternative plan.

The 16th of February 2005 was the dawn of our struggle. On that day the Kennedy Road committee had a very successful meeting with the chair of the housing portfolio of the executive committee of the municipality, the director of housing and the ward councillor. They all promised us the vacant land on the Clare Estate for housing. The land on Elf Road was one of the identified areas. But then we were betrayed by the most trusted people in our city. Just one month later, without any warning or explanation, bulldozers began digging the land. People were excited. They went to see what was happening and were shocked to be told that a brick factory was being built there.

Later, when we blocked the road, our local councillor, a man put into power by our votes and holding our trust and hopes told the police "Arrest these people they are criminals". The police beat us, their dogs bit us and they arrested 14 of us. We asked what happened to the promised land. We were told "Who the hell are you people to demand this land?" This betrayal mobilised the people. The people who betrayed us are responsible for this movement. Those people are the second force.

Our movement started with 14 arrests – we called them the 14 heroes. Now we have 14 settlements united together as Abahlali baseMjondolo [shack dwellers]. Each settlement meets once a week and the leaders of all the settlements meet once a week. We are prepared to talk but if that doesn't work we are prepared to use our strength. We will do what ever it costs us to get what we need to live safely.

We have learnt from our experience that when you want to achieve what you want, when you want to achieve what is legitimate by peaceful negotiations, by humbleness, by respecting those in authority your plea becomes criminal. You will be deceived for more than ten years, you will be fooled and undermined.

This is why we have resorted to the streets. When we stand there in our thousands we are taken seriously.

The struggle that started in Kennedy Road was the beginning of a new era. We are aware of the strategies that the police are coming with to demoralise and threaten the poor. We don't mind them building the jails for us and hiring more security if they are not prepared to listen to what we are saying. It is important for every shack dwellers to know that we are aware of what is happening in Alexander in Johannesburg, in P.E., in Cape Town. We know that our struggle is not by itself. We have sent our solidarity. We will not rest in peace until there is justice for the poor – not only in Kennedy Road there are many Kennedy Roads, many Mhlengis, many poor voices that are not heard and not understood. But we have discovered the language that works. We will stick with it. The victims have spoken. We have said enough is enough.

It must be clear that this is not a political game. This movement is a kind of social tool by which the community hopes to get quicker results. This has nothing to do with politics or parties. Our members are part of every political organisation that you may think of. This is a non political movement. It will finish its job when land and housing, electricity and basic services have been won and poverty eliminated. It is enough for us to be united until our people have achieved what is wanted – which is basic. But until that is materialised we will never stop.

The community has realised that voting for parties has not brought any change to us – especially at the level of local government elections. We can see some important changes at national level but at local level who ever wins the elections will be challenged by us. We have been betrayed by our own elected councillor. We have decided not to vote. The campaign that has begun – 'No Land, No House, No Vote', is a campaign that has been agreed upon in all 14 settlements.

We are driven by the Third Force, the suffering of the poor. Our betrayers are the Second Force. The First Force was our struggle against apartheid. The Third Force will stop when the Fourth Force comes. The Fourth Force is land, housing, water, electricity, health care, education and work. We are only asking what is basic – not what is luxurious. This is the struggle of the poor. The time has come for the poor to show themselves that we can be poor in life but not in mind.

For us time has been a very good teacher. People have realised so many things. We have learnt from the past – we have suffered alone. That pain and suffering has taught us a lot. We have begun to realise that we are not supposed to be living under these conditions. There has been a dawn of democracy for the poor. No one else would have told us – neither our elected leaders nor any officials would have told us what we are entitled to. Even the Freedom Charter is only good in theory. It has nothing to do with the ordinary lives of poor. It doesn't help us. It is the thinking of the masses of the people that matters. We have noted that our country is rich. More airports are being built, there are more developments at the Point water front, more stadiums are being renovated, more money is floating around, even being lent to Mugabe. But when you ask for what is basic you are told that there is no money. It is clear that there is no money for the poor. The money is for the rich. We have come to the decision of saying 'enough is enough.' We all agree that something must be done.

NOVEMBER 2005

Interviews · Nonhlanhla Mzobe, Jerome Bhengu, Mnikelo Ndabankulu, William Bogege

Interviews with Nonhlanhla Mzobe, Jerome Bhengu, Mnikelo Ndabankulu and William Bogege

Interviews by Jacob Bryant, November 2005

Transcribed Interview with Nonhlanhla Mzobe

Princess Nonhlanhla Mzobe is thirty years old and has lived at the Kennedy Road informal settlement her entire life, where her Granny, uncle, and uncle's wife also lived. Now she lives on her own, across from the volunteer-run preschool that she helped to found, working there for ten years. She now works for Durban Solid Waste, and serves on the Kennedy Road Development Committee as the Health chair. She also founded and runs the Clare Estate Drop-in Center. I interviewed her on the afternoon of November 15th at the Kennedy Road Development Committee's office, and several other friends and committee members dropped in casually to chat with us.

J: How did your family come here?

N: The reason we came to stay here was that my uncle got a job in the municipality, and it was too far from Pinetown, where my Granny stayed. I went to school in Pinetown and stayed with my Granny there during the week, and stayed here on the weekends and during holidays. The place is not good, but people stay here to be near jobs. Back then when the shacks were few – about 10 or 15 – the place was better, not so crowded, but it was just the shacks. But we want proper housing, because you can't live in shacks your whole life.

J: Are there things that you like about living here?

N: It's near the jobs, and we're not paying any rent for the housing. If you're working, you can do your own things with your money. And you can't start a new life; I've been here for 30 years. Before I taught preschool for ten years, but there was no payment because the children's parents had no money, not even twenty rand, or five rand. But I kept working there because I saw that the

children were suffering, and they were going to Indian primary schools without knowing any English. I wanted to teach the children how to say that they need to go to the toilet, or that they're hungry, just some things so that when they go to school they won't have any problems. And I wanted to help kids not get raped or play with dirt. In the preschool there is no dirt, it's clean, otherwise the kids will just play in the dirt or in the road, and there were many accidents. Sometimes a priest would come and give the children porridge, but otherwise if the child stayed at home the mother might be working or might be a drunkard and not take care of him. Now I'm a Project Manager at Durban Solid Waste. I look after the other people who work there, manage how they do their jobs, check their time sheets and things like that. If there's something wrong they tell me, and I talk to the management. I've been working there since 2004.

J: How did the committee start?

N: At first, it was just my Granny and the old fathers, and they would call meetings under the tree and talk about things. I remember when I was about ten or twelve there was a white man, a big boss from the municipality, called black jack, who told the Grannies that they mustn't give anybody else permission to build shacks. He said that they should leave the shacks for their children, who can go to school and get a job and move into a [formal] house, but not to let anyone else build shacks. But our parents weren't educated, and they didn't know how to keep records. They couldn't stop more people from coming, because those people would get angry and yell and bring a gun to the committee. People came and came. If you have space, you would build a house or an extra room and call people to come and pay rent. By then, not many of the shack owners were working, so they would use the rent they charged to buy food.

In 1995 I became a committee member. I was teaching the children how to model, and there was one white woman helping us organize a fashion show. I was teaching them to be drum majorettes, and we were organizing fashion shows for the community. I don't do it any more, my uniform was stolen. And you need uniforms to do drum majorettes –you can't be drum majorettes if one person is wearing red and another person is wearing black, you know. I was a drum majorette at school, that's how I learned leadership.

J: Have most of the committee members been there for as long as you?

N: Some of the committee members are old committee members, like me, and some are newer committee members

J: How do you elect the committee?

N: To elect the committee, we call a mass meeting, usually 400 or 500 people come to the community hall, and we say “now we’re going to elect a new committee” and we ask them who they will nominate for the development committee. First we take nominations for positions, for the chairperson and deputy chairperson, for the secretary and deputy secretary, and for the treasurer. The rest are standing members. After people have nominated all of the people that they want to, we vote for who will be on the committee. At the first meeting of the new committee we give all of the members a position – like health, or safety and security, which Jerome [Bengu] does now. There’s also a position for development, which includes housing.

If the committee is doing well, people will say that they don’t want to elect a new committee, but we must tell them that our time is up and that they can elect a new committee if they want to, [otherwise] that would not be fair.

J: Do committee members receive anything?

N: Hey! The committee doesn’t receive anything, it’s all voluntary.

J: But you get respect?

N: Ja, but sometimes not, people swear at you, or tell you this thing or that thing.

J: When did people get angry at the municipality?

N: The first time we went all the comrades [at the department of housing] were disciplined, you could go and meet the man at housing, and tell him that you wanted a house and things. But people would say next time that the man who you met with wasn’t there, or that he was at a meeting, and we got frustrated. So we went to the councilor to go with him to meet the housing department to talk about land nearby where we could build houses. The councilor mentioned Elf Road, and then the ganda ganda came and those people were leveling the ground there, and people were happy with the committee. But then the committee said: why if they’re making houses for us don’t they tell us? So we sent some people to go and ask the men who were working there . . . they say that they’re making a scrap yard, not housing, and the people started to be angry. So the [Kennedy Road] people marched down to the road [to get ready to block it] and Councilor Baig called me and said “hey Princess, what’s going on?” And I said “Baig, you never come down here to see for yourself, why don’t you ever come down and see for yourself what’s going on?” But he said he can’t come, the

people are crazy, let the police do their work. The police hit them, and sent dogs, and take the fourteen [who were arrested]. We marched on the police station the next day and the police came and blocked us in like at Foreman Road yesterday. They [the fourteen] were starting now to go to court, and we met Richard [Pithouse], but the people didn't like Richard and they chased him away, but he introduced himself to me. People said "hey Princess, your man is here" or "your umlungu (white person) is here!" Then we started the good relationship and then we met Raj, then Fazel, and the lawyers.

We started planning for the second march once the fourteen were out, and we made a party for them – "welcome heroes!" The second march was for Councilor Baig, but there was no response, no nothing, no one told us what was going on. We marched, called Baig, and gave him the memorandum.

In the third march, there were people from Cape Town, all the informal settlements around here, Chatsworth people. We made a coffin for Baig with a Teddy bear, and we said "this bear is Baig." We carried the coffin in the march, and said "Baig, you're dead, rest in peace, rest in peace. You just bring Breyani, you don't care if people live under a tree or if they're suffering, rest in peace. Then people from housing started to come and fix the toilet – I think it was broken for ten years – and started meetings to promise us this and that. At the last meeting, the mayor promised us that they would build houses here, and for other informal settlements. If they take too long . . . [we will march again]. We told them they must not just give the people housing, but give the people taps, and electricity.

J: Why did the people chase Richard away?

N: They didn't know if people are going to help them or not . . . we are tired of white people coming saying that they were going to help and then breaking their promises. It's hard to trust people.

J: How did you trust him?

N: It just happened, but it was only me that trusted him.

J: Did you talk with the people who came to march from Cape Town, and from Chatsworth?

N: Oh, there were also people from Pietermaritzburg. We talked with them, the people that came, and we let them talk too. Everyone talked. We held a meeting in the park before the march, and we let everyone talk there. There

were so many people there marching. After the second time, the [municipality] wrote “the people are crazy,” but after the third time, the deputy mayor came.

J: What's the way forward?

N: We'll wait until the 22nd, and meet with the mayor, we'll know then.

J: What went wrong at Foreman Road yesterday? (She had said earlier that she thought it had gone badly)

N: I won't pin it on anyone . . . we told them after the meeting with the mayor (the previous week), that we should wait to talk to them (the municipality, in the next meeting). And when you meet with the mayor, you can take the minutes to court as proof, and say “he promised us this” and show them the minutes. Foreman Road thought that we lied to them, they said that the 24th would be too late. In myself, I said that we should wait for the 24th and then, if we need to, march again. Foreman Road forced S'bu to go there. We went for the Rally, he told them that they would die, that the police would hit them . . . you can't march without permission! If you do things you must plan – plan one, plan two, plan three. I think there was a misunderstanding, but at least they tried.

J: Why don't you think they made a better plan?

N: They didn't listen, they said that the offer for housing didn't include them. But Mlaba mentioned there would be housing for Foreman Road, we should have waited for the 24th – there was no plan B. The first time we blocked the road, there was no plan B, we just did it because of anger. Then we sat down and talked about what we'd done right and what we'd done wrong. Some people who know, like Richard, how to march and to do this and this and this. Now different people from different places [are working together]. Richard knew all the things for how to march, and all the forms that you need to make and things you need to do so that no one gets arrested. Now if it's Kennedy Road, no people get arrested, no nothing. First you must call a mass meeting and tell people we are marching for this thing and this thing. We tell them “listen to the marshals, don't hit the cars, the police, don't touch anything.” But people from Kennedy Road can't lead people from Foreman. I'll repeat again: “don't hit the police, don't get ahead of the marshals, you can sing and shout and whatever you want, but it must be a peaceful march.” Then the people will do a proper march. People will listen, and stop and go.

J: What do you think of the ANC?

N: The ANC is good, it's the people. The first step for the ANC is the BEC. I'll talk with our BEC . . . committee members for our BEC don't talk about development, they talk about politics — won't help the people now they only fight for the positions. I was a BEC member, now we have a drop-in center, there is a good thing. I made it for the entire community.

When I started the drop-in center I had no money, was not working, and I had my children. There was a man who was sick with no wife and no kids living by himself. If there's a person who's sick, we make him a meal, clean his house for him.

Transcribed Interview with Thembisio Jerome Bhengu

Jerome Bhengu is 38 years old and has lived in the Kennedy Road informal settlement for the last five years. He had worked at the docks in Durban but resigned in protest at the companies' refusal to formalise the employment of their laborers. He now runs a cigarette and snack shop with his wife, and they live together with his daughter and grandson. He was only able to attend school through to standard seven, but educated himself with books that he salvaged from the trash and with newspapers and now speaks near-perfect English. He has been a member of the Kennedy Road Development Committee for three years and is working to found a non-profit organization, the Crime & Health Strategic Movement. He is also active in the Shembe church. I interviewed him in his home which, on the rainy days, also serves as the shop.

Jacob: How long have you lived at Kennedy Road?

Jerome: I've lived here for five years. Before I lived at Hammersdale – but we came here for the jobs, and it was full of crime and people just suffering. I grew up there, near Pietermaritzburg. I started serving on the development committee last year. My purpose was to help them, they have problems, but I think the more we get together, the more we can help them. I need them [on the committee] to be able to find jobs – I can have ideas of how to create jobs, not for me but for themselves, I can show them how to help themselves.

Jacob: What do you think of moving to Phoenix?

Jerome: I have criticized Fazel and his team [a negotiating team elected by the KRDC], how are we supposed to just move to Phoenix? We are working here. Fazel is talking as if this is a union, but we are not workers, if you're in a company you can toyi toyi and come back in a few days. But if we move we move

for life. And what about the children who are going to school here? [Customer is very surprised to see a white person in the shack] Apartheid has made us not to understand each other.

The government fears losing ratepayers [from Clare Estate] . . . the value of the houses includes the view and the environment. The threat of crime and killings means that the value of the property declines. We [the residents of the informal settlement and the neighbours] are scared of each other – we need a transformation of things, we need to understand each other. If no one comes up with a plan, we will just fight each other until we die. We are not criminals. A few of us, maybe five are criminals.

We shouldn't be living like this. If Steve Biko was the leader, maybe we wouldn't be living like this – but he was so aggressive. You see S'bu is growing very big – but there are problems coming. He may be taken out by the councilors . . . I've told him many times, he needs to be careful. Our people like S'bu, but they [at Jadhu Place yesterday] wanted to hit him. They were so angry because they said we persuaded them to be in the march, we were lucky to get out alive. But people are not as angry now as before the meeting [at Jadhu Place]. People are still a little bit angry, though, because they got hurt [by the police].

Jacob: What's it like to be on the development committee?

Jerome: They can't understand – the other committee members – what it means to be a committee member. They need to have some skills. Like, leadership skills. With everyone with his portfolio, they don't even understand these jobs, they are not capable of the jobs that they have. The only person who understands leadership is S'bu. The others they don't even understand which alternative they should take – at Kennedy Road, or at the Shack Dwellers' Association. They need some training.

On Politics

Jerome: The IFP? It's a sad story. We're trying to prevent our kingdom from being ruled by other nations, like the Xhosas. We don't need parliament, we love to serve and be served under the King. The IFP leader was using them, he knew our leaders were getting paid so they come and bribe us.

ANCs are more aggressive, they don't want any other party to exist. The ANC is starting to fight us. Most of us are going to die. They are going to kill us. The ANC are the traitors. I was an ANC member, they said that we should kill the [apartheid] councilors, that we didn't want these want these small township [houses]. At the end of the day, now that they're in power, they build these small, small rooms and call them houses. I think their time is over. Knowing the way that we are . . . we need to be free to be what we are. The problem is that we have customs, but we can't practice our customs in this kind of place. I have to be a Christian even though I don't want to be one. We can't communicate with our king. The IFPs have been killed because no one could understand what their grievances are – not the IFP itself [that has been killed], but the idea. You must go deep down to understand the solution. The ANC doesn't want to provide us with jobs, but where else could we find more jobs? Isn't this creating more criminals?

This is our country and it's where we need to be free, which is why now things [like inequality and crime] are getting more out of hand – and there's more that's going to happen. We need to stop this, but the government doesn't know how to control the situation.

Mbeki thought this [protesting] could only happen under apartheid, and that it would never happen to him. If they kill one of our people, we'll be obliged to go and do the same to him. And there will be more, like at Foreman Road, things are starting to get out of hand . . .

Jacob: Did you participate in the marches?

Jerome: Ja I had a big role . . . but I see where the problem lies. You still got apartheid, and you cannot force Yacoob or the municipality to change right away.

Jerome: Now there's a new session of our development committee . . . it began in September, but we need to have new portfolios.

Transcribed Interview with Mnikelo Ndabankulu and William Bogege

Mnikelo is 19 and William is 21. They're both young leaders of the Foreman Road Informal Settlement.

Jacob: What's it like to live at Foreman Road?

Mnikelo: What I can just tell you is it's nice in Foreman Road but it's difficult to be in the shacks. If we can have better houses like our neighbours, the coloureds, than it can be nice. The problem is the houses . . . if we got the houses, we can be super-happy. We've got a lakker relationship with our neighbours, if we lived at Phoenix we'd have to budget and come and visit you.

Jacob: What else is nice?

Mnikelo: It's nice there because we've stayed here for so long. We've got these friendships because we've been living there for so long.

Jacob: Do you get along with the neighbors?

Mnikelo: We've got a big relationship! Like the Indian named Mkhize, who works for the independent newspaper. When we have fires they phone the fire brigade for us, or the cops, they phone them when we are in trouble. Fires are a big problem that we have in the shacks

Jacob: What are some of the things that you don't like about living there?

William: Fires, and it's too dirty there.

Mnikelo: It's too dirty and it affects the children, because it's dirty and there are rats and mosquitos.

Jacob: When did you first want to start marching?

Mnikelo: We started to march after 10 years of empty promises from the government. From 1994, the president was Nelson Mandela, they announced that people would have houses, would have land. 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 toyi-toying

Jacob: Who was making the promises, the national government, the councilors?

Mnikelo: Everyone, the ANC as a whole from the cabinet up to the councilors say the same thing: "vote ANC for a better life."

Jacob: What inspired you?

William: I think it was the burning of the shacks. There were many people dying, we lose a lot of things in the fires – we lose our people, we lose our clothes, even our IDs.

Jacob: Did you start toyi-toying before Kennedy Road, how did you meet up with them?

Mnikelo: With Kennedy Road, we are together, we want the same thing. We both want land and housing, for Ward 23, we are marching as a ward because we are united. We are marching in wards and not for Kennedy Road or Foreman Road. When there is a march we are always part-and-parcel of that march. When Kennedy Road is marching we are always there, if Foreman Road is there Kennedy Road is marching.

Jacob: How did you meet the people at Kennedy Road?

Mnikelo: We always know each other from the ANC rallies. They will pay for a bus, that will load Kennedy Road, then Foreman Road. Let's say there's an announcement that there's 4 buses in Ward 25,

Jacob: Did you go when Kennedy Road blocked the road with the burning tires?

Mnikelo: No, it was an illegal march so we were not informed. It was heat of the moment, because they were so sick and tired of broken promises. When they make legal marches, we are always there.

Jacob: So, you marched in the . . .

Mnikelo: 2 marches giving the councilor a funeral, and then a march on Bachu from Quarry Road. And then the same ones were there marching against Mlaba.

Jacob: Is there a development committee at Foreman Road, like at Kennedy Road?

Mnikelo: There's a development committee at Foreman Road, and they're in charge of development. There's also an area committee, so if somebody steals someone's something, or there's a problem, they sort out that thing. The development committee is always there for development only

Jacob: How do you create the development committee?

Mnikelo: The development committee has been elected by the community

Jacob: Are you satisfied with them?

Mnikelo: Yes, we're satisfied with them, they're getting so popular now – you can see them on E-TV, in the Mercury, they are telling the whole world that we

are suffering at Foreman Road. They're there to tell the government that the people of Foreman Road want houses. We're super-satisfied with them.

Jacob: Are you on the development committee?

Mnikelo: Yes, I'm a member.

Jacob: Who was mobilizing people for the march against Mlaba?

Mnikelo: It's not a one man show, it's everybody's job. Everybody wants to march, everybody who's got time to mobilize. Like when we supplied the pamphlet, everybody was happy about this, and was willing to work not because they were told but because they want a way forward.

Jacob: What about Abahlali baseMjondolo, when did those meetings begin?

Mnikelo: It began when the marches began. If we want to march in numbers, we must have an umbrella, we must show the government that they must act quickly.

Jacob: After the march, there was a lot of conflict at Foreman Road. What was happening?

Mnikelo: That's not a serious issue, it's just that people didn't understand. It's not a serious issue. They were just fighting for the permit, because they need to go to Mlaba.

Jacob: What's the goal? When will you stop struggling?

William: After we got what we need – land and houses. And we want the land next to our shacks, we were promised by the mayor in 2000. We don't want bushes there, we want houses. They mayor promised us that land, and we want him to fulfill his promises.

Jacob: If he promised it to you in 2000, why do you think it's taking so long?

Mnikelo: The government is always making empty promises. If they've got an election, they'll come and make you promises, but then they'll just sit in their offices and they won't come around anymore.

Jacob: What are some ways to force the government to fill their promises?

Mnikelo: Well, we march on them, and we tell them that we won't vote for them unless they fulfill their promises. Thabo Mbeki is the president because of our Xs.

Jacob: You don't want houses in Phoenix?

Mnikelo: We are the residents of Ward 25, we want to remain in Ward 25.

Jacob: Even if they made jobs for you there?

William: We've got jobs here, we don't want to go there.

Mnikelo: We get little income, but we have no transport costs.

Jacob: What have you learned from the struggle? How has it changed you?

Mnikelo: We've learned that you must demand services by marching on the road. Everyone is doing that – the teachers, even COSATU. It does something to the councilors' dignity, to have a funeral even when you are not dead. The people are not satisfied with the service from them, and they cannot go and say "I have been the councilor from Ward 25" somewhere else, because those people will say "your people have been marching against you."

William: Marching is the only way to force government, I don't think there's any other way.

Jacob: What are some threats to Abahlali baseMjondolo, or challenges or obstacles?

Mnikelo: Only if the government doesn't give us permits to march, that will be a problem. We know the proper channels, we know how to do the marshals and the t-shirts, but at the end of the day, if you don't get the permit, that's going to be a big problem.

Jacob: That's a problem from the outside, but could there be any problems from the inside?

Mnikelo: Actually we are united there is nobody who's willing to go behind somebody's back, if the government gives us permits to march, that's the only problem.

William: I think everyone who lives in the jondolos wants proper housing, I don't think they like living in the shacks, so we are united.

Jacob: What about other problems from the outside?

Mnikelo: If they want to stop our march, they must give us what we want.

Jacob: What else might they do to stop the march?

William: Oh, you know when we were going to Kennedy Road for the march on Baig, we saw the pamphlets on that morning that said that the march was for the IFP. But we went there because we knew that that was just a trick.

Jacob: How did you know?

Mnikelo: Because we knew that these ones were not IFP members. Since we've been living in the shacks, we've known that these ones, they were members of the ANC. Then that morning they were IFP members – why? It's just because they didn't want us to march. That was just a waste of time — the ANC is our party, but we can't support them if they're not delivering. But we won't vote for

the IFP, we must force this one to do what we want, because the government must do what we want. We must march against them to give us services. We won't be IFP members until we die, we can't say that ANC is good if they're not good, we must speak out

William: To say what is in our minds. You can't pretend as if they are good if they've got these mistakes. We can't say the ANC is good if they're not giving us houses. We must show them that we are not happy – why? Because of land and housing.

Jacob: When did you meet Richard, and Fazel, and Raj?

Mnikelo: Richard was there on the day of the illegal march at Kennedy Road. Fazel and Raj I saw at the second march. They are always with us, on bad and good days.

Jacob: Do they help the struggle?

Mnikelo: Yes, they're super-helpful, these guys spend their time and money to help us – they just want to help us. They've got land, housing, they have what we are fighting for.

Jacob: What do they do for the struggle that you can't do for yourselves?

William: They brought a video for us for the last march, it showed our people that they are not the only ones who are [protesting]

Mnikelo: and I don't think anyone in the shacks have videos, all these equipment, generators. Hey, these guys are great man. They print t-shirts, and pamphlets.

Jacob: What do you think that they want?

Mnikelo: They just want us to have a better life like them. They've got houses, they've got toilets, they've got land. They want us to be comfortable like them. Better life for all! — they want us to have a better life like them.

Jacob: What's the way forward, what's next?

Mnikelo: We've got a meeting with the mayor. They're always giving us empty promises, and we're always aware that they're bluffing, so we're ready to march again. We've got meetings with Mlaba himself – he says "trust me," but he must have a deadline. If we see no results from that we'll continue to march until he gives us what we want.

Jacob: Who's going to the meeting?

Mnikelo: The development committees of Ward 23 and Ward 25.

Jacob: Are you going to go?

Mnikelo: I'm not sure, but I'm willing to meet him, because I want to tell him straight: this is what we want.

Jacob: Is there anything else that you want to say?

Mnikelo: We can be glad as now we're struggling, we can be glad as everyone in the world can see that we're suffering. Because everyone can see, the premier (of KZN) must come and support us, the president must come and support us. If they tell us that we're going to build houses, they must not just tell us, they must come and build them.

4 MARCH 2006

Speech · S'bu Zikode

Speech at the Centre for Civil Society and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Colloquium

Centre for Civil Society and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation colloquium, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 4 March 2006. Transcript.

Amandla! Viva Abahlali baseMjondolo, viva! Viva CCS, Viva! Viva all the Social Movements, Viva! Viva Chatsworth, Viva! Viva Wentworth, Viva! Viva the Right to Work Campaign Viva!

Comrades! I am not used to sitting, I am not used to comfortable chairs; so don't be taken aback that I will be standing. I am used to Zabalaza, to struggling; there's no time to sleep and to be jolly with the comfortable chairs. Comrades, thank you very much to Patrick for this great opportunity that I have just been given to speak at this university on behalf of people from Abahlali. I am going to use this opportunity to talk about the pain and suffering we are facing with the hard of the hardest in our own country; the pain of arrests, beatings, detention and death.

Today comrades the question that many comrades have raised is the issue of two classes in our society: the high class and the lower class. Some people refer to the lower class as the middle class. And I think it is very unfair to call the poor of the poorest as the middle class. Fazel Khan, has already indicated that he has seven taps and a number of toilets. He also has a vehicle that he uses to move around. Therefore he cannot be compared to the person who has nothing, and this is why I think it is very unfair to refer to the lower class as the middle class.

Comrades, before I go to the "G" of the story, I would like just to share my experience with you. I have suffered a lot. For years I have tried the so called diplomacy. I have approached the high profile members of the ruling party, and tried to make deals, deals that will liberate you and I; deals that will answer the critical questions of access to basic rights like clean water, housing, sanitation, electricity, health care and education. But all in vain! In this democracy the poor are only used for voting. Once we have voted we are only lied to and undermined

and ignored. So it is very critical that today we share the pain and suffering, the hard of the hardest, that we experience every day of our lives. I am going to talk about our level. We may be here at the university of the academics and students today, but we look like we are living in a different planet. In actual fact, we are living in the same planet, that is, the earth. But, we from Abahlali are living at the grass root level, where there is no one below us. We are the poor of the poorest. Our lives are the ignored truth of this society. Some of our people are doing the cleaning at this university. They also have important things to say.

Comrades, hearing all the speakers talking about the so called solidarity, it is clear to me that this solidarity is in fact "verbal solidarity." For instance, where are other social movements when the Abahlali are facing the arrest and detention by the police? Where is COSATU, where are the other social movements, when we face police brutality, and when our children get burnt in the jondolos? Where is everyone when people with AIDS have to share one toilet with a thousand people and stand in long queues for water? Where is everyone? Verbal solidarity! Comrades, lets be careful.

However, let me extend our gratitude to all comrades who worked with us for the success of the 27 of February 2006, where an extensive political drama was being played out in front of the whole country, and the High Court of South Africa ruled in favour of the Abahlali baseMjondolo, defending our right to express ourselves through marching against Sutcliffe's attempts to ban us from marching. That was an important victory. Amandla!

Comrades, I am going to share with you the pain and suffering that we all go through, the pain and suffering in which we have no choice, except to fight back.

We who live in the jondolos of Durban, we democrats and loyal citizens of South Africa note that this country is rich because of the theft of our land and because of our work in the farms, mines, factories, kitchens, laundries of the rich. We cannot, and we will not, continue to suffer the way we do. Our voices cannot be stifled today like everyday. We brave heat, hunger, thirst, exhaustion and police repression. We have now had our day in court, we won recognition of our right to speak, we marched on the city, because now we are going to stand up for our rights, not only to speak, but to live, to breath, to eat, to sleep, to work in dignity and safety. Today we demand adequate land and housing to live in safety, healthy environment and with dignity. Today we demand the creation

of well-paying and dignified jobs. Today we demand the right of all people in rented flats not to be evicted from their homes. Today we demand to genuine participation in genuine democratic processes so that we can make our own future. Today we demand safe and secure environments in which we can work, play and live. Today we demand that the fight against HIV and AIDS be given the seriousness it deserves. In view of this, today we demand well resourced and staffed health facilities.

Today we cannot afford electricity, and today we demand that these services be made free to all the poor. Today we live without toilets or clean water; therefore, today we demand access to these basic human rights. If we are not given what a human being needs to survive while the city builds casinos and stadiums and themeparks we will have no choice but to take it. Those big projects, those casinos, that make some few rich people richer are built with resources stolen from our future.

Today many people from around the city and the country are uniting in support of our struggle for genuine democracy and for basic human needs such as basic health care, clean water, electricity and housing. We would also like to give our support to our comrades involved in the same fight elsewhere. We have stood with, and we will continue to stand with our comrades in Chatsworth, Crossmore, Marianridge, Merebank, Shallcross, Clairwood and Wentworth in their fight against Ethekwini Municipality, in its attempt to evict them from their homes. We will also continue to stand with the people of South Durban in their struggle against the environmental racism, the poor students facing exclusion from technikons and universities, and with comrades all over the country fighting for land, housing, work, education, health care and democratic development. We affirm that their struggle to resist evictions from their homes and win basic services is just. We also stand with our comrades in rural areas like eMandeni – we do not forget that rural areas are the biggest jondolo.

Today we demand answers. We have approached the municipality on many occasions and we have been promised that we will be allocated land, yet still we have no land. The municipality says it will house us. We demand to know when, we demand to know where, we demand to know how, we demand to know how many houses, we demand to know how long we have to be on the waiting list. We demand all this today.

We have fought and won, we have beaten Sutcliffe the city manager of Durban. Obed Mlaba, the Mayor of Durban, also tried to silence us but we would not go quietly. The police tied us up with helicopters and armoured cars and guns and we broke free and marched into the heart of the city. All around the city hall it was red that day. Today and everyday, until the government acts to the demand of the poor, we will raise our voices and we will fight for justice.

Comrades, while I am standing before you, in Umlazi, E Section, the day before yesterday, in the protest against the imposition of a councillor, against the repression of the freedom of the people and the will of the people, a twenty-three year old woman, Monica Ngcobo, was shot dead. The Abahlali baseMjondolo throughout the whole country are watching Umlazi, and because God has always been on the side of the poor, it is our hope that justice shall triumph. Although we have been badly beaten and shot in all the numerous marches that we have had, we have never experienced loss of life like what happened in Umlazi. Therefore we extend our condolences to the people of Umlazi, E Section and other comrades around the country as we mourn. We will march with them and stand with them. We know that this struggle will also be long. We will walk the road with the Umlazi comrades for as long as it must be walked.

Comrades what we need to share with you today is that there is much more that we can learn from one another. As I was posing the question, where was Patrick Bond when we buried our twelve-year old child who was burnt to death in the shacks? We need to ask, for how long shall we experience these kinds of abuse? That is why today we are saying, Sekwane! Sekwane! (Enough is enough!). Until our hands come together we shall not conquer. We need one another. What we can share today is that our masses speak volume, that we can only win the struggle if we unite; unity is what will liberate this country. Without unity there is no hope. But unity must be real. It cannot be created from the top. It cannot be created by a few individuals sending emails to each other. It must be created in the middle of the struggle of the poor. That is where we must do our discussing and thinking and strategising.

What we have learnt is that the government currently in power, cannot understand isiZulu nor can they hear any English. We have tried isiXhosa, they cannot understand isiXhosa. We have written letters, they the languages of pens, faxes and telephones. The only language that they can understand is, guess what? Putting thousands of people on the streets! Amandla! It works, it worked for us,

it may work for you. We must not waste time speaking languages that those high up don't understand. Our people are dying everyday. The queues for water get longer everyday. For the poor everyday is an emergency – every day.

So what we have learnt from our experiences is that our masses speak volumes. It is all about numbers, it's all about masses; that's where our strength lies. But our masses are not just bodies without land and houses and bodies marching on the street. We can be poor materially, but we are not poor in mind. This is why we have the University of Kennedy Road, the University of Foreman Road and the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. Some of the intellectuals understand that we think our own struggle. Others still don't understand this. Mlaba and Sutcliffe still don't understand this. So comrades, today, I appeal to you, that what we need to do, as part of our way forward to conquer this capitalist system, (because each second you turn your head, the capitalist system is there) is to unite and think and fight together where there poor are, where the poor live, where the poor suffer. In your working environment, just like in mine, just like for all of us, there comes the capitalist system. We need to think about this carefully. Each tree we shake, we find that the capitalist system is there. It is already designed to direct you, to direct me, to direct us all, even to direct our struggles, so let us think well and fight bravely to overcome it. Amandla!

Comrades, even if those of us here from the communities come from different communities living in different places and with different histories, we all live at the grass root levels where we face electricity cut-offs, water disconnections, police brutality and so on. Peter Dwyer has spoken well about unemployment. He was talking about organizing the unorganized, organizing the unemployed people. Though many poor people have nobody to talk to or someone to listen to them, slowly the voice of the poor is getting louder and louder and it cannot be ignored. Slowly the unorganised are starting a big fight.

For the cause of the poor, Abahlali baseMjondolo has become the home for the homeless, the hope for the hopeless, the volume for the voices of the voiceless, both in rural areas and in the centre of big cities like Durban. There are many people who have no home, nobody to speak to and no one to listen to their plight. But we are here to make sure that the voices of the poor are heard and paid attention to. We are here to stand against injustice, against the inhumane attack on the poor.

So comrades, what I am going to suggest right now is that, since we are coming from different backgrounds, from different spectra of life and we have grown up in different environments, and from different walks of life, we should put all of those experiences and skills together. Putting that experience together will bring us something that is going to change this country into what we expect from liberation. We should not expect much right now, but we should focus on securing our basic needs first and build from there.

So comrades, without wasting any of your time, I would just like to share some strategic approaches and strategic ideas that one could adopt in order to proceed to fight injustice. Let us avoid extending SMS-solidarity, email solidarity and verbal solidarity. Instead let us fight side by side with each other. Let us face the police together. Let us think together in the jondolos and on the streets. Some of the intellectuals are already doing this. Let us also follow the example of some of the comrades who, when they cannot afford to physically be wherever they are needed, have extended whatever support they can, either in the form of financial or moral support. The Foundation for Human Rights and the Freedom of _expression_ Institute gave us weapons so that we could fight Mlaba and Sutcliffe better. Let us come together, let us put our heads together, and I promise, (like most of the speakers here have said, "united we stand") that nothing shall conquer us if we stand together. But of course it is not the time to come and campaign about the movement and so on while the reality remains that people are suffering. So I would emphasise that we need to start working together and to start allowing each one of us to share their experiences and their ideas. Then we can build a movement that can really fight because it really grows from the people.

Our movement is home for the destitute, it is home for the hopeless, it is home for those who cannot afford anything, those who cannot afford to have their voices being heard anywhere else. So we should carefully and patiently give a chance to each one of us to express their experience and feelings knowing that some people are battling even to get a Rand to buy a tomato, to have their dinner. We must start by asking how we address the issues of day to day suffering? So comrades, it is time for us to say, enough is enough. Let us start implementing ideas, ideas that have been shared here.

All of the struggling communities here have very vibrant leaders who have stood in front of you during the time of darkness, happiness, threats of violence,

threats of death, the hazards of detention and arrest. They will always stand for you. So what we therefore need to do is not for us to come and also stand in front of you and talk. You also need to be given a chance to say whatever you feel like. The only really clever thinking from a leader given trust by the poor, maybe like myself, maybe like yourself, is that instead of talking more, the leader should provide a platform for the people to talk. So let us therefore allow other people to share their experiences and ideas. Let us hear from everyone, especially those are not normally confident to speak in a place like this.

Thank you very much!

JULY 2006

Lecture · S'bu Zikode

The Greatest Threat to Future Stability in our Country vs the Greatest Strength of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA

Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture, Durban, July 2006

Many things have been said. Many things have been seen. Many policies have been passed. Many people have voted. But what has been done has not been done for the poor. It has been done for the rich. The poor are outside. We have no country. This is not the democracy that the poor fought for. We must ask, are we citizens of this country? If we are not citizens then who are we and where are we?

AFRAID

I am afraid. Every day is an emergency in the jondolos. I am afraid that the AIDS epidemic and poverty are the greatest threat to future stability in our country. Our people are dying. Our people are struggling just to survive. Our desperation and anger can go in many directions. I am afraid that it won't always go the people who are getting richer while we suffer.

I remain afraid when I see how much is said at the high level of government. I am afraid when government and the NGOs and academics speak about the poor all the time but so few want to speak to the poor. I am afraid when it becomes clear that our job is just to vote and then watch the rich speak about us as we get poorer.

We have seen that when the wild forests and plantations of the rich are on fire there are often large helicopters with hundreds of tons of water to extinguish the fires. But when our shacks are on fire the helicopters and ambulances are nowhere to be found. Mhlengi Khumalo, a one year old boy died in a fire in Kennedy Road. When this happened there was neither briyani nor Durban Electricity on the scene. Helicopters only come for us when we want to march. The state comes for us when we try to say what we think. We must understand

this lesson very well. We are on our own. We have no choice but to fight. It is not about us but our children, our nation and our country S.A.

I become ever more afraid when I see that so much money is being spent at the high level e.g. at conference centres, hotels, uShaka, stadiums, etc and that so little is being spent at the grass root level where most of our people live and suffer. Communities have had enough death. Families are not only facing this high rate of mortality but must also face the funeral expenses which also threaten our safety. It is clear that Aids breeds poverty and poverty breeds Aids. Both must be fought if we are not to be afraid in the future. It is warned that this is not about making small changes to policies. This is a class struggle. This is a struggle between the Haves and Don't Haves. Our society can only be saved if the Don't Haves win this struggle. If we loose this struggle everyone will have to live afraid for ever. Everything will be broken everywhere.

BRAVE

However I am brave now. More and more thousands of us are becoming brave. We are brave enough to fight this struggle now. We are brave because for the first time in history of this country, South Africa, the poorest of the poor are saying that it is time for us to begin to say "This is who we are. This is where we are. This is how we live. This is what we feel. This is what we think. This is how we want things to be done so that we can live without fear.'

The ABAHLALI BASEMJONDOLO MOVEMENT (SA) is the hope of the hopeless, the home of the homeless, the voice of the poor of the poorest. It is the ground for He/She who knows not that She /He knows not that He/She knows not but knows that the poor suffer, knows that this country is rich and knows exactly what made and makes this country rich. Our movement seeks to bring the government to the ground, to bring the institutions of government & the private sector to the ground. We fight to bring policies that affect our people under the control of our people. We are realistic. We start where we are but we fight to bridge the gap between the rich & the poor. We fight to make those who are blind to poverty to be able to see the poverty that we see. We work to show those who are blind to the power of the poor to see the strength of the strong poor. The threat of fires, storms, illnesses, police brutality and government repression make it clear that if we do not stand up now and act

together, then, I am afraid, the poor citizens would once be remembered to have not survived to be part of the beauty of this nature.

STRENGTH

The Shack Dwellers (Abahlali baseMjondolo) have acknowledged that, the majority of this country & this continent and this world are the poor who are often undermined. This has made it possible for us to mobilise the broader communities who feel neglected by the State. It is the very same poverty and neglect by the State that throws us together in our settlements and from that togetherness we become strong. Our masses, our unity and diversity is our strength, our pain, our voice. We have become the strong poor. The politics of the strong poor is an anti party politics. Our politics is not to put someone in an office. Our politics is to put our people above that office. And when we have finished with one office we move on to the next office. Our politics is also not a politics of a few people who have learnt some fancy political words and who expect everyone to follow them because they know these words. Our politics is a traditional home politics which is understood very well by all the old mamas and gogos because it affects their lives and gives them a home. In this home everybody is important, everybody can speak and we look after each other and think about situation and plan our fight together. We believe that housing policy does not only require housing specialists, rich consultants and government. We believe that housing policy requires, most importantly, the people who need the houses. But we also know, as poor communities and as Shack dwellers that the broader poor have no choice but to play a role in shaping and re-shaping this country in to an anti-capitalist system. This is the task that the betrayal of our struggle and the struggles of our ancestors has given to us. We are on our own. We have to fight this fight. Although we will fight for land and housing in the city we know that this is not only a fight for land and housing in the city. Giving reasonable budgets to democratic development in district municipalities and advancing rural areas will mean that people will no longer have no choice but to leave their homes and build shacks everywhere. If the shackdwellers do not belong to this country then they must be sent back to where they belong. If they do belong here, then they are entitled to all the benefits of the soil of South Africa.

DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE

The alternative, the direction of our struggle, will come out of the thinking that we do in our communities. We are doing this thinking all the time in our communities. Tonight we can use this opportunity to do it here. Let us start with some questions. I will ask these questions now and then we can turn this lecture into a meeting. The world is full of lectures. Lectures usually come to us as one more way of making us sit quietly while rich people think for us. In our struggle we need meetings where everyone can speak and think together.

- Have the poor Durban shackdwellers succeeded in their struggle for land and housing in the city? What has been won? What must still be won? What have we learned from our struggle?
- Have the Western Cape QQ Section and Anti-Eviction Campaign succeeded in their struggle for housing? What can be learnt from their struggle?
- Have the South Durban Communities succeeded in their fight against the threats from the Engin refinery and the generally poisonous environment? What can be learnt from this struggle?
- Have the flat residents such as Bayview, Albert Park, Sydenham Heights, New Lands and Phoenix been attended to? What must still be done? What can we learn from this struggle?
- Have Bachu, Baig, Xulu, Shezi and Dimba been removed from the offices of the community? Why are these people imposed on us? What should we do about it?
- Have the deaths of Monica Ngcobo, Tebogo Mkhonza, Komi Zulu and Mhlengi Khumalo brought about any changes in our communities? What have we learnt from these deaths? Why are our people being killed by the police, by fire, by councillors? Why does no one high up seem to care?
- What stops the poor from becoming the political majority of this country in which they are the majority of citizens? What stops us from deciding the policies that affect our lives? What stops from being in control of our future?
- What strategy will force the blind government to see and get the deaf government to hear? What strategy will force those who are rich to share, those who do not give account to account?
- How can we unite our struggling communities and movements to make them stronger?

I am optimistic that the “will” of the poor will soon be done simple because the poor are the majority of this country and the majority is beginning to speak for itself. We have the courage to do what must be done. But this optimism can only be kept for as long as democracy prevails so democracy must be protected and deepened. This is why we took Sutcliffe to court when he tried to ban us from marching. Comrades, let us now think about these questions together.

23 NOVEMBER 2006

Essay · Philani Zungu

From Party Politics to Service Delivery to the Politics of the Poor

I hope that one day it will be realised by our government officials how much betrayal they have served to the floors on which they stand and where they belong. It is very sad that our politicians forget that their power started with people like us, people like the red shirts. Their silk suits come from older struggles, from other people struggling then like we do now, in the yellow shirts of the UDF and the unions.

When they were coming into power they told us that the only colour that mattered was the colour of the skin. But the black men in silk suits do not work for us. They work for the rich – black and white. They say that they are working to give us service delivery. They are really working to deliver us to the rich – to smash our informal shacks and either leave us homeless or dump us in formal jondolos in the bush. It is the colour of the heart that matters. In our struggle we have learnt that people of different skin colours have red hearts. It is the colour of the heart that matters.

Freedom is the equalisation of all people. All people need the same respect and all people need what is necessary for a proper life – some land, a house, water, electricity, access to good education and doctors, police and courts that work for the people, the chance for proper work and support for the young, the old and the sick.

It is very sad that the people we trusted the most, the people we gave a mandate to secure our freedom, seem not to understand what is freedom. They understood quite well in the struggle but now they no longer understand. It is quite that the struggle is not over. We cannot just wait for service delivery. We are in a second phase of struggle. Older struggles put our people in the silk suits. Now our struggle, the second phase of struggle, has to force the men in silk suits to work for the poor and not the rich.

In the first struggle, when there was no freedom at all, people did not accept to be silent victims. People did not compromise. They were brave enough to put

their lives at risk. Many people had so much faith that they gave up their lives to invest them in the new generation that would live in a free country.

Now that we have some freedoms in law but no full freedom in reality, now that there is no better life for all, now that the government leaves shack dwellers to burn in the fires, beats us when we march and smashes up our homes and either leaves us homeless or dumps in formal jondolos in the bush why should we be silent? Why does the Municipality of eThekweni expect Abahlali baseMjondolo to remain silent? Why are we expected to have unlimited patience while we are being attacked because 'service delivery is coming'? Why are Abahlali baseMjondolo victimised when we claim back our humanity and the rights that we are promised with our citizenship? Why are we not allowed to work with academics at the university? Why are academics at the university not allowed to work with the poor?

The answer is clear. This democracy is not for us. We must stay silent so that this truth can be kept hidden. This democracy is for the rich who will build and then enjoy themselves at uShaka, King Senzagakhona Stadium and King Shaka Airport. We will only go to these places to protect and clean up for the rich.

Today Fazel Khan, a sociologist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), is facing charges for speaking to the media. But it is very clear to Abahlali baseMjondolo that the intention behind these charges is to get rid of Fazel from the university. He must go because he has broken the rules. With other academics, academics who are already gone from the University, he has spoken to the poor instead of for the poor. He has worked with the poor instead of with the rich in the name of the poor. Abahlali already know what the outcome of Fazel's case will be. His dismissal is the main objective of the university bosses right now.

For a long time we have heard rumours from various people that eThekweni City Manager, Mike Sutcliffe, has been boasting that he has instructed the university to get rid of Fazel Khan and Richard Pithouse. Last year the Mercury reported that the University Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Makgoba, had told Fazel that Mayor Obed Mlaba had instructed him to 'act against academics working with Abahlali.' It seems that this is now being accomplished with the charges against Fazel.

The people in power are fighting against the poor instead of serving the poor. Because the poor still exist in unfreedom it is clear that people in power are fighting against freedom.

18 JANUARY 2007

Essay · No author given

Juba Place Evictions

Living in shack settlements sometimes has its disadvantages. Some take you like you are not a living human being, just because of the shack area you are living in. Others take you like a short-minded person, someone who is always doing wrong. Some people try to get the attention of the eye of the world through shack settlements. For an example the Ethekwini municipality is trying to evict all people from all shack settlements for the 2010 World Cup. Juba Place is one settlement that has already been attacked. What happened to Juba Place shack settlements hurts so badly. Juba Place is a small shack settlement, which was situated down the hill at Reservoir Hills opposite Newlands East.

On Thursday, the 9th November 2006 the Municipality told people in Juba Place that they would be relocated. They were told that they were coming to evict on the 11th (Saturday) of same month surely and they did come and they did evict on that day. They destroyed the houses (shacks), giving a house to the shack owners only, leaving homeless all the people who were staying with the owners and all those who were guiding houses for owners who were for years at farm, or no longer living in the area. With every eviction most of the owners are relocated but the people staying with them are just left homeless. On the 11th after demolishing people's homes the municipality promised to come back on the 14th (Tuesday) as it didn't finish on the first day. People left homeless on the first day then took their belongings to the other houses that hadn't been demolished to try and keep them safe. But the Municipality came back to complete its destruction of people's houses and lives and the community on Thursday (16th) and then Saturday (18th)

A large number of people, including children and grannies were left homeless. Then the municipality gave those homeless only the Sunday (9th) to move out from the area with all their belongings. They were told that if they didn't move out with all their belongings by the end of the day then they would bring the police security force to remove them and guard the area. People got stranded and frightened not knowing what to do and where to go. The ABAHLALI

BASEMJONDOLO MOVEMENT SOUTH AFRICA arrived at the scene, listened to the story and tried to get an alternate place to stay for people. Fortunately places were found in nearby shack settlements (Pemary Ridge & Mpolweeni) and the movement also managed to get a community hall in the area for emergency accommodation. Woman and children went to the hall. A list was made of people who had been left homeless and who were still in the area and it came to 35 people. A court case was opened against the municipality (eThekweni) at the Durban High Court. This was all done with the aid of Legal Resource Centre – and NGO, like COHRE, ODAC and the FXI that respects the human dignity of shack dwellers.

Abahlali and the LRC took these evictions as an abuse to human dignity. The constitution says “The people shall govern,” and “There shall be shelter for all.” That must be fulfilled. It hurts as this turns out to be a habit to the municipality. When ever they relocate they leave people homeless. The break the law all the time. There’s even an old mother who owned a house and she didn’t get a new house after it was demolished. Her house was given to another woman who was a tenant in another house. There is always this corruption in every relocation. That mother is now homeless. This is why Abahlali is fighting every day. We will stop forced removals and we will stop evictions. We will force the municipality to upgrade the settlements where people are living. We will force the municipality to obey the law. We will force the municipality to talk to shack dwellers and not for shack dwellers. Sekwanele!

19 JANUARY 2007

Essay · Philani Zungu

The Strong Poor & the Police

Abahlali have discovered that when the strong poor speak for ourselves the people who are paid to speak for us, from local councillors, to Mike Sutcliffe and some NGOs and academics, call us criminal. They ignore the fact that it is hundreds of years of crimes against our ancestors that have driven us into the shacks and that even in these shacks the municipality breaks the law when it demolishes our homes. It seems that when ever we want the same rights as other citizens we will be called criminal. Often the powerful people who call us criminal for telling the truth get the police to attack us.

The South African Constitution gives us all the right to gather and to protest and say what we want to say. It is therefore unacceptable that every time there are mass gatherings of the poor and that every time we raise our voices the police are sent to oppress us. The police are sent to break the law and to stop us from marching and from speaking.

In a democratic society the police would exist to maintain the law and to ensure the safety of our communities. The police would be there to ensure our safety when we organise mass gatherings. But when we organise mass gatherings the police are there to make us unsafe! They assault us and shoot at us when they should be protecting us. Police brutality is not the exception. We suffer from illegal police brutality all the time.

On the 3rd of December 2006, the day after Abahlali and the AEC protested together at the SMI, the people of the Siyanda settlement blockaded the Inanda Road to protest against eviction and forced removals. They had a memorandum to hand over to their councillor. Abahlali and AEC were there. Before the councillor could arrive to receive the memorandum he, like so many other councillors, instructed the police officials to act on his behalf. Residents of Siyanda said that one of the police officers told them that they had been personally instructed by the councillor. The same thing has happened in settlements like Kennedy Road and Motala Heights. The councillor for Siyanda instructed the police to attack the people. He said that he would personally love to be there to help.

People were assaulted very badly to the extent that 3 people were admitted to King Edward Hospital and kept their under police guard. One other lady went to hospital on her own. Her situation is still very bad. She was already on strong medication before the police assaulted her so cruelly. According to Ntombi Fikile policemen were even breaking down people's door to assault them in their own houses. We have also seen this in E-Section, Umlazi where one man was even shot in his own home and in Foreman Road.

Abahlali baseMjondolo counted eleven people who had been badly injured after being assaulted by the police but there were rumours that more people had been hurt and were hiding in case the police came back to hurt them again.

My personal point of view is that as far as Section 205 of the 1993 Regulations of Gatherings Act goes the police in fact committed a crime in Siyanda. Just as they have committed crimes in Foreman Road, in Kennedy Road and in Motala Heights. In all of these places they have disobeyed the constitution of our country. This behaviour needs to be condemned. Serious steps need to be taken against the regular breaking of the law by the police because while they break they law they criminalise us. The police are getting paid for their work on days when they commit these crimes even though they fail to understand that their duty is to the people and the constitution that protects the people and not to the powerful. The police are there to work for us. Abahlali have struggled to make them understand this in some places and will continue to struggle to make the police serve the people. In Umlazi, E-Section, there has been a big success with the arrest of the councillor's hired assassins. There the police are now protecting the people from the powerful.

Like in other police attacks in other settlements the people in Siyanda lost their cell phones and had the doors to their homes broken. In fact what happened is that they suffered from armed robbery but the armed robbers were the police. Then the victims of the criminal behaviour were charged in court with public violence! It was the police that committed public violence! More than 100 Bahlali have been charged in the last year and a half but every time the charges have been dropped. This is because the police arrest us to intimidate us but never had any evidence against us. For them they use arrest just like tear gas or dogs or bullets. It is just one of their weapons.

Our communities need the South African Police Service to do their job. We want to enjoy our rights and to feel safe. The behaviour of the police is therefore

a challenge for Abahlali baseMjondolo, a social movement who loves the poor people and who will defend the poor people. We need to push for a strong campaign to conscientise the media, our people and the police about our rights and what the police are really supposed to be doing and who they are really supposed to be working for. All we need to do is to get the police to obey the constitution. When it stops the police from attacking the poor it will be real and it will be strong.

19 JANUARY 2007

Essay · S'bu Zikode

Make Crime History

The poor were not born to be poor. We didn't become poor because we are lazy or stupid. In fact we have to work very hard and be very clever just to find a place for ourselves in this world that the rich have made for themselves. History made us poor and the history of our country is a history of crimes against the innocent. Because of these crimes millions of people are living in shacks and selling in the streets. The poor have the most to gain from an end to crime. More than anybody else we want a country where the human dignity of every person is respected. More than anybody else we understand that working for an end to crime is the responsibility of every one of us. It is our duty to God, to our country and to our children. We are prepared to do our part of this work.

But I feel oppressed when high profile people, including politicians, speak about crime at the high level where it is very unusual for anyone to be a victim of crime. So few powerful people want to speak directly to communities. They prefer to make statements on the papers, radios and televisions. But when you make a statement there is no person in front of you to tell you about their lives. When you just make statements it is like you think that you already know everything. But when you humble yourself and talk to people you show that you know that you don't know everything. A proper understanding can only come from talking to everybody and that talking can never be finished. That is why all the good leaders were humble. They were servants of the people, not masters.

Some kinds of crimes are planned in shacks. Others are planned in big conferences at the ICC. Both of these kinds of crimes make people to suffer and must be stopped. But we must remember that both kinds of crime the truth is that most of the time the victims are not the powerful people. It is the people without power who most affected by crime. It is the poor and women and children. Putting more poor people in prisons will only make them better criminals. The way to deal with crime is to invest our energy, resources and time in our communities. When human dignity is at the centre of our communities then our communities are places where crime is not accepted inside or outside.

There is a big problem with many local police stations. We will begin to deal with local crimes only when men like acting Superintendent Glen Nayager of the Sydenham Police Station can acknowledge that he and he alone can't deal with crime. If he keeps treating all the poor as if we are all criminals he will just be wasting his energy. He will just make us feel that the police are our enemies. He must acknowledge that he is too high to understand the daily life at the grassroots. He must understand that just because we can't address him like he can address us that doesn't mean that we are just rogues.

Before I started struggling against the big crimes with Abahlali baseMjondolo I struggled against the local crimes. I joined the Police Reserve Force in February 2000. I had been into the Sydenham Community Service Centre. Before I entered I found an old African Mama with a baby on her back standing outside the door just helplessly waiting. When I asked her why she was just waiting there she told me that she had been chased out because she didn't speak English. None of the policemen on duty could speak isiZulu or even isiFanakalo. I was hurt to hear that. How can a police station serve the people when no one there can speak to people in their own language? I went inside with that woman to translate so that she could lay her charge and from there I decided to be a reservist. I underwent interviews, tests from the District Surgeon and trainings and worked as a Reservist at the Sydenham Police station.

Now that shack dwellers are fighting against evictions and for land and housing in the city he calls us all criminals. He thinks that he can arrest and beat us any time. He comes when we are marching and he comes when we are meeting and he comes when we are just living our daily lives. He needs to understand that we are an anti-crime movement. We have a trackable record in working against all kinds of crime. And he needs to think about the fact that although the police have arrested hundreds of us the courts have dropped the charges every time. But we, the shack dwellers, have won a number of victories against the City in the courts. We work to make this a country in which there is respect for the human dignity of each person. We would be happy to work with the local police to make our communities and all the people around us safe if they recognised us as citizens. If our communities could work against crime in a partnership with police officers that treated us with respect we could make our communities and neighbourhoods safe for everyone.

If the police continue to behave too high from the people like Nayager does then I fear that incidents of people taking the law into their own hands, as it happened in KwaMashu recently, could happen more often. When police officers like Nayager take the law into their own hands thinking that they are above the law then communities start to do the same. We can only really condemn what happened in KwaMashu when our police force becomes a police service as Madiba instructed.

We need the high profile people to make less statements and do more talking where people live and work. We need these discussions to be real discussions. We need the results of these discussions to be acted on. We need to build a country where the police serve all the people. If the police serve all the people then they will be trusted and it will be easy to marginalise the criminals in our communities and to organise against the criminals high up who are using the county's money for themselves and making the poor poorer. Then we can make our country safe for everyone.

28 FEBRUARY 2007

Essay · S'bu Zikode

When Choices Can No Longer Be Choices

In South Africa everyone will say that life is not fair for the poor. Even the rich will say that what they are doing is for the poor. They will even say this when they are just finding more and more excuses to give more of the country's money to themselves to build all these very expensive things that they have seen in those few rich countries on TV. They want to have those things here so that they can feel themselves to be 'world class'. Meanwhile our children, who, like the children in Haiti and Kenya and Zimbabwe are never on TV, are burning in shack fires and dying from diarrhoea around the corner.

One of the truths that people want to hide from is that in this country where everything is done in the name of the suffering of the poor life is good for the masters of the poor but it is very unfair for the servants of the poor. I have suffered in my own society and in my working place for standing strong for the poor. I am not the only one. We have lost count of how many members of Abahlali baseMjondolo have been arrested and beaten even though not one of us has ever been convicted of a crime. I have also had my turn to be taken from my family and beaten in the Sydenham police station. People in and outside the government who want to be the masters of a long journey to a better future for the poor have gone into the same rage and told the same wild lies about us when we have only asked to think and speak for ourselves. I have also suffered this. Every uMhlali with a job who has stood strong for the poor in the media has almost lost, is losing or has already lost that job. Now my turn has come.

I worked at a petrol station. I have invested so much of my energy and my time at this petrol station trying to the best of my ability to prove that I can be a productive and profitable member of this society. I used all my knowledge, my historic background to work honestly and humbly and to communicate well with co-workers and customers.

In 2005 shackdwellers and other marginalised people in Durban formed Abahlali baseMjondolo to protect the interests of the poor. I decided to stand

strong with Abahlali. The movement became massive. It carried us like a powerful river. The days of my life became strenuous. Every time that Abahlali organised a protest, or I attended a conference or a workshop, or we were in the newspapers or on radio and TV, or even if I happened to have an article in a newspaper, my employer, the owner of the Petroport River Horse Valley, called me for a disciplinary hearing. At these hearings the charges were always made up and they always went away in the end. But what did not go away was that he would threaten me for speaking the truth about the life that the poor are living in this world. He told me clearly that he could not have me embarrassing the mayor.

As the movement got stronger and stronger I suffered more and more harassment from my employer. He is the head of the Durban Chamber of Commerce, a close friend of the mayor and a well respected business man. I felt more oppressed at work in that smart building than I did at home in my shack. But my colleagues gave me strong support. They had a firm belief that I would laugh at this poison and stand firm for myself and for the liberation of all us at work like I was doing in my community. This kept me strong and I therefore owe them a lot. I was not alone. As the poor we are often on our own but as people we are closely together.

Things went very sour early this year. I attended a customer complaint like I did every day as it was part of my duties. He shouted at me and accused me of holding political meetings with strangers during working hours. I explained that the strangers were his customers who had come to have their car filled with petrol and washed. He then accused me of over using the telephone for my political activities with shack dwellers across the country. I told him that I have always used my own cell phone and the money that should be for my family for these calls. He then accused me not returning a call from him. This was true. He had phoned me at night in my time with family and I had not returned this call because he does not own my time at night. Then he told me that I am no longer responsible.

On Monday 5th February he shouted at me to come to his office as normal. He finally told me that he was getting too stressed about having me there and that he could no longer trust me or work with a person like me. I told him that I could not stop the work that I was doing with Abahlali in my own time. At 16:00 p.m. he gave me a resignation letter and forced me to sign. The choice to resign was not my choice. That choice was taken from me. I had to choose from

no choice. I did as he commanded without thinking for my children, my family and the implications for how I can continue to work for the people that I serve without even money for airtime. In 2005 I had committed to stand strong with Abahlali. I stayed with that decision. My choice in 2005 was also for my family because my family are also poor. But in 2007 my choice to sign that form put my community ahead of my family. This is a very, very hard thing.

I know that there are many patriots like myself who want to work to make the poor strong but who cannot commit themselves to their communities. This is not because they don't have time. It is because they fear losing their jobs and they fear other kinds of threats – threats from the police, threats from councillors. Today I brave losing my job like it is any other day. It takes a strong leader to choose from no choice. But for a long time I will continue to pray for the tears that I saw on the day that I signed the letter to resign. The comforting SMS's, the powerful messages and support I received will always be in my heart till the dawn of justice for all.

But for that dawn to come we must accept the truth that in our country, a country where everyone says that what they are doing is for the poor, a country where the law gives everyone the right to gather and to speak, in reality the poor have to make their choices from no choice. Business and politics, the left and the right are all united in their demand for our silence. We know the truth of what has been decided about our place. We will continue to be assaulted by the police on the way to an interview on a radio station, we will continue to be assaulted by the police at the door of the television talk show to which we have been invited, we will continue to have our marches stopped, organisations and people that have never supported us will continue to misuse our struggle to make themselves look good, the NGOs that want us to be silent while they speak for us will continue to call security if we try to bring our university to their university like they did on 3 December, the police will continue to shoot at us and even kill us like they did at the Siyanda road blockade on 4 December. Struggle is hard. Having your life destroyed by forced removal to a formal jondolo far outside the city is harder.

Every day we are maturing in our struggle. We were always many but every day we are more. The red river that carried me will carry us all on and on through the shooting and the lies and the unfairness and all the choices that we will have to make without choice.

7 MARCH 2007

Interviews · Abahlali youth

Interviews with Abahlali Youth

Interviews by Ally Brundige, November 2006

06/11/2006 Vuyisiwe Mvula, (F 27/matric), Jadhu Place Settlement.

When did you first come to Jadhu Place?

I started staying in Jadhu Place in 2001, on May 6. When I was staying at Jadhu Place the Chairman was telling us we were getting houses. Each and every month we were paying money for the ANC membership and SANCO membership cards but even now we didn't get the houses.

I came from the Drakensberg to look for jobs because I have my matriculation. I decided to stay at the shacks. I didn't have a relationship with anyone here. I have met many people who have spent many years there, more than 15 years, and are still looking for development. Right now, we still haven't gotten it. That's why we're communicating with Abahlali because they are talking the language we are talking. We are sick and tired of the promises.

How'd you first get involved with Abahlali?

I started as a member [of Abahlali] in December 2005. To us Abahlali, we stand alone. There is no one standing in front of us. We are talking ourselves. No one can tell us what can be done because we are sick and tired of staying in the shacks.

What are the problems facing youth?

Unemployment and politicians. In politics they are focusing on the politics [and not the people]. Our problem is pregnancy of young people and HIV and AIDS.

Why join Abahlali?

We are going straight to the municipality to make meetings with them, to march. We mobilize people to go straight to the community and say, "Tell us what you want from the municipality". They express their feelings with their suffering.

I like to work with different people: teamwork. I was tired. I needed to speak to the official government myself, especially the Housing Minister and talk to him face to face.... Some people are telling us they talk to him for us. I'm sick and tired of talking to someone because there are only promises. That's why I joined Abahlali because we're speaking ourselves.

Are youth selfish?

Yes, I agree. I think they are uneducated, especially when you come from a rural area. You didn't get that time of going to school. Youth of South Africa, most of them (the black ones), they think there's no need to use the resources because they didn't get training. They're wasting money and using alcohol. 75% of the youth are using alcohol and drugs.

Abahlali is trying to deal with the (alcohol and drug) abuse of the youth by making some groups and activities, singing, and volunteering in their community. Abahlali advises activism in different things, also in making projects for employment. Sewing and catering for those who don't have jobs. We're not concentrating only on housing. We're doing different things."

How do you make change?

To us Abahlali, we pressure them. We go to them and tell them what we want. They see the crowd.

Does the government care?

Some of them come to work with us (step by step because we are a new movement).

Do you vote?

No, I did not make my vote because we are sick and tired of voting and never getting the promises. We told the government we would hold our votes because he didn't give us our basic needs (especially housing). No one in Jadhu Place voted because all the people staying here are Abahlali.

What needs to happen?

I'm on track because I'm getting more experience and I'm communicating with more people from different provinces and different countries. When I went to Cape Town, I experienced different things. To be a member of Abahlali, you experience different provinces. I feel connected to young people and women and to struggles of other people as well.

I'll never get a relaxing time. I keep busy because I'm working always. I work with different peoples. I go to the community. I volunteer with different things: HIV/AIDs, HSRC Research, and Abahlali. I'm always busy.

Are you a leader?

When God gives me the chance, I'll be a leader. In Jadhu Place, they look at me like a leader. I give when they come to me even though I don't have 1 cent. They look me up and down and see that I'm serious. I didn't tell people lies. When I don't know, I say I don't know. We respect each other.

Why is Abahlali so powerful?

We respect one another. It's a democracy because there's no one who tells us what to do. We are making it happen at every point.

Why do others join?

We are going to the community and telling people what Abahlali is and then they decide [if they want to join]. The people who are sick and tired of speaking about politics come to Abahlali and express their views. They are getting to be strong, to be Bahlali, because they'll say something and then we'll do it. When we decide something we go straight to the community and tell them what's going on.

What's the role of young people for the future?

The role of young people in South Africa is to be educated. If we're not educated, we'll end up on a lower level. When we're educated you're on the right track: you can start a business.

What should the government do to make South Africa a better place for youth?

The government can give the youth bursaries and events for the youth from grade 8 and lower. As well as housing. We don't get a real life without a house. For Jadhu Place, we have a school for the youth but this school is not educating in isiZulu. It's taught in English. The library is too far for us. We need free education because we are poor people. We need basic needs [provided for]. We want housing. We want to get a real house where you have electricity, water, and sanitation. When we get that we're on the right track. Then, for the youth, we'll make a grounds, a hall, a library and work as well. We need to have money. We'll do everything for government when they give us these things.

What message would you like sent out to others about Abahlali?

To tell the people of South Africa, that we're staying on our own. Don't make promises and lies if you are a leader to your country. We need land and housing

this year. When we get housing we'll be free. To be free, we'll feel South Africa is a democratic world. We will get everything we need in South Africa.

What does it mean to you to be an active citizen?

To be an active South African citizen, means that we're doing everything that needs to be done. There's no one who can tell us what to do. We're independent.

09/11/06, Philani "Star" Ntanzu, (M 20/matric 2005), Foreman Road Settlement (tape recording).

What first got you involved in Abahlali?

Actually, it was last year. If I'm not mistaken, it was between August and September when the Kennedy Road Committee approached us to support them on their march against the Councilor Baig. They were still alone. So they came here to Foreman Road and they told us that they need our support because we are still fighting for the same thing. We still need the houses. Also them, they need houses. We marched with them. Then, on the 13 November, we at Foreman Road also decided to do a march to Mlaba, the Mayor. Then, we also needed support from them. It all started then. After that march, we decided to come together. We were all fighting for the same thing so [we thought] "Let's combine together," and that's where it all started.

Where has it been your experience with Abahlali so far?

Abahlali is recognized everywhere. All people talk about Abahlali. Everything seems to be all right although we are still struggling because we haven't gotten the things that we want. We're still hearing the promises, and at the end of the day we are still suffering.

What are you fighting for?

That's obvious. We're fighting for land and housing. Councilor Baig came to Foreman at the time that he was campaigning for votes, and he told us, together with the mayor, "If the ANC wins, there's land there. If you vote for the ANC we will definitely build houses there." But ever since the ANC won, they have been ignoring us.

Actually, they are trying to move people from there now. They haven't told us anything; they just told us, "We're relocating you. We're not upgrading there" – [the land] where they had promised us [houses]. But actually, most people are working around this area, so it would be difficult for them to move there [to the new site]. It's a rural area. There's no hospital. There's no police station, so if the people move from here to there, they're actually going to struggle more.

And they will lose their jobs. There are no jobs there. Whereas here, people are working here and earning small amounts but they are able to pay the school fees for their children. There it will be difficult. The promises that they made us still haven't been fulfilled. That's why we're still unhappy with the municipality and Abahlali will take it forward."

Is the government doing enough for young people?

He is trying. I can not say "he's doing well or he's not doing well". He is trying, but he is still one step behind. Most of young people are just sitting there. There's nothing for them to do. There's no job opportunities. There's nothing going on for them. This just leads to young people eventually to [become] involved in drugs and crime. So he is trying because there are some youth development efforts like Umsobomvu. They're trying to help youth to have some job opportunities so, yes, he is trying but not that much.

What needs to happen for young people? (If you could make the decisions, what would you do for young people?)

I would try to put an organization [together], which would be driven by youth. This organization will be based on youth culture and will involve youth and ask them what they want, how they feel, what needs to be done, what the government should do for you So that they can participate and the government can really understand that they are the future of the country.

Does the government reach out to youth?

No, it doesn't. Maybe it's still in the process. But for now, nothing has been done so far.

As a young person, do you agree that young people are selfish or care only about material things?(cell phones etc)?

I don't agree because now it's a new generation. Young people need to be happy with their lives. They need to be happy. By getting all the phones, it's a new freedom for them. They have to express themselves. That's why others are saying 'they're selfish or what what.' They have to do what they want. They need to express themselves.

What's the role of young people in making South Africa better for the future?

Young peoples' role is to question the government and to explain to the government that what he's doing is not right... He needs to be careful with the people especially the poor people. They mustn't just be ignored and then only be remembered when the election campaign is going to happen. Because that's

what the government is doing right now. They just ignore the poor and then when it is vote time, they come here and go to where people are poor and try to offer something that will bring them on board and at the end they just leave them like that.

Trying to make change, what's the most effective way to do it? How do you bring about change? Is politics effective?

I think two things: Social organizations organizing and then politics, because it's where the government actually is... in social organizations, maybe we have to make marches against them so that they can listen to us because if we're just sitting there like that nothing will happen. You can raise your voice but no one will hear you, but once you start putting people in the street, it's when the government will really understand, "Hey these people, they really need this thing." And two, politics. Politics is where government is. Actually, if we don't talk politics, there's nothing that will happen. Government will just ignore you. It means, "Oh, everything in the country is going well. People are not complaining."

To be an active citizen what does it mean to you?

To take part where people need help most. To be active, is where you can actually help the people who really need your help. To help the people to understand what they want, issues, proper channels to follow rather than just to sit down and not do anything.

Are you an active citizen?

I am. In my community, I am still fighting for the people. I can say that I'm active because they always put the responsibility on me and they say, "You still have the potential to go there, but us we are old now, there's not too much energy. You are still young. You are still active. You have to go. You have to challenge these people in order for our things to be done properly."

What's it like to have been a young person in Abahlali?

It's great. At the beginning we didn't understand the struggle. And that's where Abahlali came. And then Abahlali taught us that being in the struggle is like this and you have to know your rights and you have to follow the proper channels. Now, we really understand. At the beginning, when Abahlali were not here, we used to be treated so badly by the politicians and the police. They used to come where we live in the settlement, Foreman Road. They used to beat us. They'd not even ask but just come to us and then they'd beat us. But now if the

police came, we'll ask the police "Under which act?" Hawu! It's something that we know now that the police won't take advantage of us. Abahlali has helped us a lot because we know the things we didn't know at the beginning. It's so good to be in Abahlali.

What story would you like to tell?

On the 27 February, we were marching to Mlaba outside the Minister of Housing Mgwela Gula. It was about quarter past eight, and we were still waiting for buses. And then we heard that Sutcliffe, the Durban City Manager had not released the permit so the march was illegal because we hadn't been given the permit to march. We were organizing the people to come in numbers, and we didn't tell the people the march was cancelled because it was illegal. We knew at the end we would get the permit because there was nothing wrong with what we were doing. Then the police came. They came early in the morning at about six o'clock. I was one that was active in the march. They came to us and they questioned us, "The march is not legal." And we told them "don't worry about us." They told us we have to go to our shacks inside. But we denied them because the road was full and no people were going. They told us that we were trying to block the people going to work, but...people wanted to march. There was no one who had been prevented from going to work. And then they told us tell the people the march is illegal. We couldn't tell them that because we know our rights. ... They started trying to catch us and we ran into the shacks but we came out again. It was just hide and seek between the police and us. We were playing, but actually it was not fair play. They caught me. They had marked the activists who were the most energetic. I was one of them, and I was at my house. I closed the door, but they saw where I had gone. They came there and opened the door and grabbed me. I was at my house. I was alone and the door was closed. But they arrested three guys from Foreman road, M'du Hlongwa, the Secretary of Abahlali, and me. They beat us and said, "Who are you?" "Who are you that you thought you were going to give the people houses?" Then they tried to talk their stories. Most of the police don't like us. They beat us there, and we were charged with illegal gathering. I was alone at my home and charged with illegal gathering, but how can they charge me with illegal gathering when I was alone? The next day we went to court, but the case kept on being postponed. At the end, we got the lawyers and the case was dismissed. That's one story I remember, when we were arrested. There are so many memories.

Why don't the police like you?

The problem with the police is that they have friendship with the Councilor. That's why they don't like us. Actually, we were the ones that were pushing the slogan "No House, No Land, No vote." "The police didn't like that slogan because they wanted the people to vote for their friend, the Councilor. And the councilor kept pressuring them saying that we, Abahlali were intimidating the people not to go to vote, but it was the police who were intimidating us to force us to vote. And the councilor was intimidating us, saying that we have to vote.

What's behind the slogan?

It was 'No Land No House No Vote' and then 'House First, Man Behind'. If you give me a house now, then let me be sure I will have to vote for you. Then, Abahlali demanded that they write a statement answering how many houses they've built, where and when and how. If they didn't do that, we were not going to vote. It all started from then, the pressure from the police. Even now, they don't like us but now they have no choice because we know the law now. We are not complete in our knowledge of the whole law, but we know a little bit of the law so they cannot do everything they like to us.

Will you vote in the future?

If it continues like this, I won't vote because I have to vote for something that has changed my life. At the moment, there is nothing that has changed my life so why would I vote? To vote would mean that I would be wasting my vote, I would be putting a person on top of me, on top of my head. I would be his tool, just working for him while he doesn't give me anything.

Will you vote in Abahlali's Annual General Meeting?

[Laughter.] Definitely. Sure. Why? Because it's Abahlali. It's Abahlali: it's real not something that's promised. Abahlali is a social organization that is trying to help poor people with what the political parties have promised us. It's something that's totally different. I have to vote for Abahlali.

Do you feel connected to other youth ?

I feel connected because we as young people, if we sit down, we really talk about these issues. We have to be aware of what is happening in the country. We have to take action with what is happening in the country...I am aware of what is going on.

Are young people leaders?

Young people are leaders because without young people, the country will stop. Without young people, there's nothing that will be going on. Young people come fresh-minded. As young people, we are still growing this country. We know where things went wrong, what we need to do, what channels we need to set in order for things to be right.

How does race come into play?

Race is another problem. Since 1994, people are free, but people, especially black people, are still suffering. The police have been beating us. They are trying to trick us because they thought we didn't know our rights. I heard the conversation of some black policeman in Sydenham, and they said the reason some other policemen do this to us is because they knew black people were not well-educated and they didn't know their rights very well. They knew there was nothing they would do against them. That's still racist.

Other problems facing young people?

Job opportunities. There are no jobs here. Young people are still suffering. Some are involved in drugs, crime. Nothing seems to be going their way.

How has being part of Abahlali changed you?

It's changed me because now I know that most of the politicians are liars. They can promise you (something) but at the end of the day they will not fulfill that promise, they will just leave you and say, "Who are you? Just go away. You have done what we wanted from you. Just leave us." We cannot trust politicians. But at the moment, I'm still learning.

How does it make you feel to be part of Abahlali?

It's where I belong. It's where I started. And it's where I'll end.

What does 'uMhlali for life' mean to you?

It means I will live uMhlali, eat uMhlali, and sleep uMhlali. I will be uMhlali. I cannot change from uMhlali until I die. It's only death that will separate Philani from uMhlali.

Do you have anything else to add?

Young people should realize that they have to stand on their feet. They should not rely on politicians and the promises of the politicians. They have to be themselves. They have to take the actions against what they don't like. Because if they just keep their suffering there and are not doing anything, nothing good will come.

Stand up and speak for yourself because there is no one who will speak for you if you're just sitting on the corner not doing anything!

Politicians [should realize that] it feels bad to be ignored, as we are the poor from the poorest. I don't know where it will end because they are the ones who told us, "Vote for me, and I will do this and do this and do this." As Abahlali we didn't ask them what they should do for us, we were just sitting in our homes not doing anything. Then they came to us saying vote for me and I will do this: I will build houses for you; I will make it so you don't have to pay at school; I will give you jobs." Then what happened to their promises? We've been neglected now. We've realized that to be poor, it's really hard in South Africa. Especially in South Africa, it seems that the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer. If you're poor, you'll be poor for the rest of your life unless you can see that this is not where I belong. And then we have to take legal action. That's what Abahlali is doing.

Abahlali will continue taking action until people get what they want. Because Abahlali will remain forever. There is nothing that can scare Abahlali. Abahlali are the ones that stand for the poor people. They are the ones that have a real understanding of poor people's needs, of how it's like to be poor. Abahlali understand the life of the poor much better than some people who have researched the poor without ever knowing how it feels to be poor.

08/11/06, Mazwi "Raymond" Zimonde (M 15, Grade 9-Protea Secondary School) Joe Slovo Settlement (tape recording).

Why did you first get involved with Abahlali?

Firstly, because there were so many problems in Joe Slovo. They promised us housing. I think in 2003, one man came in my house and he said "You've got free housing." Then he came back and said "You can't have the house because we've lost your form" but they said that "next year you will get the house". Okay, so I wait and I wait and I wait. And somehow I found Abahlali because I thought maybe these people can help because next year we don't want to leave here in Joe Slovo. We went to Abahlali and Abahlali fought for us and we're still in Joe Slovo. That's why I joined Abahlali.

How did you first hear of Abahlali?

One lady from Joe Slovo was in the paper fighting for the same thing. Mnikelo Ndabankulu and Philani Zungu [a leader of Abahlali] saw the lady in the paper, and they asked for her number, they got her number, and they came

back to her. She told us "Hey, I found these people who say they are Abahlali." Abahlali are good people. They are nice people.". That's how we saw them. Philani called and said "Come and join Abahlali," and we did because they government was taking us far away.

Is the government doing enough for young people?

No, nothing really is being done for young people because here in Joe Slovo we just have to sit in the house and do nothing all day. Some young people go and do crime because they don't know what to do. No ground. No house. Living in a shack like this. What else do they have to do? Go for crime. Go for drugs. So I chose to join Abahlali.

What needs to happen to make Joe Slovo and South Africa a better place?

I don't see anything happening. At the moment, all these people are fighting. Now, we're left like this in the shacks. I think we'll stay in the shacks forever if it wasn't for Abahlali....If we keep fighting maybe something can happen, but I don't know.

What are you fighting for?

I'm fighting for the same thing: Houses and umhlaba. If I get my house, my umhlaba, and the water, everything you see, ...I'll be a happy man that day.

When you're old enough, will you vote?

I'm going to vote. Maybe next time, I'll vote for Zikode, I don't know.

Why vote?

I'll vote because they say if you are a South African citizen you have to vote, so they can know that in South Africa you are alive. So I would have to vote.

What does it mean to be an active South African citizen?

I'm proud of being a South African. South Africa is a nice country, but there are some people who are doing bad things. I'm proud of being a South African.

In your opinion, what does it mean to be an active citizen?

It's a tough one, because I'm very young. But I'm with people like Sihle and he's telling me what happened in 1994.

Some people say youth today are more selfish than other generations agree?

No, I don't agree. See, I don't have a house, but I'm doing it for my mother and my father. I'm going to join Abahlali because of my mother and my father and my younger brother. We are not selfish.

Do you think its true that the youth only care about materialist things cell phones etc?

No, I don't. I carry the cell phone for personal things. I don't carry this cell phone for fun.

What do young people care about?

First of all, my family, my friends and my colleagues

What are the issues facing young people?

HIV, drugs. You see these days, that's what we're facing and what we're fighting against.

Do you feel connected to other young people?

Not really. Young people, many of them, they care only about drugs and girlfriends.

How's Abahlali different?

Abahlali are different because in Abahlali, we all meet together. You don't see Abahlali fighting. There in Abahlali, I make friends. Here in Joe Slovo, even in school, I don't have any friends. I just sit alone. But when I met Abahlali, I met people like Md'u and Philani, so I have friends. I even met you. That's how I connect with Abahlali. When I go to Abahlali, I feel happy you see because when I'm here in Joe Slovo, I just sit sad. I can only come to Sihle but when Sihle's not here I just sit alone.

What are your memories of Abahlali? What are the victories with Abahlali?

I think the first victory was here in Joe Slovo because they were telling us that "next month you are going. Next month, we're not going to come back here and see you [still] here in Joe Slovo." But Mnikelo and Philani went and said, "The people of Joe Slovo are not going anywhere unless you give them housing where they stay." In my house, they came and showed us RDP housing and told us, "this is your house," but they came and put another lady inside. When I met Abahlali, that thing stopped. So that was a victory.

What's been Abahlali's impact on you?? Abahlali, it's a good thing because I feel good when I see every one of them. There's something special about them.

As a young person what would you want to happen for South Africa, if you could make the decisions?

Firstly, everyone must have water in his or her houses. Every youth must have something to do- some fun, because we don't have a place to play. Everyone must get a free house. You know housing is very important. Without housing, nothing. When you are living in a shack like this, people look at you and they

say "This one, he is mad." I'd say, "Build a house for everyone. Give him water. Give him electricity." That's all I can say if I were to make the decisions.

What in your view is the way to get power and be powerful?

One time, Zikode told me if you want to do something, you write it down and submit it to a meeting because it is important to show people what you want. . It's up to Abahlali how they want the country to go because the government can't do anything for us. We have to be in power. We have to tell the government this is what we want.

Why is it important to be with Abahlali and to be struggling?

It's important for my own good. If I don't go to Abahlali, who knows, maybe I would be in an mjondolo forever. If I go to Abahlali, no one can touch me, no one can remove me from my home. Whenever I'm with Abahlali, I think it's home.

08/11/06, Sihle Sidisi (M 26), Joe Slovo Settlement (tape recording).

What made you first get involved with Abahlali?

I'll mention three things. Firstly, I heard about Abahlali because before there was a part of the political parties. They promised us this and that, this and that but they wouldn't give us what they said. We see that in this mjondolo. I'd say in 1992, I started staying here. They promised me many things. But there's nothing that they produced. One, I don't have water here. They're supposed to put in a community tap. Two, my cabin is like this. I can't afford any small luxuries. So there's a difference between needs and wants. First the needs: shelter, clothes, food, and water. So this political party went across with the needs and now they want the wants [for themselves]. That's why I jumped to Abahlali because I saw their programs and their progress. That's why I joined them.

How'd you first hear about Abahlali?

The first year is this year. This is my first year with Abahlali. I saw that in the movement of Abahlali here in Joe Slovo, there was a lot of woman. There were no men. There was a want for the men of Joe Slovo to join Abahlali. I jumped into the part of Abahlali to give them that diversity to say we are not the same gender. We are both in Abahlali now. And, more especially, I was the first one to be a youth in Abahlali. So for everything that we are supposed to participate in or take part in they also need the fresh men to run wherever they want to go.

What does it mean to be a young person in Abahlali. and in South Africa?

To be a young person, I love it. If I could do it my own way, I would like to be a youth forever. Because when you are a youth you can experience many things. At the moment in our generation, in our youth, you can find that most of the youth are involving themselves in cruel things. They are going to drugs and crime and everything that's against the law. So, for me as UMhlali, I want to be exemplary to them to show them you can live without everything that shortens your life. Because when you do these things that oppose the law, you're just shortening your days. When you go to the Bible, it says respect the man and the woman, your mother and your father in order to have a long life.

People say that young people are selfish today. Do you agree?

I agree with them because many of us as the youth like the things that you take for free without working. [For example,] when I want Raymond's cell phone, I take the knife and I point it at him because I want his cell phone. They want the things easy. ...It's not like the old system. In the old system, they would listen to the elders. When an elder says, "Stop going this way," they won't ask why. They'll stop it. For us, they'll say "You mustn't go this way." We'll say "Why must we not go this way?" They'll tell you the reason "this and this and this and this." It wasn't there in their youth time. Now, it's our time. So when you tell me, "you mustn't go there," I must go and see what's inside what you are trying to protect me from. That's why our life has become selfish because we think for us. We don't think for our parents or our nation.

Why have things changed like this?

It's changed most especially because of a lack of respect. Each and everyone we're not respecting ourselves. We're not respecting our parents. It means we're not respecting anybody because when we see the aunty outside, and we see it's the same elder as my mom, I'm not respecting her because I'm not respecting my mom at my house. "

Have things improved since the end of apartheid?

At that time, there was apartheid. We were out in apartheid. It was a bad time; we were blocked with a board. But now as Africans lead the country, now we are free. But I just see that there's concrete now, a concrete block for us. It was better at that time to be blocked with a board, because we could fight to demolish that board, but now when it's concrete and it's not easy to fight and break that concrete. Why I say that is because the people that have power won't respect the lower people. When I vote for him, he says "Okay, I was staying with

you but now I'm adopting the stage of the other people." Then they come to tell us to vote after they've ignored us. They come back and say, "I'm a candidate and I'll do this and this and this," and they just promise everything. So I'll say it was better in apartheid, though I didn't live in apartheid that long but the time I saw was better than this one.

Do you vote?

Yes, I was voting. I was voting because I was brainwashed. The old people said "Eh, you know what, apartheid was doing this and this and this. Now it's better to vote and vote for your colour in order to break from the chains that they wore before." That's why I would vote. To vote for my colour and my nation. Now, I'm free because I'm out from the whites. This country is for us as a black people. But when the politicians leave us and change over their ways and took their things for themselves, now I'm feeling it's better to go back to where we come from. So at the moment, it's hard to say I'm not voting or I'm voting. Now, they're doing everything. They're starting to come to us and tell us everything. I want to see the process of what they're doing. After I see that they're doing what they say, that I can vote for.

Is the government doing enough for young people?

No.

What should they be doing?

Firstly, the government said that they would create jobs. But there's no institution that says I want all the children who come from school, having finished their grade 12, and they can go forward and do what they want to do in this institution. But [with Umsobomvu] when you go there, you need huge money but they know exactly that we don't have money. In other words, when you're rich you get richer. When you're poor, you're very poor.

In 1993, they said when you've finished your grade 12, you will have a license in your hand. In 1994, they finished that thing. Now, you can try your own to get the license, but now when you want a job they want the license and the computer skills and everything that they're supposed to give us in our schools but they don't give us in our schools. They give everything to the private schools, which are for the rich.

Some of the government is lying to the youth. Because now, they're starting this programme Umsobomvu but this umsobomvu you need funds when I'm starting my company. When I'm applying for the funds from umsobomvu they

say you must give us the thing, something worth 20,000 for when I'm failing to pay them. As for me, I don't have anything to pay them worth 20,000 so I don't know because it's hard. They oppose what they've said.

If government isn't doing it, how do you make change?

I think that the Abahlali movement is the only movement, which is fighting for their rights straight to government. Because the government said, I'll build you houses, I'll give you free water, I'll give you free electricity, free education, free health when you're going to hospital. I'll treat you for free. But all those things, they're not doing well. So now, Abahlali they want the houses first. They want the infrastructure first. They promised us that they'd build a house. They must build a house. Because, you see, the people came from the farm to Durban to the city because they wanted to be a short distance to their work. It's not easy if I'm working here in Mbongeni but I'm staying in KwaNgoma. The bus rate is about 80 to 90 rand but how much they're paying me is about 40 R a day... That's why I built my cabin here, my mjondolo in order to be a short distance to where I'm working. The government said they'd build the houses. But as before, in apartheid they'd build a hostel so for all the men staying in the hostel it would be a short distance to work. So now, when we build mjondolos, we are building so that they'll be a short distance to where we are working, where we are schooling, where we are doing all these things. So now, instead of doing that, they're demolishing our mjondolos. When they're demolishing our mjondolos, they won't tell us when they are demolishing our mjondolos, where you are going. Which means, I must know my rights. There is a procedure for government. Because, they [apartheid] appeared in Joe Slovo and they were cutting the mjondolos. When we were fighting with apartheid, we were fighting alone. There was not this organization Abahlali baseMjondolo. We'd build one afternoon and they'd come in the morning and drop it again. We'd build one afternoon and they'd come in the morning and drop it again. Now, this government is going back to what they did, the whites, in the old South Africa. It's going back.

What's Abahlali doing to make change?

Abahlali, now, the movement is different. When I see [how it was] before and now and the future, I see the difference because now in Abahlali I can talk with the councillor. Before, we were not allowed to talk to the councillor. When you wanted to talk to the councillor, we were supposed to chat with the area

committee member first, and the committee members would gather and discuss what you said, and from that they'd tell the BEC member and the BEC members would discuss and then now they'd go to the councillor. You see it would take a long period of time to talk to the councillor. Now, when we have a problem we go straight to the councillor and tell the councillor this and this and this and this. When the councillor fails to deliver, now it's easy to tell Abahlali "You know what, my colleague? This is my problem and I've seen the councillor and he replied like this, so what am I supposed to do about my problem?" So Abahlali gives me the strength, the courage to solve the thing. When I phone Abahlali and say, "I don't have this and this and this," they say just wait and they come and they deliver. "

What makes Abahlali effective?

We are moving forward because we are asking the City Manager what we want to ask now, and for us what we want from them as a city. Because when they think and plan for 2010, they said there will be no mjondolos in the city, but I don't know because they give us double stories. ...On the radios they say 2014. Now we don't know which is which. Yes, we want the houses, but to us, as Abahlali, they said you must move. This place is for the municipality or this place is for somebody else. So now, it's hard to communicate. Now the councillors they won't help us with anything that we want. Some of our mothers they want the stamps for the grants. When they go to the councillor the councillor says "I don't know you." But how can you get the stamp when you want to register a child for the grant, and the councillor says "I don't know you"?

Do you have a message to other young people or to the government as to what young people should do to move South Africa forward?

At the moment, to youth, don't drink. If you want to drink, you must limit the drink. You must stop the drugs... The youth are buying these drugs and using these drugs. After that, we as a youth must unite and do fun [activities] like sport and exercise and going to the pool to exercise ourselves. We must learn from people older than us how to fight with the government as they were doing before with the apartheid government. We must ask them, what can we do to take that information and change it, so our generation will use it. Three, every youth is accepted in Abahlali. This is Abahlali's movement. We're not fighting for anybody else. We're fighting for us. For our future.

17/11/06. System Cele (F28), Kennedy Road Settlement (tape recording).

How'd you first get involved in Abahlali? When did you first come to Kennedy Road ?

I was born in Ntuzuma and my family came to stay here in Kennedy Road in 1987 so from 1987 I grew up here. My father was a member of the committee, and he was a pastor. They were having meetings with the municipality people and fighting for the space where we were living so the municipality promised that they would build houses here for them. So they came, I don't know whether it was an organization or a company, called the Urban Foundation, they came and built a hall and these toilets, and they said that there was progress here and that we were not going anywhere. And they did make a survey and put markings to mark your site, so they were promising us that we weren't going anywhere. Later on, they changed. They said this space was unstable. The land is moving and if you build a house, it will crack. They saw that we didn't understand that and after a while they said no, there are gases in the air here because you live near the dump. The gases are dangerous to you and your children you will have to move away. We asked them why all of a sudden... we hadn't seen anyone here but they said no they had sent people to do the research. But we didn't see anyone doing the research. So my father passed away in 2004, in January. We started a project called a Cleaning Campaign with the PDI. The PDI gave us green bags to sort the rubbish. When we were cleaning, the rubbish was down by the hall and the municipality wouldn't come to pick up the rubbish because they said the plastics were the green ones, and they didn't take the green ones- they take only the yellow. So after that we started to march because the rubbish was full down by the hall. We tried to contact our councilor, and our councilor didn't even attend our meetings. There was a group of people who were against us who say we don't belong here, we must move from here, we are thieves, and we are stealing from them, all this stuff. Our councilor was involved with all those people. He doesn't like us. He didn't attend our meetings. We tried to call him to talk to him about the rubbish. He didn't come so that was the day we decided to march. We picked up the rubbish and put it in Kennedy Road so that the councilor would come and talk to us. He didn't come because he didn't recognize us. We went down to M19. We burned tires there. Then, the police asked why are we angry. We told the police the whole story. Then they tried to phone our councilor. The councilor said I don't know those people. They're just criminals so just arrest them. So the police started shooting rubber bullets.

They beat 14 comrades including two young teenagers who were supposed to write their exams. They took them to the police station. We tried to march to the police station but the police blocked us there. So they took them to Westville Prison and we were thinking those Bahlali were Nelson Mandela because they were arrested for the people. After that march, that was when Raj and Richard and Fazel saw it in the papers and came and said okay guys we would like to work with people like you. Now, the government says Richard was after us making us do these things but they saw it in the paper and then they came to see what was going on and what we were fighting for.

The thing that makes me join the struggle is that from 1987, since I moved here, we're living in shacks. Whenever it's raining, water is coming into the houses, as you can see that spot over there. In the kitchen, water is coming down everywhere. I'm sick and tired of this life.

We have no jobs here. I have four kids, and I'm realizing they're not going to be kids forever. They're growing up. So they will need a home, a real home. So if we're stuck like this in the shacks, I can't call it a home. I need to have my own home with my children. So that's why I joined the struggle. I'm not fighting for anyone. I'm fighting for myself. Whenever I do anything to pick up the struggle, I'm not telling myself I'm doing it for our President, S'bu, or for other comrades or just to show off. I'm fighting for my children. I'm fighting for my life. Because this is not a real life we are living here.

Is the government doing enough for young people?

No, I don't think so because right now as I was telling you I have four children. The government doesn't care about the youth because it's important to be educated. But right now I'm struggling for them. I'm collecting grants for them. Three of them are going to attend school and I also only have grade 11. I don't have my matric. I was finishing school but it is very hard for me to pay for my matric. It's too expensive for me. And there is an age limit in school. Because of this, I can't finish my matric. So the government doesn't care about the youth. I'm still the youth because I'm 28. And with this age limit, there's a little apartheid. Because since having my children I've learned my mistakes. Now, I'm realizing that it is wrong to rush into the stage of being a mom and all the stuff. I'm realizing I should have finished school first. So if I go back to school, I won't put bad flu into the other children. I know why I'm going to school. I've learned my lesson. I know that it is bad to have children before marriage. When I go

to school, I know what I want now. So I think this is wrong. The government doesn't care about youth.

This is one of the things that make the youth do whatever. They know "now I can't go to school. I'm over 18. So what must I do? There are no jobs." So the youth just turn to drugs. Go stealing.

But I can tell you there is a future for the youth if the government can focus on the youth. The youth have a lot of energy. A lot of spirit. They can make anything possible.

What would it mean to focus on the youth?

First of all, education. And to receive more skills. The youth have the energy. More skills so the youth can see where they're going. If the youth are doing nothing, no sports, nothing, that's what makes the youth go stealing because they are lonely. There's nothing they can do. They go to do other things because there's nothing to keep them busy.

Even at school, there's a problem with the school fees. If children don't pay the school fees, they won't get their reports. That's abuse to the youth. Especially when the child knows exactly that he or she has passed, but the problem is school fees. The government doesn't care about the rights of the children. They said that our children would have the right to free education when our parents voted in 1994. I've also voted (I don't know whether its three times) but I can't see anything promised according to the youth. They're doing nothing. There's no free education for the youth. I don't see anything done. For those who like to pick up their skills, they have to pay money and go to some company.

Why did you vote then?

I voted because, you know the ruling party is ANC, because it is the leading party. I voted in hope because they promised and promised. I know since 1994, when our parents voted, they didn't fulfill their promises, but whenever I go to vote I tell myself maybe this time there's going to be a change. Also, you know when you vote they put a mark on your ID. Some say, "eh if you don't vote, there will come a time when you have no say because you didn't vote." That is a reason that makes me really go to vote. Because they say if you don't vote, there will come a time when they will check whether you did vote or not." But really, really, I can't see anything that we are voting for.

If you were in charge, what would you do?

I will focus on the youth. I don't say adults are not important but I'll focus on the youth because the youth is the next generation. Do you remember the other day in the hall when the other comrade said "Inkunzi isemitholeni"? In English, it says "a bull comes from a calf" which means to be an adult you started from a child. The child is very important. To be an adult, you come from the child and the child has a fresh mind. I'll focus on the youth because the youth has important inputs. They have skills. They have energy. They are so clever. So I would make sure if I was in charge that the youth have free education and [the chance] to pick up their skills in every area that they need. And I would do it for free because it is important for the youth to know all these things because the adults are going. And our going parents didn't have the chance to be educated. So now everything is according to technology and youth are fast so I would focus on the youth.

Are youth selfish and more materialistic than older people?

No, I don't think so. The reason that some of the youth focus on the cell phones and all that stuff is because it is the only thing that they can do to keep themselves busy. There are no free computer centers or studies. Nothing. The youth love technology and the computer is a part of it. You can find data, there's the Internet, all that stuff. If there were computer studies for free, the youth would focus on the computer. So I don't think it's their fault that they love cell phones and all that stuff because they are just ignored.

The youth are not selfish. Even at home, when a child is having a friend who is taking drugs, the youth doesn't like to be accused of the things they don't do. You mustn't say, "Hey, don't go with these people because it means you, you take drugs too." You must talk to them politely in a way that makes he or she understand what is wrong with that stuff so they will try to convince his or her friend that "guys this thing is not right because what what what." Don't say "no, you are going with these people so you are like that." This is not the way. For those selfish youth, it starts with the parent. The parents don't know how to talk to the youth. Because a child grows in stages. Parents must understand when a child is coming to a certain stage that, okay, you mustn't shout. You must sit her down. Talk to her nicely and don't pretend you didn't reach that stage of being a youth. You don't want everyone to shout at you. Make an example from yourself because you did mistakes too. Tell the child, I've been there. "You mustn't do this because it doesn't help. I've done it myself." Don't point to the neighbour. Tell

them, “My child, this is wrong. Take it from me. When your father and I were young we made a mistake and I fell pregnant. I don’t want you to fall in this hole just like me. I want you to pick me up as I am nothing now. I want to show the world that even if I failed to finish my education and become a famous I did managed to raise you and teach you the right thing.” If you’re shouting at a child, the child will resemble you. Parents have input to children being rude.

You can see the difference between a child growing with parents who always shout and a child growing with parents who don’t shout. For me, I am an example. I had friends who loved to go to clubs and where things were happening. But after school, I would come home running quickly because I knew I would get a whip. Those friends don’t have children, none of them, because their parents talked to them nicely. Me because I was scared by the time, I had a chance to run away and meet my boyfriend I was even afraid to come back and by that way, I fell pregnant because no one was telling me this is wrong. This is right. They’re always telling you “the baby comes from the plane.” Those children whose parents talked to them nicely know how to prevent the baby, know whenever I go out I must do this but not do that. They knew the rules but they were free. And so even when my child goes out she knows what’s right and what’s good. By the time you shout at the child and beat the child, you are the reason she does the stuff. Once you beat the child, she gets used to it. Whenever she does wrong, she knows they’ll get the whip and it will be over.

What’s it mean to be an active citizen? To be involved?

It means- I’m a strong lady. I can stand on my feet and fight for myself. Not waiting for someone to say “Can’t you see there’s no development? Come out!” So I’m proud of being an activist. I can fight for myself not waiting for anyone to talk for me. I talk for myself because I’m the one who’s suffering.”

What has being part of Abahlali meant to you?

Well, to me, being uMhlali is a very good thing. I’m very proud of it. I’m talking to other comrades who are scared even to wear the red t-shirt. I’m wearing it whenever I feel like it. I know there are some people we’re living with in the shacks who don’t like the red t-shirts and whenever they ask me some questions about it, I’m not afraid to answer them. I’m proud of being uMhlali because I know even if they don’t like use they’re also Abahlali because we still live with them here in the mud, here in the poverty, but it’s just that their eyes are not

open yet. They still believe in these deceiving councillors but in the meantime they will realise that there's nothing in the councillors.

What does it feel like to wear the red t-shirt? What does it mean to be a part of Abahlali?

I feel like a hero because everywhere people are talking about the red t-shirts. Even if I'm not wearing a red t-shirt, I can hear some people in the community "Hey these people Abahlali, eh they're very strong." I'm famous as a part of Abahlali. People are talking about me everywhere. I'm proud of it. And the other day I heard the people saying "Eh, those are the ones who marched and one lady was beaten by the police and they broke her tooth. Hey I wish to see that lady." I didn't say "Here I am." I just listened to them talk and talk and talk. And other people said "It's a shame because these people were not fighting, they just needed service delivery." "They're not against ANC." So I can hear some people debating about us. Eh, I feel like a hero. I say, Abahlali are too powerful and I feel like a powerful lady. I am powerful.

What happened in that protest when you were beaten?

The protest was going to start from Foreman Road. The municipality didn't want to give us permission to march. The chairperson from Foreman Road told the people that the march was not permitted and the people argued saying, Hey, we told our bosses we are not coming to the work, we are going to march. Whether there's permission or not, we are going to march. Black or blue, we are going to march. So it's not like our leaders forced us to march. And we were going in peace. That day there was no way to come out of Foreman Road because the marshals were summoned to collect the people who wanted to go to the march but some of the people didn't want us to march. And there was an argument but we chased away the people, the friends of the councillor, who threatened us and tried to stop us. So we had to go through Loon Road, and we were not fighting with anyone at that point, we were just singing. The police told us to stop. We stopped and waited for our leaders to come from the back. The police didn't even give us 5 minutes notice. They just took out their sticks and their guns and they started pushing us. By the time we tried to run away, they tripped me, and I fell on my knee. By the time I tried to get up, the policeman hit me and I fell on my face and broke my tooth. He grabbed me and put me in the van. They put us in the police station and said "Where do you come from? Kennedy Road?" They said "Eh, The people from Kennedy Road they're

the ones who influence all the shackdwellers from everywhere. It's because of Kennedy Road that all the people living in the shacks are joining this thing of yours with this bad attitude of yours." So we stayed there I don't remember how many hours, then they removed us. Then Richard came and took me to the doctor. We're still attending the problem of my tooth.

Why did the police act that way?

I think they're siding with our councillor.

What does democracy mean to you and does South Africa have a democracy?

Yes. Democracy is good but it's used unnecessarily because some people don't understand the way democracy works or they do understand but like to be always negative. In a democracy everybody have a right to do whatever, so some people don't care. As long as I know I have rights, my life doesn't affect your life. They're over doing it. If I slap you, I say "it's my right that if you make me angry that I slap you." But actually it's your right not to be slapped.

Is Abahlali democratic?

Abahlali is democratic. Whenever we're having meetings, or maybe we have an invitation, we don't just say "Go S'bu because you are the leader". No, they open it to everybody to choose. If I say "Ally" and someone says "No- System," we must use democracy and vote to see how many are saying Ally and how many are saying System. Our leaders don't make the decision. We are the ones who make the decisions. We act to have the different views of Abahlali so we can come to one decision.

What have you learned in Abahlali?

What I have learned is that when you're fighting alone, you can't win a fight. Although, we haven't gotten what we want, I can see the way we are powerful. I think we will defeat the municipality and our councilor. To be strong, we have to come together. I've learned that unity is powerful. You can't fight alone. For example, if you collect some wood, one piece, you can just break it, but if you make a pile, you can't break that pile because there are too many pieces now. So I think we are strong. To be united, is powerful. No one will defeat us.

Do you feel connected to other young people?

Ja sure. Because I'm a person who loves to joke. And I love to talk a lot. Whenever I'm with people, I feel free.

What's it like to be a young person in Abahlali?

It's great because Abahlali has an active youth. Whenever there's something to be done, the youth are there. So it's fun. It's like we are a family, one big family.

Anything else to add about Abahlali and its future and the future of South Africa?

I wish that Abahlali will grow more and more and more. And they will grow more because Abahlali started here but I won't stop even if they give us houses because they say we're the one who puts bad influence on the shackdwellers. Even when I get a proper house, I won't stop to be an uMhlali until all the shacks are finished. Until then, I won't stop and the struggle continues. I don't think they'll be able to finish the shacks because here they're doing corruption. Whenever they build houses, their workers are selling cement so they build cracking houses. And the people come back to build another shack because they say it was even better to stay at the shacks than to stay in a house still getting rain. Like, in Nazareth they built houses with toilets inside but with no water. How can you use a toilet inside a house with no water? It's unhealthy. I think they won't finish the shacks because they are greedy. They go out to other countries to collect donations in the name of poor people. When they come back with that money, they put it in their stomachs. They've forgotten about us.

In the information we asked for from the Municipality, they estimated the end of shacks in 2017 but what about the things they said in the newspapers that by 2010 the shacks will be finished? Once they stop being greedy, that's when they're going to finish the shacks until then they won't. And Abahlali will grow more and more to put more pressure on them. And we can't stop until we defeat them because right now their chairs are too hot because Abahlali is marching to the media and all that stuff.

20/11/2006, Zodwa Nsibande (F22), Kennedy Road Settlement (tape recording).

I came here in 2002. It's been four years being involved with the Kennedy Road struggle, and one year being involved with Abahlali.

How'd you first get involved with Abahlali?

I was just a community activist with the Kennedy Road Community Development Committee. I felt that there must be some things to be done and I should be part and parcel of the changes.

What did you first get involved with?

I was just attending the meetings. Whenever they were having the meetings, I was always there.

How did Abahlali get started? How did you first hear of Abahlali

If you go down by Kennedy road on your left there's an open space that the Councillor Yacoob Baig promised people and the Kennedy Development Committee that he was going to build some houses there. We saw that there was some upgrading that they were doing and we thought they were starting to build houses, but they said no the councillor has a bigger plan with business owners. It was how Abahlali started because we marched and we decided we must form a movement to march against the location of our homes being sold off to business.

Since then what has Abahlali been doing? What's it been about for you?

Since then, Abahlali has become big because now there are many shackdwellers who are allied with Abahlali because they see that there is hope in being involved with Abahlali because Abahlali only wants land and housing. We don't want to be recognized. We don't want any positions. We want land and housing only.

How has it affected you being a member of Abahlali? What have you learned from it?

I've learned to be great. You have to give back in whatever you are doing. You must be united.

What's it mean to be an active citizen in South Africa?

It's a person who wants to make changes. Who wants to see changes but who wants to be the changes and to be part and parcel of the change.

Do you think politics is an effective way to make change happen?

Ja. Politics has an effect on changes because now if you want to fight for justice, they act as if you are just opposing them because you are now exposing their weaknesses.

Are politicians and the government doing enough for young people?

According to them, they are saying they are doing enough but according to me, I can't say they are doing enough. Because according to the statistics, 70% of youth are not working so they are not doing enough. 70% is a huge number.

What should the government be doing for young people?

Provide some skills. Youth need to acquire some skills so they will be able to find a job. Again, they must stop privatizing things. Whenever you look for

a job they only ask “do you have any experience?” Where can you get experience because you are young and you are coming from school. If government is owning the businesses, I don’t think they’ll be asking for any experiences.

Why did you come here? To look for a job?

I came here for my tertiary level. I studied IT. On my third year, this year, I was supposed to do my third year, but this year, I had an accident I got burnt so next year I will do my third year.

What memories or stories do you have about Abahlali?

On the 27 of February this year, when we took the municipality to the high courts and we won the case.

You’re smiling: how come?

Because no one had ever thought that people from shacks can take the municipality, recognized as the biggest municipality for the whole country, to the courts and win the case. It’s a victory. Because people from the shacks are the lower classes so the people in the municipality don’t treat them as South African citizens.

Why don’t they treat them as South African citizens?

Maybe because we are living in shacks. I don’t know because we are the voters but if you’re living in the shacks, people don’t take you seriously.

Are you proud citizen?

I’m proudly South African. I’m proudly KZN.

Do you vote?

Yes because it’s my democracy. I vote to make democracy work. It’s important to vote but for local government I didn’t vote because I feel that by voting for a person who I don’t believe in, I’m just giving that person power, power to oppress us. So I didn’t vote for the local government. But provincially and nationally, I always vote.

What would it take for you to vote in local government?

If the councillor can make change, then I will vote.

If you were a councillor what would that change look like?

It’s important to come to the people and hear from the people what they want. You can’t give them all they want, but at least you must give them some. You mustn’t just sit there at the office and act as if you are leading the people when you don’t even know how they are feeling or if they have any crises you are not there you are just sitting there on your own. You just come to them

whenever you need them to vote. The people want land and housing, electricity, water, and sanitation.

Do you feel connected to other young people in Abahlali, in the world etc?

I can say I'm connected, but not the way as much as I would like. I'm still working on that.

You just went to the conference for women? What was that about?

It was a women's school whereby they invited professional women to empower young women like us about how we can be proud of ourselves, what are our rights as a women, and give us the guidelines about what we can do. I feel empowered and proud to be a woman. It inspired me to see those women. It made me want to be like them. If they can be like that in that position why not me? What can stop me to be like them? You must start small and grow and grow. You mustn't let people defeat you.

How does it relate to Abahlali?

It can relate because there are many women in Abahlali who have been oppressed. Since Abahlali are fighting for land and housing. The person responsible for the house is the mother. If there is no mother in the house, that house is nothing.

Are you empowered as a young person in Abahlali?

Ja. They make sure that the youth is doing the most so that they can learn how to do things.

People say that youth don't care. That they're selfish. They just care about materialistic things. They want cell phones etc. Is that true?

Yes, that's true. That's what we want. We want to have money, to have capitalistic things. Because we feel that in order to be recognized, you must have something material.

What else do youth care about?

Fun. Youth want to have fun.

What needs to happen to make Durban a better place for the future?

The government must change its policy. These policies are the ones that are causing the country to be like this because these policies are making the rich richer and the poor poorer. If the government can change its policies, maybe it would be a better place.

What's the role of youth in making change happen?

More work for youth. More youth can be developed. Then, the crime will decrease. The crime is high because people have nothing to do. If they have something to do, then that means there won't be as much crime either. Crime statistics would be lower.

Do you consider yourself a leader?

I can't say that I'm a leader because being a leader gives you a headache because everyone wants you to be perfect. If you are a leader, they want you to be perfect. I don't want to be a leader.

But aren't you doing a lot of work for Abahlali?

I just want to learn new things. That's why I'm always doing the work.

Anything else to add?

The other thing I've gained from Abahlali is the legal action. Abahlali taught us about the law. We didn't know how to exercise our rights but since I've been Abahlali I know how to exercise my rights.

14 AUGUST 2007

Essay · Philani Zungu

Democracy in My Experience

People have different definitions of democracy.

Some people say that democracy means freeing everyone to do whatever they want, regardless of rule or controls, with no instructions or boundaries, no importance to whether what is done is wrong or right.

Some people say democracy is the power of the state to decide things, acting in the interests of those who hold state power, its behaviour designed to suit their demands. In this vision, society is always in a position of compliance with orders from the state.

Some people say democracy is about rights. After the Freedom Charter was created, people came to know about their particular rights. The more they understood their rights, the freer they became. We never expected to be disappointed in turning these rights into reality. But we were.

Some people say democracy is for all of us – as society. They say it is a reason to improve and protect our lives. It is equality, whereby all should participate in building a better society and achieving a better life for all.

Let me share my experience of democracy since 1994 as a shackdweller in Durban.

I stayed with my mother, step-father and my younger brother in a small house, four by four meters. We were tightly squeezed up. The eThekweni Department of Housing decided that we could no longer build or extend shack structures. We had no choice. If we built, they would come and demolish the same day, or soon after.

I also felt the shame of women giving birth in the shacks. This they did after not attending clinic for a long time, because nurses shout at them, and when they are admitted, are not being attended to in good faith.

New to unemployment, my parents had no finance to support us; so I had to come from school and look for work, such as car washing and gardening.

I had to stop school at grade 9. When I was 20 years old, I needed to be independent, so I tried to build a house. It was demolished, and inside it was

everything I owned. I was assaulted by the land invasion unit, and had to be admitted to Addington Hospital. I was denied a right to housing.

This happened purely because it was already decided for me, in advance, without any redress or consultation, how I could live.

I was arrested for demonstrating against the lack of delivery, and lack of consultation in 2005.

In 2006, I was arrested again. This time, I was being searched by a police officer on the way to a radio interview. I asked why I was being searched. It was a relevant question to ask, in case I might have some information to assist on a particular case. But the policeman replied that a black man is always a suspect. And then they arrested me. This time I was arrested for asking why I could not be treated like a human being, with rights, in a democracy. Once again I was assaulted, this time in the Sydenham Police station.

In 2007 I was arrested for not agreeing to be treated like an animal by the police. The police had come to my home and demanded to search me after I had built myself a new home so that I and my wife and child could move out of my mothers' house where I had lived for 16 years. I had nothing to hide. I had written a letter to the Land Invasions Unit and the Housing Department telling them that I was going to build my own house and why. I just asked the police why they wanted to search me and their response was arrest. Formal warnings were issued by the Sydenham police Station.

I can see that in the future, I'm expected to accept the unacceptable. That is the reality of democracy of the state and democracy of human rights in my experience. My only remaining hope for an acceptable future is hope in the democracy of society.

30 SEPTEMBER 2007

Essay · S'bu Zikode

Silencing the Right to Speak, is Taking Away Citizenship

Not only as a leader of the Movement of Abahlali, but also as an ordinary South African Citizen, as a parent, as a father and mostly a human being I am extremely hurt. My heart is torn apart when in my own country, in a broad daylight like on Friday the 28 September 2007, it is made so clear that the poor are not Citizens. When they try to sweep up us out of the cities it is clear that we are not citizens. When they beat us to stop us speaking it is clear that we are not citizens.

It is of a great concern that thousands of Abahlali baseMjondolo members have marched peacefully to the eThekweni municipal mayor Obed Mlaba and have been received with such violence. We marched to demand no power, no position no fame, nothing from his family. We only marched for the Right to life of the shack dwellers, the farm dwellers and thousands of forgotten citizens of this country in the name of democracy, in the name of a better life for all.

What a life without shame, without conscience, without respect for vulnerable groups in our society the elderly women and children. The presence of church leaders amongst the poor has had a far-reaching reason to those in need of a church. The biggest curse is that while praying, the innocents were started to be flooded with heavy forces of water, the strong church leaders stood very firm to shield the innocents. The heavy armed members of the SAPS started assaulting the church leaders, throwing teargas, beating helpless women, shooting old women and men at the back while running to their homes.

This event took place at about 12:15pm when the innocent marchers were still waiting for the mayor to receive the memorandum of demands as arranged with him. The march had complied with the Gathering Act of SA. Without any provocation or unruliness the police decided to act on the instructions of the Mayor of non compliance with the South African Law, because he thinks being at that position means being the law unto himself.

The incident took place in my presence. I had offered myself to represent the helpless so that they may see many more, so that they may not be alone while taking their pain for as long as they still believe that we all have all the Right to life. I think this is a difficult leadership style one needs to adopt to save so many lives. Thus I think it is enough that many of us are born and die in shack fires in jondolos, that we die through various diseases associated with unhygienic conditions from the poisonous air we breath in the jondolos, that we live and die with TB and HIV/AIDS as the research confirms that the shack settlements have the highest infection of the virus. People die because of crime, floods and storms; they die while trying to find toilets in the night. We are seeing no future to our children except to the children of those in authority like Mayor Mlaba. Some of us die while trying to speak truth to power, as we get shot while marching.

After a long shooting I had received a call from the Municipality saying that a representative is on his way to receive the memorandum. But already fourteen members were arrested, four were heavily shot and two were badly wounded. This was quite disturbing. Who was going to hand over the memorandum as the police under the command Sydenham Glen Nayager had already chased everyone? In the next ten minutes I received a call saying that I must bring the Memorandum in Baig's office as the official was very scared to come out. Then I said he must come out as most comrades have fled, wounded and harmless, and most police were gone still chasing people away down the roads. I had remained with a small group of less than one hundred with elderly people and pregnant women you couldn't flee.

Then we had no other choice but to face the remaining police and I read the memorandum loudly to Mr. Mzi Magubane who described himself as a senior Manager from the Dept. of Housing in eThekweni municipality. Magubane has been described by System Cele as another old liar. She said that when she was still a child 'this man used to deceive my father when he was still alive working in the Kennedy Road Committee, today he has come to bluff me.' So Bahlali your message was sent with another dishonest man with a history of lies.

Today we have to take care of our comrades who for no reasons were imprisoned; today we have to look for money to pay bail and lawyers to represent them in court for nothing. Today like other days we have to run around doctors and hospitals to try and support the shot and hurt comrades. Today like any

other day we have stood together and planned an alternative, as we shall not allow any forces to force us silent. So as long as Amandla belongs to us we shall not fear. As long as democracy is used to further the political scores of the minority and as long as there is great inequality in our society Abahlali will stand together for the dawn of true democracy where everyone matters.

As challenges increase every day for the Movement one is for us to seek for justice to take its course. I will soon be writing to the Amnesty International for a wide range of legal support on this dirty behaviour of SAPS. But all of this will not compromise any demands. We will make a follow up and engage the city in a progressive manner that seeks to see a remarkable social change for all. Our city and our country still need true leaders that do not run away from their responsibility like Mlaba. We need leaders that will act, as servants of the public and not expect to be masters over the public like eThekweni Mayor Obed Mlaba.

S'bu Zikode

Abahlali baseMjondolo

13 NOVEMBER 2007

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Let the People Tell You About Themselves

Sometimes politics is a dangerous game. I say this because there are those who think that there is nothing other people can say for themselves. They think that we, we who are the poor, must let others speak about us. Today if you say something about yourself the masters of politics will just say “Who the hell are you to talk about the poor people?”

It is like they think that they were born to just know all the sufferings of the poor. But how can they predict what I feel and think about being poor and how can they predict my analysis of how the system that they are favouring has affected my future?

Are these people really thinking that the only way to get us to vote for them is to make promises to us? And if they think that making promises is the way to get our votes why do they always promise the poor and then fail to fulfil those promises?

When we remind them of their promises they say that we are the traitors to the new liberalism! They can break their promises but we must not remind them of the broken promises! Is this the new liberalism? They all say that we are included to their freedom. But if this is true then why are they silencing us with violent police when we try to say that we are dissatisfied? It is clear that in this new liberalism they have the right to lie at elections but that we do not have the right to point to these lies. It is clear that we are not included to the freedom of the political masters.

Our political masters claim to be sympathisers of the poor. One respected political leader accused the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement of being traitors who are on the side of the opposition parties that are trying to bring the ruling party down. How can a respected man behave so childishly? If you are wearing a shoe and it is itching you then who will know about that? You or the man who takes the right to speak for you? I'd like to apologise on this article if what is said makes the politicians feel uncomfortable. But this is the truth.

How long will our political masters speak about the poor without ever contacting them to speak to them? Why don't they want us to say what we feel and think? I think it is because of the political system they are using. They know that it is a hazard for them and their system when the poor speak for themselves. This is why they speak for us and have us beaten and arrested when we speak for ourselves. The grassroots is the nice grass for the political masters to stand on when they speak for the poor. But it is a hazard when it speaks for itself. Then it is a dangerous fire to be put out.

Now we have gone passed nicely asking to be heard. Now we are all shouting to try and let them know how their new liberalism affects us. We are trying to shout that it is ruining our lives. But they still don't want to listen.

I ask myself why. The answer is clear. It is because the people all believe in a bottom up system! When the people speak they will condemn this top down system! Therefore the people must be kept silent so that this top down system can be made to look like a real democracy which it is not.

How long must the people suffer while the political masters talk about protecting the new democracy from the voices of the people?

All in all I say that those political masters who insulted us after the Municipal Elections in a big magazine are not the true leaders of the people. They are the antagonists of the people. It is them who are destroying this country. How can they just write about us as if we are a threat to the country without ever talking to us? It is clear that they think that they are the country. But they are not the country. They are just an elite at the top of the economy and the politics. They are a very small part of the country. In their understanding democracy is their right to think and speak for us. But we know that democracy is the right of everyone to think and speak for themselves.

Let's all wake up please!!!

21 NOVEMBER 2007

Interviews · System Cele, Lindela Figlan, Louisa Motha, David Ntseng

Interviews with System Cele, Mashumi Figlan, Louisa Motha and David Ntseng

Excerpted from a paper by Kate Gunby

They Don't Even Know How It Would Feel To Live In a Shack

System Cele interview 21 November 2007

System Cele is in her late twenties and a mother of four. She has lived in the Kennedy Road settlement for over 18 years. Her contribution to the people of Kennedy Road started years ago, before the creation of Abahlali, through volunteering. She has been a member of Abahlali since the beginning, and her family is, "supportive, although they don't attend the meetings with me, at home I'm the only one who goes." System has lost her front teeth to police brutality. Her family has said, "please stop going, you're not getting anything, you're not working, what are they doing for you?" but she explains, "I'm not doing it for people, I'm doing it for myself because I'm a parent. I hate living in these conditions, the life I'm living here with my children, we deserve decent houses."

It is clear to System that the ANC government is failing to help the people who live in informal settlements. She is disappointed, though that doesn't mean she hates the ANC, just they way the party is working.

I think there is nothing wrong with the ANC itself, but it's the people who are leading it. I think it's the greediness, money is the thing that divides people. The councilor is given the money to do projects, and the money just vanishes into their pocket.... The people from the region were surprised because they thought there was something going on with the government because the councilor is given money to do projects in the community, and they are surprised that there is no development.

It seems that the poor are not a high priority for the government, and that their conditions can be easily hidden from the rest of the world.

I see no action of development. I think they are too busy preparing for 2010, we will hear on the radio that the cement it poured and the stadium is not finished yet. They forgot about us. Even the people coming from the other countries, they won't show them here, they'll just show them inside the city where they will stay at hotels, they won't show them here because it will be embarrassing because they went to the other countries and said they are doing their job, they are taking care of the poor. ... The thing that's annoying us the most is that the people in government positions, they go to different countries saying they are going to deliver to our people, they are going to help us, they get the money and we do not know what they are doing with that money. They don't come back to us to give the report, how they are doing, what they told the people from other countries what sort of solution they would be doing, you will see them in television and they won't even mention the names of the people living in the shacks, they will talk about the people living in the shack, they don't even know how it would feel to live in a shack. They talk about us, about our needs, but they're doing nothing for us. So that's why we're saying don't talk about us, talk to us, because we are the one who are suffering.

Accountability, follow-through, and listening to the people are top priorities for System, but party politics have not been satisfactory.

There is nothing happening. When they're campaigning, they can promise everything, not only this government, every political party, they all promise the same things, but they don't deliver. That's why we say we don't care who the leader is or which political party, as long as they are going to deliver.... Here in Kennedy we are blaming the ANC because the majority of Kennedy road are members of ANC, so we talk politics about the ANC. I think everybody living here in the shacks are Abahlali baseMjondolo because we all because though we all come from different areas and different political parties, so we formed the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement. Not because we were fighting ANC, because in the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement people come from different political parties. So it's not that we are against ANC, even the people from other parties they are sick and tired of the councilors who lied to them, promised them, and they deliver nothing.

The members of Abahlali want the government to sit down and really listen to them, and on a regular basis. They began marching, "because the councilor didn't want to come to meetings with us." However the ANC seems to only care

about shack dwellers at election time, and tends to bring small gifts to try to buy support.

They only come to us when they want our vote. We go through the fires, the wind, rain, anything because our homes are made of cardboard, plastic. They know that if they come do something for us they can get the majority to vote for them. They will do something for us. They came with biryani and juice, but after the election they forget about us... They are buying the people with biryani and those itchy blankets, the gray ones, because they know that poverty is very high in our community of people who live in the shacks. So if you come with the food, the blankets, and the clothes, it will be like you have come with the heaven, you've done a good thing. ... They say, 'leave Abahlali, join ANC.' People can be easily taken because they are poor.

Even though the government has yet to give in to Abahlali's demands, the movement has made significant progress in giving shack dwellers the voice that all citizens in a democracy are supposed to have.

Before, even though we had the right, we were not allowed to speak for ourselves. People from the shacks were ignored when they went to the official's office, they just ignored you. Now we are able to talk to our government, we are able to talk to any official we want to talk to because we are a community.

Still, the ANC remains blind to the reasons behind Abahlali's actions, or perhaps in denial of their responsibilities, and tries to silence the people of Abahlali.

If you are marching they think you are mad, they don't understand, they think we act like uneducated people. But we are not mad, our mothers are not mad, our grannies are not mad, they are not going to the street and jump for nothing. ... We go with the memorandum with our demands and to show them that we are not fighting. But they don't understand what we're doing, they just hit us. When we march at the end they just beat us.

Abahlali, They Are Speaking the Truth All the Time

Lindelani (Mashumi) Figlan interview 15 November 2007

Mashumi Figlan was born in the Eastern Cape in 1970, and grew up there. At young age he became inspired to speak out against the apartheid government.

One day, I think it was 1982, I was still young, I was sitting on the shade behind the room of my father, and my father was there. So I saw the soldiers coming from down near the river, coming up. Then after that I look at those people and my father was just puffing that pipe, so the soldiers when they passed, they looked at my father, they asked him, 'why you puffing the dagga?' and my father was very old, and he said, 'no, I can't puff any dagga, I'm too old now, I'm just puffing tobacco.' And then, they decided to take that pipe, they threw that tobacco down, then they noticed that there was no dagga there. And after that they say, 'why are you sitting here when some other people in that area they are fighting?' And my father just told them, 'I'm not the type for fighting all the time, I like what is known as peace.' And one of the soldiers, and I think that guy was about 18 years, 21 years, he slapped my father, and he was a wise guy. And my father ask him, 'why you slapping me?' and that guy said, 'are you chicken?' I think that guy, he was not more than 20 years, less than 20 years, I think my father at that time he was 72 years. And after that, he took a shovel and gave it to my father. And I was crying and my mother was in church, and I was crying and running straight to my mother and told my mother they are hitting my father. ... Then my mother told me, "It's like that in South Africa. They can hit you anytime they like, they can shoot you anytime they like'. And I asked myself when I was on my bed, 'why do they do this?'

Then after that I went to school the next day and narrated the story to other young girls, young guys, and they just told me that, 'listen, there is a man coming who's going to take over this country, his name is Mandela. And that man, once he takes over there will be no one going to hit another one. And everybody's going to be safe. And everybody is (we were still young) going to have a car, cows, goats, sheep, and all those things.' I was so inspired. I decided to ask my father about Mandela. 'Sorry, daddy, who's Mandela?' Then my father just slapped me, and said, 'don't ever talk about that, just because you'll go behind bars, once you talk about that.' I asked myself, 'why they silence me when I ask about Mandela?'

Then one other day my auntie was working here in Durban, so my uncle just came, and he was sitting inside my father's room, they were just drinking

alcohol, brandy. Then I come and I sit between my uncle's legs, and I noticed that they were planning to talk about this Mandela. I pretended like I feel sleepy, then I slept. So they talk freely about Mandela, now, telling each other all those things, and I was listening attentively. Then after that I woke up and I told my uncle that I want to go to the toilet. I go to the toilet, then after that I jump over the fence, went to one of my friends, and I started to tell him. I said, 'I heard my father talking about this Mandela.' And I told him about Mandela, all those things. So I get inspired, and the way my father was talking to my uncle about Mandela, I was so inspired. Just because the way they were talking. And I used to open my eyes a little bit, and the way they were talking I noticed they didn't want anyone to come inside. They didn't know there was someone still listening to the things they were talking about.

In high school Mashumi served as chairperson of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), which was affiliated with the ANC. After passing standard 10 in 1986, he joined the struggle with the ANC and became the chairperson of the ANC Youth League in his town. In 1994 he canvassed for the ANC to help win the election, and put great faith in what the party would do for the country. He says, "Before 1994 I believed that once the ANC took over the rule of this country, just because in that day we believed that the son of God would come back, Jesus Christ. I used to say, 'the ANC is going to hand over the rule of this country to Jesus Christ'." Once Mashumi realized the ANC was not fulfilling their promises, he severed his ties with the party, though he continued to vote for them.

Now according to what they do, ignoring the people who are voting for them. I see no other political party, but I think the people they are sick and tired of going to the polling station to vote for them for nothing. Really I can't say because I don't think there are any other political parties who can change the ANC, just because all of them, I think they are not good. But if the ANC can stick with the principles of the ANC, help the people the way the people helped the ANC, I think it would take longer to take the ANC away from the rule of this country.

Though Mashumi no longer approves of the ANC leadership, he still supports the organization's doctrine.

I really believe in the principles of the ANC, but I don't believe in the rulers of the ANC, I think they are not following the principles of the ANC accordingly...

They promised many things, and our constitution, the constitution of the ANC, we used to read it and it's very fair to all the people. ... But after 1994 we noticed, the poor, that they're not really stuck on what the constitution said. So that is why the ANC, they're not really clear on their way, they were planning away from their constitution. Just because the only thing they do is to ignore their constitution.

While ANC the constitution provides basic safeties and liberties, people in shack settlements do not appreciate these rights.

People still stay in squatters and there are fires, floods, everything bad, crooks are there, we are really not protected. I cannot say they've done well just because they say, 'ja, we've got the right of expressing ourselves, we can say whatever we want to say.' But that is not the freedom we are fighting for, only to talk, just because sometimes when we talk they just send police then after that they are silencing us."

This difference between the principles of the ANC and how the leaders are behaving is what drove Mashumi to join Abahlali and become the movement's vice-president.

That is why here in KwaZulu-Natal I fight for Abahlali baseMjondolo. I saw that Abahlali baseMjondolo was not a movement against the ANC, the movement reminded the ANC to fill their promises. During the elections they always promised that 'if you vote for us, what we're going to do, we're going to build houses for you, we are going to do this and this and this and this.' Then after that, once we finished voting, they forget about us. That is why I decided to join Abahlali baseMjondolo.

While Mashumi participates in Abahlali's protests and "No Land, No House, No Vote" election boycott, he still likes to attend ANC meetings when he is home with his family at the Eastern Cape. Mashumi's mother was very supportive of his involvement with the ANC, "and still now, my mother, still likes the ANC too much. You can't stop her. And even if I tell her about Abahlali, she says, 'my child, don't forget the ANC.'" However the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal it is different. He expands, "Here, you don't feel like you are in the ANC meetings. And even if you put your own opinion, they listen to you differently, the way you talk. And after that, you notice that the way they answer your questions is a little bit unassertive. Just because our language is different, and they just listen to our language, they go, 'oh, just because you're Xhosa you think you're clever.'"

Nevertheless, Mashumi maintains that the ANC has established the values to help the people, it's just a matter of following them. He says, "If they follow the principles of the ANC accordingly, the way it's written, the way they put it, and even those who died for it. If they can follow what the ANC was, I think it will be good, and they can fix the problem in the ANC. But if they don't want to follow the principles, they will not be able to change."

Abahlali was formed to make the voice of its members heard, in hopes that politicians will stick to the principles their party has established and start working to help the people. While Mashumi was not at Abahlali's founding protest, he had previously discussed the need of a movement to unite and empower the people.

The time Abahlali started I was not here, I was at home, there was a funeral. I spoke to one, I used to stay there in Forman road, and I told the men at Forman road. I said, 'guys, let us wake up, and fight against this lack of service.' They ask, 'how?' I say, 'I don't know, but let's try to join together and voice out what we are dissatisfied of.' Then after that they said, 'No no, go back home, then once you come back then we are gonna talk about it.' Then they told me at home, they told me that, 'ja, we met with Kennedy road.' So Kennedy road would form what is known as Abahlali. When I came back I notice that there is an organization known as Abahlali. And I went there to join Abahlali, and I decided to listen to the principles of Abahlali. Then after that I noted, 'these are the only principles I need' where the people there can abide themselves on truth, and can try to help the poor people.

Abahlali offers the shack dwellers not only a way to voice their grievances, but a fighting chance at actually being heard. Their power builds as time passes and the movement gains members and attention. They also are true to their guiding principles; Abahlali works democratically, and accommodates everyone. Mashumi testifies, "Here in Abahlali baseMjondolo, ah, I feel at home. Most of them are Zulu people. But, the way they like me, I feel at home really. They know that I'm a Xhosa and always at the meetings I speak my language.... They always want me to talk all the time, just because they appreciate the language.... We treat each other the same."

Abahlali operates with truth, which is a stark contrast to the lies of the ANC. Mashumi explains, "The thing I like about Abahlali baseMjondolo is that they speak truth. If they don't know how to do something they say, 'No, we don't

know how to this and this and this and this. Can you tell us what we can do?' That is what I like. They're transparent, and tell the truth, not to lie about it, just because I don't like the people who are lying." This truth is hard for the ANC leadership to handle, and why Abahlali is constantly threatened in hopes of keeping the people quiet.

They can listen anytime if they want to, but if they are still corrupt I don't think they can listen to Abahlali, just because Abahlali, they are speaking the truth all the time. But I don't think they can associate with the people who are only speaking truth when they don't want to hear it. But if they want this country to be a better country, I think they can listen to Abahlali, but Abahlali is good, the truth is good.... You can't force the ANC to listen if they are not prepared to. Or change their mind, you can't do it. We can just force the lack of service delivery because it's our right to voice what we are dissatisfied with.

The ability to voice complaints and be heard by the government is not much to ask, in fact it is a right that the South African constitution is supposed to promote.

It's so unfair. To voice our views is what even the ANC constitution says, that we have to voice our views. ... What they preach they are not practicing. They want other people to practice, but they themselves they don't want to practice what they preach. To treat the social movement and all other people the way they treat is not what is written in the ANC constitution. Just because we know the constitution of the ANC, we read the constitution of the ANC, and I think the constitution of the ANC is in my head. But the people who are in power, they don't like to follow it through and through.

Failing to ensure the rights of all citizens means that many people have yet to be fully liberated, even thirteen years after South Africa became a democracy.

When these people say they are protecting our new liberation, and when they say our new liberation what they mean, they say we are also involved in that new liberation. If we are involved in that new liberation, why when we express ourselves, why when we share our opinion we are silenced, if we are all free? They must say they are free, not all of us. Just because...whenever we are marching they are trying by all means to silence us.

Abahlali has proven that the ANC cannot silence the truth as easily as the ruling party would like, and that every attempt to quiet the shack dwellers will be met with another demand for service delivery and accountability.

Contrasting Abahlali's truth is the corruption and greed of ANC leadership. Rather than worrying about the needs of the voters only at election time, politicians must remain accountable all the time.

If our leaders, they can stop to be greedy, just because I think they are so greedy. They want to fulfill their needs, and are not there to fulfill the needs of the people, they are there to fulfill the needs of their family, their friends, cousins, and all those people. But if they want to take care of the people and know that 'these people, they voted for us to be here, to do whatever they want us to do for them,' they can be good, and they achieve a lot and I think this country could be a better country.

Corruption is a problem that leaders must try to solve, but the citizens must do their part to keep the leaders inline.

[We must] try to irradiate by all means what is known as corruption, just because this country is under severe corruption, and even if the people here in SA, if you're corrupt they mustn't support you. They should just let the law take its course; I think it would be good. Just because some other people sometimes notice that they are favoring. If I did something wrong, they lied to me. Even if it's wrong, even if it's right, they just follow me, no matter where I go or as I'm going to the river, they just follow me that way. And if the people can speak the truth and concentrate on the important, I think it would good.

Careerism has also become a problem in South African politics, especially with the yearly floor crossing period.

Another thing that has made the ANC government to be so corrupt is that thing I really hate that crossing floor legislation. I think that those people they cross the floor, they're not really members of the ANC or whatever, I think they're just the people who want to get a job. They don't care about the poor people, and all those things, they just care about themselves. And the ANC allows those people to come, and some of them they are not doing the job the way the ANC is doing the job, or the way the ANC wants them to do their job. They've got their other constitution on this hand, and another constitution on this hand.

The people voted in by the people must work to serve the people, and follow the principles the people elected them to follow.

Though Abahlali is working hard to challenge the government, and there are youth who are very instrumental in the movement, Mashumi is concerned

about the younger generation. Part of this may be due to their selfishness, as he states, “most of the youngsters, for instance, they don’t care about the politics, they feel like if we challenge a politician or whatever, your mind is not straight, just because you care about other people, you don’t care about yourself.... The youngsters believe that if you have something, you must use it in your own time, not to share it with other people.” It also seems that the youth respect authority more than their rights.

They don’t want to challenge the government. They think that if you challenge the government you are a sinner or whatever, you are turning the country upside down. They don’t want to practice their rights. And that is what I believe, that you have to practice your rights, no matter what, or else they can put a finger on your eye. But if you say, ‘I don’t like this’, you have to, don’t run away, challenge them. I always say sometimes, I believe that, if you see a cow there, and somebody asks you, ‘what is that?’ don’t say, ‘something with 2 horns and 4 legs,’ just say, ‘that is a cow.’ Straight.

With any luck Abahlali will not only open the eyes of the government, but show the youth that change is possible, but it requires taking a stand for the truth.

Mashumi is dedicated to Abahlali, and believes that the movement’s future will bring great things. He declares, “I don’t even worry about other social movements, about any other thing, the only thing I want to make sure it that Abahlali proves the point, that is what I want to achieve. Just because I believe that, we fought against apartheid and we succeeded, and I was involved. And now I am involved in Abahlali, and I think we are going to win this race.” Once Abahlali makes local councilors listen to the poor and provide housing, Mashumi thinks the movement could broaden its scope and move on to include other struggles.

Even if they give us houses and all those things, I think to banish a movement like Abahlali I would consider it to be stupidity. But if we keep Abahlali going, I think Abahlali can make so many things in the country straight. If ever they build houses we must continue with another thing, we can fight whatever, whatever thing we notice that is not good, here in South Africa. ... In my own opinion, I think if they can continue even beyond this development, ja, it would be no problem.

S'bu Zikode, the president of Abahlali, is a major inspiration for Mashumi. He is one of the people, a contrast to the government officials who refuse to come to the shack settlements and listen to the people.

First of all he's not a greedy person. Secondly, whatever he's doing, he can feel about it. And he's always encouraging the people all the time, and the way he talks, he's not just talking anyhow to the people, he's always down when he talks. You can't say, 'this is a leader.' You can say, 'this is a leader,' only when you see him talking. But when you walk with him, or do anything with him, he's an ordinary man, like everybody. ... Some other people they feel like they can go to town and stay in town, he always stays with the people. And he believes in what is known as humanity, he really believes in it.

While Mashumi's allegiances are now firmly planted in Abahlali baseMjondolo, he has not forgotten his ANC beginnings, and what the liberation movement did for the country, though there is still much to be done.

When you think about Mandela sometimes you even forget about the politics, or what he did for the country and all those things. When I think about Mandela I think about him as a father. No matter what father did wrong, he's always your father. I rate him as a very good man who knows what the poor people need. He sacrificed his life for the betterment of the poor, but there's still no betterment of the poor.

They Ignore Our Struggle

Louisa Motha interview 21 November 2007

Louisa Motha was born in the Motala Heights settlement and still lives there with her family today. She first became involved in Abahlali baseMjondolo in 2004, and is now the movement's coordinator. Louisa was not affiliated with any social movements prior to joining Abahlali, and said that this movement attracted her, "Because they're talking this language we want, they understand our situation.... Like how the ANC doing, they just shout, they talking so much like they're gonna build this, they're gonna make this, and this and this and this. And at the end of the day, nothing."

Since 1994, the ANC has been promising to help people in informal settlements by improving water and sanitation, and building houses. Yet the local government has not delivered on these promises:

They're just thinking for themselves, they're not worried about the people. There is so much lies. The ANC doesn't come and contact the people who are poor. When it is time for the vote, they just come and say they're going to do this. Counselors, they are government and they don't want to just do something for the people, they come using lies. They're not doing anything. They're just telling lies for the vote, after the vote they just kick you out.... The government they say they must make the tents or the jobs. They just make them to be more than before. They don't care about the poor, because some of the councilors they're just taking from that tent.

This may be due to the leaders' greed and lack of understanding for what poor people are going through. Louisa asks, "If you're not working and you've got to buy everything, how are you going to buy the food if you're not working? Like I'm not working myself, how am I supposed to go buy food?" Rather than using their resources to help the poor, "People from government they just take the money from somebody else, they never give even one cent, they just take for themselves."

Conditions for people who live in shacks have not improved since the country became a democracy, and globalization is often blamed for keeping the poor impoverished. Louisa [speaking about the factories that displaced her from her first home] proclaims, "South Africa's very bad. The people from outside they come in here and make the business. The people from here they're not making the business, and people from outside they're carrying on the business on our land. There's nothing for us." Yet she is convinced that the South African government cannot continue to operate this way, and that, "When government changes their plans then I think we will have more jobs."

One of Abahlali's main slogans is talk to us, not about us, and Louisa is a true believer in this motto. She says political officials, "need to listen to what we say, and they must come, and listen." If given the opportunity to talk to the councilor she would tell him:

Come and see what's happening. You can say you know I'm hungry, but you never come in my house and see if I've got food or not. At the end of the day you just go to the parliament and shout, 'my people are full,' but you never see that thing. You're not coming to see the people and connecting with the people. The government does not mind about us, because for so many years we're just shouting, and nothing. We haven't got houses, we're shouting for houses, even

my mother today is passing away from the shacks. Myself too I will pass away from the shacks, even my children.... They're just saying everything's nice, but at the end of the day we know it's a lie.

The more the government continues to silence the people, the longer shack dwellers will remain in unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Yet this change can only happen when the government stops silencing the people. Louisa declares, "The ANC they're just trying to close the mouths of everybody." She argues that, "Words from everyone have to be heard. They mustn't listen to just the words of the rich, or the big people, they must listen to the words from everyone. They say it's a government for everyone, but the way they do they don't look like they're a government for everyone." That is what makes the space Abahlali has created so vital to giving participatory democracy a chance and improving the lives of the poor, no matter how long and hard the fight may be. Louisa says, "When we march, they just send the police to just hit us, for nothing, for no reason. The constitution it says we can march, but they're hitting the people, oppressing the people, it's not a good thing."

Abahlali's strength comes from their apolitical position and conviction to speak out against the ANC without becoming a political party. Louisa explains, "We're not involved with the politics, we're just asking our demand from the government, that's it." By maintaining their autonomy from political baggage, Abahlali's voice can be heard. She continues, "We're trying to make something because we're talking. They must listen to us, we mustn't listen to them. They ignore our struggle. We came from the shacks, we know this life, we carry on with this life, but something for us needs to change. They mustn't expect to just get the vote and go away." Abahlali's No Land, No House, No Vote election boycott has helped to prove this point. Louisa, like the majority of people involved in Abahlali, voted ANC before participating in this boycott. She clarifies, "We are ANC supporters. But they must change the conditions; they don't know what we want.... These workers for government, they do everything nice but they're not doing nice things."

It Doesn't Feel Liberating; You Don't Get the Sense of Freedom

David Ntseng interview 28 November 2007

David Ntseng grew up in an informal settlement in Inanda, near Durban. He first became drawn in to activism when he was in school. David recounts, "In 1986, I was schooling in kwaMashu, that was the time when students across KZN, and across the country actually, we were boycotting paying for education and demanding textbooks for free, and that whole activism at schools around free education and free textbooks and stuff like that. So my first orientation was at the school level of politics." His participation grew from there, to include local issues. He continues, "And then from then on it just spilled over to area politics where there was a lot around party political factions between ANC, IFP, at the time it wasn't even ANC it was UDF, and later on became the Mass Democratic Movement, and things like that." After finishing matric in 1991, David decided to study activism and went to a school in Cape Town.

There was one post matric school that was teaching activists on various modules. We were looking at West Africa as a potential area for maintaining some activism in the sense that in the 60s, that whole movement in the 60s, countries gaining independence, the imminent of struggle in South Africa in the beginning of the 90s. So West Africa was an interesting place, at least at that school, because it was training activists to look at what is politics beyond party politics, what is politics in as far as people's own political identity. It used to be called the Workers' Fund. It was almost like and NGO but an institution where activists were recruited from various areas, some would be recruited from the Eastern Cape, some from Western Cape, we were all there. We had to learn some French because that's the medium in West Africa, and then we could eventually interact with activists from there.

The school related the struggles in other countries to the changes in South Africa.

We looked at how South Africa was doing in relation to, at that time I would say the Rwanda genocide was still continuing at a high speed, so it was at that time when there were some unrests in some parts of Africa. So all that is looked at in relation to what is happening in South Africa, the unbanning of the ANC, releasing of Mandela, people coming back from exile, and of course the unfortunate death of Chris Hani, the dismantling of what was known as Bantustans, or homelands government, in other words that whole push between 1992 and 93,

especially 93 where a number of protests marches were launched on the Bantustans territories.

After the Workers' Fund, David attended the University of KwaZulu Natal from 1994 until 1997. He completed his bachelors and honors in Theology, and also did some Environment and Development Studies. During his time at school and since, David has been inspired by a variety of authors and movements around the world. Some authors that stand out are Frantz Fanon, Michael Neocosmos, and Alain Badiou. The Landless Workers Movement in Brazil called MST or Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra and the Land Research Action Network or LRAN have also been motivated his work. David confirms, "All that material has somewhat shaped how I think, how I feel."

In 1999 David got an internship at the Church Land Programme (CLP), the NGO where he now works. In 2001 they employed him full time.

I got in as a researcher. It was after the elections, and already they new ANC led government was looking at this whole issue of land reform, because that's the thrust of South African politics, or African politics as it were, what to do with land that people were dispossessed of, in the 1800s and prior, let's say the whole era of colonialism, imperialism, the system. So the South African government that took over in 1994, the priority as far as one hoped, was that you redressed land. Of course they introduced land reform policies. The organization that I work for, at that time observing what is happening, farmers expected to make available their land or government expropriating some land, it was concerned to the fact that all this is happening and nothing is said or done about land that is owned by churches. We are talking about Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, all these missionary originated churches. They in their introduction took quite large amounts of hectares so that they can establish missions, schools, you name it. Now the new dispensation, if 1994 is anything to refer to, already people are settled down on these farms and they are settled there in large quantities, in terms of family numbers, and they equally don't have security on those farms. They are as vulnerable as anyone else in the country. Now the organization said someone must look into this issue of land that is owned by churches. I was then employed to do an internship to look at how many each denomination owns. I looked at the Methodist, I looked at the Catholics, also Lutherans, and of course with history in South Africa, quite a number of properties have been expropriated from these churches, especially in those homeland

systems parts of the country, the Transkei and others. I remember in Transkei almost about 80% of land was declared state land because the Transkei government of the time wouldn't allow private ownership, except on those coastal belts near the sea... So I came in doing from 1999, in 2002 I started working with one community which is near Verulam, that's like 20 kilometers north of Durban. This community was part of land reform and they were dynamics there around the issue of rights, the issue of sovereignty, in as far as who decides what has to happen in the communities. Is it elders from the community, is it government, is it private companies, in this case sugar cane growers, the small and medium enterprises around that.

While he has worked for the CLP, David has been loosely involved with the Landless People's Movement by working collaboratively on request. However he was never a member of the movement.

There were times where we had discussions, sit in meetings, with this other movement called Landless People's Movement, but that movement works largely with one other organization that we dialogue with called AFRA – Association for the Rural Advancement. Going there would be on request, 'can you come and be part of this strategizing meeting,' I've been part of those. We've had a collaborating research with them looking at the restitution program: how effective is it, will it yield the results as expected, what does it do to landlessness? That kind of research we did collaboratively with LPM. That was the level at which I got involved with them at the time. But in the way that one is involved with Abahlali, no I have not been with any other movement.

David became involved with Abahlali baseMjondolo in early 2006 through Dr. Raj Patel, an active member and supporter of Abahlali.

He would interact with our organization and one time he said, 'look, if you are in Durban just take your time and come to some of our meetings in Durban.' At that time I remember there was going to be the march on the 27th of February, and Abahlali was mobilizing for resources, so they sent a request across for organizations to support in order to pay for busses and what what what. So we got that request at our center, and we heard Raj talking about these guys. So then I got involved by knowing someone who was actively involved, he seduced me into it, but into the right place.... I then became more interested, I think it was around the time when Abahlali were planning a big event for the 27th of April, which was called 'Unfreedom Day' to coincide with 'Freedom Day,' as the

country would have it, even in our calendar. So I attended some of the meetings that were taking place at University and some were here.

His appreciation for the Abahlali is related to his upbringing, education, and job at the CLP.

I've always respected what people like Abahlali are doing. I myself come from an informal settlement, my home is still there. I live in kwaMashu which is a township, I work for the organization that prioritizes working with ordinary people in a way that allows them to set the agenda of what it means for them to be free, or what it means for them to work towards freedom. So all those things to me lay the grounds for falling in love with this kind of worth. I always say it's a blessing that one had an opportunity to work with Abahlali baseMjondolo.

David also respects the way supporters of Abahlali who do not live in informal settlements interact with the movement, as it sets an example for how poor people should be supported.

Of course there are people like Raj Patel, people like Richard Pithouse, who have this resilience to make sure that they work to support movements of ordinary people, and observing the kind of stuff that they do, you feel motivated, and say this is possible. You can work on the basis of what actually movements of the poor want, and leadership that is coming from communities that are impoverished, rather than bring in your own assumptions as someone who is surrounded by resources and set the agenda for them.

Relationships where the poor are in control and can make their own plans are the ideal.

This model of poor people deciding what they want, and then being assisted by community members with resources is what David hopes people at NGOs will learn to do.

If people like myself who work in NGOs and such still want to see their work as being progressive in the sense that it tries to allow alternatives from this dominant neo-liberal agenda or way of running the country, for it to do that successfully it has to listen to the poor it serves. Instead of directing, leading, strategizing for them, allow them to say how they see their reality, and what they think it will take for their reality to be transformed. In that approach, try to see in what way can they offer support, because NGOs have resources and they are connected even overseas, how do the resources that they have give effect to the

strategies that the poor themselves have set. To me, that will be a way to go in terms of supporting strategies and struggles of basic communities.

Yet to go about business this way, an NGO cannot follow top-down plans, and thus risks severing any existing relationships they have with the government. David explains, "It depends how that NGO conducts itself, or how that NGO regards itself. If it feels it's a quasigovernment NGO, surely it will be treated with high respects and all, or it will be regarded highly as a partner with government, by virtue of it being quasigovernment." The same is true of social movements. They are forced to choose between following state policies and forfeiting a critical perspective, or speaking out for the people they represent but being quieted by the government.

Likewise social movements that will look into forming partnerships with the state, affirming what the state is doing, looking up to what the state is promising even if it doesn't offer. That social movement of course will be legitimate the eyes of the state. Now to me that says any organization or social movement that does the opposite, that breaks away from the state politics or state projects, then it's launching an offensive to the state, and they will be treated by all means as an enemy, and be crushed.

For someone employed by an NGO, involved in a social movement, and educated in activism, this situation is unacceptable. David declares, "It's so not on, so not on. It's unethical; it's not supposed to be that way. It's immature, both at the level of politics and at the level of governing the country. So it's not allowed to be like that."

Much of the ANC's refusal to listen to protest comes from the history of the liberation movement.

I doubt that there will be a time when the ANC will actually try to listen, because if you listen carefully to the national leaders of the ANC are saying, they talk about the ANC tradition, often time when something comes up as a crisis in the ANC they say, 'the ANC tradition says...' That ANC tradition goes back to Lusaka as the headquarters of the ANC of the country, or headquarters of the ANC in exile so that they can always give direction to what happens in the country and everywhere else in the universe as long as people are part of the ANC. So what is that tradition? That tradition is the tradition of obedience, of capturing, grasping, and internalizing the word, the direction, as coming from the headquarters, or as coming from the national executive council, if not the

national working community. So anything that looks disobedient or deviant to that word is anti-ANC and it's anti-traditional. It will be difficult to imagine the ANC that believes in the voices from the margins, the voices from the grass-roots, it will be difficult to imagine the ANC that does that. Of course at branch levels there are discussions, but those discussions are so much about what is the word from the national headquarters, and how is that word communicated to the branch level, and how then do the branches dialogue with it in a way that they show they have internalized it, they understand what the word is.

David backs this analysis up with practical examples:

People of Khutsong have declared on a number of occasions that they don't want to be removed from Gauteng, they want to remain in Gauteng and they don't want to go to Northwest. No matter what the reasons are, the least you can do is to listen. But it's not what has happened. Another example, Abahlali baseMjondolo. Their politics is simple, it's politics of life: all we want is homes, decent homes, where we're living because it's next to where we work. All we want is jobs, all we want is safe water, proper sanitation, we want to be treated as decent human beings like everyone else. Now that's difficult to stand as the ANC because it doesn't code the word from the national headquarters. Actually, it works against the word from the national headquarters because at the moment the word from the national headquarters is the BEE, the ensuring of economic growth being GEAR. Now if you have people who are forcing you to account and actually put them in a picture that says as the country this is how you transform ordinary people's lives, it doesn't offer that opportunity. And so, the ANC tradition then suggests you silence those voices because they are disobedient to the word. So it's hard to imagine a transformed ANC.

Though the possibility of the ANC beginning listen to the people is unlikely, people have begun to speak up.

This to me is just the beginning, there's more to come. If more and more people believe in their own power, believe in the power of their own intellectual resources, their own strategies, their thinking capacities, their dreams, because that's what's how you drive them to a better future, to believe in the actualization of their dreams, their dreams to be human beings, that's what they want, it's nothing more than that. If movements like this one make that more and more visible to anyone and everyone, surely people will want to do the same. At the moment to me Abahlali are like a cloud of witness that need to convince

everyone that as an ordinary person you can still make your voice heard, or you can force your voice to be heard. That will begin to allow other people to gain conviction and do likewise.

One group that particularly needs to learn the power of their voice is the youth of South Africa, who have grown complacent since they have not lived through apartheid.

Getting youth will take quite a lot of conscientization, quite a lot, especially because schools through the subjects like history and other social oriented studies does open the opportunity to read about South Africa before 94, but it's not enough because not every youth is at school, so in areas where people live it will take a lot of conscientization, drawing the picture, for people to understand.

Yet it is not necessary to have lived through apartheid to be dissatisfied with the current problems in South Africa.

Say you don't know about apartheid, fine, but you still have to make sense of why is it, in this day in age, there are so few extremely rich people, and so many really really poor people? You don't have to know apartheid in order to look into this as one of the tormenting issues or conditions in the country. You have to say, why does this happen under the banner of liberations? Because it doesn't feel liberating; you don't get the sense of freedom. Now if you were to be asked those questions: why aren't you working, why aren't you at varsity, do you think it's fair that education is this expensive? All those things will probe them to think, and think about the fact that they are unable to prosper or be citizens that they want to be. You look at the youth that is part of Abahlali and most of them are people of your age, and surely at the time there was the first national elections in 94, some were far from getting IDs, but they can tell that someone is consciously deciding to make life hard for some people."

When the youth open their eyes to the inequalities surrounding them, regardless of the nation's history, they will find that they need to stand up for themselves and make their voices heard

It is important that the ANC begins to listen to movements like Abahlali and NGOs like the Church Land Programme. Though the ANC came to power with good intentions, things have gone horribly wrong.

Obviously the ANC has had the legitimation by virtue of its history as a liberation movement, way back from how it began, the fact that most of its members went through exile, were forced to exile, imprisoned, some longer like former

President Nelson Mandela. All of that legitimated its identity in relation to Black people in South Africa and all people concerned with the liberation, irrespective of their race. Come 94, everyone was sick of national apartheid government. Now the alternative is this people's movement, national liberation movement as everyone understood it at the time, and what it represented. What happens in government, especially say in 1996, the open declaration of economic policy in the form of GEAR was for many concerned people alarm bells ringing, to say something big is coming, or something has happened and it caught us off guard. No one expected the turning point of 1996. Of course some want to do connections with even the vision of the RDP document as one that had been used to ensure that all disadvantaged South African enjoyed freedoms, some want to make connections that even there were elements of neo-liberal policies, it's just that the language was so disguised that you wouldn't pick it up the first time, but come 1996 with GEAR, it was so obvious that the main thrust here is to that the government has an open way for the neo-liberal agenda. That started making things for almost everyone. The lack of service delivery, they were the beginning of talks around privatization of water, and actually the trials of implementing some of those projects, retrenchment in numbers of people who had been working, some for state or parastatal companies, privatization of almost every asset that the state owned. That was the beginning of the end of hopes for freedom and liberation, and that was the end of looking at the ANC as this liberation movement as it were. These guys, seemingly they are not that different from what we've been through, it's just that this time it's done by people of the same color. There's a lot of disillusionment I'd say, there's a lot of disillusionment. It has never changed, instead it's aggravated, it's picked up speed, I mean in every sector that you can imagine where one would have expected government to have taken advantage to launch real programs of reform: land reform is going nowhere, restitution in particular is going nowhere. I think the dates for actual completion of restitution programs have been shifted 3 times now. The first was by 1999, 30% of land in South Africa would have been transferred from Whites to Blacks, it was pushed to 2004, and it was pushed to 2008. And until now only 4%, and it's been over ten years, it's been 4%. Now this thing of halting poverty by 2014 then becomes a dream, a far fetched dream just to lure people into hoping, hoping, hoping but nothing actually takes place on the ground.

There are a variety of factors that have resulted in these problems in South Africa, many dealing with the nation's economic relations with the West.

It's a long story and there are so many connections to it. The fact that South Africa has brought itself to countries of Europe in a silver platter, or maybe shall I say platinum platter, is one of the reasons. You can't open yourself up to be dictated to by the western countries, they are way ahead of you in this economic trade and what have you. They are way ahead because they started a long time ago, with manipulating resources and raw material from Africa. Now the interest of seeing this democratically elected or popular elected leadership of this country, to them it's still a win, because then they will introduce you to some of the wonders, as understood in Western economics, of being part of the players in world economics. But rules of the game are so difficult for your own people, but nevertheless, because it will open doors for some of the people, those that are rich will take the offer. You cannot explain why you have sharks like Tokyo Sexwale who's in the construction company in a big way, he's a money maker that guy, and the likes of Mathebe, and at the same time have ordinary people like the ones who live in shacks here. Yet they are all represented by one government, the liberation government. Surely, when it gets to the level of the European economy, there are some that are not represented, and those that are not represented unfortunately become your shack dwellers, your people living on farms. The Mathebes, the Tokyo Sexwales are represented because it's easy to side with other heavyweights in the Western economy. To me it's all linked to economic play. To grow the economy, how that is grown, is just play the game.

Until the ANC becomes aware of the needs of the people and steps out of their game with the Western economy, the wealth disparities of the country will continue to grow.

Though South Africa is plagued with a variety of problems, and the ANC has not lived up to the expectations of the people, it is unlikely that they will put there support behind another political party.

When you try to listen to these informal discussions... you still get the sense that in as much as people are so disillusioned by the ANC in government, they ask you, 'where do we go?' And no one is ready to go anywhere but the ANC, unless people consciously decide not to vote at all. People would rather hold their vote than take that anywhere else. That's the current trend at the moment that I've witnessed and I've heard people sharing. With the last elections, it was

clear that the number of voters had gone down tremendously. But still whatever the number or percentage of reduction is, the ANC still sits on top, in relation to other political parties. So that will continue to happen unless other promising political parties emerge in the near future, and how that will happen I don't know. I don't know because what I can see is that people have realized that party politics really doesn't go anywhere, it doesn't yield any results to expect political parties to make changes. That's part of the disillusionment that we've gone through with the ANC, which was most trusted. Less and less people believe that political parties will yield something.

So what does this mean for the future of South Africa and civil society?

I know that part of it means people will slowly believe that power lies with people who are suffering. Now how to express that power, I think it's up for scrutiny, part of which will be to abort any attempt to become a political party themselves, because otherwise the oppressed become the oppressors, and then find ways of expressing their political power, not through party politics but through their own sovereignty as peoples of the country, as ordinary citizens, to say they will take power, they will run power, but they not take the state. Probably that will be one of the positions, not necessarily the position that people may end up taking. This I am saying in relation to observing how Abahlali are conducting their politics, they are prepared to hold the state to account, but they are not themselves part of the state, in the sense that they have state political power. But they are saying whoever is in the position of being the state is subject to accountability and transparency. So maybe that's the kind of future that one will witness should movements like Abahlali continue to grow and connect with other forces everywhere else in the country. I have so much belief in that. From what I've observed in the past two years now, I think they have the potential to grow. They are beginning to make networks in with groups in Cape Town, continuing to make groups with networks in the Free State, so their struggle is strong, and it's not even their struggle as Abahlali's struggle, it's their struggle as any ordinary citizen that is undermined, marginalized, oppressed, not listened to.

18 FEBRUARY 2008

Essay · S'bu Zikode

Kennedy Road Shack Fire, a Double Attack

Another Shack fire after eThekweni Municipality disconnected electricity in Kennedy Road

Abahlali baseKennedy a bigger branch of Abahlali baseMjondolo has again and again been forced to accept the unacceptable. Last night at about 22:00 Saturday 16 February 2008 Kennedy Road settlement was on fire, fifteen shacks were bunt down. About 25 people including women and children were displaced and left homeless. It was fortunate that at least within 25 minutes the fire department was at the scene. The cause of fire is said to be the paraffin stove that exploded. The fire victims have worked so hard and for so long to have what they have had. It is known that there is no one who is going to return their belongings of their sweat. The shack fires have become one of those common minor incidents that do not matter, it does not attract the interest of most media nor does it attract the sympathy of those in high authority. There are no efforts of any kind that the eThekweni municipality is prepared to explore in order to address the carnage of shack fires. Shack fires can be avoided in a caring city like Durban as so much money and energy is used to impress those who do not live in Durban and to attract foreign investment.

The shack fire comes after the Durban Electricity Department, members of the heavily armed South African Police Services and private security forces invaded Kennedy Road Shack settlement disconnecting all the electricity from peoples homes. No notice was given, no permission was granted and they claimed to have the right to trespass to people's home without their concerns. This shows how much power they have, being the law unto themselves. It is well known that the electricity shortage is a national concern. Why must the poor be blamed and forced to pay the price while the big corporations are running their businesses day and night, making profit while the shack dwellers use it just to light and to cook? The shack dwellers themselves often get blamed for childrens who die in the shacks through fires and rat bites for failing to keep the settlements clean. These dirty accusation do not make any sense when there are

dirty policies like the KZN Slums Act and the policy that prohibit all informal settlement to access electricity in Durban Metropolitan area. These policies are a killer, these policies must be scrapped by all means possible.

We have been attacked consistently to pay the price of speaking the truth to power, some of us have suffered a lot of injustice in the hands of the SAPS like in Sydenham police station, some of us have been beaten for speaking the truth to power in a form of protests, so many of us have been arrested for the same truth, some of us have been forced to lie to the police, while some of us have been arrested to disunite our Movement. Most of us have had electricity cut off and forced to live in darkness while the streets and the graves of Durban are in light 24 hours a day. Thus both the electricity disconnection and shack fires have been considered by Abahlali baseKennedy as an ultimate capital punishment. We do not know as to when this conviction will last. Our ancestors suffered the same punishment under old laws of the past which made us poor. The same punishment must be resisted by all means possible. Such lifelong living in the threat of fire, rats and injustice in the name of the caring city must be dealt with by all means necessary. Electricity is not a luxury but a basic human right, a right to live and right that must be protected by all means possible. Even rural areas are now provided with electricity, but the city like Durban sees the electricity as something for few special minority that can afford high rent.

A mass meeting was held in Kennedy Road on Thursday 14 February 2008 to discuss a collective solution to the national crisis of electricity that has now become a settlementised Kennedy Road crisis in isolation to the rest of the country. All Abahlali settlements will fight to oppose all forms of oppressive policies that are a threat to future stability in our country. A legal opinion has been sought from our legal experts around the country so that the city will see itself having to answer before the court of law. It has not been easy having to deal with both the no light scenario and the shack fire at the same time.

I believe that the comrades of Abahlali, the Abahlali friends, progressive and democratic NGO's, Unionists, intellectuals, progressive leaders and Human Right Organisations will not be silenced, when peace and justice is at the brink of catastrophe.

S'bu Zikode

Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA.

7:33 p.m., Sunday 17 February 2008

26 JUNE 2008

Essay · Fanuel Nsingo

The Country That Never Was

Excitement gripped me when I was able to go back across the border to visit my family in Zimbabwe. Pleased as I was, I tried to ignore all the media reports on the country's disregard of acceptable and proper treatment of human beings. Before going home, I braced myself for whatever the hell was to befall me! Imagine going back home to unpredictable situations, disastrous conditions, or even impending death – and when home is Zimbabwe this is no exaggeration. If you have been in South Africa you are immediately suspected of being MDC. Anyway, going home was the only way to please my mum!

From Johannesburg I boarded a bus directly to Harare, Zimbabwe. I paid 300 Rands for the trip and took at least seven hours to reach the Beitbridge Border Post. The border was highly-congested, with border officials dragging their feet at main checkpoints. My stay there was four hours. Later, the bus had to leave for Harare at around 5 o'clock in the morning. The bus took eight hours to reach Harare.

My arrival in the capital city was met by a great shock. There was no transport to ferry me to my small city of birth, Marondera. Familiar to my country's economic woes, I immediately settled on the fuel disaster as the explanation. However, I waited by Fourth Street, just behind Roadport for any transport, and immediately arrived a smoking, dusty, ready-for-scrap Mazda T3500 lorry, and not wanting to miss it, I jostled alongside other stranded commuters onto its back. Along the way the driver demanded Z\$500 million, as transport fares. He said this was to enable him to buy fuel.

As we drove past Ruwa, a small town just outside Harare, the black-marketeers of fuel waved down the driver. It was a clear signal that only Zimbabwe could run dry, but never the black-marketeers. Immediately, the driver parked by the roadside, but was told to restart and get fuelled in a small patch of thick bush, obviously to be hidden away from the raging battalion of the army or police. He complied. I tried to get as close to the black-marketeer as I could to grasp details of his conversation with the driver, but had to gather the two

were arguing over the exact price of the 'precious liquid'. It seemed the young man was attempting to refuel the lorry before settling on the actual price.

When I arrived in the newly-crowned city of Marondera [formerly a town, and recently given a city status], I just slept overnight, eager to catch the morning bus to my mother's plot, that she was allocated by the ruling Zanu-PF party. The house in Marondera belongs to my grandfather, my mother's stepfather. Currently, the four-bedroomed tiny property is home to my mother's sister, together with her three children. Her first-born is a boy, who has two younger sisters as well. The next morning I took a lift to the Baker Plots that were grabbed from a Mr. Baker, a white farmer. Mr. Baker is one of the 4 000 white farmers whose farms were forcibly grabbed by the ruling government in 1997, under the influence of the late and former Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans' Association leader, Chenjerai Hunzvi.

I paid Z\$200 million from Marondera to Baker's. Initially, the driver of the small, out-of-date obsolete Datsun Pulsar had asked for Z\$300 million, arguing that the exchange rate of the ZimDollar Versus the South African Rand was unpredictable, thus the need to cater for the unexpected devaluation of the dollar. True to his utterances, and as I had to experience for myself during my short stay in Zimbabwe, the Z\$ keeps falling on an hourly basis. To stay on the safe side, one has to keep a close and tight guard on the 'now indispensable' Tito Mboweni product.

As I reached the place, I was greeted by a commotion of chants of slogans and shouts, by ruling party youths at the local shopping centre. Then there was another shocking horror, the shelves in one of the stores were the emptiest and grubbiest in the whole world! Immediately, I rushed for my mother's plot, and when she saw me, she burst into tears, wondering how on earth God had spared me from the 'Xenophobia Attacks'. We hugged and kissed, and I told her, 'Give thanks to Abahlali baseMjondolo', to which she, who has never lived in a shack, responded curtly, 'Who the hell's that?!' I mumbled to answer her as I felt I would shock her in my struggle for land and housing as an 'Umhlali.'

When we were seated, I began by narrating how good Abahlali had been to me and told her all about the red T-shirts – at the same time pulling out the colours with pride, and showcasing the movement logo, all to her surprise. 'That's politics, my son!', worried my mother. I continued with the different marches that I had been part of, the camp meetings, the regular fortnightly

meetings, office work, drinking and eating in the same plate with the President of Abahlali. I wondered if the same could be done with the ailing and wilting Bob. I wondered at the ease by which I was proud to wear the Abahlali red. I wondered how difficult and burdening it must be to have to wear the old dictator's picture on a shirt. Free at last, ain't I?

The one and only cock at our roots was made to suffer the consequences of my return, as is the African custom. It had to be sacrificed for my arrival. How good the meal was, as my sister's authority and expertise over the rural pots proved itself! No spices, just the boiled chicken and a few grains of salt. Of course no cooking oil or any fatty additives whatsoever these days. But the meal was perfect.

The next day mother forced me to wear the ZANU-PF T-Shirt and to attend an everyday compulsory ZANU-PF meeting. She was very worried that I would be under suspicion after having been away. When we arrived at the meeting place I heard war veterans boasting that they had just acquired knew knobkerries to beat those who had absconded from the previous day's meeting. At first I thought it was a joke, but was shocked to see a young man being dragged in front of everyone, and thereafter being severely beaten. A certain headman was also being accused of defecting to the opposition MDC. He however managed to save his skin because of his ill-health, otherwise he would have received the canning. But others have been ironed on their backs until they admit to being MDC and promise that they have seen the errors of their ways and that they will be loyal to ZANU-PF.

When I was to return, mother wrote a letter to the President of Abahlali, stating how grateful she was for my good upkeep. She further narrated how difficult it was to survive, mentioning the billions of ZimDollars-for-nothing needed to survive on a daily basis. To this day, I feel pity for her.

When I got to Beitbridge for my intended journey into South Africa, I overheard some youths openly debating on who the richest man in Zimbabwe was. All the tycoons and bigwigs mentioned in that debate are Zanu-PF loyalists. One talkative youth even got to the extent of boasting about Phillip Chiyangwa, nephew of Robert Mugabe and former MP for Chinhoyi West. The youth was saying Chiyangwa's pair of shoes could cost approximately US\$5 000.00. His car could talk, he had a machine to wash his teeth, six wardrobes of shoes – from his Bulawayo-based G & D Shoes Engineering, twenty wardrobes of suits and so

on. For your own information, the fallen MP was also booted out of the ruling party for allegedly engaging in espionage, selling all the 'top secrets' to the then Tony Blair-led government in England.

My question is; if people spend government resources to enrich themselves, to the extent of living luxurious and flamboyant lives, whilst 90% of the population are suffering, even starving, what is the motive behind this? If a pair of shoes is worth a life, how come the leadership is failing to dish out its leftovers or excesses towards the livelihood of the poor? Does ZANU-PF care about ordinary Zimbabweans at all? What other assets are the ruling party cronies hiding throughout the world? We are told that there is a struggle between Zimbabwe and England but it feels like a struggle between the rich and the poor in Zimbabwe.

As the events further unfolded, some MDC youths arrived at the Beitbridge Rank, not knowing about the worse to come. Within ten minutes of their arrival, the police began chasing them away, accusing them of serving a puppet leader, and warning them of arrests. The opposition youths could do nothing but listen to Mugabe's bees. Immediately, an old, forget-my-past Mazda 323 dragged itself towards the rank and out came the ugliest face I have ever seen, wailing a loudhailer that 'Operation Mirai Zvakana' was to start in ten minutes time, therefore every street-trader, and all the ladies by the vegetable market, should 'shut down' and attend an urgent meeting. 'Operation Mirai Zvakana' means 'Operation Get Rightly Sorted Out', literally, 'Operation Know Your One and Only ZANU-PF Party.' In Abahlali we come to a meeting with all our different ideas and experiences and discuss things together until we see a way forward together. We are free. In Zimbabwe ZANU-PF tells you what to think. If you don't say publicly that think what you have been told to think you will be beaten, sometimes even killed.

After the ten minutes were over, the meeting was held, with youths 'sorting-out' everybody who they had seen walking around, without attending the urgent call. I felt pity for Morgan Tsvangirai and his colleagues. Surely, this wasn't an atmosphere for free and fair elections. Surely, this wasn't an atmosphere for people with their own ideas to be safe. There is no freedom here.

The army is also brutalizing the people, the police have become the opposite of real protectors, and everybody is scared. What will happen to me now that my mother has been Zanufied? How will she fare if the MDC wins the June 27th

run-off elections? Will I be made to carry the burden that she put herself in? On the other hand, the 4 000 white farmers, whose farms were grabbed took their case to the SADC Tribunal. The question is: If Uncle Bob retains power, and the farmers win the case on the 20th July, is he[Uncle Bob] going to budge, and immediately trigger a war? If he gives in to the tribunal demands, where is my mother going to go at her current old age, together with my brother and three sisters? Or above all else, shouldn't I start a political party as soon as possible? A political party that is for land and freedom? A political party based on the full involvement of the poor, the street-traders who have been chased away from their stalls, the shack dwellers whose homes have been destroyed, the people who have been beaten and tortured? A political party in which people like my mother will be able to speak freely and will know that they will not be old and without a place where they can live and look after their children?

Prepared by: Nsingo Fanuel

28 AUGUST 2008

Speech · S'bu Zikode

Land and Housing

Diakonia Council of Churches Economic Justice Forum, Durban, 28 August 2008

I have been asked to speak on the burning issues of land and housing. I only get these invitations because of the strength of the movement of which I am part and so, on behalf of Abahlali baseMjondolo, I thank Diakonia for this platform.

The churches have rallied to our struggle in difficult times – after fires, after arrests, after beatings. We know about the role that the churches have played in Brazil and in Haiti and we believe that the churches can play the same role here if they take a clear decision, as some church leaders bravely have already, to be with the people, to clearly take the side of the people instead of being just another ‘stakeholder’. Bishop Rubin Philip has stood strong in the politics of the poor and tonight I want to say that we wish him a quick and full recovery from his illness.

The right to land and the right to housing remain huge problems in South Africa. These problems are not technical, they are political. These problems will not be solved by consultants’ reports, academic conferences at the ICC and meetings with the MEC at Suncoast. These problems will be solved when the people who do not count in this system, the people that have no proper place are able to stand up and to take their place and to be counted as citizens of this country.

Our politics starts by recognizing the humanity of every human being. We decided that we will no longer be good boys and girls that quietly wait for our humanity to be finally recognized one day. Voting has not worked for us. We have already taken our place on the land in the cities and we have held that ground. We have also decided to take our place in all the discussions and to take it right now. We take our place humbly because we know that we don’t have all the answers, that no one has all the answers. Our politics is about carefully working things out together, moving forward together. But although we take our place humbly we take it firmly. We do not allow the state to keep us quiet in the name of a future revolution that does not come. We do not allow the

NGOs to keep us quiet in the name of a future socialism that they can't build. We take our place as people who count the same as everyone else. Sometimes we take that place in the streets with teargas and the rubber bullets. Sometimes we take that place in the courts. Sometimes we take it on the radio. Tonight we take it here. Our politics starts from the places we have taken. We call it a living politics because it comes from the people and stays with the people. It is ours and it is part of our lives. We organize it in our own languages and in our own communities. It is the politics of our lives. It is made at home with what we have and it is made for us and by us. We are finished with being ladders for politicians to climb up over the people.

Sometimes it gets hard but we keep going forward together. Sometimes we don't know what to do any more but we keep thinking together. Sometimes a settlement stays strong. Sometimes a settlement fails to stay strong. But we keep going forward together.

Tonight we need to talk about the politics of land. We need to talk about the politics of housing.

We need to talk about the politics of fire. We need to talk about the politics of toilets. We need to talk about the politics of xenophobia and the politics of rape.

To think about all this we must start with where we come from.

It has become clear to us that when ever we talk about history we are seen to be launching an offensive. It has become clear to us that this is because the rich want to believe that we are poor because we are less than them – less intelligent, less responsible, less clean, less honest. If we are poor because we are just less than the rich then we must be happy for every little thing that we are given, we must be happy with a hamper or some old clothes when our children are dying in the rats and the fire and the mud.

But we are not poor because we are less than the rich. We are poor because we were made poor. The rich are rich because they were made rich. If your ancestors had the land you will go to university and get a nice job and look after your family well. If your ancestors lost the land you will be lucky to find a dangerous job that you hate so that your family can just survive.

The growing poverty in rural communities encourages mostly young people to migrate to the cities. Therefore as long as the cities grow in the same way as poverty, urbanization is not an exception. People will have to keep moving to

the cities in search of hope. This reality calls upon all city authorities to learn to share the cities and to accept this growth. It is the same poor people that build cities and then get kicked out to rot in places like Parkgate once they are finished building for the attraction of foreign investment. It is the same poor people that wash and iron for the rich who have live in shacks where it is very difficult to wash and iron their clothes. It is the same poor people that bravely guard the homes and business of the rich who come home to find their homes illegally destroyed by the criminals that are called the Land Invasions Unit.

This is wrong. We need democratic cities. We need fair cities. We need welcoming cities. We need cities for all.

We need to think about how we can create a new kind of communism, a new kind of togetherness. A living communism that recognizes the equal humanity of every person wherever they were born, wherever their ancestors came from, whether they are poor or rich, women or men. This new togetherness must also understand that the world, what God has given to us all, must be shared by us all.

The system we suffer under now keeps the land in the hands of the descendants of those who had stolen it through the barrel of colonial guns. The system turns the once most trusted leaders in our cities into enemies. The enemies that do not only hate and neglect the poor but the enemies that send police to beat the poor, arrest and shoot them when ever we voice out our concerns. Tonight we remember Mthokozisi Nkwanyana, a student and a shack dweller, who was killed by the police in a student protest on Thursday last week. The system talks a lot about democracy, but does not practice democracy. The system talks more about all the rights, gender equality and justice but does not make any of this real. This is a system where almost everything is done in the name of the poor but only for the poor to be betrayed and undermined again and again. This is a system that allows formations of many institutions such as NGOs, NPOs, businesses and states to violate the human rights of the poor and the marginalized in our society.

We need to ask ourselves what is this system?

This system is a system where the people are separated into two – those that count and those that do not count. Those that count are those with money. Those that do not count are those without money. This system values business profit before humane value. This system turns democracy into a way to become

rich. Money is made to dominate human thinking. Therefore we have to turn it upside down and put the human being first. Always we must start with the worst off.

What went very wrong in our society is when business profit is put ahead of human value. What went very wrong in our society is the thinking that sees development as being only the job of the few clever technical people, who are meant to think about development for the majority. Grass root organizations such as Abahlali baseMjondolo are strongly opposed to this top-down approach to development that sees people as nothing else than the helpless individuals who can not think for themselves. In this view the work of the poor is to vote when we are told and to be passive receivers of services. This is why the so called experts on the poor and our struggles always want to call our protests as 'service delivery protests' even when we clearly state what we are struggling for.

We are the people that are not meant to think. We are the people that are not meant to participate in planning and to debate on issues that affect us. We are the people that should be happy to live on hampers. The poor are strongly opposed to these dehumanizing characteristics of the top down system that has terrorized our communities and our lives.

Abahlali have said over and over that the majority of our people believe in a true democracy, a democracy that caters for every gogo and mkhulu's at home, a democracy that does not see people differently, a democracy that does not make few people better than the majority, a democracy that is not driven by the wealth that has torn our society apart. We believe in a participatory development of the people, for the people and by the people themselves. We are concerned that at least most of the houses that are being built, they are built for the people, without the people. This is why some people reluctantly accept these houses and then they either rent them out or sell them to some desperate fellows and run back to jondolos. This is not a matter for the police and the NIA. The reason for this is not that shack dwellers can not think or are stupid. The reasons for this is the failure of authorities to involve shack dwellers not only in the planning but right from the project identification through to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation – in fact all through the project cycle. If you take people out of their communities, sometimes at gun point, and move them to rural human dumping grounds where there is no work they will not stay there. People have to survive. We want it to be clearly understood that the bottom up development

approach that recognizes that a properly human life is what the majority of the poor prefers. Thus communication and consultation is vital if authorities were to be serious and respecting of those that they call 'beneficiaries'.

It is very sad that some business men, like Ricky Govender in Motala Heights, have been terrorizing their communities in search for a land to expand their business and wealth. In Motala Heights the settlement leadership and very senior families have been forced up and down the lawyers and courts to defend their right not to be evicted from their land. It is the same with the eNkwalini community who have consistently been threatened with eviction by the farmer, who had just bought the farm in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. What is more upsetting with all the evictions that are taking place in eThekweni is that they are not only illegal because they are carried out without the court orders but that they are also criminal. We have had to advise the police and municipal officials quite several times of section 26 of the South African constitution and the Prevention of Illegal Occupation of Land Act that protects the homeless, the poor and most vulnerable members of our society, children and women. Abahlali baseMjondolo has managed to stop most evictions in eThekweni in settlements like Motala Heights, Shannon Drive, Pemary Ridge, and Arnett Drive just to mention a few. But while we were winning an important victory in the High Court against evictions in Arnett Drive on Tuesday the Municipality was outside illegally demolishing shacks in Siyanda at the very same time! If already the law is not respected by the authorities then it is difficult to imagine how other new laws like the very notorious KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Slums Act will be used.

It is very sad that some academics and NGOs continue to think that it is their natural right to dominate instead of to support the struggles of the poor. We have kept our silence for years but now we must say that it is clear that at the Centre for Civil Society the work of the intellectual is to determine our intelligence by trying to undermine our intelligence. They try to buy individuals, intimidate our comrades and tell the worst lies to try and show that we are too stupid to think our own struggles. They fail to understand that we are poor, not stupid. This is their politics.

The shack dwellers believe that land and housing in the cities will bring about the safer environment, an environment that is free from shack fires, an environment that is free from rats, rapes and crime when our children and

women have to find water and toilets in the bushes. If we were to be serious about caring cities, the first step will have to be to respect human life and human dignity. Mnikelo Ndabankulu a spokesperson for Abahlali baseMjondolo often says that “we do not need electricity, it is needed by our lives”. Our settlements are not temporary. Some of us have lived our whole lives in them. Our children have grown up in them. Electricity, water and sanitation can no longer be denied to shack dwellers. The eThekweni Municipality has often told us that money is not a problem, but that the problem is land. But the problem has never been just that there is no land in the cities as we have always been told. There is land. The political problem is that that land is privately owned by companies like Tongaat-Hulett. That problem can be solved but that would require recognizing the humanity of everyone and there has never been human recognition in the first place. For this City being poor, living in a shack or selling in the street, is seen as a crime. Until this is fixed right the poor will always be taken as trouble makers when in fact they are excluded from positive thinking that could contribute in the building of a caring city. A city where everyone has a say and an equal opportunity in shaping and reshaping this city into a caring one.

One of the biggest mistakes when planning development in the city is when the city does not provide basic services that are urgently needed by human lives. I am talking about services like the inadequate provision of water supply, not enough toilets and no proper collection of refuse as there is no access road to inner shack settlements. The result of these denied services is very serious. Without refuse removal there are rat bites and diseases. Without electricity there are shack fires. Who is to be blamed for the fact that we still live without these life saving services other than those who are meant to save the public in governments? We have seen the authorities shifting blame to the poor themselves with childish claims that the shack dwellers are dirty or lazy or that we do not want to move from filthy conditions. They say in the newspaper that “Zikode must educate his people”, as if people living in shacks are stupid and as if they all belong to one ordinary man like Zikode. I want to make it very clear that we have built a democratic politics and that our settlements are far too well organized to be controlled or thought by one man like Zikode. Zikode has his own kids to educate like any other responsible parent who cares about the future of their children. But Zikode does not educate the people who elected him to speak with them and then for them. In fact every day Zikode is educated by the suffering

and the courage and the intelligence of the people that elected him. Therefore it is very disrespectful to say that elderly people must be educated to light paraffin stoves or light candles. The solution to fires is not education. The solution to fires is that electricity must be provided in all settlements. Electricity is not a luxury. It is needed to save lives. We cannot compromise on this point. I hope that tonight we can all agree on the need for the settlements to be electrified.

Abahlali's concerns over the shack fires that have terrorized our communities have caused this Movement to call upon all shack settlements to discuss this matter openly and to allow every shack settlement to have a say on what they think could be a solution. We have called a city summit on shack fires that will include all those who care about the lives of our people, be it the municipal authorities, progressive NGOs, churches, individuals etc. We believe that all of what is seen to be problems associated with the shack dwellers can be resolved by and with shack dwellers themselves. Thus Abahlali believes that the issue of land and housing is not just the issue for the technical people and for the government but of all who are meant to benefit from it.

The shack fire summit will be held on Monday 22 September. The day before, Sunday 21 September, we will hold a mass prayer for all the shack dwellers who have died in the fires.

People are often confused about what our movement stands for when it comes to land and housing. Tonight I want to suggest a list of ten demands on the burning questions of land and housing that could be used to begin a discussion about a platform for a united front on land and housing. These demands come out of years of discussion in our movement. We would be very happy if you could discuss them in your own organizations so that we can, together, start the work of shaping a new vision for our cities.

- 1. There must be no more evictions.
- 2. Life saving basic services, including electricity, water, refuse removal and toilets, must be provided to all settlements.
- 3. The land on which the settlements have been founded must be transferred to the collective ownership of the people living in each settlement.
- 4. Settlements must be upgraded where they are where ever this is possible.
- 5. When people have to be relocated they must be given the option of moving to well located land.

- 6. Land must be expropriated from Tongaat-Hullet to house the poor.
- 7. There must be no more forced removals. People must only be relocated voluntarily.
- 8. Government must negotiate with the organizations that represent each settlement and not with the councilors.
- 9. Shack dwellers have a right to disagree with the government.
- 10. Shack dwellers have a right to organize themselves outside of the political parties.

We have asked people to speak to us, not for us. We have asked people to work with us, not for us. We have asked people to think with us, not for us. We have asked people to understand that our movement will always belong to its members and never to any NGO or political party. We have asked people to understand that we need a living solidarity, a solidarity that is built in partnership with our living politics, a solidarity that is built around the real everyday suffering and struggles of our people. I thank Diakonia for this invitation to speak. I thank the churches for their brave support during difficult times in our struggle. I invite everyone here to work to build a partnership for a democratic city together with us and with all democratic organizations of the poor. I invite you all to our summit on shack fires. Maybe we can start there. Let us see.

13 OCTOBER 2008

Essay · Mzonke Poni

Upgrading of Informal Settlements (Don't destroy it upgrade it)

Published in the Khayelitsha Struggles blog

This is a very good concept, and ABM WC support the concept, because:

- 1. It house people where they have established them selves
- 2. It gives them legal status
- 3. It gives people security of tenure
- 4. It does not remove people where they are performing their daily economic activities

As much as we support the concept, there are few problem or challenges regard to this that still need to be addressed such as;

- 1. De-densifying; as this approach exclude people from the process and it also break the social link that people have established and it also take people away from where they are performing their daily economic activities.
- 2. Relocating; it is not a good view to relocate people in order them to make a way for construction, as this process complicate people's life and it also affect their jobs. When this approach of relocation is being carried government must compensate people as this process impact at their livelihood, when doing so individual circumstances must be considered not a silver bullet approach or one size fits all, here we are talking about the lives of poor people not the lives of animals and that need to be taken seriously and be respected.
- 3. The top down approach: When this process took place people who are going to benefit must be recognized and they must play a vital role in the process especially when it comes to decision making, because this decisions affects them not anybody else therefore their view matters and need to be respected.
- 4. Politics/politicians: Government and community leaders need to stop mixing politics and development, here we need to be clear when talking about peoples

living conditions we are talking about the desperation and peoples lives. People have been living under appalling conditions at informal settlements for years others have been living more than 20 years without toilet, water and electricity because of that our people become vulnerable to corrupt leaders.

5. Single plot one house: This approach is out of fashion now and this approach forces lot of people out of the area, and few will benefit and it also incite division in our communities and it make it easier for politicians and corrupt leaders to take advantage of our people at their communities. With this approach instead of people focusing on alternatives or on how they can share the piece of land that they are occupying, they spend lot of their time fighting among them selves on who must benefit and who must not benefit, because of this corrupt community leaders take advantage of the process and sell plots to outsiders and accept bribes from desperate people within the community.

- 6. No community participation = no accountability: If developments excludes peoples participation and is not people driven or people centered then such process will be faced with lot of problem, and it is likely possible that such process will delay and over spend because is politically driven and will be politically challenged.

Our Stand Point

1. We call for transparency, before the project of upgrading the informal settlement people must be educated of pre processes, time line and the budget or cost of the projects, If this process is clear from the beginning it will help people to participate meaning fully in the process, if people does don't have enough information about the project and where the money comes from, they'll not be able to participate meaningfully, but if people are clear of the fact that the money that will develop the area in which they are staying at it is their subsidy money and no one is doing favour for them, then it became easier for people to voice their views freely because they are clear of the process, but if people are under the impression that government is doing favours for them when upgrading their areas then people will accept that easier because they are under the impression that half of a loaf is better than nothing and in reality it is better than nothing only if you don't have a choice but when you have a choice you need to exercise that right.

2. Transfer of land ownership: This is a major problem with housing in South Africa, and the question of housing will not be solved now or within ten years it will take between 40 to 60+ years before is sorted as long as people does not have a security f tenure, which makes it difficult for people to take control of their situations, or play vital role on developing their communities. We believe that if first government can transfer the ownership of land to people who occupied the area it makes easier for people to engage on their housing approach, even before that they can engage on how they'll own and manage the land collectively and this process create meaning full community participation because everyone become a role player and every ones decision will be respected and this with this approach it will be very difficult for people to be left out of the project, because when people take decision on what types of houses they need they'll take into consideration two things

2.1. They'll not want to leave any body out side/ they'll need to make sure that everybody will benefit from the project, vital decisions will not be taken through voting but through consensus.

3. Community Participation; If people are in charge of their development, and are controlling it there will be no need for people to relocate or for densification, as long as decisions are made on a community level irrespective of which housing approach will be carried, if the process is community owned people will be able to way a way for construction to take place for first phase and the are number of options that people can look at instead of relocation and this options will be painless and will not have a major impact on their livelihood as long as they are in charge of the process is community based.

Temporal relocation Area (TRA's)

TRA's are not only unsuitable but also a waste of tax payers money's, instead of government identifying land to relocate people to other areas, what we are saying is:

1. They are wasting lot of money on the top structure of these TRA's, instead of doing that after identifying the piece of land they must build houses for people that are nearby the area and backyard dwellers must be prioritized as a tool to upgrade them as well where they are and people who are on the waiting to that particular must also be prioritized instead of inciting division to the poor and make them fight about the piece of land.

- 2. Relocation is not democratic, should be opposed at all corners and should not be tolerated, people themselves need to establish zero tolerance policies at their communities for relocation to the dumping sites.
- 3. People need to relocate themselves where it is suitable for them, by occupying available land within towns, unused buildings or centers and empty hotels.

Land Invasions

Government is trying by all means to come up with zero tolerance policies against land invasion and they are setting up land invasion units, hiring bidders to demolish people's structures that are invading land.

- 1. We are saying if government can not build enough houses for people, when people create their own communities should be allowed, and they need to be supported by government by immediately providing services for them, and immediately recognize them as legal occupants, lastly transfer the ownership of land to them
- 2. This process of invading land is people centered and it must be respected, because it is democratic, based on the fact that a decision to invade comes from people and a decision on where to invade it also comes from people as well it's unlike the forced relocation where people will be forced out of a well located piece of land to the dumping site,

Human Settlement

This is also a good view as well and needs to be supported, in terms of cutting across division, in terms of race, gender and class in our communities and create future communities, but when this takes place poor should not be taken advantage of in the process, why government must force poor people out of their own communities, then after build houses that people will not even qualify for?

Partnership

When upgrading the area who must government enter into partnership with, there's poor people that are currently living in the area and there are big monopolies?

ABM Western Cape condemns this capitalist partnership of public private partnership and calls for public public partnership.

We are saying when upgrading the area the first and the last partners are people who occupied the land irrespective of the financial circumstances and a house shouldn't be made a privilege for the poor, this is the basic fundamental right and need to be respected.

Physical intervention

The rate of poverty at our community is very high based on the fact that most people at our communities are unemployed therefore we call on government when upgrading the area people from the area which is being upgraded they must be involved so that the process can create employment for unemployed people and people will need to be trained and this can be done through skills development programs.

If this process can be respected it will create accountability because people are involved and participating at each and every step of the process and it becomes very difficult for corrupt leaders and governmental officials to manipulate the process and it also prevents corrupt construction companies from building poor houses or ghost houses.

20 OCTOBER 2008

Essay · Fanuel Nsingo

The Award of Hope!

It came as a surprise to be awarded the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Trophy at the third annual graduation ceremony for the University of Abahlali base-Mjondolo. Not only was I surprised by my achievement, but I ran out of words as well. The Kennedy Road Community Hall was packed to capacity as the Master of Ceremonies cleared his voice and began the announcement that changed my life, saying, ‘The Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award goes to ___eh.....this young man, who comes aaaaaall the waaaaay from ___ Zimmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmbabweweeeeeeeeeeeeeeee ___!’

The graduation ceremony by the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo is a rare one. It signifies how a militant poor people’s movement recognizes the skills, capabilities and talents of the poor and oppressed. It is a salutation of the achievements by the now-popular shack dwellers’ movement in the right to education and self empowerment. It is also to prove the true meaning of Abahlalism and what it entails to be an ‘Umhlali’.

When I was growing up back in Zimbabwe, little did I know that the poor and oppressed could seek recognition for themselves if not being recognized by others, could seek justice for themselves if being denied the right to justice, could seek to empower themselves if being marginalized from empowerment initiatives, or could seek to dignify themselves if denied the right to human dignity. However, for Abahlali baseMjondolo, being a shack dweller boosts some certain pride for the movement’s members. Abahlali has tried by all means to expose how shack dwellers are being oppressed, repressed, depressed, suppressed and expressed. Our movement has shown how the poor are sidelined, excluded from participating in life-changing opportunities, forced out of the cities and even presumed to be guilty without committing an offence. All the misfortune

of shack dwellers saw the Zimbabwean government 'eradicating and eliminating' all the shacks in the country, leaving millions of people homeless. At Abahlali we always propose that shack settlements be upgraded where they are instead of being bulldozed to the ground. We always propose that grassroots urban planning must be supported and defended.

During the so-called xenophobic attacks, Abahlali was at the forefront of condemning the sad violence on our African brothers and sisters. It issued a very strong Press Statement which was widely-circulated and read. It organized countless meetings to alert the people to the danger of attacking their brothers and sisters. It organized defence. It even stopped an attack that was happening in a settlement where we have no members. I'm pleased to announce today that the attacks left me unscathed, all because of Abahlali's caring love and protection. Had I been back home at Old Bob's slaughtering territory during the election campaign I would be limping on crutches today. The old, reluctant dictator has tried by all means to punish innocent Zimbabweans if ever they vote for the MDC. His unity is founded on fear. S'bu Zikode, the President of Abahlali has done it the other way round, positively, he has founded a unity on hope. He has united the Xhosas with the Zulus; the Pondos with the Shangaans; the Vendas with the Sothos; the Africans with the Indian community, and those born in South Africa with those born in other countries. S'bu has made it clear that he will not tolerate any ethnic or racial divisions, thus Abahlali's gospel is spreading like veldfires, even as far as Kimberly, uniting all tribes from all corners of South Africa. At Abahlali we have made a home for everyone, regardless whether one is a card-carrying-member of the movement or not; regardless whether one is a member of a certain political party or not; regardless whether one is a foreigner or not; and regardless whether one is a shack dweller or not. One is not born to be an Umhlali – one chooses to be an Umhlali when one accepts Abahlalism – the bottom up living politic that says everyone can think, everyone must be respected. This wonderful movement is always neutral in the face of the human being – everyone counts for one. But the movement is never neutral in the face of injustice! The spirit that S'bu's style of leading by listening has ingested in Abahlali is much-needed in all the governments of the world!

When it comes to my award, I feel the 'real and true' spirit of 'Zikodeism' played an important role. I could tell by the expression on his face that he was elated, to say the least, when I received the unexpected award. I could also tell by

the suddenness of his rush for the cameras, just to be pictured with me, never shying away from a ‘foreigner’. I could also not help imagining how Mugabe would feel to be outdone by the president of Abahlali, if ever he heard the news. During the photo shots with S’bu, I could not even think of my family back home, as I felt his fatherly and brotherly presence to receive the award on my behalf. He even forgot to hand over the neckband medal that he had received on my behalf, owing largely to his excitement, and I had to follow him to his home and remind him. Still, he was wearing it around his neck!

I also feel indebted to Fazel Khan, the Programme Co-ordinator for the Computer part of the University of Abahlali Classes. He was all smiles during the graduation ceremony, but when it came to presenting my award, he just said, ‘I’m sorry I couldn’t have told you about the award. That would be cheating’. Oh! I couldn’t stop admiring the man who had put so much effort in the progress of the computer classes. Fazel said that “Fanwell, our comrade, has been given the right to South African citizenship by Abahlali baseMjondolo’!

What more can I say? The award gave me hope that leaders like S’bu Zikode are needed worldwide; that Abahlali baseMjondolo shall become the home of all people from all walks of life; that Abahlali shall win the struggle in the ‘Land and Housing’ issues. It gave me hope that one day I could be part of a real struggle to change Zimbabwe with the experience I have gained at Abahlali. For me, it was truly an award of hope for a bright Zimbabwe that is not surviving on power-sharing deals, and hope for the millions of starving Zimbabweans and my mother, including other family members too!

Prepared by: Nsingo Fanwell, Abahlali baseMjondolo Member and Activist

29 NOVEMBER 2008

Essay · Mzonke Poni

The Big Threat to Informal Settlements

More than 50% of people who do not have houses in South Africa are living at informal settlements, and informal settlements have been viewed as a step towards getting a house in South Africa.

Most people when getting to the City from rural areas, most of the time when they come they'll first squat (live) with their friend, family members or relatives, while they are still looking for a work but once they get a job the first thing that they will think about is to get their own place first so that they can have their own space or privacy. Most of the time people view this option as the best option to jump the queue from the housing list as they know that if they bought a house at informal settlement and when the area is being relocated or being developed they will also benefit as they also owned a house from the area and this most of the time create problem between people who are coming out side the City and with people who have been in the City longer or people who have been born in the City but does not have a house.

One of the most reason why people buy their own houses at informal settlements is because they want to be independent and they want to be in control of their own lives probably because they are employed and they can afford a shack, 98 % of people who bought shacks at informal settlement when they bought it it's probably they are employed, have source of income or have a financial support base system, whether a person is having a business or a family member will be supporting that person. There are few people that are living at informal settlement who can afford to buy houses for them selves, but chose to live at informal settlement, most professionals such as teachers, nurses etc that are doing this you'll find out they are doing because they are contract workers, casual workers, others are unemployed.

In most cases all this people will be pushed out of the community by people that they are living with not only professionals but all people who works at better places or people who are having valuable goods at their shacks such as

DVD home theatre, Computers especially laptops, good looking phones and other valuable items such as cameras, jewellery, expensive clothes etc.

Not only people who are having valuable items but also people who are contributing meaningfully to the development of people who are living at informal settlements, that is why most of the time people who are living at informal settlements are being represented by people who are not living at informal settlements because people that are coming from informal settlements do not want to play active role as they fear their lives because they are not safe because of the conditions that they are living under off. Most houses at informal settlements does not even have a yard, and the security of everyone is being compromised by the conditions, the areas are very dense.

If you turn to differ with others at a community meeting or you supported a serious decision in favour of others and against others it is likely possible that you become the victim or the target, because of this most people who are living at informal settlement they are happy with the fact that they are still employed and they are still able to provide for their families, because of this they chose not to involve them selves at issues that are happening at a community level not because they don't want to be involved but because they fear for their lives.

As a results of this our communities are divided, and people sing different songs and as a results of this our communities are being ruled by the thugs. Tsotsi's (thugs) they do as they please at our communities, they rule our communities. They have big guns and big knives. All these tsotsi's are known to our communities, they rob a cell phone from one corner and they sell it to the other corner from the same community, they steal a DVD from one house and they will sell it to the other house. They still from the same community and they will sell it from the same community and people are enjoying buying cheap goods from tsotsi's without understanding that they are destroying our communities.

This has become a big threat to our communities.

From Site B, Town two to Site C, everyone is talking about tsotsi's and when people talk about tsotsi's you might thought that they are talking about people that they don't know whereas they talk about people that they know, when community meeting is called to address the issue of crime, people will not participate or they might surprise you, they can take a total different position and you will be viewed as someone who is having a personal problem with tsotsi's, and now

they will not be called as tsotsis they will be called by their names by the very same people that they were calling them as tsotsis.

If you want to be a target at our communities call a meeting and start addressing the issue of crime and you will be a target, few people will support you but the majority will sit back or not participate at all.

The worst part is these tsotsis will shoot, or kill someone in front of people and no one will come out and say 'I've seen who killed the other person', and this means your security is being compromised by your neighbour and by your community, this means the are people around you but you are not safe.

When something happens in our communities the first people that we criticized of their incompetence are the police, how can you criticized them when reporting a crime scene and no one saw a suspect or no one is willing to come out and testify against the suspect? I am not sure what kind of communities that we are building, if people does not want to unite and deal with this threat, if we are not taking the issue of crime at our communities serious we are going to lose skilled people at our communities and we'll always be the victims of the system as there will be no skilled people at our communities to address issues that affect our people such as lack of tapes, toilets and electricity as a results of this our communities will not be developed but be destroyed by the tsotsis and the system.

If at each an every corner of our communities we can make sure people comes together and fight crime we can be able to build crime free communities and our skilled people who were forced out of the community by uncalled activities can be able to come back to our communities and contribute with skills that they have in order to advance the interest of the poor.

When people address the issue of crime, I am not saying community must be up into arms and try to solve crime with crime, I think when someone is ding justice is doing something that will be proud of where a person will be able to say a justice has been done, but killing someone is not justice, or beating someone is not justice.

The are few options that are available at communities to address the issue of crime.

Before we want to deal with this threat to our communities, first we must understand the cause of crime at communities, because if we don't understand the cause then we will fight a losing back battle at our communities and we will

be frustrated and lose control, as a results of this we will start beating people or stoning people to death with a thought that we are dealing with crime at our communities.

The reality is whether we like it or not crime will not be combated through two popular systems that are in favour of many people at our communities

- 1. Jail system
- 2. Community Justice

Jail System.

The jail system is not a good system especially for rehabilitation, instead of rehabilitating a person it only build a criminal. The system is not working and it need to be scraped or overhauled completely. In my view most people that goes to jail are innocent and are being failed by the system. Most of the time people steal things that they don't need, but for selling them so that they can get cash/money to survive. This means the system has failed that person. It is the responsibility of government to create job opportunities for people who are unemployed, and create skills training program and income generating project for people who does not have any educational qualification of formal educations.

Most people who commit crime at our communities does not have any educational qualification and most of them are unemployed and some of them does not even have matric, they have dropped at high school for certain financial reason. All people who commit crime goes to jail, it doesn't matter whether you have killed someone or stole from someone else, if you go to jail you all go to the same system, and most people today who are criminals are being built by the jail system, someone make a mistake and stole someone's television because that person was very desperate for money not even for drugs but for food, as part of that you'll find out when people steal things they don't steal things because they want them, they steal them because they want to sell them in order to make cash. If people steal things because they want to get cash in order to survive, can we really say they deserve to go to jail and mix with big criminals who killed people, and raped people? If we do then what we are doing we are contributing on building stronger criminals, because these people when they are arrested they are being recruited by gangsters, and when they come out of the prison they join or form gangsters, what does this mean? This means by sending people to jail we are sending them to be trained as criminals.

The way forward

Everyone does make mistakes, as human beings and we all need a second chance in life. Crime can not be combated through the jail system but through creating employment, skills training program and creating income generating programs for unemployed people. If people commit crime in our communities that person has committed crime on a community level and that person must be punished on a community level not by sending a person to jail. A person must do a community service for a certain period, and while a person is doing a community service such person must be capacitated with life skills and it should be a must for a person to participate at these life skills programs and also those who commit big crimes such as arm robbery they also need to be given a second chance before people are being send to jail, and when people undermine this kind of system of community service it is then that they'll need to be send to jail and when they are being send to jail they must face a life sentence, so that people can understand that committing crime is a serious offence, and people were given the second chance. I believe we all make mistakes, and I've seen people making mistakes and admit that they've made a mistake, and if they had stolen people's goods they'll return them and ask forgiveness and people are being forgiven and if it means they must pay back whatever they've sold they are able to do that, but if such person was sent to jail that person would not have asked for forgiven, instead he or she would have go straight to jail and it is highly possible that person at jail would have joined one of gangsters.

Community Justice System

This is not a good System of justice but a system of heartless people, who are frustrated and fed up with these uncalled activities, but when looking at this system very close you'll find out the same people that beat people to death are the very same people that failed those people at their communities, because these people that commit crime in our communities are people that we live with and most of the time these people are being failed by us, community members, they suffer in front of us and there's no one who is willing to share with them, instead of helping them we gossip about them, most of the time when people commit crime especially at a community level they'll steal electric wires, phones, do house breaking, steal money, rob people make the community unsafe etc.

They are doing it because they are unemployed and they are hungry and there's no one is willing to assist them instead of seeing the community as a place to protect they see the community as a place to make money through these un-called activities and they also joined gangsters, and share the information about their community with other gangsters, they'll go and rob at other area and people from other area comes and commit crime at their area, and this makes the community unsafe for everyone.

Way forward

This kind of system can also be prevented by the community members only if everyone cares enough about other human being, part of the challenges will be this so called capitalist system which does not enable people to learn to share with those that they don't have, instead it create division and competition in our communities.

It becomes difficult for people to help others especially if they'll will not benefit from the process, in our days people at our communities will only help you only if there is something in return and this kind of attitude is the one that lead those that does not have to join gangster and steal from those that they have within the community.

Each and every community must accept local responsibility and come up with their community program on how to prevent crime. People who are unemployed at our communities are known by community members and people who are on drugs are known at our communities, people who steals cars are known to our communities, people who are robbing people are known at our communities, then what makes it so difficult for people to manage these issues at our communities, there's nothing at all but its just that our communities are divided and these criminals they are taking the advantage of such division within our communities, and these people that are committing crime most of the time are not living alone they are living with their family members or their parents.

There's nothing that can not be controlled and managed at a community level.

In conclusion

- 1. If government does not finance and empower communities to initiate their own community programs such as skills training and development crime will not be combated at our communities and people on the ground will remain the victims of crime and more money will be spend on building more jails and on criminals.
- 2. As long as the educational system does not support those children who comes from highly disadvantage communities then will continue having more people dropping out of school before they finish Matric and eventually they'll join gangsters in order to maintain themselves.
- 3. As long as government continue implementing these so called neo liberal based policies, that create gap between the poor and the rich, crime level will continue increasing on a daily basis.
- 4. As long as people at a community level view crime as something that need to be dealt with by the Police, the Police will continue failing community members, because without the help of the community members the Police will always failed our community.
- 5. As long as people are still under paid at work and the price of food keeps increasing the crime rate will not be tackled, as long as goods are not affordable to certain group of people crime will always increase at our communities.
- 6. As long certain jobs are not being created, the crime rate will continue increasing at our communities
- 7. As long as public private partnership is still the option crime will continue increasing at our communities.
- 8. As long as people are still homeless, unemployed, and are still living under the appalling conditions, crime will not be combated.

By: Mzonke Poni

ABM WC Chairperson

14 DECEMBER 2008

Speech · S'bu Zikode

Post Annual General Meeting Speech

Delivered to Abahlali baseMjondolo at the Blue Lagoon, Durban, 14 December 2008

Introduction

Comrades, as you all know we have come from a very unique AGM of our beloved Movement, a Movement whose unique strength has enabled so many shack dwellers to stand together and to be very strong in defending and protecting ourselves, our communities and our right to the cities.

Our 2008 AGM held in the Kennedy Road Hall on 23 November was as successful as all the others that we have held since the launch of our movement in October 2005. Our movement is still growing and all of our branches and affiliated settlements elected their representatives and the hall at Kennedy Road was overflowing. Everyone was free to say what ever they wanted to say. The voting went well and it was wonderful to have our comrades from the Poor People's Alliance with us. But, as you all know, I took a decision not to stand for another term. As I explained my intention was always to remain strongly committed to the movement but it seemed clear to me that all positions at all levels of leadership in our movement need to be shared, that the burden of leadership in a movement of volunteers needs to be shared, that I need time for my family and to be able to read and to think about what we have achieved with our living politic – a politic that was always based on us thinking carefully about our lives and our struggles. We have to change ourselves before we can change the world and, without time to think, that change becomes difficult.

We have often said that as the poor our only strength is in our discipline. Our numbers mean nothing if we are not organized and we cannot be organized without being disciplined. Our discipline has never been about taking orders from above. Our movement grew out of a rejection of the top down politics of the councillors, the ward committees and the branch executive committees. We have always rejected top down politics in all its forms – including those NGOs

that want to remote our movements. Our discipline has been about discussing things carefully at our meetings, thinking together at our meetings and then taking decisions that we are all committed too. Our discipline is a shared responsibility. It is not about some people disciplining other people. It is about us sharing responsibility together. For this reason our movement is built around the meetings. All of our meetings are always open. Anyone can put any issue on the agenda. Anyone can speak. If comrades have questions or worries they must come to the meetings in their settlements or the meetings of the Women's League, the Youth League or the Abahlali baseMjondolo secretariat. This is the space for questions to be asked and for worries to be coughed out. It is also the space where we share the work that must be done. If we continue to respect this space our movement will continue to be strong.

Leading this movement is not an easy task. It is a task that demands a leader who is humble enough to listen to everyone but strong enough to never compromise people's lives by not standing up when that becomes necessary. The task demands political creativity because we have to invent our struggle as we wage it. The task demands respect for all age groups within the Movement – it demands a better understanding of what Abahlali Youth is like, Abahlali Mama's, Gogo's, Baba's and Mkhulu's are like. It calls for a leader who is willing to learn and who is prepared to be led as the Vice President of Abahlali, Lindela Figlan, likes to puts it. This willingness of all our leaders to learn and to be led is very important in our Movement's work of defining itself and knowing itself before someone else from somewhere else defines our Movement. We can never know our enemy and our world without knowing ourselves; we can not understand all the challenges lying ahead of us and their possible solutions if we do not understand ourselves.

As a disciplined member of Abahlali baseMjondolo I have always admired how members of our Movement have shown such trust in me in this very high and very demanding Task to lead such a growing Movement. And I still ask myself as to what wonders or qualities of leadership I have demonstrated to Abahlali that you can elect, re-elect and then re-elect me again in this challenging task. As you all know this year I did not stand and no one else stood for the position of president and so the ballot paper for the position of the president was empty. And yet you all wrote my name on the empty ballot papers. It was a very emotional day for all of us.

Comrades I have noted how you asked me to reconsider my decision at the AGM. I have noted the views of the new secretariat and the outgoing secretariat. I have noted all the views of those of you that have come to the office and to my home to ask me to reconsider.

Comrades I have also noted how our comrades from all the organizations that make up the Poor People's Alliance have stood strong for my return as your leader, these comrades have come with a smile to us as they come from a mile to strengthen our course as their course. I can not stop reading sms's and it has been their call that has finally prompted my decision to accept the trust that you placed in me at the AGM. I refer to comrades from the Landless People's Movement in Gauteng, the Anti-Eviction Campaign in the Western Cape, Abahlali baseMjondolo in the Western Cape and the Rural Network in KZN. I salute their commitment for a just society. I salute their commitment to the principle that the poor should think and lead their own struggles. I salute their courage over the years. There is a long road ahead but we will walk it together.

Oppression

We declared 2005, the year in which we formed our movement, as the Year of Action. How we marched that year! Last year was the Year of No Evictions and we were successful in stopping every eviction that threatened our settlements that year. We declared 2008 the year of Land and Housing. But instead it became the year of the Red Devil in Jondolos (Matt Birkinshaw 2008). Kennedy Road, Jadhu Place, Foreman Road, Emmause, Motala Heights, Arnet Drive, Emagwaveni, Ash Road in Pietermaritzburg and QQ-Section in the Western Cape were all affected by the plague of fires. This was also another year of rats attacking our children. A baby was killed in Kennedy Road and more babies were bitten afterwards. This was also a year in which shack dwellers in Durban were still denied official access to electricity and suffered assaults and even shootings in the armed and violent de-electrifications in settlements like Kennedy Road, Pema Ridge, Emagwaveni-Tonga and Arnet Drive. And while we are denied official electricity and attacked for making our own life saving electricity connections the government leaves live wires dangling from the pylons above our settlements. We all know that this would never happen in Westville or Umhlanga Rocks. People who are denied official electricity and attacked when they connect themselves have still been shocked to death by these dangling wires

from the high pylons in places like eMagwaveni and Kennedy Road. This has also been a year of floods (Ash Road-Pietermaritzburg) and it has been a year of threats of massive eviction in Arnet Drive, Emagwaveni in Tongaat, Motala Heights in Pinetown, Siyanda C-Section and eMacambini in the northern part of the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

This year was also the year, the terrible year, in which people born in other countries were attacked all over South Africa.

It has also been the year of the notorious transit camps.

And it has also been the year of the equally notorious Slums Act.

It has also been a year of talks, slow dragging talks, but talks nevertheless. We have been in talks with the Project Preparation Trust (PPT), the eThekweni municipality, Ricky Govender of Motala Heights, Mr Moolan of the Emagwaveni land and even the Land Invasions Unit and the police.

It ended as a challenging year where the highest post and task in the movement remained vacant for more for more than twenty days after the Annual General Meeting.

Victories in 2008

The life of the poor is not easy in this world and it is not easy in this country. I have already mentioned some of the threats that we have faced this year.

But we must remember that we have achieved a lot in 2008. As much as it has been the year of the Red Devil, the year of the transit camp and the year of the attacks on people born in other countries it has also been the year of negotiations.

We have continued with all our ordinary work this year. We have worked to build the structures in the branches and affiliated settlements, to connect water and electricity, to defend our land, to ensure the safety of our communities, to ensure the continued power of women in our movement, to start and run gardens and crèches, to continue with the university of Abahlali baseMjondolo including training in computer skills, to run a library, to hold camps where we can discuss and be together through the nights, to care for each other in times of trouble, to support the struggles of other communities when they have asked us for solidarity and to take our own struggle forward in the settlements, in the streets and in the courts. Some of our branches and affiliated settlements are full of life – their spirits are always high and they are full of energy, creativity

and courage. Some are only highly activated in times of crisis but seem to go to sleep a little when threats recede and to assume that others will keep the growing movement strong for them. Our movement ends this year much bigger than it was at the end of last year. We have many more members in many more settlements than ever before. But as the movement grows the work that must be done grows too.

Through the negotiations that we have been involved in all year our voice became louder and louder as the City was forced to sit down and listen to Abahlali. These talks were very carefully facilitated by PPT. Along the way we had to ensure that representatives from all our settlements could participate, that we kept the right to be political and to be critical and that we kept our intellectual autonomy by ensuring that we did not send all of our most committed comrades to the negotiations and that the delegates to the negotiations reported to our Abahlali meetings.

We are finalizing the details of the MOU that commits all parties to providing specified services to 14 settlements and to upgrading three settlements with on site housing. All kinds of very important breakthroughs have been achieved already including the right for shack dwellers to get services while they wait for houses, the right for shack dwellers get houses where they are living and the right to genuinely participatory and democratic urban planning.

We have already finalized the Abahlali Settlement Plan for Kennedy Road which will enable Abahlali and the city to acknowledge injustices and to find a common ground on which to respect the needs and the voice of the shack dwellers while upgrading the settlement where it is. The threat of forced removal that has been hanging over Kennedy Road since 1995 has now lifted.

In all of our negotiations we stuck to the principle of one house for one family against the one house for one shack system. In all of our negotiations we stuck to the principle that no one will left homeless by development. In all of our negotiations we stuck to the principle that an injury to one is an injury to all. We withdrew from the negotiations when any of our settlements were under threat. We have won the right to bargain collectively. We have won the right to include new settlements in our negotiations as they join us. The history of our relationship with the eThekweni Municipality has been painful. Many of us have suffered arrests and beatings. But although we have agreed that we disagree on some issues, like electricity, we have, by negotiating directly with

officials and leaving out the politicians, come to a common understanding that is a good platform for the future. As we leave this year we enter a new era in the history of Durban and in the history of our movement.

When the attacks on people born in other countries began in Johannesburg in May we committed ourselves to shelter and defend our comrades born in other countries. There were no attacks in any of our settlements and we were able to stop attacks in some nearby settlements where we do not have members. We offered sanctuary to everyone that asked for our help. A very high position in our movement was held by a person born in another country and living here without papers. We made contact with many refugee and migrant organizations.

Once again we conducted a Clean up Campaign in Kennedy Road to try and reduce the infection of rats. It was not easy but it was successful.

In previous years the city and the media ignored the people left homeless as result of shack fires but during this year Abahlali has forced the city to provide at least the building materials after shack fires, or even those tin houses when that is the will of the affected communities and families. We have been clear that people have the right to choose or to reject the tin houses after fires. The City has accepted this.

As always we have strongly rejected all forms of forced relocation. Right now we are fighting this battle in Siyanda where people face forced removal by the Provincial Department of Transport for the construction of MR577 Freeway. This battle has also been fought very hard in Motala Heights and in Arnet Drive through political means and on legal terms. A very huge victory was won by Arnet Drive in the Durban High Court this year and, although the year is not quite over, we can say that we have successfully stopped every eviction threatened against our members, old or new, during this year. This is the second consecutive year in which we have won every single battle against eviction. The last time an Umhlali was evicted was in December 2006. We are determined that it will never happen again.

We have also fought the notorious KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Slums Act outside and inside the court of law. We are waiting for the verdict of the judge. If we are not successful in the High Court we will continue onto the Appeal Court and then the Constitutional Court. We will never accept the Slums Act. Now that the City is treating us with respect we will force

the Province to do the same. When the Province has been forced to accept our humanity we will, with our comrades in the Poor People's Alliance, take on the national government.

The Movement has also managed to host the very big National Events such as the Unfreedom Day that we hold every year on 27 April at which the organization weighs its strengths and reflects on freedom. The freedom celebrated in the stadiums is, in fact, not the freedom that we all fought for.

In December 2006 we formed the Action Alliance with the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. Some of the left NGOs did not take that declaration of our autonomy very well. They have continued to lie about our December 2006 protest against their top down style to try and show that we are too stupid to think our own struggles. This year we expanded the alliance to include the KwaZulu-Natal Rural Network and the Johannesburg Landless People's Movement and formed the Poor People's Alliance. We are now a movement that is in the cities and on the farms. We are now a movement that is in Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg, Pinetown, Durban and Cape Town. We are determined to make this alliance a strong voice of the poor, by the poor and for the poor. We held two national meetings of the Poor People's Alliance this year.

At the November meeting of the Poor People's Alliance we took the decision to continue to refuse the domination of certain NGOs, to develop our own position and campaign on the elections and to continue to build a living politic in our communities that can take up our issues and be answerable to us. We have decided to boycott the 2009 elections under the banner of 'No Land! No House! No Vote!' We are currently working on a statement to announce and explain this boycott to the world. We will continue to refuse all attempts by NGOs to buy movements by offering money to individuals. We will continue to refuse party politics. Our aim is to build the power of the poor and to reduce the power of the rich.

On 16 June this year our Youth League became official in operation. On 9 August we also managed to launch our own Women's League in which women will support women to continue to play a leading role in the struggle of Abahlali baseMjondolo. In September, the heritage month in South Africa, a Mass Prayer was held to commemorate all those who had suffered and passed away in shack fires and rat attacks. In this month, again for the first time in our history, a City wide Shack fire Summit was held and attended by number of community

organizations, NGOs, Church Bodies and the Poor Peoples' Alliance all working together to strengthen our partnership against all forms of oppression including the red devil.

Kennedy Road Settlement and Arnet Drive and Pemary Ridge have, finally and after years of struggle, been earmarked for upgrading. This is a major victory. But up until the houses are actually built, and up until all other settlements are also catered for with decent housing in the cities, we will have to continue to stand together and to stand strong. On the 10 December comrade Zodwa and I set a meeting with Mr. Moolan, who owns the land on which the Emagwaveni Settlement has been built. We actually met. He has shown some great respect and concern for this community and made it clear that he had made an offer to release 50% of this land to the community provided that the city meets his conditions contained in the proposal that we yet to see. We will work with Mr. Moolan and the City to develop a solution for Emagwaveni.

The Way Forward

Our movement is founded on the politic of equality. We start from the recognition that we are all equal. We do not struggle to achieve equality. We struggle for the recognition of the equality that already exists. Our Movement therefore demands that we face and confront any element that seeks to undermine our humanity as ordinary citizens. Today I wish to remind comrades that we are also all equal and deserve equal treatment with in our Movement regardless of our positions and tasks. This is the Movement of the poor. It is not an NGO. The movement is not here to save you. You are the movement. You hold its future in our hands. You must decide its future. The movement only has one program – to be guided by its members.

We are all volunteers and we should all fully participate in all activities of the Movement without any fear or betrayal of one by another. We should all act together, collectively and responsible. Our Movement demands that we are honest to ourselves before others, and our Movement demands that we fear shame, disgrace and any form of evil. We are thus expected to be very humble and courageous to face what must be faced as we defend the future of our own children. If our growing Movement only places this burden and all its challenges on a handful of people then we can not win the war against oppression and injustices. If and only if we, today, all commit ourselves to working harder at

all levels in the movement and to being decisive and responsible in sharing the burdens of responsibility then I recommit myself in leading the comrades as requested by you.

We must all demand change and transformation from within ourselves before we can walk outside and make new demands. What I can guarantee to my comrades is my commitment to work with you and not for you, to be led by you and not to lead without you. There will be nothing for you without you. In all these commitments to both myself and to Abahlali I wish to express my deepest, heartfelt gratitude to the elderly mothers of our Movement who have stood very strong next to me and my family through prayers, calls and visits when the dark cloud of my attack gathered over me. I will always salute that love and warmth through all difficult times. I urge you all to offer the same support to Mzonke Poni, our chairperson in the Western Cape, who was recently subject to a similar attack, late at night, by an unknown group of young men.

In conclusion I wish all Abahlali baseMjondolo members, all shack dwellers, all Abahlali friends and supporters and all the marginalized and the oppressed a Happy Christmas and Just and Peaceful New Year that is free from evictions, disconnections, mysterious attacks in the dark of night, police violence and all the other evils that we must confront as we take on and defeat the war on the poor.

Amandla!!!

14 APRIL 2009

Essay · Mzonke Poni

Another World is Possible: Reflections and Criticisms on the World Social Forum, 2009, in Belem, Brazil

Published on the Khayelitsha Struggles blog

The Road to Brazil

My long trip started on the 20th January 2009 when I traveled from Cape Town to Durban by bus. I spent 26 hours on a City to City bus, moving from Cape Town via PE, East London and Umtata and then to Durban. As much as it was a long journey I must say it I really enjoyed it. I think it was nice touring my own country, getting the opportunity to be exposed to different corners of South Africa from Cities and Townships to Rural areas where the poorest of the poor are located as a result of the past.

As the bus goes from one City to the other you get to know the reality of the country and all the divisions of our society are displayed. You just see the difference between those who have and those who do not have. The gap between the poor and the rich is displayed very clearly.

While you are driving around Cities you see that there is everything from shopping malls, universities, schools, clinics, police stations, electricity, adequate public toilets, banks and beautiful (and expensive) houses.

But once you are more than 30 kilometres away from the Cities you will see poorly built houses made out of mud. They are close to the mountains and with few access roads and with no electricity, water taps or proper roads. When reaching these areas you get to see the reality of life in our country and to witness the fact that divisions of the past are still dominant in South Africa. The minority still continue enjoying the freedom while freedom still remains a dream for the majority.

I arrived at Durban on the 21st January 2009 at around 20:45. When getting inside the town you go 'wow'. It's amazing and very beautiful with lot more high buildings than Cape Town. Of course it's less friendly than Cape Town. It is also

more complicated than Cape Town as well. But the challenges are still the same. It's not amazing at all to find that the poor are also packed just outside the City in shack settlements which are very dense and which have no access roads at all. As a result people in these shack settlements have been the victims of fires each and every year. Life in Durban's informal settlements is very frustrating because mostly they are outside the town and there are no recreational facilities nearby the people – no libraries around, no clinics around, no police stations around, nothing around at all.

When getting inside the area you will see the same people that you will see when leaving the area. It is very difficult to get to know people apart from people that are living at the area. Cape Town is a very busy busy place from townships to cities, from informal settlements to formal settlements and people are using areas just to pass from one area to the other, you don't need to go out of the area or to town if you want to mix or interact with different people. I think this form of interaction opens up people's minds through sharing of ideas and getting to know other people at the personal level. It gives you social satisfactions because you don't have limited choices in terms of choosing who you want to socialize with. I think this aspect of life also needs to be recognized as a right not as privilege, as a freedom of socializing with all walks of life without limitations that are being imposed by geographic locations, socio-economic circumstances and all the political divisions that separate people.

29th January 2009: The way to Brazil

Early on this morning I was a little bit nervous, of course. But I was also overwhelmed by the opportunity to leave the country for the first time. But I was not sure of what to expect and I said 'thanks God' because I was not traveling alone. I was with my comrade from Durban – the deputy President of Abahlali baseMjondolo – Lindela 'Mashumi' Figlan.

I was also very curious to see which Cities and Countries we would pass while flying to Brazil and I thought this might expose me to just being able to see other African Countries. But to my surprise from Johannesburg we just crossed the deserts of Botswana and Mozambique and then after that we went straight to the sea. So I just decided to make use of entertainment facilities of the flight till we reached Sao Paulo in Brazil.

The arrival

It was amazing because we left the country just past ten in the morning and I was told that this is one of the longest routes to fly. But to my surprise we arrived at Brazil the same day at around past 4 in the afternoon.

When landing at Sao Paulo it was amazing for the first time to see such a wide city which is also very dense and immediately my mind made a connection with the work of Paulo Freire and I just said 'wow this is what inspired Freire's work and methodologies on popular education'. I also made connections between South African housing practices and international practices, and it became clear to me why Lindiwe Sisulu, the Minister for Housing, is very frustrated with the delays and challenges that are facing her flagship project of N2 Gateway Housing Project in Cape Town. She wants to comply with 'international standards', by 'clearing slums' that are at next to highways, airports, and along all major routes, by forcefully relocating people that are living at these areas to human dumping grounds outside cities. She doesn't care what the City looks like to the poor who live there every day. She cares what it looks like to people who fly in to visit.

Language

Just after landing we encountered problems with communication. It became very difficult for us to interact with local people, or even to ask for directions and etc. On our arrival at Sao Paulo the first thing we wanted to do was to buy privatized water as we were instructed by our travelling clinics not to drink unbottled water. At the airport there were lots of stalls selling food, drinks, snacks and etc, so we went to ask how much bottled water cost 500ml, hey! As we asked in English everybody was laughing at us and speaking a language that we didn't understand. The only thing we could do was to lift up our shoulders, open our hands, smile and say 'we don't know'. When they spoke again we'd show them water through the glass, nod our heads and give them US dollars. And again they'll say something that we didn't understand until we decided to leave them and go to the other stall. And the same thing happened! On the third stall they gave us a hand signal saying that we must wait while they tried to find someone who understands a little bit of English. It was then explained to us that they don't trade with US dollars and that we first change our dollars to Brazilian currency. But at that time all the foreign exchange places were closed, so we had to

continue with our trip till to Belem, without interacting with local people. At the internal flights the situation was the same.

Guys that were coming from Mozambique were quite comfortable in Brazil. They just felt at home, interacting freely and it was very difficult for them to fill us in because they also couldn't understand English. As a result of that they decided to distance themselves from us. After they distanced themselves Lindela said 'Qabane, we should not worry. 2010 is coming and people from all these countries will be in South Africa. I can see now that people are more friendly to people that they were colonized with or by. When 2010 is in South Africa it will be our turn to be more friendly to Britain and all the people colonized by Britain.'

The 30th of January or Day One in Brazil at the Hotel

We woke up just after 7 early in the morning and we had a breakfast at the hotel. We had the opportunity to meet activist of the MST that were coming from Sao Paolo. Lucky some of them could speak little bit of English and they made our stay there at the hotel a little bit easier because we could interact with other people through their assistance through translation. With the help of the MST comrades we were able to share the struggles of the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement of South Africa with other activist from throughout the globe.

It was a pleasant experience to share a hotel with comrades from around the world. We were very pleased that managed to build relationships with people from Palestine, which enable us to understand the feelings and the frustrations of the people of Gaza and the conditions caused by Israeli apartheid.

It was very good also to share a room with comrades from MST. That enabled me to develop a better understanding of MST as a social movement in Brazil's context and to be able to translate that into the South African context of organizing. It was good to understand the social movement perspective on a global level. I thought this sharing of experiences of movements involved in a mass based resistance was only to Latin America. But to my surprise 5 days later I met with other activists that are coming from Zambia, Southern Africa and they also confirmed the same practices of resistance that are dominant in Latin America are as relevant and dominant in Zambia.

During Lunch Time

On day one at the hotel nothing was clear and also we were not clear with the system of Brazil. So during the lunch we went to the kitchen for lunch as my

comrade was dying out of hunger and we were told that it's only breakfast that is included in our hotel bill and that we were responsible for our own lunch and supper. At this time we were still having dollars not Brazilian money and so we couldn't trade at all. We decided to take a walk through the streets of Brazil and we went to the park, at the park there were these long trees of mango and there was a guy taking them off the tree using a long pole with an open cap to catch the mangos from the tree. When we passed him he said something in Portuguese and I replied 'we don't know'. He said 'mango' and I said yes and he gave us a mango which was yellow, sweet, cool and delicious. We were so happy that he gave us the other one. When we left we said thank you and he wanted money. I showed him by hands that we don't have money and he laughed and said ok. We then left him with, at least, something in our stomachs.

The Weather

The weather was very, very hot. But although it was very hot there was no sun. It was amazing, because all of a sudden it would rain very hard but that would not last long, and people would just go crazy in the rain, really enjoying it. They'll be wet and within a few hours they'll dry out as if they were never wet. During the first day of the February, which was the following day, one of our friends from South Africa tried it and the next day she was sick and had to be taken to the hospital, and then from hospital to the private doctor.

The weather was the same till we came back to South Africa and I had to buy an Umbrella. In Belem in March you need to carry your umbrella wherever you go if you are scared of the rain. This is what I was doing because I knew very well that it will be very, very cheap to get flu – you'll not even have to pay anything – but when wanting to cure it will be very expensive.

The Economy

Wow, it was an awful experience to see the poor participating in the economy. It was awful because it is just the opposite of what South African government is doing to us in South Africa for 2010. In Belem people participate freely but at home the government is evicting poor people who are selling at corners of different streets, especially those that are selling at centre of towns where there will be major events for 2010.

At Brazil the hotels only provide bed and breakfast. The guests are responsible for their own lunch and supper which is available at the stalls just outside the hotel – not at registered restaurants just an ordinary stall. That would never be allowed in South Africa.

People just come up with just their food to sell and chairs. People are doing this freely and are not being intimidated by the police or big businesses or by anyone. The worst part of it is people are free to sell alcohol without the licenses that only benefit reach people.

I think South Africa needs to learn a lot from Brazil in terms of practices because both countries are third world developing countries. What we have to learn goes beyond the economic practices. It is clear that the health infrastructure of Brazil is far better than in South Africa. Their housing approach is also better. It was amazing to see shacks within the city in Brazil, something that South African government would have been very emotional about. Lastly their transport system is also much better. I was amazed by the bicycles which are being used as means of transport by poor people, others were even using them to transport people locally to earn something for themselves.

From the First Day of the World Social Forum

The first day of World Social Forum was on the 1st of February, just after our second day in Belem. It started with a march. It was anticipated that more than 150 000 people participated in the march, which started after noon just next to the Amazon river, where people and different cultures met. It was very overwhelming to get an opportunity to see all the different cultures that exist in Brazil. Brazil it's more or less the same as South Africa in terms of this – it is also a rainbow nation.

As much as it was an overwhelming experience to participate in the World Social Forum it was not impressive at all. Because the first day of the forum set the tone for the whole of the forum, and it was clear that the forum would be dominated by NGO's/Academics and by Latin America.

Other people that were not coming from Latin America were unconsciously excluded from the forum, as there were no interpreters at the forum at all, and it was very difficult for people who were coming from outside Latin America to follow speeches or activities that were taking place in the forum from day one of the forum. It was made clear that it was not the responsibility of the organizers to organize interpreters for people, it was people's responsibility to organize their own interpreters and it was very difficult for us to get that as there was no prior arrangements made. This was a pity. In our struggles in South Africa we have many different languages but our movements always take responsibility for organizing translation – especially for visitors. Of course the NGOs in South Africa want to do everything in English but not the movements.

I must say that in certain cases we were quite lucky as there was people that didn't mind to translate for us, but that also limited our freedom to chose to participate in the programs that were relevant to the struggles of Abahlali and to South African context. We had to stick most of the time with people who were willing to translate for us and we had to change our program completely and to adjust ourselves to their programs irrespective of their relevance to our struggles or to the South African context.

As much as people were doing their best to accommodate us, it was not at all easy for us. In fact it wasn't easy for the people helping us either because most of the time people that were willing to accommodate us were not coming from Latin America and they also had challenges in terms of translations as they couldn't translate for us properly. It was very difficult for us to participate at most of the sessions that we have attended because of language limitations.

We also participated at the march of MST during the day of the address from four presidents from Latin America where Chavez spoke. But we had the same problem with translation again. You could see that people were quite excited about Chavez's intervention. In his speech he disclosed that Barack Obama had come out to him and he said that Chavez is problematic and that he does not like him. Chavez also emphasized that the other world is not just possible but it is necessary.

As much as people were very impress by his speech myself I was not impressed at all by the practices that I had seen – the practices of dictatorship, dominance and general top down approaches. I thought that this was a radical space and that, therefore, the event would create space for activists to debate issues and engage with the four presidents that were present. I had thought that people would be able to influence each other directly. But instead it was business as usual. It was just another rally for big men to speak to little people, it was just another opportunity for the presidents to run another talk show and then leave. It was no different to how our politicians behave at home. This is one of the reasons why we have refused to vote for them any more.

In my view this technique whereby big men lecture the people in stadiums is politically based. It the technique that is being used by the politicians when they want to get or remain in power by demonstrating to people their abilities so that people can believe in them as their leaders. They want to look as if they are relevant people for particular positions and so they do this pretence of engaging with people but in reality they are not engaging with people. A real engagement with the people, well, that should be a two way process in which certain problems are being identified through dialogue and reflections and alternative solutions are being explored collectively. It can not be a one way process.

Even the process that is being favoured by the majority of people is very problematic. This is the process where people engaging with politicians by asking questions or stating problems and politicians are given an opportunity to respond. But in fact this process is very manipulative and undemocratic. The politicians they use it in a manner where people will feel that they have be listened to at and their frustrations have been heard.

But the problem with this process is that there's nothing that is equal. The politicians have got the power and the people do not have it. Those with the power, the politicians, are being viewed as those that know everything. That is why people are told to ask questions and not to make statements, or come up

with alternatives. They are viewed as empty vessels. This approach is similar to what Freire calls the banking approach.

In our movements we insist that everyone is equal and we work on that basis. We think together. Everyone discusses and debates together. We never have one person on a stage taking questions. If there are too many people for everyone to participate in a discussion then we just break up into groups and work it like that. This is a democratic approach. If Chavez or any other president came to Abahlali he (or she) would be welcome to participate in the discussions that we are having but as one comrade amongst other comrades. Really, I think that this is a better approach.

Summary

The World Social Forum was a success, due to the fact that many people participated in it and because local people supported it. It also created opportunities to expose the consciousness of local people (Brazilians) to the reality of market based and global based financial policies, which disadvantage the working class people.

But as much as the Forum was a success there was still a difference, a big difference between those who have and those who does not have. This difference remained a serious problem at the Forum due to the fact that people who managed to participate at the event, especially those that were coming from outside Latin America were mostly people that were coming from NGOs. Only very few people come from grass roots movements. The Forum says that 'another world is possible' but it itself is not another world. In most cases oppressed people are denied the opportunity to be part of an influential global process like this. So the forum becomes a space for an NGO elite to debate and discuss on behalf of the poor and not a space for poor people's struggles to debate and discuss for themselves.

New ways of incorporating genuine activists and genuine movements need to be created, to ensure that the struggle of the working class is taken forward by the working class. If we do not address the power imbalance in terms of controlling resources for international mobilization the middle class people and academics who associate themselves with the working class people in terms of ideas will remain as the main forces that drives and control the struggle of the poor. The poor will remain marginalized and making noise at different corners of the streets while NGOs and academics travel the world to speak for them.

And we all know that most poor people's movements have rejected those NGOs that want to be their bosses. For this we have been called criminals. If the NGOs and academics are serious about equality, about making another world a reality, they should stay at home and sponsor the movements in their countries to elect their own representatives to go to the forum.

Conclusion

It was a good thing for ABM to send activists to participate at the WSF. We found that we had to represent not only our ten thousand members, not only South Africa but even the entire Africa. Our presence gave us opportunity to interact with representatives from other African countries and we had opportunity to consolidate solidarity with our brothers and sisters who were recently victimized by South Africans and labelled as foreigners and kwere-kweres. As a movement this was very important for us.

Our presence also created opportunity for us to build concrete relationships with some of influential Latin American grassroots based movements who are well known through Latin America and world wide. We became especially close to MST. This will give us future opportunities to interact more with these movements and to exchange ideas and build more solidarity world wide. Hopefully one day we will be able to create a situation where grassroots movements from around the world can meet each other regularly and directly – a movement forum and not an NGO forum.

As much as we couldn't come up with programs for the Forum in advance we were able, through our activeness during our stay at Belem, to manage to show our presence at the Forum. We were recognized by many NGO's/Academics and progressive donors and by the media as well. We were quoted in some local and national newspapers and we even participated in a documentary which will be screened in Latin and North America. All this is good. Our attendance at the Forum was very much worth while. But we must still say that because 'another world is necessary' therefore it follows that 'another Forum is necessary.'

By: Mzonke Poni

ABM Western Cape Chairperson

28 APRIL 2009

Interview · S'bu Zikode

To Resist All Degradations and Divisions

Interview by Richard Pithouse, published by Pambazuka News in April 2009 and in Interface 1(2), November 2009

Tell me something about where you were born and who your family were.

I was born in a village called Loskop which is near the town called Estcourt. It is in the Natal Midlands. I was born in 1975. I have a twin sister, her name is Thoko. We are now the last born. I have two other sisters. I also had a brother who passed away so I am the only son.

And when we grew up, very early, at the age of 7 years, when Thoko and I started school, our parents separated. We grew up with mother who used to work as a domestic worker. She would mostly be at work and we would remain with her sister most of the days. We did not have mother close to us. She would come once a month. And then we grew from different hands. When we were doing primary school we went to more than four schools. My mother would be away and it would be hard for her to support us so we grew up with different families. They were all good to us.

When I look back I can see that that helped me a lot; learning at different schools, living with different relatives.

Where was your mother working?

In Estcourt, in town. From town to Loskop, today you are paying R9. The distance is 32 kilometres. She would come once a month.

That must have been very difficult for the children.

Ja, very difficult. Very difficult.

How was she treated by the people she worked for?

No, they were quite good people. Sometime we would visit her and I remember that they bought me a bike. They were good people. The problem is this system where so many women have no choice but to leave their homes and wash and clean for other families.

When I was older they also found me a job. When I was at school they found me a job too. I was working with their boys as well, in one of the bottle stores, pushing trolleys. They'd call me over the weekends and I'd do some temporary jobs.

But you were well looked after by the wider family.

Yes, and when I was doing Standard Three I joined Boy Scouts. I had the opportunity to go on camps and other trainings and I learned a lot about manhood. Scouting was about training future men, future citizens. I was lucky to be appointed as a leader and to have the opportunity to attend even more trainings. I remember one of the trainings that I attended in Pietermaritzburg, Lexden.

I went to Lexden as well!

Ey, you know! The Patrol Leaders' Training Unit! There was a lot of growth and learning. It was winter time. I can remember very vividly, it was difficult. And you had to decide whether to continue with this or to resign from being a Boy Scout. I remember when I returned back to the school and reported to the principal, because I would report directly to the principal who knew more about Scouts, he laughed a lot and I knew that he knew exactly what was going to happen. He asked me if I would still continue and I said 'Ja'. A lot of lessons I learnt from there, from the hardship. It was preparing me for the worst to come and I have seen it in recent years. I am sure that I was shaped and made to be able to face the challenges that we are now facing.

But it wasn't just the hardship at Lexden. It was also the focus on responsibility and involvement in the community. I remember the Scout Motto: 'Be Prepared'.

And there was also a Scout Promise; that you promise to do your duty to God and to your country, to help other people at all times and to obey the Scout's Law. I was still young and fresh at that time. I learnt the Scout's Law. A Scout's honour is to be trusted, a Scout is loyal, a Scout's duty is to be useful and to help others, a Scout is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout, a Scout tries his best to do at least one good turn to somebody every day.

The things that I do today, for me are something that grew up in myself; my understanding of society, the social context, what the expectations are and what kind of society we are looking for.

So there was no politics but leadership was in my veins. Even at the high school level I was invited to start a Scout's movement at my school, which I did

because I was growing with other boys, and then there was also a demand from the girls to start their movement. I only met the Girl Guides at the jamboree. The jamboree is a big event that brings all the Scouts and Guides together. It is one of the happiest days of your life as a young person to get to meet all different people from different spaces. It's like the WSF(laughing).

The Jamboree took place in Howick, at the Midmar dam. It was mostly outdoor activities and this is how I became interested in the outdoor environment. There was a lot about how the environment is a heritage to be cherished and protected – to be enriched by our future generation – and I became very interested in plants and animals.

After the jamboree we sought the assistance from other schools to form the Girl Guides. We had seen all these boys working together, learning skills that were unknown in the community and the girls demanded the same. They had seen their brothers growing and wanted the same pride. It really shaped me a lot.

At the high school level I became more interested in ideas. I found that I could grasp things quickly and easily, especially in English and History. The teachers would often ask me to read ahead to prepare the lesson. I remember vividly how I was asked to learn about the Voortrekkers – how I learnt that to the dictionary. I had to analyse the meaning of each word all by myself ahead of others. I remember how I had to start by cutting this word Voortrekkers and to understand the word 'voor' and then 'trekkers'. Doing all these analysis it slowly became clear that we were learning about the Boers who travelled or came first in Natal. But, still, I was lucky to be given this opportunity because I learnt how to analyse things on my own and then to share the ideas. History was really about remembering dates and I found that I had a good memory.

Things were positive. I was still too young to understand the outside politics, even the family related stuff, what problems were at home. And I was fortunate in being able to finish high school, from Standard Six right through to Matric, in one high school. But in the primary school it was really difficult being circled in one family.

When you were growing up in Estcourt it was the time of the transition with Mandela being released and the ANC being unbanned. Did you think about politics much or was there much politics happening around you?

There was a lot of fighting, heavy fights. I remember my friend was shot just in front of me when we were together in a rural farm – you know these plantations where crops such as mealies get planted and grow very high with grass in times like autumn. In summer, as the grass began to grow very high, there was this fighting and shooting. Sometimes the army would boost the other side. In politics and fighting I was not involved but in the area where I stayed there was a strong presence of Inkatha. And in the Zulu tradition we believe that you do not run away in times of war. This was also the culture of Inkatha. So when there is a gunshot they would quickly mobilise and everyone goes – every man and every boy. It's compulsory. You were not asked whether you joined the party or not but you had to defend your vicinity, your surroundings. So we were involved in that way knowing that the fight was between Inkatha and the ANC. Mostly from the ANC side there would be soldiers hiding, and also shooting. You would think that you'd be fighting the other side only to find that you are fighting the army because the army would also be taking sides. They made it clear that they were not there to make peace. So, I mean, I was involved in that battle in the real fighting, in the life and blood of that time. The only way to free oneself was that one would hide when one gets shot. When someone needed an ambulance you could quickly assume that responsibility of facilitating first aid and calling or waiting for the ambulance to come. That could be a way out of the battle.

At school there wasn't much politics but I used to take part in the debates. Formal debates were mostly on politics but the idea was to learn to speak English – that was the whole point. But obviously the speeches that we wrote – I remember that we often learnt more from Lucky Dube, from Mzwakhe Mbuli, and so a lot of our quotes were generated from their music and poetry. It had a lot of politic. Although we were still young to understand the outside world a clear message would come. There was also the study of Ubuntu. It was learnt at school at that time. But when we fought, when we were involved in the fight, our lives were completely independent from politics.

Scouting was also a completely non-political movement, although there were a lot of accusations from outside. People were calling us Gatsha's sons because you wear this khaki uniform which was nearly the same as the IFP uniform at that time. But we did not balk because we had nothing to do with that.

A year later when I finished school the fight was also involved at my school. I remember that some of my friends had to pull out of school because of the fighting. But in my day it didn't reach the schools. We also felt that politics was outside the school, it was something that was difficult to understand. I remember the content of the debates; the concepts and arguments were shaped by that. But we were more judged by the fluency of the language.

But we would fight the battles that we didn't understand. The mobilization tactics that were used, by the nature of being Zulu you were forced to join Inkatha. I do not remember any membership cards or even how they looked like but you would never be asked. You would be forced to come out and fight. We didn't know what we were fighting. Many people were killed at that stage. At that stage we attended a lot of funerals. In our culture we were not supposed to be attending funerals as children but it became a normal thing to attend funerals. If you didn't attend those funerals you would be accused of siding with the other party – with the ANC. It was just a difficult and confusing situation. I mean we were still very young to understand. I strongly feel that a lot of people died for no course, they did not know what they were fighting for, except that they were forced to go to war bare handed – no strategy, no politic, no ideas, no education. I strongly feel a lot of innocent died for nothing.

I remember that you once said to me that some of our politicians, people on both sides of the ANC and IFP divide, can only understand politics in terms of killing. The history of all this killing is usually told in a very simple way with all the good people in the ANC and all the bad people in the IFP – but there were warlords on both sides.

I remember even the terminology of Scouting, how it was used in the fighting. There would be a group of volunteers, amongst a group of men, who would volunteer to launch an aggressive attack and the terminology that was used was that they were scouts. And then we'd know for sure that the next day there would be mourning and blood, there would be dead bodies. My understanding was that to be well known, to be well respected as a person who is fighting, who is struggling for the country, you had got to kill. It was not only that you had to defend your community – you also had to be aggressive, to launch some attacks on the other side. You become known like that, you become respected.

The other dirty thing that used to happen, that used to influence the whole thing, was that if you are a school boy you would be perceived as an ANC member. So to be well recognised and well respected you must not go to school, you must not have a bath, you must not be involved with water, and you must not be smart. You must become a nasty and clumsy person. I don't know where this idea came from but a lot of smart people with tranquillity were killed not because they were members of the ANC but because they looked good, because they looked different from the others, the ones doing the fighting. From that time it was when I began to think that this was just about killing. The only reality is that people were dying. People did not know what they were dying for, what they were fighting for or what they were killing for. Even elderly people in the struggle did not understand politics. If such people were to be interviewed now I'm not sure if they could say clearly what they were dying for, being killed for.

As Zulus we were encouraged not to hide, not to run away. Instead we must face the war. What became clear was that the IFP did not have guns. Most people who had guns were ANC members. With shields and sticks it was quite difficult to fight people with guns.

I've talked so much about the IFP because I was in Loskop, a stronghold of the IFP. I remember also going to Wembezi, a township in Estcourt, and a lot of people were shot in our presence.

I know that a similar strategy was used on the other side. A group of people would be trained to attack. You know those massacres that are often referred to – they were part of a well planned fight. But this fight also killed innocent people and those that were killed did not know what they were killed for. Once a son was suspected to have been involved he was killed – being suspected was what you died for. That was the horrible situation. I cannot imagine how some of the people who are now in government, with blood in their hands, have never regretted.

As Zulu people you were mostly respected for being a good fighter. It was the whole initial tradition – that being a good fighter gives you respect. As a good fighter you would be given a position as a commander of an aggressive group – that was the whole idea. When there were these mass attacks it was always organised. When there were funerals, where there were services, prayers, or any other traditional gatherings – a lot of people together – they were just seen

as an opportunity to kill people. What counts is how many people were killed. That was the whole idea. When people praised themselves they talked about how many people they had killed, not about why they were killing, not about any politics.

Because of the South African history you still ask yourself if people in power are now matured to really understand politics. They assume that if we don't have similar ideas to them that automatically make us enemies. I doubt if people are yet in the position of understanding politics. If you do not agree with my ideas then you must die. I am sure that it is going to take time for people to understand that politics is about ideas, about discussion, should be about love and passion for one's country, so any tactic should be about how to serve the world better, how to win minds and heart of the majority. It is going to take even longer for people to understand that those debates should be open to everyone, that a real politics is not about how many people you are willing to arrest, threaten or kill; that a real politics is not a fight to be able to abuse state power but that a real politics is in fact about how many people you are willing to listen to and to serve – and to listen to them and to serve them as it pleases them, not yourself.

When did you first come to Durban?

I began matric in 1996 and that was also the year that I first came to Durban. During the weekends and when the schools were closed I stayed with my brother-in-law in Moore Road, in Glenwood. There's a flat behind Berea Centre, 264, it's called Cardigan Mansions. He was paid well. He was working as a mechanic. I worked temporary in Victoria Street in one of the stores that sells clothing, its called Smilesen's. And I worked for City Girl's stores in Greyville, in Game City Centre. I spent a lot of years working for City Girl stores.

How was it to be in Durban compared to Loskop?

Ja, it was peaceful. I was living in this rich area, Glenwood. It was different. From work I'd go directly to the flat. I had no friends in Durban. As such life isolated me away from ordinary people a lot of thinking began. I began to realise how poor I was.

And university?

Well I finished my matric that year and I did well, but not as well as had been expected. There had been a lot of hope for me at the school but, you know, as you grow you begin to reflect back on things, you come to be aware of a lot of things. When you begin to reflect on the environment a lot of things begin to

disturb you, to disturb your intelligence. It was also the time when I realised how I had survived the very trying circumstances over the past few years.

And obviously there was never any guidance at school so it was very difficult to proceed with tertiary education. But the following year I was fortunate to be admitted at the former UDW, the University of Durban-Westville as it used to be called. I enrolled for law. All I wanted was to become a lawyer.

Why Law?

In school a lot was said about teaching and being a policeman for the boys and a nurse for the girls. Those were the only chances and that is why we have a lot of teaches nurses, and policemen. I was encouraged at school to be a teacher but I decided to differ.

What was it like to be student?

I was not under any parental care so it was difficult. When I arrived here I had no friends. It was hard to imagine how life could be so difficult. My brother-in-law gave me a place to stay but obviously I was not his burden so I could just appreciate his accommodation. My studies were a separate deal that was beyond his burden.

I was very lonely. It was not interesting at all because I was still new in the institution without knowing anybody. It was difficult to get used to the institution and I was a very shy person; in fact when I grew up I never used to talk. Through the Scouting thing then I began to slowly become more confident. Even people who sometimes see me on the TV often don't believe it, that that man used to be so quiet in the class and now he can talk everywhere.

When I saw the challenges of being grown up that's when I began to realise that in fact school days were the happiest days of my life. I didn't want to stress people. I had to find ways of surviving. With school it was completely different. Now I had to study and I had to think of all of this, financing my studies, accommodation, and food. And so I had to withdraw from the university and continue working as a security guard.

In 1997 a teacher went on maternity leave at my school and they wanted me to stand in. They wanted me because the well respected Circuit Inspector had promised me after coming back from Lexden that should I fail to proceed with tertiary education he would find me a school to teach. This was public commitment and promise in a gathering full of teachers, parents and scholars. I was highly congratulated for this personal commitment of a Circuit Inspector.

They looked all over for me but by the time they found me it was too late – and so I carried on working as a security guard. I was all by myself.

Being a security guard, how was that?

No, that was terrible. I was still young. The people that I was working for were robbing me, sometimes they wouldn't pay me. I was like earning R500 a month, sometimes this guy would give me R300. I was just well grown up, having dropped from school and then being treated like that. It was difficult but of course when I found this job at the petrol station it was much better. So even today I listen when Mashumi shares his stories of being a security guard.

Was the work dangerous?

It was. It was, ja. There were organised groups, like shoplifters, in town. They would go into the store together. One of them would keep you busy and the others would start stealing. Some of those shops, like City Girl, would have this alarm, so I would just stand by the door and watch people passing because each garment would have this alarm. That was much better. After the security job I was employed at the petrol station.

And working at the petrol station?

Well in 1997 I met Sindy. We were working together at the petrol station. She had good parents. Her mother is still working here at Tollgate, in Manor Gardens. She is working for nice people. In Sindy's family there are ten of them, eight girls with two brothers. She was staying with her mother there in Tollgate and came to work in Springfield Park. She had also finished her matric and then had to find a job. With us, in our growth, the most important thing was to finish matric then the other stuff, well, that would be an additional luck.

When did you come to the Kennedy Road settlement?

Before I came to the settlement I lived in Umlazi. It was difficult to travel with trains. And, also, I had no friends there. It was difficult, it was difficult. The in 1999 I started living here in Elf Place. Because I was working at the Springfield Park Service Station, it is just here, opposite Makro. But I couldn't pay my rent. I would just work for the rent. You don't get paid much at the petrol station. As a patrol attendant you earn like R200 a week.

Then I was promoted to cashier and then they started teaching me computer at the back office. That's how things moved. After five years we moved to the PetroPort, in Queen Nandi Drive which is on the N2 Freeway, just before the Gateway Shopping Mall.

What was it like when you first came to the settlement?

Well when I was still attending at the UDW and passing the shacks I hadn't known what the shacks were looking like so I couldn't believe it. Later when I was working at the petrol station and living here in Elf Place it was easy to use the spaza shop here in the settlement and life was quite good. Obviously I could feel shame that people were living this life because I did not believe that one day I would be living here. It was tough. But coming here to use the shops I began to meet people and then as the rent was going high we started talking to people and I found a place to rent here.

I remember that we started renting here at R80, it was R80! (Laughs) In Elf place the rent was R600 a month and we had to share the rent with other people living there. We ended up having to pay R200 a month. So this was much better. We had our own place and we could even save some money. When we came here we were much relieved. Life was much better because we could live close to work and schools at an affordable cost.

But I told myself that this was not yet an acceptable life. Although I didn't know politics that much I felt that the community did not do enough to struggle for housing, for toilets, enough water. It was not acceptable for human beings to live like that and so I committed myself to change things.

What kind of organisation was there in Kennedy Road at that time?

Well the chairperson at that time was Jarphas Ndlovu. He had been chairperson for like 6 years. There were no elections.

Meetings would be called and one or two people would be known to be the committee but one man would do everything – that's how it used to work. Only one man was respected in the community. Everything had to be reported to him. There was no committee meeting. Community meetings would sometimes be called but not committee meetings. I involved myself and attended these meetings but only to find that only one man was talking and that people were failing to cope with the politics and development issues that were being spoken about. They were not given the information that you need to participate. Even the committee, if they would go meet with City they would just stand outside, while he was inside. He would also meet with the ratepayer's association on his own. He had some shops, and he rented out some shacks. People feared him. You know that old tradition of the Indunas. There is a kind of respect but it is not a democratic respect.

I realised that if the community was going to be able to participate in their own development then we would have to create a democracy in the settlement, to elect a committee. It made no sense that we were voting for politicians to sit in parliament but in our own communities we still had to listen to Indunas.

What was the political affiliation of the Induna?

He was an IFP. But the settlement was always made by different groups of people.

It was difficult to get rid of the old leadership. We mobilised the young people. We started with youth activities, like clean up campaigns, and then when the people were mobilised we struggled to force that there must be elections, that there must be democracy.

How did people respond?

They were well relieved. After that first democratic election, it was in 2000, we restructured everything in terms of democracy. We had a lot of discussions about democracy.

Was that when you were first elected as chairperson?

Yes.

How old were you?

I was still young. 25.

And what was your political affiliation?

When I came here I was not interested in party politics. I had begun to hate party politics from what I had learnt from the IFP while I was still at home. For me politics was a dirty game. And there wasn't really much interest in politics in the settlement. Most people just saw it as this dirty game.

But these guys from outside, led by Mabeneza, started to come to the settlement, to organise meetings, campaigning for the ANC. That's when I became interested because of the way that they were engaging and approaching the young people. They were saying that we could mobilise ourselves for a better life. We had all seen the transition to democracy at the national level. The ANC was the party of Mandela. But at the local level what I liked was what I hadn't had since my school days – an opportunity to meet other young people and to engage. And it was also a platform to engage on political matters which was an opportunity to work for the changes that I was looking for.

And seeing that the ANC was in government I thought that it could be an easy tool to transform this community. I thought that the ANC would be a platform for the shack dwellers and that it would be able to deliver.

As residents of the informal settlements, we were considered as temporal communities. There was an inference that we were not entitled to full citizenship in this area. We thought that all we had to do to secure our place here, here in the city, was to take the initiative to support the ANC.

So in 2002 I joined the ANC and was elected to the Branch Executive Committee (BEC). The following year I became the Deputy Chairperson of the ANC branch in Ward 25.

For some years I was in the BEC. The reality is that we did not understand politics. Baig was brought in from the outside, imposed from the top. He was not known to the community. But because he was an ANC we did not question that. We did not question the wisdom of the party and so we did not worry about it that much although it was clear that there wasn't any fairness, any democracy.

This wasn't like Inkatha when I was growing. I wasn't made to do it. I was very active. I did it because I had my own ideas, because I thought that we should mobilise the people for a better life. But I was mobilising for the party and we made compromises for the party. Of course we discovered that mobilising for the people and mobilising for the party is not the same thing.

How did the break with the ANC come about?

Well a lot was happening. Former housing minister Dumisani Makhaye introduced the Slums Clearance programme with a budget of R200 million. A Slums Clearance committee was set up in partnership with the eThekweni Municipality, it included a number of wards. I was also elected to that committee. Kennedy Road was one of the communities that was meant to benefit from this programme. There was a settlement down there by the bridge, it was called eVukani. Those people were moved to Welbedacht. Some of the people from the Quarry Road settlement were moved to Parkgate. I remember taking a tour to Parkgate with the Slums Clearance committee. It was before the houses were built there, it was still sugarcane.

That is when I became conscious, that is when I became a conscious activist. I remember when we were getting into this microbus from the metro with nice air conditioning. I remember how we were told to get into those kombis but not told where we were going. I remember as we went past all those bridges that you

pass as you leave the city. The further away we moved the more worried I was. We had been very excited but the comrades all became quite as we went further and further away from the city. We became very shocked. Then we arrived at a farm and we were told that this would be where our houses would be built.

Even today I do not understand the link between the BEC of the ANC and the development that took place. These projects had never been discussed with the BEC. Even when the minister announced the Slum Clearance programme it had never been discussed at the branch level. It was a top down system, a completely top down system. For this reason I continue to question the relevance of the BEC. I continue to see it as nothing but a way for the party leaders to control the people. The only job of the BECs is to keep branches vibrant for elections. They are not there to bring about development, they are not there for any political education or political discussion. They are not there to take the views of the people up. Rather they are there for people to be enslaved and to remain slaves for the benefit of those that have been ruthless enough to rise up.

All of us in that committee had hope. We had a good heart to see change in our communities. But we did not know how politics worked. The first problem was that we had been promised that Kennedy Road would benefit but when it didn't it was hard to question that within the ANC structures.

When the promises became lies we felt that we had been used – just used to keep the people loyal while they were being betrayed. We had been used so that the people in power could fulfil their own ambitions, their own project. We were used as ladders so that they could climb up over the people to their positions. The way the system works makes it impossible for people to call their leaders into account. The resources are there but the system allows leaders to only think for themselves. There is no mechanism for accountability. There is always budget for elite projects but each and every year nothing is spoken about how to achieve real change for ordinary people.

When did you become a police reservist?

When I was working at the petrol station. I was ordered to work at least eight hours a month and to attend some police courses at the Edgewood College. I did a lot of volunteer work in the charge office there. I worked for, like five years, as a reservist. This was part of the decision I had made to fulfil my duty to my country.

I was forced to this. It was not that I liked to be a policeman. I was still new at the settlement and I arrived at the charge office and saw a women crying. She had a baby on her back. I asked her why she was weeping outside and she said that she had been chased out because she couldn't speak English. I asked her to come inside with me and I translated. I was touched and angry – worried about how many poor people like her would not be assisted because they could not speak English. That's when I took the decision to become a reservist. I thought that with my English I could ensure that people would have their dignity respected.

It wasn't easy. There were interviews and tests. But when I finished it all I was never given a chance to learn at the charge office. I was just made to cook for the prisoners and to dish out for them. I was annoyed. I became to be suspicious and conscious about what was happening at the police station. The Superintendent wasn't Nayager at that time – it was Senior Superintendent Marais.

I remember our first march on the police station – it was in 2005, that march where we were saying 'release them all or arrest us all'. Superintendent Marais met with Baba Duma, Chazumzi – I still have minutes of that meeting. Shortly after that march Marais left and Nayager came.

Was the racism the same?

Oh yes. It wasn't just the senior officers. The racism was just a normal thing. It was an Indian police station – not a police station for everyone. As an African you were treated like a servant, like dirt. I could not stand it. I made a small contribution where I could. Because, you know, people are victimised and go to that police station and are just further victimised by this racism at the hands of the law. When I could I helped people but I could not transform the station. I was a victim there myself. It was quite difficult. I resigned from the police force in 2004 because of the racism. It blocked every possibility for bringing about some little progress. The only time that I ever got to do anything there beyond being a servant was during weekends where there was family violence or students having parties, any kind of noise or fight. I would be deployed to deal with drunkard Africans. It was believed that they would understand me better than any Indian police men.

But, you know, those experiences did help me.

So, given that you'd been a police reservist, and that you were on the BEC of the local ANC did the road blockade in 2005 come as a surprise?

No, it wasn't a surprise. The Kennedy Road Development Committee (KRDC) shaped this. In 2004 the KRDC declared that 2005 would be the year of action. We said that we were tired of this, tired of all of the lies and deeply disappointed with the previous engagement with the City. We would not compromise our future because of our loyalty to the ANC. So the road blockade was not a surprise but what did become a surprise was to see a protest becoming a movement, to see other settlements joining us.

In 2004 there were road blockades and protests all over the country and these protests became even more common in 2005. Were people in Kennedy Road inspired by what they saw in the media?

In my personal experience no. It really came from a very personal experience of betrayal. But I always asked myself how it was that 2005 became a national year of action. I am not too sure with others but for me it was not that one read about other road blockades and became motivated. The anger here in Kennedy Road was growing and growing – it could have gone in many directions but people decided to block the road.

How was the day of the road blockade?

It was good. We were all so full of anger that there was no regret. It was difficult to turn against our comrades in the ANC but we weren't attacking them personally. We wanted to make them aware that all these meetings of the ANC – the BEC meetings, the Branch General Meetings, they were all a waste of time. In fact they were further oppressing us in a number of ways. They were just there to keep the ball rolling up until the next election. Our job as local leaders was just to mobilise people for the ANC.

It had become clear that the only space for the poor in the ANC was as voters – there was no politics of the poor in the ANC. The road blockade was the beginning of a politics of the poor.

As you know I first came to Kennedy Road the day after the road blockade. People had just tried to march on the police station and had been beaten back. The settlement was occupied by the police and there was a very strong sense of people being on their own. That must have been a heavy weight to carry.

Ja, definitely. That was not easy. But we had to stand firm. That was the reality.

I had no idea that a movement would be formed, no idea. And I didn't know what form would be taken by the politics of the poor that became possible after

the road blockade. I didn't know what impact it would have. That is why it is quite difficult when I get interviewed. Most people think that this was planned – that a group of people sat down and decided to establish a movement. You know, how the NGOs work.

There has been a lot of analysis and interpretation of the movement – sometimes we read it in papers. But all we knew was that we had decided to make the break. To accept that we were on our own and to insist that the people could not be ladders any more; that the new politics had to be led by poor people and to be for poor people; that nothing could be decided for us without us. The road blockade was the start. We didn't know what would come next. After the blockade we discussed things and then we decided on a second step. That's how it went, that's how it grew. We learnt as we went. It is still like that now. We discuss things until we have decided on the next step and then we take it. Personally I have learnt a lot.

There was a tremendous collective excitement and pride in the beginning. Did you share that? Or were you, as a leader, under too much pressure?

Ja, although I was very angry with everything from a political point of view, very angry with the way the ANC was treating the people, very angry with their policies, I felt very confident when we began to rebel. I found my inner peace. The real danger when things go wrong like this is being silence. When you voice out, cough it out then you can heal. You can find this faith in yourself. There is all this frustration and humiliation. Humiliation from the way you are forced to live and humiliation from the way you are treated. When it is expressed it is like taking out a poison. You become free to act and you become angry and that anger is the source of an incredible energy.

So even though we didn't have the houses we had found our voice. We didn't have all the answers. But the fact that we had built this platform, that on its own was a very remarkable progress.

Was it difficult to move from being one settlement in rebellion to linking up with other settlements and building a movement?

No, it wasn't difficult to link up with other settlements. From my experience in the ANC, and on the BEC, I knew people in the other settlements, and we were all having similar problems so it was actually easy to build up this movement.

You had worked with the ANC, the BEC and their councillors.

Now you were leading marches at which the councillors were being symbolically buried. Was that difficult? Were you under a lot of pressure?

Not really. Of course things were said and threats were made but I was very confident because I knew that I was now fighting for what I strongly believed was right. And of course we were not alone. When you are thousands you are not intimidated. So, regardless of politics, of who said what, we just carried on. And for me personally I had nothing to lose. My involvement with the ANC, my position on the BEC, had done nothing for the people. In the party you make compromises for some bigger picture but in the end all what is real is the suffering of the people right in front of you. In fact it had become a shame. To say that 'enough is enough' is to walk away from that shame. Instead of the party telling the community what to do the community was now deciding what to do on its own.

The only pressure came when people were arrested. And in the first arrest there were two teenagers amongst the 14 that were taken to Westville Prison so there was also pressure from the parents.

Today you have over ten thousand paid up members and many more supporters. When the decision was taken to form the movement, that was on the 6th of October 2005, just after the Quarry Road march, did you have any sense of what they movement would become?

No, not that much. But what I knew, what I was aware of, was that the coming together of these settlements would turn us into a collective force. That it would strengthen the rebellion that was started in Kennedy Road. I didn't have a picture of how the movement is now. But I understood what democracy should be about and that our voice would become more louder the more we are. I knew that it would become a heavy political force.

There has been a lot of academic speculation, much of not researched at all, about where the politics of Abahlalisms comes from. Some people have said it comes from the popular struggles of the 1980s with their stress on bottom up democratic practice, others have said that it comes from the churches with their stress on the dignity of each person, others have said that it is something completely new. Where do you think that it comes from?

When things go wrong silence speaks volumes. Silence is the voice of the defeated, people whose spirits have been vandalized. It is a big danger to be silence in times of trying circumstances. Condemning injustice, calling it by its

real names, and doing this together; that on its own does a lot. That on its own is a kind of change, a lot of change.

The movement comes from recognition of this danger in conjunction with our cultural beliefs. It is a common sense that everyone is equal, that everyone matters, that the world must be shared.

My understanding is that this common sense comes from the very new spirit of ubuntu, from the spirit of humanity, from the understanding of what is required for a proper respect of each person's dignity, of what they are required to do.

Our movement is formed by different people, all poor people but some with different beliefs, different religious backgrounds. But the reality is that most people start with the belief that we are all created in the image of God, and that was the earliest understanding of the spirit of humanity in the movement. Here in the settlements we come from many places, we speak many languages. Therefore we are forced to ensure that the spirit of humanity is for everyone. We are forced to ensure that it is universal. There are all kinds of unfamiliar words that some of us are now using to explain this but it is actually very simple.

From this it follows that we can not allow division, degradation – any form that keeps us apart. On this point we have to be completely inflexible. On this point we do not negotiate. If we give up this point we will have given up on our movement.

It is not always clear what that should be done. We are not always strong enough to achieve all of our demands. This is one reason why we are sometimes quite flexible in our tactics. Sometimes we are blockading roads, sometimes we are connecting people to water and electricity, sometimes we are forcing the government to negotiate directly with us instead of the councillors, sometimes we are at court having to ask a judge to recognise our humanity.

The collective culture that we have built within the movement, that pride of belonging to this collective force that was not spoken about before, becomes a new concept, a new belief – especially as Abahlali in its own nature, on its own, is different to other politics. It requires a different style of membership and leadership. It requires a lot of thinking, not only on what is read, but on what is common to all the areas. Therefore learning Abahlalism demands, in its nature, the form that it takes. It doesn't require one to adopt some ideas and approach from outside. When you pull all the different people together and make

sure that everyone fits in, that it is everyone's home, that's when it requires a different approach from normal kinds of politics and leadership. By the nature of its demand it requires a direct flexibility of thinking, able to deal with its uniqueness. It gives us the strength to support each other, to keep thinking together, to keep fighting together.

From what I have seen Abahlali is original but it is also natural – it gets generated from different people, with different ideas, who have grown up in different places, in different levels of space. Putting all this together requires its own genius. It's not the same like other movements that take their mandate and understanding from ordinary politics.

It requires learning the demands that come from all the areas – its nature demands the form that the movement takes. It doesn't require one adopting some other ideas and approach from outside. Then when you pull all the demands together and try and make sure that the movement is everyone's home it requires a different approach from normal kinds of politics. By the nature of its demand it requires a direct flexibility to be able to deal with its uniqueness. The movement is not like an NGO or a political party where some few people, some experts in politics, sit down and decide how other people should be organised, what they should demand and how.

Other movements take their mandate, or their understanding, from what has been read. We did not start with a plan – the movement has always been shaped by the daily activities of the people that make it, by their daily thinking, by their daily influence. This togetherness is what has shaped the movement.

I am not too sure where our ideas would come from if there was no daily lives of people, a living movement can only be shaped by the daily lives of its members. I strongly believe that. This is where we formulate our debates and then our demands. We are going to court on Tuesday – winning or losing will affect how we go forward. It is the environment that we breathe in that shapes how we carry our politics forward. But it is who we are, human beings oppressed by other human beings, that directs our politics.

My next question was going to be: "What is your understanding of a living politics?" but I think that perhaps you've just answered that.

No, that is a simple one because we are all human beings and so our needs are all, one way or the other, similar. A living politics is not a politics that requires a formal education – a living politics is a politics that is easily understood because

it arises from our daily lives and the daily challenges we face. It is a politics that every ordinary person can understand. It is a politics that knows that we have no water but that in fact we all deserve water. It is a politics that everyone must have electricity because it is required by our lives. That understanding – that there are no toilets but that in fact there should be toilets – is a living politics. It is not complicated; it does not require big books to find the information. It doesn't have a hidden agenda – it is a politics of living that is just founded only on the nature of living. Every person can understand these kinds of demands and every person has to recognise that these demands are legitimate.

Of course sometimes we need formal expertise – we might need a lawyer if we have an eviction case, or a policy expert if we are negotiating with government. But then we only work with these people when they freely understand that their role is to become part of our living politics. They might bring a skill but the way forward, how we use that skill, if we use that skill, well, that comes out of a meeting, a meeting of the movement. By insisting on this we have found the right people to work with.

You've also spoken about a living communism before. Can you tell me what you meant by that?

For me understanding communism starts with understanding community. You have to start with the situation of the community, the culture of the community. Once you understand the complete needs of the community you can develop demands that are fair to anyone; to everyone. Everyone must have equal treatment. And obviously all what needs to be shaped in the society must be shaped equally and fairly. And of course if everyone is able to shape the world, and if we should shape it fairly, that means that the world must be shared. That is my understanding. It means one community, one demand.

To be more simple a living communism is a living idea and a living practice of ordinary people. The idea is the full and real equality of everyone without exception. The practice, well, a community must collectively own or forcefully take collective ownership of natural resources – especially the water supply, land and food. Every community is rightfully entitled to these resources. After that we can think about the next steps. We are already taking electricity, building and running crèches, insisting that our children can access the schools. We just need to keep going.

Again I do not think we should be thinking away from ordinary people, having to learn complicated new ideas and ways of speaking. Instead we should approach the very ordinary people that are so often accused of lacking ideas, those who must always be taught or given a political direction. We need to ask these people a simple question: 'What is needed for your life, for your safety, for your dignity?'. That simple question asked to ordinary people, well, it is a kind of social explosion. From that explosion your programme just develops on its own.

Of course a struggle always starts in one place, amongst people dealing with one part of the human reality. Maybe they are, like us, living like pigs in the mud, strange pigs that are also supposed to survive constant fires. Or maybe they are being taken to Lindela or maybe they are being attacked from the sky, being bombed. You have to start with what is being done to you, with what is being denied to you.

But for me communism means a complete community. It does not mean a community that is complete because everyone in it thinks the same or because one kind of division has been overcome. It means a complete community that is complete because no one is excluded – a community that is open to all. It means a very active and proactive community – a community that thinks and debates and demands. It is the universal spirit of humanity. Obviously this starts with one human life. We know that if we do not value every human life then we would be deceiving ourselves if we say that there is a community at all.

We are communists here in the mud and fire but we are not communists because of the mud and fire. We are communists because we are human beings in the mud and fire. We are communists because we have decided to take our humanity seriously and to resist all degradations and divisions.

You have suffered in this struggle. You have lost your job, you've been arrested, slandered, beaten. Why do you think that the state reacted so badly to the emergence of Abahlali baseMjondolo?

I think that it is because the system is such that it makes it impossible for equality. It makes sure that it divides in order to retain the status quo. It has created its own empire for its own people that matter to it, that are accountable to it. The system itself makes other people to be less, to be not important, not to matter.

What I was trying to do was to invade their territory and to show that we all have the power to do it.

It is a capitalist system and it is also a political system in which the few dominate the many. So it has to make certain people better than others, to be privileged over others. If you want to join the winning team then you have to fight. And it's not easy. They want us to think that we can never beat them and that the only hope is to join them. But the system makes these different layers and it makes it very difficult, almost completely impossible for a certain layer to penetrate. That's where the issue of blood and death first comes in. This is a very strong empire.

If you decide not to join the winning team, if as a poor person you decide to change the whole game, well, then you are invading their territory, territory that is too good for you. They will first ask 'Who the hell are you?'. That is always the first question – from the councillors, the police officers, the officials, the politicians, everyone. And if you have an answer, well, sometimes intelligence is not enough. Blood and death come in again. And when you are challenging the system rather than trying to get inside it there are still these layers. Even if you pass the first layer it will ensure that you do not reach the next layer where clever people belong, people who count. If you are born poor it is taken that you are born stupid. But if you invade their territory you don't find clever people. You find that it is greedy people and ruthless people who seem to count. You find that they want to control the world. They will defend their greed. I am very clear that if you try to pass into the forbidden territory you will have to pass certain tests, certain difficulties.

I always wonder how the system can divide people. I always say that the strongest thing that the system can do is to be able to divide people which is why we all struggle in our own confined dark corners, separated from one another. At the end of the day we are the majority, not the system. But it is such that it manages to divide us, to divide our struggles. This is why the big question that most people ask is 'how few hands can remote so many people?'. Those few people in the system are able to remote the world. How do they do this? How can hundreds of people remote millions? The answer is the division of our struggles. That is why I understand why Kennedy was such a big threat. The collectivity that we built, first within Kennedy, and then between the settlements that formed the movement; on its own it is a threat to the system.

When I was growing up it was the Cold War. Although I did not understand it properly then this struggle for global supremacy affected individuals, people's neighbours, families. Moscow was struggling for power with Washington and children were fighting and dying in Loskop.

It is interesting that we send comrades to this WSF with a clear message that another world is necessary, necessary as a matter of urgency. We hear that everyone agrees that another world is possible. This is good but that no one has ever asked when this will happen, when we will all take a collective step towards this change.

I am not too sure at what stage our own intellectuals will understand the system and why ordinary people still don't have a way of changing the society. I still wonder at what stage a new communism will become necessary. I don't know when it will become clear that poor people themselves can and must come up with a new living, an autonomous life, a completely independent stance where a new order would be about alternative ways of living and working instead of trying to compete with each other or limiting our demands to the return of what is already stolen. But it is possible. Already the struggles of the poor have created a situation where everything is done in the name of the poor. The state, the NGOs, academics, the churches, the World Bank all of them are saying that what they are doing they are doing for the poor. Now that the poor themselves are saying 'not in our name', now that we are saying that we will do things for ourselves, that we will think and speak for ourselves and that we will keep going until we find our own way out and a new society is born we have opened a real space for discussion. Our first duty is to keep this space wide open. Our second duty is to encourage as many people as possible to take their place in this new space.

But it is interesting that some people are already living according to the values of the new society where one person cannot eat up while other people's children have not eaten. Some people, like Mr. Jagarnath in Reservoir Hills, is already doing this as a business man.

Intellectuals are also called upon to serve our little world. It is difficult to analyse and change the world, to change its format, to turn it upside down. I always remember Bishop Rubin Philip's speech when he said that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. It is easy to say it, and it's acceptable to most people, but it's not easy to make it real. But to be realistic we must start from

where we are, with what we have, from our families, by teaching our children, and then to our schools, to our little neighbourhoods and communities before we say anything at the world level like the WSF. We must not fool ourselves and produce ideas that are not grounded in any soil.

Its one thing to explain why the state reacted so badly to Abahlali but why do you think that some NGOs reacted so badly? Was that a shock?

It was a shock but for me it was a learning. I have learnt that your enemy will not only be the state. We found a situation where people that we expected to be comrades were turning on us. But I began to understand why. When you talk of capitalism it is really not only the state. It is obviously a system, it's a system that creates its own empires. These spaces may say that they are on the side of the poor but they accept the rules of the state. They also accept the basic logic of capitalism because they are spaces that are accountable to their own interests and that protect their own interests.

So in the NGO sector you find the same system. It's everywhere. I mean, it's in the social movements. People have their own spaces and they protect their own interests. There are all kinds of spaces. Obviously Abahlali has created its own space where it is able to protect its own interests, our dignity, where we can do our activities without fear.

The NGOs are not all the same. But in the NGO sector I see a lot of empires. An individual can create his own empire so that he can be ruler for life.

For many people around the world Abahlali is best known for the position that it took against xenophobia. How did the movement come to take the position that equality must be universal?

This is a bigger question, a question of people who are in this world. But we've already talked about ubuntu, communism and what makes a complete society. It is true that this could be in the sense of belonging. But belonging where? It could be in one country but it could also be in the world – that it is acceptable for everyone in the world to live freely without any boundaries, without any colour or any other restrictions.

Obviously if you were to talk about a just society then it is the human culture, ubuntu – that makes a complete human being. The culture, where a person comes from, the colour – this does not count. Therefore it was clear for Abahlali that we have to take a very strong side in defending human life – any human

life, every human life. It is acceptable and legitimate that one person protects another. It is as simple as that.

There are no boundaries to the human life. Therefore the attack on people born in other countries, the so called foreign nationals – it was inhuman. It was very easy to take a position on this.

Obviously you have got to look at the perpetrators of this, at their intelligence, their conscience, their consciousness – their intelligence really. What ever they say about their reasons for the attacks clearly shows how the world was corrupted. People breathe a poisonous air. They get caught up, in their whole life, in a way of living where you turn an eye to one another. It is a terrible situation. This is a very big challenge for South Africans who have lived most of their life during apartheid, whose teaching was about boundaries, segregations – that not everyone was a human being. At that stage only whites were considered to be human by the system. A proper opposition to that system would reject its segregations completely and insist that everyone is human. But some of the opposition to that system has been about fighting to take a place in that system, not doing away with it. So now black people have turned on other black people, against their brothers and sisters. It is a disgrace. This is one of the damages the past laws have installed in some people's minds. A lot needs to be done to change the mindsets of those whose frustration is unsound.

The other thing that has really attracted attention was the decision that Abahlali took in 2006 not to vote. How do you understand this decision?

I think that it was a very practical decision in our politic. For a number of years we have voted but not seen any change. In 2006 Abahlali realised that we have power. We had always been asked to shout 'Amandla! Awethu!' but refraining from voting was a way of showing that Amandla is ours. Basically we had decided not to give our power away. It has a simple message – that we had no confidence in politicians and that we believed that we could empower ourselves – that we really do believe that the people shall govern.

It was also a tactical action; a warning to the government that if they exclude us from shaping the country then we will exclude ourselves from giving them support. And it has been a way for us to start thinking about our own alternative governance.

Has the formation of the Poor People's Alliance last year given you hope?

Well I was just explaining that the strength of capitalism is how it has managed to divide our struggles. So if we are able to come together, not just nationally but also internationally, then I think that we are on a good track. This is the only way that it will really become possible to face and to contest the system. None of us will succeed on our own.

What has been the most difficult thing for you about being involved in Abahlali, and what has been the best thing?

The day when I had to choose from no choice. Ok, losing the job was the second aspect of it. The first aspect of it was that I was given a choice, to either align myself with the eThekweni people, with City Hall and, you know, to have a career, opportunities or to remain with the poor. Offers were made to me. They ask you some questions the main one being 'What is it that you want in order to keep quiet?' They always see it as an individual trouble maker. Remember when Mabuyakhulu said that 'Zikode must educate his people'. That's the belief that they had. They can't understand that I am educated by the people. But when you have four children growing here in the mud and the fire...

But I have no regrets. Working with people is not easy. And it's not just dealing with your enemies, even working with your comrades, trying to satisfy everyone is not easy. The time and the energy that is involved create a real pressure. But aside from that I have peace of mind, the inner peace.

I am more informed than I was, I am more vigorous then ever before. I am more vigilant and conscious than ever before. There is a lot of variety of things in life, more than just the politics. I have no regrets.

And the best thing?

All the victories we have won. I don't just mean victories in court, or evictions that have been stopped, or water and electricity connected. I am talking about seeing comrades becoming confident, being happy for knowing their power, knowing their rights in this world. Seeing comrades gaining a bit of respect, seeing people who have never counted being able to engage at the level at which they struggle is now fought. Young comrades are debating with government ministers on the radio and TV! Seeing the strength of the women comrades in the movement. Seeing poor people challenging the system, because its not just about challenging Bheki Cele or Mabuyakhulu, it's about challenging the whole system, how it functions.

Would you like to say a little more about the strength of the women comrades in the movement?

Well I am very satisfied and proud to see how some of the Abahlali settlements are chaired and led by women. This is evident in Siyanda A, B and C sections in Newlands in Durban. This is also evident in Motala Heights in Pine-town, in Joe Slovo and other settlements. From the very beginning women have been elected to the high positions of leadership in the movement and it is impossible to imagine the movement without the strength of women comrades. The Abahlali office itself is headed by a young woman, Zodwa Nsibande, who has earned herself a high respect from both men and other women for her role in connecting the movement and the outside world. But there are also many projects that don't get the same public attention and most of these projects, such as crèches, kitchens, sewing, bead work, gardening and poetry are run purely by women.

The strength of women comes from the fact that women are expected to carry our love, not only for their children and husbands but for the communities too. Women are raised to be sensitive and caring. We are all told that a home that has a woman is often warm with love and care. A person that is given responsibility for this love and care will fight like a lion to protect her home and her family. It is not surprising that women are often in the forefront of struggles against eviction, for toilets, for electricity and against the fires. Sometimes in Abahlali women feel that men are very slow and too compromising.

Over the years many women have faced arrest and police beatings. Women have confronted police officers, landlords, shack lords, BECs, councillors, NGOs, academics – everyone that has to be confronted in a struggle like this. The fact that Abahlali women have given away fear and decided to confront the reality of life tells us that there is something seriously wrong with our governing systems – that another world is necessary. Women don't risk their safety when they have children to care for unless they have a very good reason for doing so. The fact that women have stood up to and faced the barrel of guns during our protests is an indication that indeed another world is possible because without women nothing is possible and without courage nothing is possible. Our hopes are dependent on the courage of women.

We know that in the past that in times of any war women were never and under no circumstances touched by the physical pain associated with any war.

But today poor women are shot by the same police who are meant to protect them by law. I wish to salute the role that our mothers are playing in not only raising us under these trying circumstances but in also having to face this violence from the state while fighting for a better world for us. Their motherly does not count because they are not the wives of the politicians and of the rich.

But we know that their strength changes their subjectivity to vulnerability putting them in the forefront of our struggle. We know by nature that their tears can never be ignored by a natural person for ever and ever.

I know that it's a Sunday night and your family are waiting for you. This will be my last question. What does it mean for you when you say that Abahlalisms is the politics of those that don't count, the politics of those that are not supposed to speak.

I think that I have a clear understanding of this. I know from my own personal experience how I came to have enemies that I did not have because now I am speaking. When you are quiet, when you know your place, you are accepted and you are as safe as a poor person can be. But the moment you start talking you become a threat.

When one talks about the politics of those that do not count one must start from the fact that the system makes it impossible for everyone to count. If ordinary people counted it would collapse immediately. The way to hide the fact that ordinary people do not count, and that the system depends on this, is to ensure that ordinary people are taken as being unable to think and therefore unable to say anything intelligent. We are supposed to be led.

The politics of those that do not count makes no respect for those who are meant to think for everyone else, to lead. This turning the tide, when the life turns one at the front and takes him to the back, it is like you are doing a chaos because you want to do away with the status quo. You want to be innovative, you want to be creative, you want to live your life but it seems that the only way is to undermine those who have led the way. So you do not accept that someone must be a slave and work for someone else. No boss will find this acceptable. You do not accept that someone must be a good boy or a good girl, an obedient follower who does not think and act for themselves. No politician will find this acceptable. They will fight up until those tides are turned back. So we must face the difficulty of this politics.

The understanding is just that simple. In order for those who count to defend their own territory someone should not talk, someone should just be led, someone should not question, someone should just be a beneficiary of those particular services that are meant to be given.

The moment that you begin to question then you are threatening the system. You are not supposed to do that, and your intelligence and capability are not supposed to allow you to voice or to take the space. The system keeps people separate. If you want to unite and to make a culture that people should be equal then you are invading the space that is forbidden to you, you are threatening the system.

That's very powerful. Thank you.

24 JULY 2009

Paper · S'bu Zikode

Meaningful Engagement

Colloquium on meaningful engagement, Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, July 2009

I thank Lauren Royston and Kate Tissington for the opportunity to comment on the topic of meaningful engagement.

Our movement is always very happy to visit CALS. CALS is an important ally in the struggles of the poor and all our movements hold your organization in high respect. You have worked with us and not for us. You have not been scared to confront power whether it is the provincial government or a gangster landlord. We remember how Stuart Wilson sat taking instruction from Uncle James in Motala Heights while Ricky Govender's thugs threw rocks at Uncle James' house. We know how hard and how well Stuart and your team worked on the Slums Act case.

It is a fact that may not be disputed that not all engagements between the state and the people are meant to be meaningful. What is called 'engagement' or 'public participation' is often just a kind of instruction, sometimes even a threat. Many times it is done in such a way that all possibilities for real discussion and understanding are closed from the start. In these cases what is called engagement is really just a way for the state to pretend to be democratic when in reality all decisions are already taken and taken far away from poor people.

However all purposes of engagement are meant to be meaningful by virtue of their intention. When you engage for a particular purpose you want the purpose itself to determine the nature of the engagement. The purpose therefore comes first. In each engagement we must be clear about who we are and what we want. This determines our tactics and what we can accept and not accept in each engagement.

It is one thing if we are beneficiaries who need delivery. It is another thing if we are citizens who want to shape the future of our cities, even our country.

It is another thing if we are human beings who have decided that it is our duty to humanize the world.

Some problems are technical. Some problems are political. But we find that without our own political empowerment we can not even resolve the technical problems. The solving of even very small technical problems, like a broken toilet, requires that we are first recognized as people that count. If you are not recognized they will just say 'who the hell are you?'. To be recognized requires struggle. It took Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban three years of hard struggle – with many police attacks, many beatings and arrests – before we were even recognized as people who could negotiate with the state. Then there was another year of a different kind of struggle within the negotiations before we were properly recognized there. Right now in Cape Town Abahlali baseMjondolo are still fighting the first struggle against repression. Right now communities all over the country are in rebellion. Many are still at the stage of demanding to be recognized as people that count. We are very much encouraged by many of these rebellions. We support the land occupations, the strikes and the eating of food in the big shops in Durban. Of course we condemn the new xenophobia in Mpumalanga. When the anger of the poor turns on the poor it is nothing but disaster. Terrible, terrible disaster.

The road is long. We have travelled far in Durban but it remains possible that we could be pushed back. Therefore we must always remain strong – we must remain many, we must remain active, we must continue to think and to debate all issues. This is the only way to ensure that we keep going forward.

There are some clear rules for meaningful engagement. Firstly the people that are supposed to participate in that engagement must be informed prior to date of that engagement and they need to be aware of what is going to be discussed during that engagement. The time, place, language and culture of that engagement must suit the people.

The leadership of the movement or community that will attend the engagement also has important responsibilities. They need to inform all of their members about the engagement in good time. They need to explain clearly what will be at stake. The organizing and placing of notices should not only be limited to a leadership or organizational level but to ordinary people to avoid any form of exclusion. Women must be included on the same basis as men. The young and the old must be included on the same basis. The poor and the even poorer must

be included on the same basis. There must be no distinction between people born here and people born in other countries.

The local leadership must use its relevant culture and the strategies that are often used in that particular community. It is important not to allow the NGOs to teach people ways of being 'professional' about development that separate people from the culture of a community.

Representatives must be elected and mandated. When there is ongoing engagement it is important that representatives are rotated and re-elected for each engagement. All decisions must be referred back to the movement or community before being finalized.

During the engagement the processes should be conducted in a way that all the parties that are involved in that engagement feel that their opinions are being heard. You cannot have a situation where one party controls the agenda and chairs the meeting without consultation. Everyone must be able to speak freely.

My experience in the past has been that some government officials would come up with a concluded decision with no room to accommodate views of the people and then organize an engagement. This is the experience of most communities and most movements. In these cases what is the point of engaging under these circumstances?

This was most evident to us when the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature introduced the KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-Emergence of Slums Bill 2007, in the Kennedy Road Settlement. They started with a police helicopter just above us, flying low over the settlement. There were police everywhere. We were not allowed to speak if we couldn't quote a section of Act. Those who did speak were dismissed without respect. Our concerns were treated as if they were ignorant or stupid.

It became clear that there was no reason for the legislature to hold this public meeting except that they were required by the law to do it. We organized many shack dwellers to attend this meeting. We prepared for it very carefully. We read that Bill together line by line. We discussed each point in that Bill. On the day the Kennedy Road Community Hall was fully packed. But our presence was turned to be used to justify the passing of the Bill into an Act on the basis that a lot of people were present to endorse the Act! It is thus clear that the good move

of holding public meetings can easily be monopolized and abused in order to justify the exclusion of the public from the discussions that really matter.

In such instances one can rightfully say that, such government officials see no need to engage ordinary people on policy formulation matters that affect them directly. This thinking goes with the idea that ordinary people should just become the passive receivers of services. They must just trust that everything that is done in their name and for them is an attempt to help them. Of course we cannot trust in this because people are being evicted everywhere. People are facing forced removals everywhere. People are being dumped in transit camps everywhere. People are being disconnected everywhere, burnt everywhere, arrested everywhere, beaten everywhere. We have good reason not to automatically trust the state. Where we have achieved trust with some officials it has been after long struggle and long negotiation followed by the experience of learning to work together.

Active citizen participation is discouraged by those that hold the power. Sometimes it is discouraged with contempt. Sometimes it is discouraged with violence. Sometimes it is discouraged by making simple issues too complicated for ordinary people to understand. Sometimes it is discouraged by just making it too difficult to engage. How many shack dwellers can afford to be on hold on their cellphones for twenty minutes?

We expressed our anger at the so called 'public participation' meeting for the Slums Bill. Some members of Abahlali baseMjondolo were then invited to the KwaZulu-Natal parliament to participate in the discussions there. They prepared carefully. They had a written submission and we were ready for all debates. They travelled there on a work day. But the Act was passed in their presence without any opportunity given to them to say a word. The Act was passed against the will of the people.

Meaningful engagement will of course mean different things to different people. But it is clear that a reasonable service provider, stakeholder, leader or official should not be judged by how many public hearing meetings or izimbizos it conducts but by the number of people whom they manage to reach and listen to and to take into serious account during those meetings. Meaningful engagement should make sure that both parties involved will be able to benefit from that engagement. It can never be meaningful if it is just for the people to listen and to never be able to voice out their own thinking.

The government says that it wants to 'bring government to the people'. It is much better to 'bring government to the people' than to send in the police, the private security and the land invasions unit to evict and disconnect and to then call that good governance. But bringing the government to the people is not enough. Meaningful engagement will only happen when we can, through our struggles, bring the people into government.

That does not mean that we want to replace one councillor with another or one party with another. It means that we want to bring the government, regardless of who is sitting on the comfy chairs there, under the control of the people.

That is why we also say that the struggle of our movements is a struggle to democratize the society from below. Yes we do want services. Services are needed by our lives. They are basic to life. We will always engage to try and get or to keep these services. These little struggles are important.

But we also want full recognition of our humanity. Things must be done with us and not for us or to us. Therefore the government must come under the people. This requires the current political system to be turned upside down. If each community and each movement builds its power by respecting its members fully so that as each individual grows in power each community and movement grows in its power then we can slowly achieve this step by step. That is our vision for meaningful engagement – a slow revolution from below fought day by day across the country.

S'bu. Zikode.

Kennedy Road Settlement, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, 24 July 2009

26 AUGUST 2009

Paper · Abahlali baseMjondolo delegates

Notes on Gentrification for the Manchester Conference

Manchester conference, August 2009

defining ourselves

We are here as elected delegates of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the South African shackdwellers' movement. We approach each challenge and opportunity from within our own 'living politics' which the President of our movement, S'bu Zikode has described as a politics that:

starts from the places we have taken. We call it a living politics because it comes from the people and stays with the people. It is ours and it is part of our lives. ... It is the politics of our lives. It is made at home with what we have and it is made for us and by us.

Zikode, 2008.

Throughout our struggles, we have found that others want to define us and they want to understand our struggle according their own definitions and projects. It is always necessary to resist this and to insist that we think and speak for ourselves. Without this discipline, our living politics would die.

clarifying our thought and struggle in relation to 'gentrification'

We have discussed the issue that this conference will confront in a number of meetings and, last Saturday, in a camp (an all night meeting). We have concluded that the idea of 'gentrification' is not one that can really be said to be part of the living politics of Abahlali baseMjondolo. It is not a word that you will hear shackdwellers in South Africa using a lot (or at all really!) to describe their lives or to analyse their situation. This is not surprising since the term was developed in the 1960s by Northern analysts trying to explain certain patterns in the historical development of mostly Northern cities. We know that the word continues to be used, and that it is used quite widely by now. We know that the patterns and issues it deals with are definitely important for all of us who are

thinking about cities and who are committed to people's struggles for justice in cities all over the world. We are very clear that we fully support the struggle of the poor against the rich every where in the world – in Zimbabwe, in Haiti and also in England. But, from the perspective of the living politics of the shack-dwellers of South Africa, we want to suggest that it might be more important to clarify some of the ways in which our struggle is not about gentrification – rather than trying to fit our story to match the theories and ideas developed elsewhere by others who do not know our story. This why we can really get to know each other and our struggles that are different in some ways and the same in other ways.

pointing at the differences

Although there are lots of debates about it, 'gentrification' usually describes the process where richer people move into neighbourhoods that had been settled by poorer people but which, for various reasons, have become attractive neighbourhoods for these new groups of richer people. On the surface, the results of this can look quite good – if you prefer the aesthetics of wealthy people and their neighbourhoods to those of poor people! Buildings get done up and repaired, new businesses spring up to service these interesting new elites with money to spend lounging about in coffee shops, art galleries or whatever. But below the surface, the results are usually disastrous for the poor. They may have lived in, and helped shape, the 'edgy' atmosphere so attractive to some of these new elites, and their inner-city housing may have quaint and historical appeal too – but the rising land, housing and rental costs invariably squeeze them out. So people are evicted by the market.

What we must be clear on is that this is not the pattern that affects shackdwellers in South Africa. Our shack settlements, our homes and neighbourhoods, are under active threat of being demolished and destroyed by the state, and we are being forcibly removed. We are violently evicted by the police, anti-land invasion units and private security – including Group 4 Securicor from England. Rich people do not move in and renovate and refurbish our settlements! On the contrary they want to eradicate rather than upgrade our places. They want to make it look as though our settlements were never there. So it is perfectly clear that elites in our part of the world do not view our settlements as places that are somehow quaint, if a little run down. Their view is one of utter contempt,

and that contempt extends beyond the way they talk about the places we live in – which they repeatedly describe as ‘slums’ and ‘hotbeds of criminality’ – to a hateful contempt for the people themselves. This is the dehumanising hatred and contempt we fight against. What we have demanded again and again is to be treated as human beings and citizens who can work with government to make improvements to our settlements on our own terms, so that we can remain in the places we live and make a decent life for the people who are there now.

Often we face resistance to our struggle as shackdwellers from more middle-class people living near to shack settlements. These groups, often sharing the broad elite attitude to shacks and shackdwellers of fear and loathing, can mobilise elite and political opinion against what we can perhaps call the “de-gentrification” that takes place when we as poor people have occupied land and moved into areas reserved for the rich. It seems to be that the armed wing of the state, especially the police, as well as the party-political classes, are often very sympathetic to these middle-class voices and can join in this struggle to remove us.

Of course, as the movement of shackdwellers, we do not claim to represent all of the struggles of all the poor. We are aware of the struggles that have had to be fought by people living in blocks of flats in the inner city of Johannesburg who face violent and frankly illegal evictions in a process that might be closer to ‘gentrification’. But even there, what is happening cannot be seen as some sort of ‘natural’ process arising from the movement and changes in different social groups of Johannesburg– it is a malicious and aggressive project of the local state, backed by big business, private security and the thinking of the World Bank.

suggesting possible commonalities

It does not surprise us to learn that, although the poor of other cities experience different patterns to ours, many of the results look more or less similar. It comes as no surprise that other cities also experience the process of elite projects trumping democratic ones; of rich and powerful people benefiting, and of the poor being pushed aside and right outside the cities. We, as Abahlali, have seen very clearly how our world is made to extract land and labour and life from the poor to benefit a small group of the rich and powerful. We have seen how, in practice, this has turned the idea of 'development' into a war against the poor; it has fertilised the elite fantasy idea of the 'world class city' where the poor have no place, no voice. We reject this in Durban and we reject this everywhere.

We are therefore sure that we can find strength and solidarity with all other genuine and grassroots movements of poor people in cities all over the world, including those who organise and fight to resist gentrification's pernicious effects on them. Where resistance and contestation of these processes by the poor becomes a common, popular and political project forged in the minds and hands of poor people themselves, there we know we will find true comrades in a living politics that asserts the right of everyone to the city. We will support this politics full force.

We know too that gentrification is not only a threat against the long-established neighbourhoods of the poor. It is also a threat against spaces in the city that have been taken and appropriated by those who are not counted in the official order of things. Many young people in cities of the North who are called 'squatters' have already understood the importance of our own struggles in South Africa, and they have, like the Camberwell Social Centre, found important ways of being in solidarity with us as Abahlali. From their own experiences, they know a lot about evictions and the violence of the state that is unleashed against both them and us. Some of them have come to live and struggle with us for a while. They have been there when the police come to evict us, or when the fires race through our settlements. They are our comrades. We are talking about people like Antonios Vradis and Matt Birkinshaw.

Our movement is a scandal for the rich and the state. Perhaps the biggest scandal of a movement like Abahlali baseMjondolo is our refusal to accept this place of having no place and our insistence that everyone counts – and that refusal is made every-time and every-where that people resist being pushed away

and aside by the rich and powerful. We like this idea of the 'right to say put'. We like it a lot.

resisting gentrification of our struggle

So there are differences and commonalities but we also can't help wondering whether what we might call "resistance against the gentrification of our struggle" isn't one of the most interesting conversations to have. What we mean is something like this:

- though our struggle/s, we create new political spaces for contesting power;
- this inevitably creates speculative interest from professional vanguardist 'activists' and 'civil society' looking for constituencies to populate their imagined fantasies of resistance and revolution;
- they try by all means to invade and take over (often with offers of money) the space our struggle opened up and;
- unless we sustain a living politics militantly resisting against this onslaught, the result looks very much like what the academics describe as the result of gentrification: namely;

* the poor get moved out once again, but the quaint and edgy appeal of the spaces they created has a residual value for the professional activist class who occupy it through their superior access to various international currencies – sometimes quite literally, greater resources and money, but also other currencies of organisational and patronage networks, media and communication technology that can 'represent' people's issues and struggles with no accountability to or insertion in the actual movements themselves that are the currency of 'civil society's' claims to legitimacy, and relevance.

This is why we said at the beginning:

we have found that others want to define us and they want to understand our struggle according their own definitions and projects. It is always necessary to resist this and to insist that we think and speak for ourselves. Without this discipline, our living politics would die.

10 SEPTEMBER 2009

Interview · Mnikelo Ndabankulu & Zodwa Nsibande

Accountability and Keeping Promises

Interview by Sokari Ekine, Pambazuka News, September 2009

Sokari Ekine recently met in London with two members of the South African shackdwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo, Mnikelo Ndabankulu, a founding member and spokesperson, and Zodwa Nsibande, the general secretary of the Abahlali Youth League. In their interview they were joined by David Ntseng of the Church Land Programme, an NGO based in KwaZulu-Natal province which works on land rights issues. They discuss a range of issues from movement building and successes and the 2008 'Slums Act', to the decision not to vote in national elections and combating xenophobia in South Africa.

In 2005 Durban's shackdwellers started to build the Abahlali baseMjondolo (people living in shacks) movement, which in just four years has become the largest organisation of the militant poor, not only in South Africa but across the whole continent.

The broad aims of Abahlali are to prevent illegal evictions and the demolition of shacks; to demand improved service delivery such as clean water, electricity and proper sanitation; to challenge anti-poor legislation such as the 2008 'Slums Act'; to provide training and education to develop the skills of its members; and to build alliances with other land rights and poor movements in South Africa and across the globe.

Full Transcription of the Interview

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Thank you both, the two of you for coming and meeting with me today. Mnikelo and Zodwa can you tell me a little bit about your backgrounds, and how you came to live in the settlements?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: For me, I came to live in the settlement, it was 2003 because I had finished my studies, I had to come to Durban and my mother was already staying in the informal settlement so I had to stay with her.

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: I came to this city after I was over 18 years of age, usually in South Africa when moving from childhood to adulthood, you have to look for employment in order sustain or start your own family. That requires someone to move from rural areas to urban areas, because the urban areas have more job opportunities than the rural areas.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: So that's how you came to stay on Kennedy road is it?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: Actually I am staying in another area called Foreman Road Informal Settlement.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Mnikelo, you were one of the founding members of Abahlali. And as I understand, the decision to form the movement was taken in October 2005, following the march on Quarry Road. What was the vision you had at that time, and what were your goals during those initial months?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: Well, actually there was not an official conference or any gathering which was called where the people said, we must form an organization. It was not like the way NGOs [non-governmental organisations] are formed whereby people meet or have courses and decide to form a non-governmental organisation. The organisation was formed because of frustration and the loss of patience by the shackdwellers to the non-fulfilment of the promises, particularly the land and housing delivery promises to the people who live in the informal settlements.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: What in particular happened during the Quarry Road march that kind of spurred on the idea of the movement?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: Actually the organisation was formed before even that march, the first protest march that the organisation staged was before it was officially called by the name of the organisation. It was when the Branch (which is one of the first branches to form the organisation) was promised a certain piece of land close to where they were staying. It started when they saw some Caterpillars clearing their land, people said: 'Oh God at last, since 1994 we

have been promised houses, here is the construction to start building houses.' Then people started to approach the Caterpillar driver to ask: 'What is really happening here?' The Caterpillar driver said 'no', he is working for a private company that is going to build a big industrial plant next to the informal settlement. People were so frustrated and said: 'No no no no, you cannot do such things, this is our land we have been promised it by the country, in no way can you come in and make business out of the land that was earmarked for housing, for us!' The people started to mobilise one another and blockaded the road by burning tires, and around 40 people were arrested. They appeared in court and were set free; nobody is behind bars now. We then started to mobilise more communities, because we found out that there is a lot in common between the settlements, we started to organise to read the constitution and follow the protocol about what do you do before you stage a protest, and then the movement moved forward to today.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: What was your vision, what were you thinking at that time, what was the long-term goal that you had in mind? In terms of your demands, but also in terms of the bonding of the movement itself?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: The thing that unites us is the non-fulfilment of the promises that were made to us. In the near future we need the shackdwellers to be respected in dignity, to be consulted about the things that involve them. Talk to us and not about us. We don't want the government to sit in the parliament and decide that we will do this for the people. We want to be consulted from the beginning of the process because if we people have never been consulted, then they might not know what people think is good about them. Because the people are not pro any party, they are human beings, they have their own ideas, so they need to have an input in something that involves their lives.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Abahlali has been described by its elected president S'bu Zikode as a living movement, a kind of 'living politics'. What do you understand by that term – living movement, living politics?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: The reason why it has been described as 'living politics' is because this politics that we are standing for is the politics that is made by the people, through the people. It is also the politics that can be understood even by an old granny, without having to go and learn about politics. It's a politics that everyone has a say in, for this reason the term 'living politics'.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Zodwa, you are the general secretary of the Abahlali Youth League. Why was there a decision taken to form a separate branch of the movement for youth?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: As we have seen, the movement has been growing and growing, and although this is the case, as it is growing, the main founders are growing in age. The people are getting poorer so we will continue to grow. While still in action the young have to be trained because we believe that this struggle will still continue.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: What sort of work do you do with the Youth League?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: We normally encourage the youth to participate in the development issues, because most of the youth think development issues have nothing to do with them, it's for people that are old. We also encourage the youth to learn; especially in the settlements you don't see the youth learning. Although you are living in a settlement, there is a life there and so you must sustain yourself.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: As a woman and as the general secretary of the youth league and as a living member of Abahlali, you have multiple roles. How do these three roles integrate with each other? Also, could tell me a bit more about the participation and contribution from women comrades in the movement?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: As a woman of the movement – as well as the youngest woman of the movement – we respect the views of each and everyone. As I'm the youngest woman of the movement but have been part of its formation, it gives hope to other women: 'No matter how old or young you are you can still participate in the making of the change'. It is not important whether you are a woman or a man. It's not only men that can make a change, it is also women that can make a change. With this African culture, we believe that it's only men that can make a change and the only place for a woman is in the kitchen – outside the kitchen, you don't have to do anything. We as women have to be an example to other women and give them the chance to participate.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: One of the problems in South Africa today is violence against women and as a movement that campaigns for equality and respects everybody, how has the Abahlali movement managed deal with the issue of violence against women? Is this something you have had to address within your own communities? I am talking about domestic violence, rape, harassment, and so on.

ZODWA NSIBANDE: South Africa has a high rate of domestic violence but within the settlements, what we are encouraging is to form what are called citizen security communities that are able to encourage security. It is because it is easier for a person within a settlement to report a crime to someone they know and trust. Furthermore the members of the security communities lead as a good example. The security communities work hand in hand with the local police stations so that the crimes can be handled in a rightful manner.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Recently Abahlali has chosen to form an alliance with other land rights movements in South Africa. Could you tell us a bit more about why you decided to do this and how that works?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: While we were addressing the shackdweller's concerns we found out that everyone in his own corner is facing the same problem so we felt the need to unite our struggles. We amalgamated our struggle with the Rural Network which is an organisation standing for the land rights and the farm workers rights. As well as the Anti-eviction Campaign from the Western Cape, which stands for the rights of people not to be evicted from their houses. As well as the Landless People's Movement (LPM), which stands for the rights of the landless people. It worked for us – for instance when Abahlali took the government to court, we only had enough resources to organise one bus to take us there. However, as we are allied with the LPM, the comrades came to the court in a show of solidarity. The media, the government and the judges can see that this is somebody's bother, and can see that we are upstanding for the rights of the people by crowding the corridors of court houses with lively people that are standing up.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: David, you are from the Church Land Programme, could you give us a little background about how that organisation started? And also why you chose, as an organisation to build the alliance with the other land rights movements?

DAVID NTSENG: The Church Land Programme was formed in 1997 by two key NGOs in Pietermaritzburg, Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa. One being the Association for Rural Advancement and the other one being Pietermaritzburg Association for Christian Social Awareness, for the reasons: To look at land issues, land struggles and how rights of communities are secured on farms, especially on mission farms owned by the Catholic, Lutheran and other missionary churches.

Later in the year, having worked a great deal in the land reform sector, we continued to look at how these rights are protected to an extent that we realised, nothing much is moving in so far as the realisation of the dream to have a home, dream to have land to call your own without insecurity of tenure. Nothing was moving around that and as an organisation we started raising questions: Why does it take so long?

Part of the findings in asking that question was that its not about the pace of the land reform but the direction that the land reform is taking. The direction being that it is serving the neoliberal agenda. For land reform to take place, there has to be the willingness of the farmer to sell the land, or the willingness of the church to sell or donate the land. If there is not that, there is not much movement.

Secondly, when land is dealt with there has to be a convincing business plan by communities wanting land to produce or develop some entrepreneurship once they get the land. Now that underlines two things: One, people want land because it is part of their history, people want land because its part of restoring their dignity, people want land because it is who they are whether you want to proceed to entrepreneurship and become a commercial farmer or a small scale farmer. But this is people's history, this is people's lives. This is the extent of the mismatch as far as the land reform is concerned.

When discovering that, we said ok, Church Land Programme not only defines itself as an organisation working on land issues – we work with the people, we work with the land, and we work with the church. Because there is so much mismatch, it has to be talked about. It has to be raised in all corridors were we make presentations or we dialogue with people.

Now Abahlali formed in 2005, which is eight years after our existence as an organisation, and we only managed to draw links with them towards the beginning of 2006. Since then our relationship, when we work around it as an organisation, is that we have to employ a different kind of politics in relating to people's formations. It has to be based on how they want that relationship to be, they being the movement, not how we as an organisation/NGO want it to be. So in a lot of instances we support them with resources and with presence of organisational personnel. But ensuring in whatever way that it appeals to what the movement is looking and asking for. There are spaces where we are asked to share an opinion on specific issues that the movement is faced with.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Although you are an NGO, an organisation, what do you think of the connections historically and also in the present between rural land rights and the urban shackdwellers' movement?

DAVID NTSENG: There are very strong connections, one of them is based on the fact that both people affected in these areas are not given space to express their demands and both people in these areas are represented or over-represented either by what the state believes they want or what some of us as NGOs believe they want.

In doing that representation we are silencing their voice and in addition to silencing their voice, we are hitting them. This happens in both areas, in rural areas and in urban areas. In both instances they are neglected in a sense that they are first to live in conditions that do not allow their dignity to prevail and their humanity to prevail.

In both instances, what they are forced to go through is dehumanising and as an organisation we see the need to be part of the imagined politics in both these contexts. Where in rural areas people are saying we cannot allow ourselves to be subjected to the injustices that some farmers are putting us through but also what the government is putting us through by being insensitive to our issues. In the urban areas there are instances where even city officials demonstrate, openly the unwillingness to pay attention to the demands of people represented within Abahlali baseMjondolo.

This for us is immoral as an organisation that is uncalled for. We then try to draw the attention of the church leaders to this fact that we cannot fold arms when people are tortured in this way and in a so-called democratic society. Where is our conscience? What do we say about their humanity? What do we say about their right to reclaim their position as citizens of the country of South Africa?

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: There has been quite a bit of discussion amongst academics and activists on the nature of Abahlali's demands. Whether these demands are simply about service delivery? Whether your vision is actually far more complex than that and much broader than simply the delivery of services? For example: You went to court regarding the Slum Elimination Bill, which is much deeper than just talking about service delivery. Could you expand on that?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: It is not about the service delivery as the media puts it, it is the way of the community of reminding the those in power, this is what you promised the people, so do it, when are you going to do it? And then the media

says that it is just a service delivery protest. It is not about service delivery, it is also about human dignity of the community. It is the community saying, what you promised us, bring it back to us. You have to listen to us, you are accountable to us, you don't only have to give services but human self-respect, dignity and life.

Power.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Why do you feel so strongly about the Slum Elimination Bill?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: It is because this act is bringing back one of those apartheid ideas, which take anybody's rights in the nation. For instance, the constitution of South Africa states that no one may be evicted from their house without an order of a court. But this act talks about evicting people, but it does not clarify under what criteria, it does not show that it is going to follow a protocol.

This act is going to make it an offence and a crime to resist evictions, which is not something that can happen in a democratic society. Resisting eviction in South Africa is a democratic right for every citizen, to say no to something they don't like. This act says that if you resist eviction you might be fined for ZAR20,000 or you might spend 10 years in prison. The act was passed by a department that is not even a relevant department because it is a housing department; their job is to house. They don't have the power to pass land rights, that's the Department of Land Affairs and even they could not pass the bill if it was not hand in hand with the constitution because we will not allow that.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Abahlali also chose to boycott the elections, not to vote. Why was that decision made and what did you hope to achieve?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: We are too patriotic about our country and we respect the heroes and heroines, which died for the liberation of South Africa, which gave every citizen a right to vote. Everyone was happy to vote, especially in 1994 for the first time. We voted, with the big hope that South Africa would change for the better.

The people's government said that it would do one, two, three, and four for the citizens when it came in to power. After 14 years of patience we never got what had been promised by the people in government when they get into power. That frustrated us because we were voting because we hoped that something might happen after voting. Then when they don't do the things that they promised us before elections, after the elections, it frustrated us.

We said to the government: ‘government, this time around we have voted more than once, with the one promise of housing and land for the slum dwellers, and you have never delivered onto that promise. This time around we will boycott our vote to show that we are no longer going to participate in something that does not work out for us.’

When we are saying, ‘no land, no house, no vote’ its not that we did not have the willingness to vote, its just that we wanted our government to be accountable to us and wanted our government to show respect to us. Because we said, ‘we do know that you cannot build houses within a short period of time’, but what did the government do to help?

Maybe they should conceive a memorandum of understanding our argument, to the people and the government, that in two years’ time, or one year’s time or five years’ time, we will build houses for you because this thereby promises that they build free houses for all. Nobody is accountable for these promises that are made on radio and through the media, there are no records in black and white that make someone accountable if the promise is never delivered.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: So what do you think are the real motives behind the government’s forced removals and the fact that they want to move you to the outskirts of the city?

DAVID NTSENG: It’s multiple issues but the most important one is that in every instance where there is a threat of eviction or an ongoing eviction, there is a development in terms of infrastructure, be it roads and whatever – big, big multimillion projects coming or going on.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: So are you saying there is a relationship between the government’s eviction policy and development of other projects in the area?

DAVID NTSENG: Very much so in terms of practice and what we have observed. In one area around Durban, a community of about 500 people was evacuated and forced off their land to make way for a highway. As we speak there is a big debate of about another threat of eviction pending for a community of about 10,000 families in northern Zululand, because there is a big development of a pipeline supported by a big company coming from Dubai to establish a mega shopping, entertainment centre that has never been seen on the continent of Africa, which will take in the region of ZAR55 billion to put up.

Now, that is not just evictions for the sake of evictions, it is evictions because there is a big mega million project coming. Varying in scale, ya? In some

instances, in rural areas in particular, when these evictions take place it's because farmers want to set up game farms and amalgamate their smaller farm plots. This is relatively speaking, when I say small. When they are put together they just fence their whole land off and introduce some game farming. Those who may have seen that a continuum of commercial farming is not taking them anywhere, they change land use from live stock or cash crop farming to game farming because they know northerners, and other people are still fascinated to see some wild life roaming around Africa.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: Remember the huge out-spring of xenophobia in South Africa? Abahlali, unlike the government, chose to actually intervene by speaking out and opposing the xenophobic attacks. Why did you feel as shackdwellers, that it was important for you to intervene in those xenophobic attacks?

ZODWA NSIBANDE: As the movement, we feel that our brothers and sisters from other countries are becoming the victims because of the government. They were the nearest targets to the locals but the end frustration was directed to the government because of the slow pace of service delivery, and because of the not fulfilling the promises to the community.

PAMBAZUKA NEWS: To end up, what I would like to ask all of you – I know this is quite a difficult question – what do you think is the most transformational achievement or success that you have had as a movement, and David, as an organisation, over, say, the past three/four years?

MNIKELO NDABANKULU: A long time before Abahlali were born, everybody thought that people from the informal settlements, also have informal minds. We showed them that we can be poor in life, but God does not automatically make us poor in mind.

Before Abahlali was born there was nothing on the news about the shackdwellers, even the media did not pay any attention, it was a forgotten society. It was only important during elections, for politicians to go into the settlements to catch their votes, and then forget about them. But now there is a lot of on coming news from the shackdwellers.

Before Abahlali, I never thought that an ordinary shackdweller can stand and say; 'government you are wrong!' and take the government to court. Although we are still waiting for the results of the Slums Act to see whether we are winning or not, we have 99.9 per cent hope that we are going to win because we know that the constitution is on our side. We have won numerous cases of evictions when the municipalities just went and demolished and evicted in the

settlement without an order of court. We took them to court with our lawyers, and have won 10 out of 10 of these cases against the government!

Also when the government tried to ban our protest march we took them to court and we won! We never had the situation of losing a case against the government because in most cases, the poor people are honest and are victims of the violation of their right. They have never done anything, which is outside of the law of the country. This is a big achievement because in the history of South Africa, never have ordinary people taken the government to court and enjoyed a victory over it, a victory like we are hoping to enjoy when the results of the Slums Act case come out.

DAVID NTSENG: I will quote the words of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement's president S'bu Zikode. Three words come to mind: 'Reclaiming, humanity, action'. That's how he describes the work of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement and that reflects the project to transform the society. When the movement starts off, as Mnikelo says, forgotten citizens, that conscientise people about who they are, what they are about.

I also quote our catholic brother, Philipo Mondini who is back in Italy, when he said in one of the gatherings: 'When I see people from the shacks, I see God, because not only are they made in the image of God but in them lives God. Whoever smashes their homes, smashes God's homes, whoever puts them in prison, is putting God in prison.' This talks about a bigger thing, that addresses who our society is? When you ask who our society is, what does the movement see as the responsibility of those that are leading our society? Now, if anything sounds, proves to be inhumane and dehumanising, this organisation stands its ground to reclaim humanity in action.

ZODWA NSIBANDE: We have achieved a lot because the main idea, was to reclaim the dignity of the people that are living in the informal settlements. This has been a success and the dignity of the people in the settlements has been reclaimed their voices have been brought back.

29 SEPTEMBER 2009

Essay · S'bu Zikode

The ANC Has Invaded Kennedy Road

The ANC has invaded Kennedy Road. We have been arrested, beaten, killed, jailed and made homeless by their armed wing. This is what it took for Yacoob Baig and Jackson Gumede to finally take back the settlement.

This was a very well organised crime. It is not just an attack on the KRDC. It is not just an attack on AbM. It is an attack on our politic.

This attack is an attempt to suppress the voice that has emerged from the dark corners of our country. That voice is the voice of ordinary poor people. This attack is an attempt to terrorise that voice back into the dark corners. It is an attempt to turn the frustration and anger of the poor onto the poor so that we will miss the real enemy.

Yacoob Baig says that 'harmony' has been restored. For the ANC harmony means their power and our silence. For us our silence means evictions, shack fires, children dying of diarrhoea and the organised contempt that we face day after day. Therefore we have to speak. We have to break the 'harmony' that is our silence in the face of our oppression.

Our movement has won many victories. We have forced the state to accept that there will be nothing for us without us. We have forced the state to accept that they must negotiate our development with us. Our politics is a common politics. We have, in many places, raised the common politics above the politicians' politics. For this some politicians hate us.

And we must not forget that we have exposed the corruption of many senior officials – most recently in Siyanda, eShowe, Mpola and Howick. We have also exposed how 'housing delivery' is actually a form of oppression breaking up communities and forcing people into ghettos far outside the cities. We have done this most famously with our case in the Constitutional Court against the Slums Act. That judgment will be coming out very soon.

For all these reasons the strength of the movement, the strength of those who are supposed to be weak and silent and powerless, is taken as a threat.

Our crime is a simple one. We are guilty of giving the poor the courage to organise the poor. We are guilty of trying to give ourselves human values. We are guilty of expressing our views.

Those in power are determined not to take instruction from the poor. They are determined that the people shall not govern.

What prospects are there for the rest of the country if the invasion of Kennedy Road is overlooked?

In this time when we are scattered between the Sydenham jail, hospitals, the homes of relatives and comrades, or even sleeping in the bushes in the rain, we are asking for solidarity. In this time when we do not know if the state will allow us to continue to exist we are asking for solidarity. In this time when we do not know if we will also be attacked in Motala Heights or Siyanda or anywhere else we are asking for solidarity.

Our message to the movements, the academics, the churches and the human rights groups is this:

We are calling for close and careful scrutiny into the nature of democracy in South Africa.

Sibusiso Innocent Zikode

President of Abahlali baseMjondolo (and, consequently, political refugee)

1 OCTOBER 2009

Interview · Mazwi Nzimande (with others)

Abahlali on Democracy Now!

Democracy Now!, 1 October 2009. Broadcast transcript.

JUAN GONZALEZ: We end today with a look at South Africa, which is poised to host the World Cup, the premier international football competition, next year. While Durban completes the finishing touches on its new stadium, thousands of the city's poor who live in sprawling informal settlements are threatened with eviction by the ruling African National Congress's, or ANC's, slum clearance policies.

Late this Saturday night, an armed gang of some forty men attacked an informal settlement on [Durban's] Kennedy Road killing at least two people and destroying thirty shacks. A thousand people have reportedly been driven out of the settlement. Eyewitnesses say the attackers acted with the support of the local ANC structures. Members of the Durban Shack Dwellers Movement, which brings together tens of thousands of shack dwellers to demand their right to fair housing in the city, were holding a youth camp when they were attacked.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, last month we interviewed a young leader from the Shack Dwellers Movement, eighteen-year-old Mazwi Nzimande. He is president of the movement's youth league. He has been displaced by this latest attack. He's currently in hiding. We also spoke with Reverend Mavuso Mbhekiseni from the Rural Network in South Africa. They were in the US speaking out against the anti-poor policies in post-apartheid South Africa.

I began by asking Mazwi to explain the Shack Dwellers Movement.

MAZWI NZIMANDE: The Shack Dwellers Movement is a movement that was made by the poor people, the people who were waiting for housing since 1994. It's the movement that is made out of poor people only, because the poor people are feeling betrayed, so they decided to join hands together and approach the government and make the government to be aware. They say there are still poor people in South Africa, because they feel that they are the forgotten citizens of the country. The only thing that is being remembered is to build stadiums for

the 2010 World Cup. They don't talk about the poor people anymore. They're only talking about promoting the country, so the poor people decided to join hands together and approach the government and say, "Hey, we are still existing in the country, so we are still waiting for those houses."

JUAN GONZALEZ: What is the [Slums] Act? When was it passed? And what has been the impact of it on the poor communities of South Africa?

MAZWI NZIMANDE: The Slums Act was first a bill in 2006, when the Shack Dwellers Movement was invited at the provincial parliament in Pietermaritzburg, when it was still a bill, you know. So we were invited to come and observe while they were introducing the Slums Act. And it has not been good for the shack dwellers, because the Slums Act says you should not resist eviction. If you resist evictions, you might be fined 20,000 rand or being sentenced at five years. So, most of us cannot afford that, because we want to be in our shacks, we want to be close in the city. I mean, that's what we want. We want the government to provide houses where the people are, close to our working place, close to our schools, close to the hospital. Plus, we have a right to be close to the city.

AMY GOODMAN: Isn't South Africa unusual in that it has housing as a human right written into the Constitution?

MAZWI NZIMANDE: It does, yes. But now, it seems like it's working for certain individuals, not for the poor people, because you will be surprised and shocked when you go to South Africa and see thousands and thousands of informal settlements. And then we just don't understand, because, I mean, since 1994, these people are still on the waiting list. Each informal settlement has about 7,000 people. And in our movement in Durban only, we have fourteen settlements, and each of those have about 7,000, 5,000. And you will just find it so hard to understand why at this time of the year.

AMY GOODMAN: Mazwi mentioned the World Cup. It's almost the only way we talk about South Africa today in the United States. But what exactly is happening to people as a result of the World Cup, which is watched by over a billion people and is going to be in South Africa for the first time?

REV. MAVUSO MBHEKISENI: Our government is concerned about developing spaces, not population development. So, as they develop spaces, they move away people. They say people should move away, so to pave way for the development, to help it. So, by building these stadia, they are moving people

away from the cities and away from their original places, even in rural areas, because they want to build malls, big malls. They want to build freeways, so that, to us, this World Cup is a mass eviction of poor people. So that's what is happening in South Africa. We are not going to live and stay in the stadia. We are not going to sleep there. So they are destroying our houses or our homes. Because we can afford those homes, so they say—they call them slums, and so we are evicted. So we are saying this World Cup is accompanied by evictions and destruction of our own—and demolishing of our own homes.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And when you say they are moved out, does the government—where are they being moved to? Is the government providing them adequate housing where they're being moved to?

REV. MAVUSO MBHEKISENI: Government is promising them that they are going to have houses about fifty kilometers away from the cities, only to find that there are no houses. You will be moved to transitional relocation camps, where they say you have to wait for some—it's ten years before you get housing.

AMY GOODMAN: Give us a historical perspective. Reverend Mavuso, you were there before the first democratically elected government of Nelson Mandela. You were there under apartheid. Compare that to today.

REV. MAVUSO MBHEKISENI: There is now a widening gap between the rich and the poor. During apartheid, it was the whites and blacks. So, now that is the type of apartheid that we see now, that people are getting more richer, and people are getting more poor.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you ever get a chance to meet Nelson Mandela? You're eighteen years old, but President Mandela is still alive.

MAZWI NZIMANDE: I mean, I didn't get a chance to see the days of Nelson Mandela, but, I mean, I'm hearing things that he's such a wonderful man, he's such a good man. You know, he has that powerful voice. But I don't believe, because he is still alive, but there are informal—there are shack dwellers in South Africa, but he hasn't said anything. There is that huge gap. Mandela is up there, and the people are down there, so it's very hard to, like, get a chance to meet with Nelson Mandela. Even the current president, I haven't met him, you know, because those people are high up. The only time they come to the communities is when the elections are going to take place. And they come with bodyguards. So, for me, it's hard to understand why does a man that we must elect as a president come to our community, has bodyguard. That means he fear

us, you know. So how can we access the man who comes with bodyguard in our communities? I don't understand.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And if it's true, as you say, that there's been so many problems in terms of the widening gap in the country, why is the ANC leadership still receiving such huge support at the polls?

REV. MAVUSO MBHEKISENI: People were educated, through what we call domestication, that they should love one party, because that party gave them—will give them freedom. This is a majority party of—and it is a black government, so they say if we vote for another party, then it means it will not be democracy. They think democracy comes with the ANC. So they think ANC is democracy.

AMY GOODMAN: Rev. Mavuso of the Rural Network in South Africa and eighteen-year-old Mazwi Nzimande, president of the Shack Dwellers Movement's youth league. We only have fifteen seconds, but he is now in hiding after a major attack on their shacks this weekend, Saturday night.

Mazwi, what happened? Very quickly, who did this? Who attacked people, killed two and hurt the shacks?

MAZWI NZIMANDE: Thank you. Firstly, we were not there, but on Sunday during the day, we went back to Kennedy Road to check on how things were, how the conditions were. I mean, it became clear when we saw the ANC guys who were there, you know, enjoying themselves, having that gathering. Even the [inaudible]

AMY GOODMAN: We have five seconds. We have five seconds.

MAZWI NZIMANDE: Even, I mean, so clear, it's the ANC, because they have mentioned it, that they want the whole informal settlement to be known to the ANC [inaudible]

AMY GOODMAN: Mazwi Nzimande, we have to leave it there.

22 OCTOBER 2009

Lecture · S'bu Zikode

Party Politic Vs Living Politic in Kennedy Road

UKZN Forum Lecture, 22 October 2009

The Kennedy Road settlement, like all other Abahlali baseMjondolo settlements, has been embarking on a living politic.

This politic is a living politic because it talks about the realities of our democracy – a democracy that serves the interests of a minority while the majority our people continue to live and to die in inhuman conditions.

Our living politic talks about the fact that shack settlements have been denied life saving basic services such as water and sanitation. It talks about the fact that there is no road access, no refuse collection and no electricity. It talks about the fact that people's lives need services like electricity.

It is a politic that talks about the fact that the intelligence of the majority has been denied while all decisions are taken by a minority.

It is a politic that says that everyone has been created in the image of God and that therefore we are all equal.

It is a politic that says that everyone in our society counts be they rich or poor and without regard to what language they speak or to where they or their ancestors were born.

It is a politic of truth that can be seen by anyone driving through Kennedy Road. Anyone can see that poverty, unemployment and hopelessness remain a challenge. It is a fact that cannot be denied that crime remains high and that ethnicity – the politic of some that is used to attack the politic of all – remains a challenge.

But the Kennedy Road Development Committee (KRDC) and Abahlali baseMjondolo have been working very hard to build a politic of all – a politic that does not divide the poor.

We have long opposed the criminalisation of all shack dwellers and demanded fair and supportive policing for shack dwellers. When the state stopped criminalising our movement and agreed to negotiate with us after the March

on Mlaba in late 2007 we were able to begin negotiations with the Sydenham Police. We eventually developed a partnership to work against crime. This partnership was one of the fruits of our struggle.

All of these efforts of years have been turned into a party politic, a politic from the top down, a dirty politic, a politic full of fear, threats, arrests and death. Therefore what is happening in Kennedy Road is no longer a living politic that starts from the lives and thinking of ordinary people. Most people are confused and frightened. They cannot tell you who is the real enemy or why the poor must now fight the poor. It is a party politic.

The attack on our movement in Kennedy Road was planned at a very high political level. It was planned at a level that has the power to remote the South African Police Services. It was planned at a level that can send war lords to destroy our movement. It was planned at a level that has tax payers' money to sponsor buses to bring our attackers to court to try and render our comrades accused of murder guilty before they go to trial – to demand that they must not be given bail and must be made to stay in Westville Prison even though no court has found them guilty of a crime.

The reasons for the attack on our movement are simple.

The politicians are trying to hide the simple truth of what has happened and what continues to happen. They are trying to blame those who were attacked by shifting the focus onto the KRDC, onto Abahlali and onto our offices.

The state itself does not talk about the dead people. It doesn't talk anything about the people who have been displaced. It doesn't talk anything about the people who have had their homes destroyed. It doesn't talk anything about the whereabouts of our children, many of whom are schooling. It doesn't talk anything about the people who threatened with death for speaking the truth about their lives.

The Disaster Management unit in the City has not responded to this crisis because it has been instructed not to respond.

Our struggle was criminalised from 2006 until the end of 2007. But we did not give up. We stood firm confident that our struggle was grounded in the truth of our lives. After 2007 our movement became a platform for poor people to engage the state. We developed some good relationships including with the head of the Human Settlements Department in the provincial government. At our last meeting with her on the 27th of August a task team was set up to investigate

the evidence that we had brought forward of misallocation, mismanagement and corruption in housing. As a result of this some high level officials are being investigated as we speak.

By constant struggle in and outside of the courts Abahlali baseMjondolo has successfully stopped most illegal evictions in the City. We insist that good land must be used to house the poor. Others insist that that same land must be used for the rich to become richer. Every time that we stop an eviction we make powerful enemies.

Abahlali baseMjondolo has taken the Provincial Department of Housing to the highest court of our land – to the Constitutional Court to challenge the already buried KwaZulu-Natal Slums Act. We know that this has angered most high profile officials and politicians.

The attack on Abahlali baseMjondolo is aimed at destroying our movement, its leadership, its membership and its head quarters in Kennedy Road. The aim is to replace our elected structures with a ‘comrade KRDC’ that will take its instruction from the party and not from the people – from the top and not from below.

I want to take this opportunity to express some words of gratitude to all of you that have given a moments’ silence to Kennedy Road. I want to thank all of you that have contributed to our struggle from the date when we first made our submission against the Slums Bill up until today. It has been a long journey from the shacks to the Constitutional Court and we have not walked the distance alone.

We have returned home from the Constitutional Court to a war on our movement and on our democracy. I want to thank all of you who have been collecting food hampers, making donations, organising protests and sending statements of solidarity.

I want to thank the Students for Law and Social Justice and all the students and academics around the country that have rallied to support our movement and to defend our democracy.

If the attack on our movement is not resisted there will be new attacks on other movements and other people. When you stand with us you also take a stand for your own future.

S’bu Zikode

18 NOVEMBER 2009

Presentation · Mnikelo Ndabankulu

We Want the Full Loaf (not just a child support grant)

Development Action Group workshop, Cape Town, 18 November 2009

The Slums Act

The Slums Act first came to our ears as a Bill in 2006. The information about this Bill came to us indirectly through our sources.

It was clear that we needed to discuss this Bill as Abahlali. M'du Hlongwa and I both went to the Government Communications to ask a copy. We had two copies and we shared these copies and we analysed the Bill. We had a number of meetings where we read the Bill together going one line by one line.

Before we could get into the Bill the name of the Bill was already frustrating us as it talked about shack settlements as 'Slums'. Yes our communities are under developed and they need development. That is obvious. But they are not 'slums'. A slum is a place where there is nothing good, where there is no survival. We immediately thought that it is wrong to call our communities 'slums'. We immediately thought that the government must recognise that our settlements are communities – communities that are underdeveloped due to neglect by the government – and that they need to be developed by that same government. They need to be made formal – not to be eradicated.

When we got into the Bill we found that it contradicts with the Constitution. It was taking away the small rights that the shack dwellers have. PIE protects us against evictions. Section 26 of the Constitution protects us against evictions. Not all evictions can be stopped with PIE and Section 26 but most can be stopped because almost all evictions are illegal.

We were not impressed that while we were having little rights these little rights were now being taken away from us. This Bill was taking us from little to nothing.

This Bill was making it a criminal offence to resist evictions whereas the Constitution allows us to resist. This Bill would mandate five years in prison or a R20 000 fine for resisting an eviction. No shack dweller can afford R20 000. If you are arrested and jailed for raising your concern about your right to keep living where you are you are then you are not living in a democracy. Nobody in their sober senses would just fold their arms, clap their hands or ululate while their home is destroyed. Therefore this Bill would make all shack dwellers to be criminals.

We saw that the Bill would also be an attack on backyard dwellers, on those who have utilised unused formal houses. The Bill was putting too much pressures on the owners of unused land and vacant houses that had been occupied to get rid of people. It was forcing the land and house owners to evict people. One clause said that landowners must make sure that their land is protected by fences and security personnel. Not all landowners are happy that we have occupied their land but they were forced by the Constitution to accept our occupation.

At that time we were already being evicted by the Municipality but those evictions were illegal. We were having good success in stopping them by going to court. We saw that this Act would give the Municipality a stand to justify their evictions – to make what was illegal become legal.

At that time the Municipality was already taking people to transit camps. We had already discovered that they are very, very bad compared to the structures that we have built ourselves. They are very bad compared to the communities that we have made ourselves. The transit camps are built in a train style. There is one wall to separate you from your neighbour. If he is a drunkard you will suffer too. People are very badly affected.

The Bill wanted to make transit camps lawful and to force our eviction to these camps. It did not specify where the transit camps would be. You might be here in Sydenham but find that you are taken to Chatsworth, to a place that you don't know. Forced removals destabilise workers, schoolers and congregants.

When we settled in these areas, when we chose these areas those areas that the government is planning to force us to were there too. But those areas were last on our list. In fact they were not even on our list. Chatsworth and Verulam were always there but we didn't choose them for a reason, for a good reason. We will always reject any programme of reruralisation.

For all these reasons we nicknamed the Slums Bill as the South African Operation Murambatsvina.

We saw that our citizenship would expire as soon as this Bill was passed.

We decided to tell the government that on the analysis of the organised poor this Bill was anti-poor. We decided to tell the government that they must implement their Breaking New Ground policy because it is more pro-poor.

Our opposition to the Bill was widely known. The government had to have a public hearing and they decided to have it at Kennedy Road so that they could say that we had agreed to it. Lennox Mabaso [at the time the spokesperson for the then MEC for Housing in the Province, Mike Mabuyakhulu] sms'd [S'bu] Zikode to say that they were coming to Kennedy. The day of the hearing came. They first sent a police helicopter. It was flying very low over the settlement from early in the morning. Then they sent in many, many police. Then ANC and SANCO supporters came in Municipal buses. Then the politicians came in a long line of big cars.

The ANC and SANCO supporters were told that they were being taken to register for houses. For this reason the government's own supporters were very frustrated at being told one thing while in fact the agenda for the meeting was different.

Only Abahlali could contest the government officials because we were the only ones that had read the Bill. But the protocol was very strict. You were only allowed to speak if you could quote from a sub-section of the Bill first but they didn't give copies of the Bill to anyone.

The reason why the Municipality could pass its electricity policy in 2001 that denies electricity to shack dwellers and condemns us to fire is that in those days there were no vocal organisations like Abahlali. Without Abahlali the Slums Act would have walked free.

We criticised the Bill very heavily that day despite their attempts to suppress us with protocol. One politician invited us to parliament to debate the Bill there. We went there, to Pietermaritzburg. When we got there we found Mabuyakhulu reading the Bill like a Pastor in church. There was no opportunity for questions. Then we were told to go out for lunch and that we could debate the Bill after lunch. But when we came back in they just said that the Act is passed and everyone clapped. The opposition parties were not interested and

did not oppose the Bill. Immediately the media were phoning us and asking for comment. We were still waiting for the debate and were caught by surprise.

We walked out of the parliament and we told our comrades what had happened. It was decided to call our legal experts. We put our proposal on the table which was that they should take this Act to court because it was violating the Constitution. They listened to us and said that they would check if this was a winnable battle and then report back to us. They reported that the battle was winnable and we filed the papers.

At first it was proposed that Judge Nicholson would hear the case. But at the last minute Judge Vuka Tshabalala decided to take the case. We wondered about the independence of the judicial system. We know that he is a big comrade of the ruling party.

At the Durban High Court the lawyers of the government presented their side of the story. Vuka Tshabalala listened well and even encouraged them from time to time. When it came to the turn of our lawyers to speak Vuka Tshabalala would attack our lawyers. He wouldn't listen and he wouldn't let them speak. Sometimes he would sleep for 20 minutes. Once he took the last sip of water from his glass, fell asleep, then woke up and tried to drink the same water again. Even the man who says 'Silence in the Court' laughed. A man who had to take a serious decision on people's lives slept in the court. We were not happy. That is why we called him Lala Tshabalala.

Once the decision came that we had lost the battle the government were too excited talking everywhere about a 'landmark decision'. We told our members that they mustn't worry. That they must wait and see who will have the last laugh. We told our people we had options – the court of appeal or the Constitutional Court. We decided to go to the Constitutional Court – straight to the Cup Final.

We filed our papers and we went to the Constitutional Court. We went to the court in two buses and a taxi. We travelled the whole night. When we arrived there the way that we were treated made us feel that we are still citizens of this nation. We were given water. There were video screens for those who could not fit into the court. Our own independent media were allowed into the court with their cameras. We were happy with the way that the judges attacked both legal teams. It was very fair. And our lawyers could respond very well to all the questions from the judges. The government lawyers could not respond

to all the questions. They even moved out before the hearing was over. They were already surrendering because they could feel the heat. On the basis of our own assessment of the court proceedings we were confident that we would be enjoying a victory. Everybody was confident. The Mail & Guardian wrote an article called 'Shack dwellers' victory bus'.

We were told to wait for three months. Three months came and we heard nothing. We kept on discussing. We were concerned that Pius Langa was retiring. Personally I expected Dikgang Moseneke to take over as it was clear that he is the best judge. But Sandile Ngcobo was appointed. I was worried. I don't call him a judge. I call him a comrade judge [a comrade of the ANC]. We were worried that comrade judges would not be ready to embarrass their comrades.

But when we were called back to the court Langa, Moseneke and Ngcobo were all there. The judgment was overdue but the result was great for Abahlali. We were not surprised. We expected victory because we knew that on this matter the Constitution was on our side. If we had lost we were going to just burn the constitution document outside the court.

Section 16 was found inconsistent with the Constitution. This was also our analysis at the very beginning. The government was told to pay all legal costs. The costs were around R250 000. I wished that the money could come from the salaries of Mabuyakhulu, Mabaso and [then Minister of Housing Lindiwe] Sisulu who all endorsed the Act and congratulated themselves so highly after Lala Tshabalala's judgment.

The perpetrators should suffer – not the people who pay their taxes to the state. That money is the people's money.

It was not just an Abahlali victory. It was a national victory as all provinces were planning similar Acts.

We will always appreciate those church leaders, academics, legal experts and activists that stood on our side during the darkness of this Act through to the brightness of our victory. We will always salute these people.

A few weeks after our court victory against the Slums Act we made a big celebration in the Richmond Farm transit camp where victims of the Act have been staying in a tin town. We buried these kinds of communities when we buried the Slums Act and so we had to celebrate our victory with the victims of this Act. We couldn't take the Constitutional Court to the people but we could take the celebration to the people.

The Kennedy Road Attacks

The Kennedy Road attacks puts the faith of the democracy of the Republic of South Africa on a water bridge. We can't guarantee the reality of the theoretical democracy that we are told that we are living in.

We do know for a fact that the attacks on the Abahlali office, the KRDC [Kennedy Road Development Committee] members and the Abahlali leaders living in Kennedy Road were planned by the ruling party.

It is a fact that since Abahlali commenced in 2005 the ruling party and the local ANC activists at ward level couldn't get hold of the Kennedy Road community.

Many people, including ruling party members, had to dance to the Abahlali tune because it was meaningful to the people – even to them. Abahlali was speaking about their real concerns – about water, electricity, houses, land and the right to remain in the city. The political party resolutions are always too far from the people. Abahlali was of the people, by the people and for the people and therefore always very close to the people. The politics of land and housing is a living politics. It is a people's politics and the people knew exactly what they were fighting for.

Councillor Baig was not happy with the success of Abahlali and the failure of his party's reputation. In 2005 Obed Mlaba said 'never mind about the mushrooming movement it will be nowhere to be found after the elections.' Four years later we were much stronger. We were not a mushroom but a big river that gets stronger as it gets closer to the sea.

The government was forced to sit down with us and to make meaningful engagement. In the end we signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide services to 14 settlements and to upgrade three where they were via Breaking New Ground. It was a historic breakthrough.

But then the Slums Act victory made some politicians to be very angry. We were the first community organisation in KZN to take the government to the Constitutional Court. Questions remained in the party: "Who do these people think they are?". It was decided that: "They must be sorted out!".

A strategy was made to make the people in Kennedy Road to fight each other. Most of the KRDC have lived in Kennedy Road for twenty years or longer. They were all elected. Everyone who is elected can be recalled if there is a problem by making an emergency AGM and holding new elections. But someone came

and told some people that the elected committee, their neighbours, were now people that must be killed.

We feel very sorry for people who can be used in this way – people who don't know who their real enemy is. The ANC were prepared to participate in any project to destroy Abahlali and to teach its leaders a lesson. In the end the project that they chose was a Pondo/Zulu tribal war.

Zulufication was inspired by Polokwane and the mobilisation for a 100% Zulu boy. Many people were happy with this. These people started to label those Zulus who didn't support Zulufication as spies or sell outs. They prepared for a political war between COPE and the ANC. All targeted people were called COPE. All independent movements, like Abahlali, were labelled as COPE so that they could be attacked.

And the decision by the Safety & Security Committee to make ten o'clock the closing time on the shebeens – a decision take to reduce tribal tensions that are escalated by alcohol abuse, gave the ANC the opportunity to mobilise the shebeen owners against the KRDC. They were very strategic to make the shebeen owners to support their attack. The shebeen owners fought against the community for their own interests. But the question of shebeen closing times was not the real issue.

The real politics is clearly revealed in the fact that Pres [S'bu Zikode] and Vice [Mashumi Figlan] have never been members of the Safety & Security Committee and they were also attacked.

And anyone who was not happy with the Safety & Security Committee could have requested a quick AGM to elect a new committee. There was no reason to kill the volunteers. Why didn't they elect a new committee? It is because they were making a political attack.

The Drop-in-Centre served thousands of people with Aids and other sick people too. It is not operating any more. The crèche was operating on behalf of parents so that their children would be safe and educated while they were at work. It is not operating any more. The hall is not being looked after any more. There is long grass growing around it now. There could be snakes and other wild reptiles there. The library is gone.

After the attack the ANC said that it was not right that people had to go through the KRDC to get the hall for marriages and funerals. They were forgetting that the KRDC was elected every year and that they must maintain and

clean and secure the hall. They must fix the broken windows, cut the grass, buy cleaning equipment and get paint and chairs. There is nothing wrong with asking people to make a small payment to use the hall for marriages and funerals. This is where the KRDC got the money to run the hall so that it was kept in a good condition for the whole community.

The really killers are left free and their victims are in jail. The Kennedy 13 are the same people whose houses were vandalised. The house of Zikode was demolished after the Kennedy Road 13 were arrested. The really perpetrators were never arrested.

As soon as Abahlali was chased out the ruling party moved in and launched its own committee. That fact shows clearly that the target was for the ruling party to take over Kennedy Road. That was the ultimate goal. They will regret what they have done when the truth comes out through the independent enquiry that we are calling for. We are confident that the truth will be revealed in this enquiry.

Now the police have attacked our people in Pema Ridge. The police will always attack us when they think that we are weak. They will only respect us when they can see that we are strong. They take shack dwellers as nothing. We are their playground.

After the attacks in Kennedy Road there was solidarity from many organisations, NGOs and activists. They all condemned the attacks. But my evaluation shows that international solidarity is more than local solidarity. We are not forgetting the efforts of the church leaders who have gone to court with us, the students that have picketed, the academics that have signed petitions. We really appreciate their support and we won't forget it. But these efforts are still less than the international solidarity. Our international friends picketed South African embassies in England, in New Zealand and in America.

So we call on those people who claim to be pro-poor to act pro-poor. We call on local activists and organisations to take a stand. In a situation like the one that we are in now everyone must make their choice and stick with it. You are either on the side of the oppressed or you are on the side of the oppressors. You are either with the government or you are with the people. We do not like people who will not take a side. Everyone must take a side.

We appreciate solidarity and we would appreciate support to continue to us and to other oppressed organisations.

The Full Loaf

We have taken one victory and suffered one defeat. But we will keep going. No one ever said that struggle is easy.

We have always been clear about our struggle. Every person is a person and every person must count the same. This is obvious. But we do not count. Therefore we have to be out of the order that oppresses us. We have to rebel. Everyone must have the full loaf of bread that each person needs to live well. Service delivery is just trying to keep the people happy with one slice of bread when in fact a person needs the whole loaf. It is the same with human rights. Having the human right to a house is not the same as having a house. Of course if you don't have any bread then you must struggle for that one slice. But our struggle does not stop there. After you have won one slice you struggle for the next slice up until you have the whole loaf. Only then can you relax. Our struggle is not only for service delivery or human rights. Our struggle is for the full loaf. It is important that this is clear to everybody.

Thank you.