

Abahlali baseMjondolo

Speeches and Writings

Volume Two

2010–2013





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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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15 APRIL 2010

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Really, it is a Shame

Daily News, as 'Hear the Voice of the Poor'

South Africans are facing tough times. It is a time when there is no humanity, a time when no one in government is interested to listen to your story if you are a poor person. There are good thinkers in this country, but if their ideologies are coming from the bottom up, from poor communities, no one is prepared to listen carefully.

A good example is what took place in the Kennedy Road shack settlement on the night of 26 September 2009. An armed group of people decided to get rid of the KRDC (Kennedy Road Development Committee), elected community leaders, and the movement of Abahlali baseMjondolo in Kennedy Road.

I was one of the victims. They came to my shack banging, trying to break my door. They were calling me “imPondo,” saying “We are here to kill you, ImPondo.” They were saying also that Abahlali President S’bu Zikode imposed the amaPondo over amaZulu.

After the attacks, an Honorable MEC said that the armed people were trying to deliver themselves from autocratic rule under Abahlali. After the attacks, a politician from the eThekweni Housing Department said that people from Eastern Cape in Kennedy Road are doing a tribal dance known as imfene, and that he only knows imfene in this province as associated with witchcraft.

Politicians are always encouraging people to go back to their roots, to be proud of what they are, to celebrate the day of heritage. But, surprisingly, the very same politicians use hate speech, like when they say a dance by people from the Eastern Cape is associated with witchcraft.

I want to know why these people decided (if we were wrong, autocratic or oppressive) to take law into their own hands. I’m always asking myself that question.

In other cases of this nature, if people decided to take law into their own hands, government intervenes to help those who are displaced. But, in this case,

we are still displaced and exiled in our own country, a country that we fought for. Even the police, in this case, decided not to worry themselves about the attacks.

The government always discourages people from taking the law into their own hands. But, in this case, we just heard those in power encouraging the actions of armed people.

Instead of discouraging the armed people from taking the law into their own hands, discouraging them from destroying our homes, and taking our belongings, the politicians said that the armed people were trying to deliver themselves from the autocratic rule of Kennedy leaders. There was not even one word from the government condemning their actions.

Why? Whose country is this? Does this country belong to criminals? If so, where do the people belong?

The poor people in Kennedy were organized by means of democratic structures with the purpose of engaging the government. We were not organised by means of carrying weapons, threatening others, and destroying their homes and belongings. Is there anything wrong with poor people being involved in their own futures? Is there also anything wrong if poor people are organizing themselves in the name of humanity?

Now the Kennedy 5, members of Abahlali who committed no crime, are still behind bars. It looks like their case will take a very long time. The Magistrate admitted that there was a political interference, and that worries me. I want to know what about those who destroyed our homes and stole our belongings: why are they not behind bars?

I also was disappointed on the 17 Feb 2010 when I visited the Sydenham Police Station to open a case about what happened that night of the Kennedy attacks. I first went to CR Swart to open a case, and they instructed me to go to my nearest police station, the Sydenham Police station. I told the policemen at CR Swart that my aim was to avoid going to the Sydenham police because the situation was so tense, and I was not sure of my safety.

When I arrived at the Sydenham Police Station, I noticed that not even one officer was wearing a name tag, and that worried me a lot because it is not good to talk to somebody you don't know. Then a police officer asked, "Can I help you?" I came closer, and I told him what I was there for. Then he asked me where I have been all this time, and I told him. Then he said, "My man, I see

you are here to play and I got no time to play.” At the time, he was shouting and everyone was staring at me and laughing.

I was so disappointed and many questions came to my mind. Where did the people who destroyed our shacks get their mandate? The police know that we lost everything, but there is no one behind bars for doing something so unacceptable.

Is it yet uhuru, or is it not yet? How can anyone survive like this? Why in your own country are you treated as an animal? Why are we still in hiding if our government is still democratic? Academics, church leaders and many in countries overseas urge our government to intervene and to make sure that those who are displaced feel protected, but no one in government listens.

Whose country is this? The aim of Abahlali is not to take over power, but to make sure that this country is for everyone and also that everyone feels as part and parcel of this country.

I’ve been thinking about my child, and the children of all those who are displaced. I’ve been thinking about how to keep them together and make sure that what happened to their parents is not something to be underestimated. What happened is something which we all must roll-up our sleeves and fight. We must all fight for a pure democracy in this country, where everyone is counted as a human being.

It is a shame also when the politicians are asking why there are always violent protests in this beautiful country. But how can the people not get furious? How can they not protest if they are hungry and noticing that those who are supposed to help them are helping themselves?

Some say the reason there are so many so-called ‘service delivery protests’ is because some within the political parties are spoon-feeding the protesters because they want to be nominated in the next municipal election. The government is always saying that someone is telling the people to riot against their councillors, and the reason why they are doing it is that they want to take over as councillors.

That is naive thinking: Do they think poor people don’t see that either there is no service delivery or else it is the wrong kind of delivery, a delivery that oppresses us? Do they think that poor people don’t know how to separate something good from something bad? It is an insult to think there are people spoon-feeding the poor. Do the poor need somebody to tell them about their suffering?

Please, come on, the poor know their problems without any help from anyone. So let us tell you what we need you to do. Now is the time to stop a top-down system and make sure that each and everyone can decide his or her own future. It is our lives and we are the masters of what we are.

One day we will see a difference between those who broke the law and those who were the victims of the system. We all know that the time is slowly coming where this country will belong to all those who live on it. Once that time comes, everybody will experience a difference between petty democracy and a true democracy. I believe that one day this country will be a pure democratic country as long the power always remains with the people. But at the moment these people in power are carrying two flags: a flag of dictatorship and a fake democratic flag.

Ayatya amaxhalanga, amahlungulu abukele!!!

BAHLALI MANYANANI, ELUMANYANWENI KUKHO UMOVUZO.

Lindela S. Figlan: vice president and also a member of ABM.

21 MAY 2010

Essay · Mzonke Poni

The Poor Must Claim the Right to be Housed Within Well Located Land

What does this notion (The Right to the City) means to the poor? This simply means:

- 1. It means improving the quality of life (as the preamble to the Constitution says the government has a duty to ‘improve the quality of life of all citizen and free the potential of each person.
- 2. It will promote social and economic development (as section 152 of the Constitution says local government must provide services to communities in a sustainable way, it must promote social and economic development, and furthers says it must encourage communities and community organizations to be involved in the matters of local government.
- 3. It will respect, promote, protect and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights (as section 7(2) of the Constitution places a duty on the state to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the Rights in the Bill of Rights.

The Right to the City should not be seen as just a demand to be housed within the city but it should be looked at how it will improve the quality of life for the poor. We need to understand that 40% of South Africans are still living below poverty lines and more than 2 millions of South Africans are still living within informal settlements with no tenure security and with possible evictions on their heads.

If 40 % of South Africans are still living below poverty lines, this means that section 21 (1) which says everyone has the right to freedom of movement will only be applicable to a certain class (this means its only the rich people who will only enjoy this right, at the expenses of the poor and be defended by relevant legislations, laws and by laws) and this means the gap between the rich and the poor will continue growing in South Africa.

As long as the South African government continues to undermine the aforementioned rights for the poor, then the poor are left with no option but to

actively take responsibility to ensure that they restore their dignity and improve the quality of their lives.

This can only be done and be achieved not by relying on government any more. We gave them opportunity to deliver services to our communities but 16 years down the line people are still living under appalling conditions with no access to clean water, electricity, toilets and decent houses and our people still continue to die everyday on shack fires, illegal electricity connections and etc.

Now is the time for the poor not to listen at empty promises any more, now is the time for the poor not to be patient any more, now is the time for the poor to do away with party politics and rally behind a united front, now is the time for the poor to do away with useless negotiation, time for negotiation is over, there's no time to talk now is the time for action.

The time to wait for government to build houses for the poor in the city is over now is the time for the poor to house themselves forcefully within the city.

During the 2010 Fifa World Cup here in South Africa, all the poor must stand up and show the world that we are not excited about the World Cup because it is not for the poor but for the rich.

The time to wait for government to identify land for the poor is over. We gave them enough time to do that and they failed but to identify land to build expensive stadiums which will only be used for 1 month and spend lot of billions it was easy for them to do that, and they even evicted many people forcefully just to ensure that they meet Fifa requirements and standards.

And it is clear that this government is not accountable to the poor but to the rich, now it is the time for the poor to occupy empty land within the city during 2010 world cup so that we can show the world if how arrogant our government is when they will evict us and demolish our structures.

It is the time now to occupy their offices and turn them into living space, so that we can show the world if how heartless they are when they throw us out of their offices like dogs.

It is time now for those who were evicted under the bridge within the city to claim back their space so that we can show the world that we are still alive, visible and refused to dumped in the dumping sites which distract our livelihood.

Aluta Continua

21 MAY 2010

Speech · Thembani Ngongoma

Speech in Rome

Press conference to launch the Abahlali baseMjondolo social tour of Italy, Rome, May 2010. Rough notes from the audio recording, not an exact transcript.

In Abahlali there is no “I”, there is only “we” – and I am not going to say my position in Abahlali because that is not important. With Abahlali what matters most is what your neighbour is doing with you. We come from South Africa, in the province of KZN, and a city known as Durban – specifically Siyanda, an informal settlement.

My lovely SA, which has a beautiful constitution that is admired by the world. Most surprisingly, take it from me, with such a beautiful constitution – the highest law of the land – most of the poor people still have to fight for their rights. Why is it like that?

It seems that everywhere, government officials behave in the very same way – as if they landed from outer space and they don’t know the circumstances that the people live in. They pretend they don’t know poverty when they turn away at people’s struggle, they pretend that they know what poverty is when they sit in their offices alone deciding for the people, instead of engaging them.

What amazes me is that the very same people that vote them into power are the very same people that suffer under their leadership – and I don’t know why it is like that. I am supposed to be happy but I am not happy at all. The reason I should be happy is that the FIFA World Cup is coming to my country South Africa, Africa. But I cannot be happy, I cannot be happy because it excludes the majority of the poor people. If we must talk more about the World Cup, we can make the time to talk about that.

I want to go deeper into what Abahlali is and what they stand for. Abahlali are a social movement for the poor, by the poor people. Most of the members live in informal settlements. A thing that amazes me is that, immediately after the attacks in Kennedy Road last year, which were meant to obliterate our movement, we have been joined by poor people living in the flats in the inner city. So instead of collapsing, the organisation is growing bigger. We must share

with you why? I can safely tell you it is because we stand for the reality, we stand for the truth.

We are an organisation that is fighting for social justice. Yes, our country was politically emancipated, but let me tell you, that political liberation was much easier than the fight for social justice in our country. We are fighting the biggest battle – that our government has a meaningful engagement with us, the poor people, the voters. Instead of the government authorities deciding for the people, the people must decide for themselves – the people are the ones who know, and they need to decide what they want and how they want to be treated. We want to be true citizens. At this time, the freedom we have in SA is one-sided. We want to be in charge of our own affairs. We know that this comes with responsibility. We want to be decision-makers and partners with government – not just treated as subjects of the government.

And that is what Abahlali would like to see across the world. We have realised that there is the same problem that is happening globally – not only in South Africa.

We have organised ourselves as the poor peoples movement and it is now beginning to bear fruit. But I can warn you – it is not easy! It comes with blood, tears, and casualties. But that also is unavoidable – it is the only way out of the situation that we are in.

Maybe Brother Filippo has shared with you about how AbM was formed – but let me tell you a few things as well. Can you imagine when the very same people you trusted, the very same people you put into power for you, betray you? Kennedy Road was like any other settlement in SA. One day there was a meeting where the authorities promised residents that they have found land where there will be houses built for the people. And that land was just nearby – across the road. After that meeting, everyone went home smiling, happy that at last something is happening for them. After a week or so, they saw the big tractors to dig the land – and they became excited. They went out of their shacks to see, and began to ask the driver of the tractor some questions. To their disappointment, the work was not for them. The answer was that the land was being prepared for a company that will make bricks, not for housing for the people. How can you work with people who cannot maintain any trust? The people took to the streets, blockaded Umgeni Road – and then the police came in. They did not come just to smile and kiss the people! They tear-gassed, sjambokked and arrested them. And that is why I have said before – the people of

SA must not think that things have changed from the time when the apartheid police abused the people before 1994.

When government people make promises, the police are not called in. But when [at this point Thembanani apologises for becoming emotional and has to pause in his address] when the time comes when they fail to deliver what they promised, and we march to their offices to ask why they have failed, then they bring the police, and then the police become the buffer zone between the promise and the ones who were promised. They are there in an attempt to prevent giving answers to the people.

And after the people of Kennedy Road were brutalised in this way, they went back to the drawing board and decided what they should do for themselves. They had an idea that they should organise because nobody was willing to assist – they realised that they were on their own. And this is how it is – if you don't have money, if you don't have a posh vehicle, and nice big house, nobody will listen to you. And that is why Abahlali was formed as a social movement – to address directly their own issues, in their own settlements, and in their own way.

Perhaps you will think we are asking for mansions to be built for us? – it's not like that! They are only asking for basic services, adequate houses, safe water, basic health services etc – and mind you, it is all there in the Constitution! Most of Abahlali membership face evictions – in the flats and in the settlements – but the Constitution states clearly that there must be meaningful engagement before any such a thing happens. That is the reason we took government to Constitutional Court to challenge the Slums Act. What is amazing is that this case went through 2 courts – first, the High Court in Durban, where we lost our case, and then the Constitutional Court, where we got a ruling in favour of the poor people. Why did we fail in High Court? – because anything to do with this social movement always has political interference – even in the courts of justice. That is the kind of struggle we are facing in everyday lives in South Africa, and that is why I say I am supposed to be happy the World Cup is coming but I am not.

I am also urging everyone who sees the need for social justice to organise – we have a lot to share. Being in a social movement is like being in a war – you have a lot of battles to fight, you win some and you lose some – you only pray that the number of battles you lose equals the number you win. I can say with confidence- we are here to share with the poor people of Italy our victories, but also our failures because we learn from them.

That is all I can say for now – thank you.

24 MAY 2010

Essay · Lindela Figlan

A Poor Man's View on Freedom Day

Mostly South Africans celebrate freedom day. Some they feel free but some do not feel free. Some are told that they are free and get excited because they trust those who tell them that they are free. They still have hope that one day the politicians will recognise them. As hard as it is we all have to face up to the reality that this is a false hope. We have to face up to the need for a second struggle.

There are two kinds of freedom. One kind of freedom is the freedom that every person in the world has inside of themselves. This is the freedom to decide how to respond to the circumstance in which they find themselves. Even under apartheid we all had this freedom. Some people chose the path of courage. Some chose the path of cowardice. But Freedom Day is not about this kind of freedom that comes from inside of people.

Freedom Day is about the kind of freedom that comes from society. One part of that freedom is the freedom that comes from real democracy, the freedom of all people to discuss matters and to make decisions for themselves. In South Africa this freedom has been taken from the poor. It has mostly been taken by the councillors and their committees. But they are supported up to a very high level.

Another part of the freedom that comes from society is about having what you need to be safe in the world and to be able to move through the world doing what you need to do. To enjoy this kind of freedom you must be free from all kinds of discrimination. But this kind of freedom is also dependent on having money or it is dependent on a state or community that can provide the things that people need – things like safe houses, transport, electricity, health care, education, lights on the streets and so on. But when it comes to this kind of freedom the reality is that only the rich, including those in government, are free. So the minority is really free in this way whereas the majority is still under the dark clouds.

On the 27th of April every year you see really very many buses transporting the people to full the stadiums. Some they sleep under the bridges, some they are begging in the city streets, and some they stay in the shacks. If you go to the stadiums to watch you see those in government dancing in front of the poor people. Some of those poor people arrive at the stadium hungry. There is nothing to eat at the stadium if you have no money. When they go to bed that night there will still be nothing to eat.

If you can ask how the government can get these buses you will be very surprised. If you can also ask who is going to pay, and how much, you will find that the money for those buses could pay for at least ten houses for people who are houseless. We have to ask ourselves why the politicians would rather pay for buses to transport houseless people to the stadiums than to pay for houses to house those people.

When you are watching these leaders dancing in front of the poor people you will see the watches on their arms – watches that can house two people who are houseless. And I'm not even talking about their fancy suits, shoes, ties or their also fancy cars. It is incredible how they can waste money on all these pretty things for themselves when the people don't even have what is basic to life.

Those who are left behind now are the descendants of those who decided to fight for their country. They were not willing to leave the land of their ancestors to those who came to confiscate it. Those who accepted colonialism were those who were incorporated in to it. Their descendants are the rich today. Those who resisted were those who were defeated. Because they were not cowards, because they were prepared to die for their land, their descendants are sleeping in the bushes now. Their descendants are left behind now. We are not poor because we are dirty and stupid and lazy. We are poor because our ancestors were defeated. We do not need education from NGOs or the government on how to develop ourselves. We do not need savings groups or training on how to wash our hands. What we need is justice. It is not for nothing that our shirts are red.

Some of those who are left behind go to the stadiums and sing freedom songs with the hope that one day they will be free. The pain and fear that they are feeling is making them to run like headless chickens. This is a very sad situation. You can run to the stadium in hope that the politicians will recognise your suffering

but when they drive off you take the bus back to life in the shade – sleeping under bridges, burning in the shack fires, harassed by the land invasions unit and the police, cleaning and securing the homes of the rich, toiling on the farms for peanuts.

When those who are left behind ask “Where is this freedom that we have been jointly fighting for?” the answer is always: “Be patient comrades. You all know how the white minority government damaged this country. We are trying to solve these problems now but it will take time. We need you to be patient and to be loyal, to root out the trouble makers so that we can continue with development.”

But really if you can count how much money has been wasted on the arms deal, travelgate and the World Cup it will soon become clear to you that this government is not interested in what the people on the ground need. The lives of the poor people are still the same if not becoming worse. Yet we are told that we are free.

On 27 April 2010 the Poor People’s Alliance in KwaZulu-Natal organised our own UnFreedom Day in a place called Babanangu. I was so shocked to see the people in one place living with wild animals. I asked myself “Is this the freedom that we fought for? For people to have to live with wild animals?” Maybe some will think that I am lying but anyone who doubts me can go and see for themselves. There is no clean water there, there are no roads, no schools, no clinic and the people are complaining about the number of cows that they are allowed to store.

The crisis of our country is in the cities too. Some in the shacks they lose their land and homes because of shack fires. But come Freedom Day they go to the stadiums and for those moments as they are singing together there they feel free. But then they must go home.

What I can say is that what is being called freedom in South Africa is a big corruption. I don’t only mean that there is corruption everywhere. I also mean that the idea of what freedom really is has been corrupted. Just look at the fact that there is never any money to develop poor communities but there is all this money for the 2010 World Cup. The government says that we must “feel it, it is here”. All that the poor can feel is what we feel in our real lives – leaking shacks, shack fires, long queues for water, the dangers of life without toilets, evictions,

disconnections, bosses that do not respect our humanity, unemployment, lying and corrupt councillors, a lack of safety for women and crime.

All that I can see is that the money for the poor has been wasted on the World Cup. If this was a government that cared about the poor they would have said to FIFA “Come to our country. We will welcome you. But you must live where our people live, eat where our people eat and play and watch soccer where our people play and watch soccer”. Instead they are attacking the poor, driving us out of the cities, and creating a new and segregated homeland for the rich in which they will hold the World Cup.

How different our country would have been if the government took all the money that it spent on the World Cup and spent it on the poor. How different our country would have been if the government decided to seriously emancipate the people from poverty and from criminals. By criminals I don’t only mean those men that attack women in the bushes where they are forced to seek privacy in the night because they don’t have toilets. I don’t only mean those who wait for us to get paid at the end of the month and then rob us. I also mean those who are committing huge corruption. We should remember that there are degrees in criminology.

I wonder if God can say that all those who died for our freedom can rise again. If they could rise again would they go to the stadiums to watch the politicians dancing in front of the poor? Or would they hide their eyes in disappointment and shame?

All I can say is that the people of this country must force the politicians to stop fighting about tenders. We need what is ours. The land and the wealth of this country must be shared. The politicians must be forced to become the servants of the people. The politicians must stop making excuses about how the white minority government damaged this country. We know that that is true. But we fought for a new government to change this country. We want an end to corruption right now. We want an end to a government that only wants to be the new partners of the old oppressors. We want a country where everybody can be happy and enjoy the fruits of his or her toil. We want a country where everybody can be safe. We want real freedom.

I was in Brazil for a few weeks last year. In Brazil I noticed that they have the same system that we have here. Even the new BRT buses that we are getting here are the same as those that they have in Brazil. Last year I was reading a

paper where it said that some of those people who will lose their jobs for the BRT they are going to be trained as security guards, some are going to be trained to fix the cars and the buses. I was so disappointed to see that some are going to be security guards because I am a security guard. We are so exploited as guards. We are exploited physically, emotionally and financially. This was something laughable when I heard about it. I remembered when one politician laughed at another one saying that his only qualification was to be a security guard. He was undermining all the security guards yet all around him there were guards.

I wonder why they decided to nominate April of all months as Freedom Day. The only thing I know about this month is the first day of it and when the people fill the stadiums I feel like the politicians are fooling the people. There is no reason to say that you are free when you know that you are not.

We as the poor, whether we are in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Brazil or Italy, we have to support each other and give courage to each other so that we can strengthen the freedom that is in us all. We need to strengthen this freedom so that we can use it to struggle for a free society.

To those who feel bad about how we criticise the politicians I can say that if they do good then I will praise that.

16 JULY 2010

Essay · Zodwa Nsibande & S'bu Zikode

Serving our Life Sentence in the Shacks

People all over South Africa have been asking the leaders of Abahlali base-Mjondolo as to why the government continues to ignore the demands of the shack dwellers. They have been asking why after all the marches, statements, reports and meetings the Kennedy Road settlement continues to get burnt down through the endless shack fires. They have been referring in particular to the recent Kennedy Road shack fire on Sunday, 4 July 2010 that took four lives, leaving more than three thousand people displaced and homeless.

Without much more words to explain this continuous tragedy we have replied that in fact the shack dwellers of South Africa are serving a life sentence. Everybody knows that we are the people who do not count in this society. But the truth that must be faced up to is that we have been sentenced to permanent exclusion from this society.

Over the years it has been made clear that the cities are not for us, that the good schools are not for us and that even the most basic human needs like toilets, electricity, safety from fire and safety from crime are not to be met for us. When we ask for these things we are presented as being unreasonable, too demanding and even as a threat to society. If we were considered as people that did count, as an equal part of society, then it would be obvious that the real threat to our society is that we have to live in mud and fire without toilets, without electricity, without enough taps and without dignity.

Waiting for 'delivery' will not liberate us from our life sentence. Sometimes 'delivery' does not come. When 'delivery' does come it often makes things worse by forcing us into government shacks that are worse than the shacks that we have built ourselves and which are in human dumping grounds far outside of the cities. 'Delivery' can be a way of formalising our exclusion from society.

But we have not only been sentenced to permanent physical exclusion from society and its cities, schools, electricity, refuse removal and sewerage systems. Our life sentence has also removed us from the discussions that take place in society. Everyone knows about the repression that we have faced from the state

and now, also, from the ruling party. Everyone knows about the years of arrests and beatings that we suffered at the hands of the police and then the attack on our movement in the Kennedy Road settlement.

We have always said that in the eyes of the state and the ruling party our real crime was that we organised and mobilised the poor outside of their control. We have thought for ourselves, discussed all the important issues for ourselves and taken decisions for ourselves on all the important issues that affect us. We have demanded that the state includes us in society and gives us what we need to have for a dignified and safe life. We have also done what we can to make our communities better places for human beings. We have run crèches, organised clean up campaigns, connected people to water and to electricity, tried to make our communities safe and worked very hard to unite people across all divisions. We have faced many challenges but we have always worked to ensure that in all of this work we treat one another with respect and dignity.

The self-organisation of the poor by the poor and for the poor has meant that all of those who were meant to do the thinking, the discussing and to take decisions on our behalf – for us but without us – no longer have a job. Our decision to build our own future may therefore not be an easy one to accept for those who can no longer continue to take decisions and to speak for us but without us. Some of the people who have refused to accept our demand that those who say that they are for the poor should struggle with and not on behalf of the poor are in the state. Some are in the party. Some are in that part of the left, often in the universities and NGOs, that sees itself as a more progressive elite than those in the party and the state and which aims to take their place in the name of our suffering and struggles.

We call this left a regressive left. For us any leftism outside of the state that, just like the ruling party, wants followers and not comrades and which is determined to ruin any politics that it cannot rule is deeply regressive. We have always and will always resist its attempts to buy our loyalty just as we have always and will always resist all attempts by the state and the ruling party to buy our loyalty. We will also resist all attempts to intimidate us into giving up our autonomy. We will always defend our comrades when they are attacked. Our movement will always be owned by its members. We negotiate on many issues. Where we have to make compromises to go forward we sometimes do so. But on this issue there will never be any negotiation.

We have done a lot for ourselves and by ourselves. But for a long time what we could not succeed in doing for ourselves was to secure good land and decent housing in our cities. We stopped the evictions and we were no longer going backwards but it was a real struggle to go forwards. But we kept pushing and made some small advances here and there. This really offended the authorities in the party. This became very clear and evident when the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal passed the notorious Slums Act, meaning that the shack dwellers would never again have any place in our cities. Our successful challenge to the Slums Act in the Highest Court in the land was a great setback for the government's plan to formalise our life sentence by eradicating our settlements and putting us in the human dumping grounds. The deal that we negotiated with the eThekweni Municipality to upgrade two settlements and to provide basic services to fourteen settlements was another setback to the eradication agenda of the politicians. The recent announcement by the eThekweni Municipality that they will accede to our demand to provide services including, for the first time since 2001, electricity to settlements across the city is another victory of our struggle and another major setback to the eradication agenda. We are slowly but surely defeating the eradication agenda.

As South Africa was hosting the World Cup Abahlali warned that it will not benefit the poorest of the poor in our land. We warned that it would make the poor, poorer and more vulnerable. Leading up to the World Cup there were more evictions and pending court cases in different parts of the country. Poor street traders had their belongings confiscated as they had no permits to sell in restricted zones and the taxi industry suffered the impoundment of their taxis. Stopping the rush to celebrate the World Cup by raising all these questions and condemning these attacks on the poor as immoral and illegitimate has been a slap on the authorities' faces. Although the fact is that all these huge soccer stadiums, hotels and other projects were built by the poor of the poorest they remained outside their benefit. The South African government has overspent its budget in building a 'world class country' and could not match and balance such expenditure with social needs such housing and the provision of the most basic services. The amount that has been spent for the World Cup could have built at least one millions homes for the poor. Although we acknowledge the efforts that have been put into this event we still feel that such effort could have been used to bring basic services and infrastructure to the poor. If that had been the

case then the shack dwellers would not have been affected by these ongoing fires every time.

The truth about the attack on our movement has always been firm and not changing at any stage. We cannot make public comment on matters that are sub judice but our demand for an independent commission of inquiry that will bring the whole story into the light remains unchanged. The Kennedy 5, part of those who are already serving their life sentence in and out of the jails, have now been released from Westville prison. They had already been serving ten months of their punishment without any evidence of guilt being brought to the court and without the court saying anything about their illegal detention. The South African Constitution says there shall be no detention without trial and that a person cannot be detained for more than 24 hours without a proper bail hearing. The fact that, up until the release of the Kennedy 5, this trial was being conducted as a political trial outside of the rule of law even though it was taking place in a court of law tells us something very important about the position of the poor in post apartheid South Africa. Those who have handed a life sentence down to us always want to exclude us from fair and equal access to the courts and the rule of law. When they fail to achieve this through the commodification of the legal system they are willing to actively undermine the system from above.

The movement insists that the people shall govern; this is what the famous Freedom Charter says. Abahlali holds on to that. The strength and the autonomy of the movement compels us all to strive for a just world, a world that is free, a world that is fair and a world that looks after all its creations. We remain convinced that the land and the wealth of this world must be shared fairly and equally. We remain convinced that every person in this world has the same right to contribute to all discussions and decision making about their own future. For us all to succeed we have to be humble but firm in what we believe is right. We have to resist all our jailers, be they in the state, the party or the regressive left, and to take our place as equals in all the discussions.

We also know that the South African government still wants to look good in the eyes of the international communities and that they fear disgrace and shame. They want to show the world Soccer City but hide eTwatwa, Blikkiesdorp, Westville Prison, the red ants and the shack fires all around the country. We wish to thank all the international activists and organisations who have raised their concern against the repression that we have faced, including those

that have organised protests against the South African diplomats in their respective countries.

We hope South Africa will become one of the world's caring countries. We hope that one day our society will be an inspiration rather than a shock to you. As Abahlali we have committed ourselves to achieving this goal. But right now we are serving a life sentence and fighting all those who are trying to keep us imprisoned in our poverty, all those who demand that we know our place – our place in the cities and our place in the discussions. We have recognised our own humanity and the power of our struggle to force the full recognition of our humanity. Therefore we remain determined to continue to refuse to know our place.

Compiled by Zodwa Nsibande and S'bu Zikode

-Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA.

11 OCTOBER 2010

Presentation · S'bu Zikode

Land is a Political Question

Development Action Group national conference, 'Re-imagining the City: A New Urban Order', 11 October 2010

It is very nice to re-imagine the city. We can all start to imagine cities with good housing for everyone and then we can imagine affordable public transport and safe streets with beautiful trees, cool shady parks and welcoming schools, clinics, libraries and sports clubs. We can imagine and imagine cities where everyone's humanity is respected and where everyone counts. It is very nice to imagine a city where no one has to live like a pig in the mud, where everyone is safe from fires, abuse, police raids, disconnections, evictions and political attacks.

But land and housing are the most urgent problems in our cities and there is a serious difficulty in resolving the issue of land and housing in our country. Land comes before housing and this difficulty comes when we all continue to pretend that the issue of land is not political. Until we accept that the issue of land is political this difficulty will continue to add more and more confusion.

The question remains very complicated when our country is administered by politicians who talk about the struggle and about being for the people while also pretending that the matter of land is not political. They have the power to use their political muscles to take the land back to the dispossessed but they prefer to pretend that the issue of land is not political. We know very well that we are the dispossessed and that we need justice. But the politicians and their NGOs continue to pretend that we are the ignorant ones who need to learn patience and to accept that fire safety workshops and forced removal to transit camps in human dumping grounds is really development.

Those who are in power today have the power to distribute our land fairly and freely to those who do not have land. Why have they betrayed us today? The answer is simple. If they do so they will be giving away the very power that makes them powerful.

Taking the land back will never be easy.

Taking the land back will require us to become and to remain the strong poor. A year ago we learnt a hard lesson. We learnt that South Africa is not a real democracy. The middle classes and even the working classes are free to debate and to discuss the future of the country. But we, as the poor, have been evicted from democracy. We were attacked and driven from our homes with the support of the police and the politicians looked. Cosatu was silent and the Human Rights Commission was silent. We have learnt that there are many people who do not think that democracy is for the poor.

We need to make this democracy real for the poor. Therefore we need allies amongst those groups who are allowed to think and to speak for themselves in South Africa. They need to use their freedom and safety to stand with us and to defend us as we struggle for our own freedom. Our organisations and movements need to forge a living solidarity with progressive faith based organization, trade unions, professionals in all specialised fields, individuals and active citizens in general. We need to form a powerful national alliance for urban reform that will always be willing to defend the right of the poor to think, speak and organise for themselves. That alliance has to be political and willing to force the state and the rich to obey the people. It has to be clear that the social value of land must come before its commercial value. It has to be willing to take real action to achieve this. Therefore it has to be independent from the state. In our analysis Slum Dwellers International is a top down attempt by the state and the rich to control the poor by persuading us to accept our oppression.

Some of us have already joined this journey to a new urban order not only by sitting in cool offices but by sweating in communities where we are busy organizing, conscientising and being conscientised as we organise and are organised by popular self education, meetings, camps and protests. Some of us have already lost our homes in the land of our birth as our punishment for struggling to access the well-located lands. It has been very evident to us that well-located land will never be brought before us by aircraft, but by sweat, beatings, arrests, and lies, water cannons, firing of live ammunition or even death. This is the price which those who are serious about the prize of A New Urban Order must be prepared to pay.

One cannot begin any meaningful discussion of the urban crisis while the poor continue to be excluded from the conversations that are meant to build the very new urban order that is for all. This discussion can only begin once the

dispossessed, those who do not count, count. We decided long ago not to accept the situation where some people talk about the poor and even for the poor without ever speaking to the poor. We have also paid a price for this decision but we will always stick to it.

There is no doubt that the work of the intellectuals, town planners, engineers, architects and other professionals is critical. We do need their skills. But for as long as they remain on their own their knowledge is very fragile. We need to plan our cities together. I remain convinced that if all the work of the urban experts is done in isolation from the poor, those who are meant to benefit from it, then it will not solve the problem. The first problem is that despite all their education the experts are often really ignorant of the real needs of the people. The second problem is that expert ideas, even good ideas that fit with the needs of the people, have no power on their own. An idea can only move into the world and start to reshape the world when it has a living force behind it. An idea that is worked out between the organised poor and the urban experts will have a living force behind it when the organised poor accept it as their own.

The issue of land and planning is too political, much more political than is recognised by many of us. It is too political and yet in most cases the state and the insensitive consultants pretend that it is only geo-technical feasibility that determines what is to be built, where and when. This has been very evident in many communities in Abahlali baseMjondolo settlements. People have identified well-located land and occupied that land themselves. But again and again we find that what may be well-located land to the poor is not so to the state and consultants and what they consider to be well-located land is not so to the poor. In the Kennedy Road settlement the municipality have always used technical reports to justify eviction. Their reports have always said that the land is not good for human habitation while our middle class neighbours across the road enjoy their stay. Everyone knows that in fact the land is very well-located. All that is required is land tenure, the provision of infrastructure and then an upgrade. In Protea South and Thembalihle in Johannesburg the land that the poor have identified and occupied for themselves is thought to be too good for them. But this is not said. Dolomite is the only frightening beast that can be used to scare and to justify eviction.

In his State of the Nation Address Msholozzi himself committed his government to acquire more than 6 000 ha of well-located land for the poor. This

promise came as a response to the struggles of the poor in the cities and towns across the country. Obviously if the state fails to acquire and redistribute this land there is nothing that will stop the people from identifying and occupying such well-located land on their own. We will give this our full support as a movement. If the alliances that we want to make with the churches, trade unions, the intellectuals and the urban experts will support us in this then we'll know that they are really on our side. For as long as human beings are living and dying in the mud and the fires any politics of patience is just another name for oppression.

But the issue of Msholozzi's promise is not just a question of whether or not the 6 000 ha is acquired and redistributed. There is also the question of who decides what is and what is not well located land. Land should not only be seen to be well located because it is identified by the state. The poor have a right to identify land that is well located for them. If our cities are to become just cities then we as the poor will have to strengthen ourselves by further organisation and mobilisation. We will all need the courage that was shown in the Symphony Way and Macassar Village occupations here in Cape Town. Our cities require a strong leadership from the poor with a real consciousness as to how the issue of land remains a fragile question. Organisation, mobilization, active citizen participation and a clear political consciousness will enable a popular democratic rebellion that can put the will of the people against the will of the few to build our new cities. The transfer of land to the poor and even to the working class requires radical action. It requires an action with minimal transactions. All these formalities and protocols are not just technical matters. They are not neutral. These formalities and protocols are biased to the rich and against the poor and have therefore bred many informalities resulting in the creation of informal settlements.

Our new urban order can only be realised when the land that has already been occupied by the poor is transferred to them with the full assurance of land tenure. If more land is not made available for those who don't already live in well located occupations then the poor can find the new land themselves. The state has a duty to invest in our communities and to support our occupations through building infrastructure and maintaining it, far before considering building subsidized housing projects. Land tenure must come first, then the provision of services and infrastructure and then housing projects.

The trend of sprawling growth in our cities shows that we may not have enough land in the nearby future. In that case it may be worth considering high-density development projects and decentralizing access to all socio economic amenities so that a new planning may begin. But without fair debates and open spaces for such conversations by all and at all levels this may not be achieved or, if it is achieved, it may not be achieved in a way that is just.

Our struggle and every real struggle is to put the human being at the centre of our society, starting with the most dispossessed who are the homeless. Washing away political discourse and narrowing the fragile political question of land into a complicated technical question will not help any of us at all. The organizing of the poor that takes place in our disgruntled spaces is very important for any change. And in those discussions by the poor who are marginalized because they do not count in our society lie some of the significant answers that most of us fail to recognize. Instead the blame for the evil produced by poverty is easily shifted to the poor. The victims of an evil system find that they are presented as evil people. The state, like those who continue to live in luxury life at the expense of the poor, continues to see the demands expressed by the poor as illegitimate and unreasonable. In fact of all the people in society our demands are the most legitimate and the most reasonable because we are living in the worst conditions. The demands of those with the most money and power are the least legitimate. Logic as well as justice is on the side of our struggle to put the will of the many against the will of the few which is the only way to turn our imaginings of a new urban order into reality.

I thank you all.

5 NOVEMBER 2010

Essay · Lindela Figlan

My Life as a Security Guard: Oppressors Gain at Expense of the Oppressed

Published on the Mandela Park Backyarders website

Maybe it is good to remind the people that where there is capitalism, the capitalists exploit the workers more than anything you can think of. These days with unemployment being so high the people are queuing up to be exploited. But we must remember that this is not a natural system. There is no reason why each and every person cannot have their dignity.

I have been working as a security guard for many years now. I used to think that the security industry is such a good industry because we always see the guards always smiling. Later I noticed that somebody told them to be always smiling. There is a real need for the government officials to do something about the security industry. One of our leaders said that the government is supposed to sort out the problem facing the security guards. The government should make sure that the industry must be regulated under the government and then they must make sure that that regulation is in the interests of the workers. Of course when ever regulation of an industry is proposed all the petty capitalists and also the venture capitalists complain because they are afraid to lose much by moneys and so in the end no one decides to support the government. Even the government gazette allows the security companies to exploit the security guards. This is how the system works. The people elect a government and instead of obeying the people the government listens to the capitalists. This is why in many countries the people are organising themselves to be able to put more pressure on the government that the capitalists.

It is bad to be a security guard because each and everyone learns how to jump using a guard. We are working with a very low remuneration. Nightshift and dayshift we always here waiting for somebody and we don't even know when he is coming or what kind of a gun is he going to come with. We are poor people and most of us are risking our lives every day to guard the property and lives of

rich people. Most of the places where we are working there is no shelter (guard house) Where I'm writing this article now I'm sitting in the sun. It's okay but when it's windy and raining I am sitting in the same place. When I get sick they don't contribute even one cent. I'm the one responsible. In some sites there is even an Occurrence Book and when you read what is in that book it looks like somebody can come and kill me and no-one will know anything about me.

If we as security guards are on stake for an increase we'll notice that the increase is less than R1.00 an hour. Even if we are asking our ministers to intervene they say we must go back to school. But is working as a security supposed to be a kind of punishment for a lack of education or is it supposed to be a job? Anyway, who said that all the security guards are not educated? Who said that those of us that couldn't finish school or who couldn't study after school are responsible for that? There is such a thing in this country as a history of oppression that made some people to be very poor. Abahlali baseMjondolo has always taught that the rich and the poor were made as they are by the very same system. Sometimes if you are complaining about something you hear those who are always repressing the guards saying 'It's not me who said you must not go to school'. One thing I think of a lot is that we must talk about life and about education because a human being is not a human being because of education. Educated or not, a human being is always a human being. When we are told to vote for these same people they don't ask for our level of education before we cast our votes. On election day we suddenly all count the same. The next day it is back to normal and we, as the poor, we count for nothing.

If you don't have political connections then you need education to get a good job. Some people become desperate. That is why people sometimes associate themselves with some university whereas they've not been there. So sometimes you see a university saying that so and so never registered with them. If we need education to be able to do good work then why is there not free education for everyone? Why does the government not invest in the people? Imagine how many people could have learnt a trade or a skill for the cost of one football stadium. I am failing to understand why, if education is so important, people are left uneducated. There are good clients and also bad clients. If a client is good on securities' side, that particular client is not good on the side of employees. If a security guard has got a good relationship with the client, make no mistake that particular guard won't last on that particular site. The reason is that maybe

a client will ask you how much are you getting paid, then that is a threat to our company. If the client is on the company's side and the company thinks that you are a troublemaker then comes the client with a lot of stories that have been created just to get rid of you.

There is a style which mostly all the companies are adopting. On each and every site there is a guard who is a company spy. Those people are being paid by the companies to spy on other workers. If you are thinking about trying to organise the bosses will know about it the same day as you have your first meeting.

All the conformed companies are the same with bad management style where if the company has been established by a white man, also all the management is white. If the company has been established by a black man the whole management is also black. It's the same with coloureds, Indians etc. But in some cases you see a black man owning a company and you think that company belongs to him but then you find that no there is someone else and he is doing that job for him (fronting). The security guards are not treated the same according to their race or let me put it this way; the blacks are not treated the same way. There are those who are treated better because of the colour of their skin. But mostly those of my blood and soul come the last. One of the best known comrades in Abahlali baseMjondolo was fired from his security job by white bosses after they saw that he was dropped off for his shift by a white woman.

The security guards sometimes find that the companies we work for suggest which union they need all the guards to join. That is against our constitution. Each and everyone is allowed by our constitution to join the union of his or her choice without being threatened by the employer. But in reality there are many companies that just tell the workers which union to join.

Freely speaking there are good companies and also good unions but the system of exploitation is still their tradition. If you were born to be Izizi Ijama then what so ever you are doing it will be in favour of your belief as Usijadu. Under this system the only way for us to make some reforms in the companies is by building the strength of the unions. But even the good unions are part of the system. The unions really need to change. The unions must make sure that the people who are supposed to deal with the people's problems must be those who

are willing to help the people. They must be the slaves of the people and revolutionaries, real revolutionaries, and those that just talks revolution on TV. They must be somebody who takes the people's feelings as theirs.

The reason why I say this is because one day I visited one of the unions which thousands of my colleagues need to join. This is a very well recognised security union. I met a guy who was really willing to help but due to protocol he decided to send me to another lady. I greeted her but she decided not to respond. As an African it is not good to talk first with somebody when you don't know if you are welcomed or not. I thought let me greet her again. She said 'Are you here to greet me or for your problem?' And I decided to tell her our problem. But then I decided to go because before I could finish our story she acted like she knew about our problem more than me. As a poor person you expect to meet people all the time who are treating the poor and the workers like criminals. In fact you meet people all the time who treat us worse than criminals but even like, if I can say, like animals. The SPCA is there to make sure that the animals are treated like human beings and not as animals anymore like before. For us it is only our organisations that can protect us and ensure that we are treated as human beings and not as animals. You don't expect to meet people who are treating workers like they are stupid in a union office. Most of the unions are so terrible. I don't want to say a lot but only they become fat cats by taking our monies from our accounts for nothing. Unions have become a kind of business. They have become a joint venture with the bosses and not a tool in the hands of the workers. We are being fired for nothing if we try to stand up for our rights but most unions are not doing their job. Some unions get just as scared as the bosses if they see that the workers are trying to organise themselves on the site. Sometimes you notice that it seems as if you joined a union only to make it easy for the company to get rid of you. It is much bad when the people get fired at the direction of the union and later the company noticed that it was a mistake to fire you and ask you to come back.

In some cases as a guard, if you approach the CCMA your problems are treated with good care. But in some companies your boss just tells you straight that 'go to CCMA and my connection is there, you won't get anything'. You don't know how relevant that statement is until you get to the CCMA. But once you can tell the person that you are going to put him in a bind he can run away.

That is why sometimes some people they don't even worry themselves to visit the CCMA. There is corruption and collusion with the bosses there too.

So now how can the government fully support and make sure that the security guards, farm workers and also the domestic workers really feel part and parcel of our democracy? They could regulate all these industries in the interests of the workers and they could enforce those regulations. They could give us free legal support. Maybe all law students should do a year of community service. They could give us education, adult education. But mostly our government is just good at talking to the people while they make all their deals with the bosses and the land owners. They promise a lot like 'together we can do more'. Together we can do more what? They never answer this question in detail. We are just expected to be quiet and to keep on voting. Well the people have decided not be just be quiet and keep on voting. People are rebelling everywhere. People are marching, burning tires, blocking roads and going to court everywhere. People are forming organisations everywhere.

To all the guards let us be united and form a working body for the security by the security. This body can be organised but not professionalised on each site. There we can discuss all the problems that are facing us and that discussion will start from us and the decision that we take their will be by us and for us. From that body we can our problems to the unions and from the union to the CCMA. But that working body will be there all the time. We will not hand our problems over the unions. We will organise outside of the unions to control the unions from the ground. Corrupt union leaders will be no more and all the workers will be respected by our employers and the clients.

9 NOVEMBER 2010

Lecture · S'bu Zikode

When Loyalty Becomes a Threat to Society

University of Chicago, November 2010

I have been invited by the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative to come to the United States of America to speak, to learn and to share our experiences of struggle in South Africa. I wish to thank the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative for their invitation and for their solidarity with our struggles. Over the last years a number of comrades from our movements have received invitations to travel to other countries to try and build a living solidarity between our different movements. As members of Abahlali baseMjondolo we only get these invitations because of the strength of the movement of which we are part and so we are very clear that we travel as elected and rotating representatives of a living movement of the poor and not as individuals.

The churches and friends of Abahlali all over the world, including here in the United States of America, have rallied to our support in most difficult times. After the shack fires that have taken many lives of our children and parents, after flooding, after beating by the police and politicians, after violent attacks etc. We thank you for all that. If it was not for your support we fear we would not still be surviving. When the poor ask for what is basic to life we are taken as a threat to society by many rich people. The most basic and humble demands are shown to the world as if they are the work of criminals, third forces and people who can't think and who are violent. For this reason it is very important for the survival of our struggles that we can build alliances with people who are willing to testify to the world that it is not the organised poor who are a threat to society but that it is the system that makes some people to be poor and others to be rich that is a threat to society.

I will speak on various issues while I am here in the USA but today I will speak on the question of loyalty.

Our living politic begins with the fact that all of us were created in the image of God and are therefore equal. Our living politic starts by recognising the full

and equal humanity of every human being. We struggle as human beings with equal worth and intelligence to all other human beings against a system that produces inequality by denying, everyday, the humanity of some of us.

When our movement started in 2005 it was out of anger, hunger and frustration. We were becoming desperate and we needed to be heard. Our first collective act, the act that gave birth to our movement, was a road blockade in March 2005. When we blocked the road none of us had planned to form such a movement. In fact none of us had even planned the road blockade long in advance. Many of us did not know that the road blockade was such a political act. Yet we realised how political it was when fourteen of us were arrested, unlawfully detained and beaten in prison. We had thought that we were being ignored because our voices were not being heard. But we discovered that when we forced our voices to be heard and asked to speak to the authorities they would send the police instead. We discovered that in the eyes of the state our demand to be heard was taken as a criminal demand. Later we discovered that some parts of civil society took the same view. We discovered that we were supposed to suffer in silence while other people, politicians and experts, debated our lives, our struggles and our futures. But we also discovered our collective strength as the organised poor, the self organised poor.

Loyalty has been both our weakness and our strength.

Loyalty was destroying us when we gave it to the political parties. Our loyalty did not help any of us with our various party political affiliations. Our loyalty did not even help those of us who struggled and made a lot of sacrifices within the United Democratic Front (UDF) during the struggle against apartheid.

But loyalty has also been the source of our survival. Loyalty is fundamental to the strength that we build in our families and with our friends, our movements and our communities. As a poor person you cannot survive in this world on your own. Without loyalty there would be no one to care for your children when you are at work, to offer you a place in their home after a fire or an attack, to introduce you to a community when you need a place to live, to stand with you when the police and the land invasions unit comes. Maybe it is because we cannot survive without loyalty that we take loyalty to be such an important thing.

But while loyalty is the great strength of the poor it is also at the same time a great threat to the poor. Loyalty to political parties and to those who try to

privatise the history of the struggle against apartheid for themselves becomes a very serious threat to the poor in a top-down system of governance. It is even dangerous to our democracy, a democracy that continues to serve the interests of the few, while the majority are rotting in the shacks, without homes, without jobs and without dignity. Loyalty becomes too dangerous when political leadership exercise their loyalties to their political parties and to individuals within their parties to advance themselves while excluding the poor. This has promoted a culture of corruption, favours, nepotism, political intolerance, violence and the party politicisation of government service delivery.

Those of us who are opposed to this loyalty to the politicians will not only be excluded but we will also be severely punished. It is on this basis that the shack dwellers and the poor are taken for a ride and are made to serve their life sentence in the shacks, despite numerous calls for small steps forward such as the Millennium Development Goals. In fact in our country the MDGs have just become a new licence for those in power to advance themselves through BEE. Our country is at the brink of catastrophe. The poor continue to get poorer while the rich get richer and more oppressive to the poor. We feel the world closing in on us. We have long been warning that the anger of the poor can go in many directions.

Loyalty should start with us. It should start from where we are, with what we have. We must first be loyal to ourselves without seeking to impress anyone else with this. We must then be loyal to our families, to our communities and to our society. Our loyalty should start from the bottom of society, where we are, and not from the politicians at the top of society.

I must also warn that loyalty does not come from being rich nor from being successful in one's career. It does not mean that we should agree when there is no need to agree. It should not be seen in terms of peace and compromise. What may be moral and benefit the most vulnerable groups in our society and our future generations may take us into conflict with the politicians and the rich. Sometimes it may also take us into conflict with some parts of civil society.

Today let us review our loyalties just to check how much of damage or good they do to others. Let us continue with those loyalties that keep us safe, that affirm our dignity, that louden our voices, that build our power. Let us put away those loyalties that tie us to the people and systems that keep us oppressed.

Loyalty to the political parties, to the experts and to the whole top down system has resulted in these loyalists denying the shack dwellers and the poor their rights to citizenship, to cities, to well located land, decent housing, safety and education. We have been denied basic services, such as water and sanitation, electricity, road access, refuse collection. We have been excluded from participating in the discussions on our future. And most importantly we have been denied our dignity, Ubuntu and Abahlalisms. It is through this denial that the state – with the support of some few regressive leftists – think that they can buy or intimidate our struggle in order to bury our struggle so that they may continue to have the only legitimate right to speak for the poor. We will never accept this. The poor have the same rights as everyone else to be at the centre of the discussions concerning our future.

We are calling upon all the poor and all the marginalised along with all the progressive social movements of the poor and those NGOs, churches and individuals that are willing to speak to and not for the poor, to struggle with and not for the poor, to join us in our journey to a fair world which is a world of equality, a world in which everyone counts. This is not an easy journey. Sometimes it is very difficult. Sometimes it is accompanied by lies, beatings, arrests and death. But we will keep going forward although we know that victories are not certain and that when they are won they are sometimes won at a considerable price.

For example in 2009 we won a case in the Constitutional Court against the KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act 2007. We slaughtered two cows in celebration for this victory. But we were punished for this victory by means of a planned violent attack on our movement. The violence that followed the attack left two people dead and several injured. The Abahlali headquarters were looted, the homes of its leadership and their families homes burnt down and several hundred people forced to hiding. Our attackers were fulfilling their loyalties to those politicians who instigated the attack. The Premier of the province and the President of the Republic were all silence. None of our attackers were arrested and the few charges that we succeeded to open against them were never investigated.

This was clearly an attack on our hard won democracy. Our constitution allows for all such formations as democratic organisations like our movement. But the state and its party are shutting down the spaces of democracy. Abahlali

have worked hard to create its own space to share, learn and build living solidarity amongst the poor. We had worked very hard to protect such a space even when the party loyalists want to hijack it for themselves to secure their future career with it. Although we have taken our space in our society humbly we also take it firmly and we refuse to give our power away. We will not allow the loyalists to the people and the system that oppresses us to destroy our movement and compromise our morals. Our loyalty remains with the oppressed and with all people who are willing to take a side with the oppressed in our struggle to build a just world.

12 NOVEMBER 2010

Presentation · S'bu Zikode

When the Poor Become Powerful Outside of State Control

Presentation to the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, United States, November 2010

It gives me great pleasure to be invited into the United States of America to speak, not only my mind but a collective mind of many Abahlali members. I only get these invitations because of the movement I am part of, so I thank Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA. I also thank the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative and I thank all friends of Abahlali based in the US.

The power of the poor starts when we as the poor recognise our own humanity – when we recognise that in fact we are created in the image of God and are therefore equal to all other human beings. But the recognition of our humanity without action to defend our humanity is meaningless. It is very important that we as the poor begin to define ourselves before someone else from somewhere else begins to define us. It is very important for the poor to say, this is who we are, this is where we are and this is what we want. In our movement, as in many movements around the world, we say that we are the poor, those who do not count. We say that we are the excluded and the disrespected. We say that we want our full humanity, that we want justice, that we want dignity and full participation in the planning of our communities.

The more of us that stand together the more our humanity is fulfilled. The power of the poor becomes evident when the poor are able to organise ourselves for ourselves. When we begin to achieve this it is always a moment of great promise and great danger. Frederick Douglass, the great hero of one of the greatest American struggles, the struggle against slavery, said: 'Power concedes nothing without a demand.' This is why a collective demand, a demand backed by organisation, determination and courage is a moment of great promise. But it is also a moment of great danger because the power of the rich and the politicians always takes the legitimate demands of the oppressed to be criminal and

illegitimate. This is one reason why we need to stand together across the sea. We can only redeem the promise of our struggle if we can survive its dangers and none of us can do that on our own. I have been sent here by Abahlali base-Mjondolo to build a living solidarity with the movements in America. We want to look for ways in which we can support each other to realise the promise of our struggles.

There is also a real danger for the organised poor if we do not define ourselves. If we allow others to define us and to define our struggle we risk being defined as people who are not able to struggle for ourselves – as people who need leaders and not comrades, as people who must be spoken for and not to. But when we succeed in defining ourselves, and in escaping the danger of not defining ourselves, we have to face a new danger. There is another kind of danger for the organised poor when we do define ourselves. Our movement is going through a tough time after successfully defining itself. We are under attack from the state, the rich and even a few individual leftists who are all divided in their economics but united in their politics – in their belief that it is their duty, the duty of elites, to speak for and to represent the poor.

As Abahlali we have successfully represented our struggle both nationally and internationally. This has been a crisis for some of those who have employed themselves to speak, write and decide for the poor. The refusal of our movement has been met with a huge campaign to discredit and rubbish our movement's effort to build a just society where everyone matters. We have learnt that there is a very big difference between those forces in civil society and the left that are looking for followers and those that are looking for comrades. We have learnt that there is a very big difference between those forces in civil society and the left who think that they are the only ones that can liberate the poor and those that are willing to work with the poor as we liberate ourselves. We remain committed to a bottom up politic, a living politic, an every day politic of the political empowerment of ordinary women and men.

The state has many strategies to silence the poor. Leaders are offered money and jobs. There is quiet diplomacy through which the movement is given some acknowledgment. There are meetings that lead into all kinds of technical debates and away from the simple politic of our demand for land and housing. There is intimidation. But when all these efforts by the state to silence the poor fail they send in the police. The police do not come, as we have asked, to protect

the poor but to beat us, arrest us and even shoot us. We have braved all that and survived brutal attacks. Our popular activism in action has made our movement grow rapidly despite repression.

Our movement has faced many challenges. When we started to become a powerful force in society and began to win many victories. We stopped evictions, forced interim services in some of the settlements and won some kind of recognition. The state then went to try its legal means of attacking the shack dwellers and the poor. The state came out with a new legislation called KwaZulu-Natal Elimination, Eradication and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act of 2007. The new legislation was created to legitimise these attacks. To be poor and homeless meant to be criminal and you could be imprisoned for up to 25 years for resisting an eviction. Abahlali mobilised all kinds of resourced people including lawyers to challenge the constitutionality of this legislation. The poor South Africans were represented by Abahlali who were represented by the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at Wits University.

When our case was heard in the Constitutional Court it was clear that the state couldn't answer our case. The state was humiliated by the inevitability of a serious defeat by shack dwellers. There was a long moment of silence. We continued to feed our orphans, to look after our sick. We continued to build crèches and vegetable gardens as projects of self help. We continued to discuss our living politic at our University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. All these good efforts of trying to build an equal society became a major threat to authority. Some state institutions have good people who we kept engaging while being very careful to always keep our autonomy. We carefully managed different negotiations without being co-opted into the system so that we could claim victories from the state while continuing to build our power outside of the state.

But as we kept building a strong movement the state was busy preparing itself to destroy our movement. On the 26 and 27 September 2009 a group of about 40 armed men violently attacked our head quarters in the Kennedy Road settlement. The police failed to protect us. As people tried to defend themselves there was fighting and two people were left dead and others injured. The homes of our leaders, their families and friends and the general membership of Abahlali were destroyed and we were driven out of the settlement and forced out to hiding. The attack was openly endorsed by the provincial leadership of the ruling party and the provincial government. Up until today our attackers were

never made to answer to their crimes committed on the day of the attack. Abahlali called for the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the attack, but this call fell on deaf ears. A short time after the attack we won a historic victory against the constitutionality of the Slums Act.

This attack is the sort of heavy price that a movement of the poor may have to pay for the prize of a human world, a world of equality and dignity, a world where the land and wealth are shared. This sort of attack happens when a movement continues to organise, to think and to grow outside state control. A living politic is not built in one day. It is built in prayer, humility, sacrifice and courage. Our struggle is a class struggle. It is the struggle of the poor – those who are living in shacks, selling on the streets, doing domestic and security work. To build a fair world where everyone matters we need allies amongst those in a similar class and amongst those with better resources and opportunities.

The time will come when the poor, the uneducated but human, will be required to play a humane role in society. A time will come when the humanity of every human being is recognised in society. This time may or may not be the judgement day. When this time comes will depend on our commitment and courage. It will also depend on how well we can support each other's struggles. History will judge us all.

16 NOVEMBER 2010

Presentation · S'bu Zikode

Presentation at the CUNY Graduate Center for Place, Culture and Politics

CUNY Graduate Center, New York, 16 November 2010. Rush transcript.

00:00 I feel like calling “Amandla”, but I thought I should be disciplined, at least the last night I am here. I am happy to be here tonight, especially to be meeting an audience like yourself. I am honored and humbled to be speaking at this university. I just thought I should share some of the sharings I have shared with some folks here in the United States. But I thought it was also important to bring the life context in which I would be able to speak and make sense of the conditions in South Africa. It gives me great pleasure to be invited here into the United States of America to speak not only my mind but a collective mind of many Abahlali members. I only get this invitation because of the movement I am part of, so I thank Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Shack Dwellers’ movement. I also thank the National Economic and Social Right Initiative. I thank the Poverty Initiative, I thank Picture the Homeless, Take the Land Back. I thank the Media in Mobilizing projects. I thank the Taxi Workers United, the Domestic Workers United. I thank Abahlali friends that are based here in the United States. I also wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the Center here, the Center for Place, Culture and Politics and all other associate departments that have made this moment special.

02:14 I thought I should just speak about the question as to what happens when the poor organize, mobilize—take their own charge outside the state control; when the poor become powerful outside the state control. Some of the clip you may have seen speaks volumes, speaks to that, what happens when the unorganized becomes organized; when those who are not meant to speak, speak. The power of the poor starts when we as the poor recognize our own humanity; when we recognize that, in fact, we are created in the image of God and are therefore equal to all other human beings. But the recognition of our humanity without action to defend our humanity is meaningless. It is very important

that we as the poor people begin to define ourselves before someone else from somewhere else define us. It is very important for the poor to say, "This is who we are, this is where we are, this is what we want, this is how we want what we want." We say that we are being excluded and disrespected. We say that we want our full humanity, that we want justice, that we want dignity and full participation in the planning of our communities, in the planning of our cities, our states, our countries, our world.

3:59 The more of us stand together, the more of our humanity is filled. The power of the poor becomes evident when the poor are able to organize ourselves for ourselves. When we begin to achieve this, it is always a moment of great promise, a moment of great danger. Frederick Douglass, the great hero of one of the greatest American struggles, the struggles against slavery, said "Power concedes nothing without demands". This is why a collective demand – a demand backed by organization, determination, and courage – is a moment of great promise. But it is also a moment of great danger, because the power of the rich and the politicians always take the legitimate demand of the oppressed to be criminal and illegitimate. This is one of reason why we need to be standing together across the sea, across color lines, borders, genders, religion, creeds, you name them – to redeem the promise of our struggle, if we can survive its dangers (and none of us can do so on our own).

I have been sent here by the movement to build a living solidarity with the movements here in the United States. We want to look for ways in which we can support each other to realize the promise of our struggle. There is also a real danger for the organized poor if we do not define ourselves, if we allow others to define us and define our struggle—we risk being defined as people who are not able to struggle for ourselves, as people who need leaders and not comrades, as people who must be spoken for and not to.

06:05 But when we succeed in defining ourselves and escaping the danger of not defining ourselves, we have to face a new danger. There is another kind of danger for the organized poor when we do define ourselves. Our movement is going through a tough time after successfully defending ourselves. We are under attack from the state, from the rich, from a few individual leftists, few individual academics—you name them – who are all divided in their politics, but united in their belief that it is their duty to speak for and to represent the poor. It has always been an insult to think that the poor cannot speak for themselves. It

has always been an inhuman and brutal attack that the rich and the landowners should employ themselves or must be hired from somewhere else to think, represent, and take decision for the poor. As a movement of the Shack Dwellers, we have successfully represented our struggle both nationally and internationally. It is one of the reasons why I am here to represent our struggle before those who have the rights, the money and the power to represent us. This has been a crisis for some of those who have employed themselves to speak, write and decide for the poor. The refusal of our movement [to accept that others should speak for us] has been met with huge campaign to discredit and rubbish our movement's efforts to build a just society where everyone matters, where everyone is equal, where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

08:16 We have learned that there is a very big difference between those forces in civil society and the left that are looking for followers and those who are looking for comrades. We have learned there is a very big difference between those forces in civil society and the left who think that they are the only one who can liberate the poor and those who are willing to work with the poor as we liberate ourselves. The state has many strategies to silence the poor as do the big corporates and the rich. Leaders are offered money and jobs. There is a quiet diplomacy through which the movement is given some acknowledgement. There are meetings that lead into all kinds of technical debates and away from the simple politics of our demands for land and housing. There is intimidation. But when all these efforts by the state to silence the poor fail, they send in the police. The police do not come as we have asked to protect the poor—but to beat us, arrest us and even shoot us. We have braved all that and survived brutality and all kinds of attack by the state and the rich. Our popularism and action has made our movement to grow rapidly despite the conditions that you may have seen. Our movement has faced many challenges. When we started to become a popular force in the society, the state went to try its diplomatic means of attacking the Shack Dwellers and the poor.

10:03 The state came out with a new legislation in Kwa-Zulu Natal which is called the Kwa-Zulu Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act in 2007. The new legislation was created to legitimize this attack and to legitimize evictions. To be poor and homeless meant to be criminal and that you could be imprisoned from up to 25 years for resisting an eviction. Abahlali

mobilized all kinds of resource people, including lawyers, to challenge the constitutionality of this legislation. The poor South Africans were represented by our movement, who were represented by the Center for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand and we won a historic victory against the constitutionality of the Slums Act. This victory against the Slums Act was not our first victory. Before that, we had stopped evictions, forced interim services in some of the informal settlements, and won some kind of recognition. But after this big victory in the constitutional court, a victory for the entire country, a victory for our future generation, there was a moment of silence as the state was humiliated after a serious defeat by the Shack Dwellers. We continued to feed our orphans, we continued to look after our sick, we continued to build preschools, vegetable gardens, as project of self-help. All these good efforts of trying to build an equal society become a major threat to the authorities. Some state institutions have good people who we kept engaging while being very careful to always keep our autonomy.

12:00 We carefully managed negotiations without being co-opted into the system so that we could claim victories from the state while continuing to build power outside the state control. But as we kept building a strong movement, the state was busy preparing itself to destroy our movement. This brought us to the 26th -27th of September 2009 when a group of about 40 men violently attacked our headquarters at the Kennedy Road Informal Settlement. The homes of our leaders, their families, their friends and the general membership of the movement were destroyed and we were driven out of the settlement and forced out to hiding. The attack was endorsed by the provincial leadership of the ruling party and the provincial government. Two people were left dead, as you may have seen, in that violence [that came with the] attack that night. Our attackers were never made to answer into these entire crimes committed on the day of the attack up until today. Abahlali called for an independent commission of inquiry into the attack, but this call has fell into deaf ears. This is the sort of heavy price that a movement of the poor may have to pay for the prize of a human world, a world of equality and dignity. This sort of attack happens when a movement continues to organize, to think, to grow outside the state control. A living politic is not build in one day, it is built in prayer, humility, sacrifice and courage. Our struggle is a class struggle, it is a struggle of the poor, those living in the shacks, selling on the streets, doing domestic and secretary works.

14:00 To build a fair world where everyone matter, we need allies among those in similar class and amongst those with better resources and opportunities. The time will come when the poor and the uneducated—but human—will be required to play a human role in our society. A time will come when the humanity of everyone, of every human being is recognized in our society. This time may or may not be on judgment day. When this time comes will depend on our commitment and courage. It will also depend on how well we can support each other. History will judge us all.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thought I should just share this story because many or probably some of you have been following the story of our movement and I am here to affirm, confirm, and also remind you that what you've just seen is not just a movie, it's life, it's the lives of the people. People are born in these conditions; people are killed in these conditions. And they are killed by those who are meant to govern us, who are meant to lead by example, to build a society. So I thought tonight it would also be an opportunity for me to remind, especially an audience of this caliber, of our role and probably the expectation that each one of us would really expect in terms of support and solidarity.

16:05 And also remind you that we have great minds, great intellectuals who have decided to also use their degrees to also rubbish the little efforts we can contribute to life. Not to impress ourselves, but at least to try and make the Earth a better place than we have found it. As Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, suggested that we should try. While our movement is under attack from the state, it is also being attacked by some academics. Some of them have studied in this beautiful university. They have obtained their degree and they have fought to serve the society, to do justice. But they have chosen to use their wisdom, their skills, their profession, to rubbish –not only rubbish—but destroy the basic struggle of surviving. There is a campaign that is going on, some of you probably will have received some of the big documents, claim to be well researched, because our movement is one of those researched movements. Where writers come and go. They leave us in those conditions. And then what they write, they do not account to us—they want to impress other people.

18:02 So we are facing a double repression from the state, from some of the famous professors, who think it is their job, obviously, to think for us, to represent us, to talk about us and to take decisions for us. So, I am here also to warn and plead for your just minds [so] that at least our wisdom and profession

should be used rather to advance the interest of justice, not to impress though, [but for] the movement but for the greater society. So our society needs you, your country needs you, maybe I am speaking too big, your family needs you, your neighbor needs you, your city needs you, your country, your world needs you. We have not claimed to be clever; we have always been humble. We take our place in our cities, humble, but we take it very firm when it comes to injustices. We have made a lot of sacrifice, we have committed ourselves. We have taken an oath that we cannot live in peace while there are people who are living under these conditions. So South Africa is one of the well-known country which have successfully hosted the FIFA World Cup. And we were reminded in South Africa during the World Cup that we should be very smiling in welcoming the international dignitaries and international communities.

20:00 Again, we were reminded to be human being, because you guys were coming to South Africa. But when you left, things have suddenly changed. And obviously leading up to the World Cup, there was a campaign to sweep the cities, to hide poverty, to hide our shack settlements. We had to deal with that. So in conclusion, I think it would be good for a dialogue, obviously, to exchange, and you know, welcome those great ideas. We should not use this space only for question but also for inputs, feedbacks. We are all learning. I'm here to learn. But I've also been sent by those old Mamas, those old gogos who have entrusted me to stand here before you to bring South Africa to you through the video, through myself. So I am welcoming some lessons, obviously [also] questions of clarity, especially around the issues of justice. So the movement that I come from, again, it's Abahlali baseMjondolo. Abahlali means "the residence—living in the shacks", it started in Kennedy Road in 2005 to fight, protect, promote and advance the movement of the Shack Dwellers and the poor. This is our call. This is what we do. Though in doing it, outside the state control, it has been a crime.

21:57 On the night of the attack, when our movement was attacked, the very same victims whose home was destroyed, burned down, were also arrested. They are yet to be tried on the 29th of November on many charges, including: murder, armed robbery, criminal injury, there's more than seven charges that were labeled. And again the very same acts that violence attack, the state has been very smart in making sure that it becomes a criminal matter, a criminal question—to take away the politics of it. A propaganda has been spread. Lot of

misleading information has been written because we do not control the media. So the information that is portrayed outside is that obviously these poor folks, you know, are thugs. They don't know what they're doing. Party politic has become the only license for democracy. To participate in decision-making, you are forced to join a particular political party it is your only token to citizenship. So social movements have been an alternative space outside of party politics and that becomes crime to those who are in power. So the victims of the attacks, people whose homes were burned down, are yet to be tried from the 29th of November.

23:59 So again, the state makes it as if it is a criminal trial. Yet, we know it is a political trial. There were poor folks that you may have seen demonstrating against their own fellow brother and sisters, because the system and the state is so smart enough to turn the poor to fight amongst one another. And we've also been warning, it is our own movement that has warned, even during the 2008 attack on foreign nationals, we have warned that the anger of the poor can go in many directions. Unfortunately, that anger is turned to one another when the poor have to vent that anger to one another. We have to deal with that at the movement level, at individual levels. It is a task that we have really have to deal with. If I were to share some of the successes of the movement, the numbers of challenges, difficulties – the movement is not perfect; not at all—but to share some of the successes besides the constitutional court victory [I would start by saying] that the movement has managed to create its own space, a very precious space where we have come together as the organized poor. We have used this space to be able to share, to learn in this space. We have used this space also to cry when we have to face the repression and the attack.

25:57 We have used this space to laugh and to enjoy life. We have not received housing in our cities, and it's even worse now that we don't even have the shelter that you saw. Those shacks were broken down, burned down, without any alternative accommodation. Yet there is a constitution, there is a housing act that says you should provide at least an alternative accommodation should an eviction order be granted. But then, after the attacks, there are hundreds of us, I'm talking about the new South Africa, the rainbow nation. Something that has just happened, thirteen months ago, we've been forced into exile, we've been forced into hiding, we've become refugees in our own country, in our own province, in our own city, in our own settlement, in our own families. It's the

story that I thought I should share to those of us who are serious and working on the issues of social justice – that any one victory may come at a considerable price. It will also test our commitment to a better life in our own small ways. But again the space that we use is a space that we protect so much. People have tried to invade that space, and we have managed to run away with the space! And we continue underground to organize, we continue to cry together and to make sure those tears fall into a fertile ground. They don't fall inside, because none of us know the damage of the tears that fall inside.

28:02 So, we have to create a basin to collect all these tears. What a wonderful space. And that on its own, it's a crime. I would not be surprised if I return to South Africa few weeks time – the first call I have always received if I were to leave the country, it would be a call coming from the National Intelligence Agency. "Where do you come from? Who did you meet? We've been missing you in the country." See how other people can remote other people's life? You know, when I lost my first job because my boss was the president of the Durban Chamber of Commerce, when he said "no, I cannot have you anymore" because as president of the Durban Chamber of Commerce, he would issue a statement and I would have different view. He would call me for discipline. I would go for protest, and the next day he would call me and discipline me. You know what, you don't own my time. You should be grateful that I work for you from 8 to 5. After 5 you don't own my time. And I had to lose that job. It is a price that we have to face wherever we are, in our own working environments. It's a test, again, to our democracy.

29:59 A democracy that serves the interest of the few. So, South Africa right now is under this so-called Black-led majority. And what has been noted is the escalation of fraud, corruption, favoritism, nepotism, political intolerance, politicization of services. So if you are not my comrades, if you are not in my party 'you get nothing, forget it'. If you are in the Shack Dwellers movement 'S'bu will give you a house'. If you belong to DA, Democratic Alliance, 'Helen Zille will provide'. A society that was once proclaimed by Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and all of those who have fought to end apartheid, and some of you who have contributed so much to the South African politics, to realize the democracy that has been undermined. I want to thank you and allow some questions and feedback. Thank you.

31:28 DARA S'bu will take one or two questions at a time and then we'll give S'bu a chance to respond.

31:36 Q1: Can you talk about the leading up to and the aftermath of the World Cup a little bit more? And also I'm curious how you continue your organization when so many people have been displaced. How do you continue bringing people into the organization?

32:00 Q2: I just wanted to get a better picture of the organization, how many people there are, and where they are located, what they do after their shacks have been destroyed, where do they go, and if they have access to other facilities that are necessary for us to survive?

32:18 S'bu: Sure, uh, maybe it's good to start with the last one. The movement has been formed in the shanty town of Kennedy Road which is in Durban. It was formed by the Shack Dwellers themselves, its lead by the Shack Dwellers. It has spread to the neighboring cities, Jo'burg, northern part of Kwa-Zulu Natal in the Western Cape, in Gauteng. So it has become a national movement. We are working with fully paid membership with 64 communities around the country. And then, those who are supporting the organization and our alliance partners, we also work with the Landless Peoples' Movement, we work with Cape Anti-Eviction campaign, the Networking from Natal to form what is called as the Poor Peoples' Alliance, PPA, as the national alliance of movements. So we have at least a minimum of 25,000 memberships [across the alliance]. [Membership] is fully paid because, to get membership you subscribe. You pay. So others are supporting without that, but we also monitor to members—you pay at least one and a half dollar to become a member and you accept responsibility of being part of the struggle from the onset. It's not easy to organize under this situation. There was a period in which we all had to go underground. There was a moment of silence when the hit men were hired and paid and were hunting for us up and down. And because of your courage, and your organizing here in the states, that has also saved our life to campaign and create awareness. Some of the folks here have protested in the South African embassy here and have written letters of support. Some of you have also written petitions raising concerns and solidarity for our movement.

35:00 S'bu: A lot of support has really come from here. We salute you for that. It has really made a difference that we are able to organize secretly and managed to continue our space. We had to relocate obviously from Kennedy Road where

our offices were based and found a space in town. So, interesting enough that the organization has grown up since the attack. It has been joined by not only Shack Dwellers but Flat Dwellers, people living in the Flats in the municipal owned Flats, people who are living in the rural communities, and under the traditional leadership of the chiefs. And again, it's becoming a threat. So, after well, we are still living in hiding. In other words, we are no longer in Kennedy Road. We have to live in safe homes and have to continue our work. We run that risk. We don't have any VIP protection, no bodyguards. We have to go to town when we need to, but there was a window in which we were hunted. But because of the support that we received internationally, then the state became aware that anything that happens to us it will not only be a national scandal, but international. So, hence we extend our deepest gratitude to all of you and to some of you who are also being criticized for supporting the thugs. We thank you for that. At least a thug that is able to breathe like you is a better thug. It's worth supporting. Help us come out of that thuggish situation.

37:11 S'bu: Well, leading to the World Cup, obviously, South Africa was excited. And those living in the shack settlements were being threatened with evictions. We had to go through a lot in trying to defend our land, our communities. Because the World Cup has also been used as a license to displace people so that they can attract investments, but also for the international communities not to see that poverty. We had to work so hard, you know, to save people's home through action. In fact we came up with the Upside Down World Cup, not because we're not patriotic, but our citizenship, well what would it mean if we didn't participate as citizens? We had to go to court in defending some of the communities who were facing eviction not only from the state but also private landowners who saw the World Cup as an opportunity to displace people. I think we've done well in that. Then obviously, after the World Cup the state is building new shacks. That's very interesting. People are living in the shacks and the government is building another shacks. The difference with those shacks is that they are government-approved shacks. So you will be moved from those shantytowns that you saw to government approved shanty towns, which we call transit camps, Lindela, temporary relocation areas, decant camps—and in those transit camps, again, outside the legislation. The very same Slums Act, was trying to legislate that, make it legal that before you get a subsidy that is assisted by government, you've got to move to another government-approved

shacks. And in those transit camps there is no specification as whether or not you'll be getting basic services like water and sanitation. The duration of stay is not clear. You can leave as long as you can leave. You can rot in those transit camps waiting. So a new politic in South Africa has been created, a politic of patience. "Order, comrades!". We've been under apartheid for more than 400 years. So, a politic of patience is now the movement of the day.

39:59 Q3: My wife and I have been working with schools in South Africa for a while now and I intend to continue to do that and we were particularly impressed with some of the schools right outside some of the townships. One was Soweto and the other one was right outside of Stellenbosch. I wonder, are you working with the school children? And I was, I guess, awed by how well the schools were run and the spirit of the children from the townships while they were in school. Do you see those schools as a vehicle for your work?

40:39 Dara: Let's take one more question.

40:42 Q4: Yes, I wanted to ask what the recent public workers' strikes a couple months ago. Was there any sort of cross-unity between the public workers who also had gotten into confrontations with the governments and they see your situation previously in conflicts with the government reflected in their own? Is there any sort of attempts unity or some sort of cross-solidarity thing? Second question I would like to ask is since Zuma was elected have you seen things get better, get worse or stay the same in terms of government attitudes to you?

41:28 S'bu: The honorable president Jacob Zuma has also been once a hope. Looking at his background from the rural communities in the northern province of KwaZulu Natal, Zululand. And again, like many, when he got to power we also thought that he should have learned so much outside, not really outside government, but [having an] observational view without being a state president. But, we have already lost a hope. He is a very silent man. He doesn't seem to be taking a decision. I'm not too sure if [it] is teaching of democracy. Sometimes you've got to be a leader. You've got to be a man. Not dictate. I was just sharing with some folks that we have invited the president to the shack settlement but because of the structures and the systems that are there, he cannot listen to us unless the ANC structures says listen to those folks. If our relationship is not good with the ANC local branch, for instance, mind you, its party politics now. If the premiere of the province is not happy with us, automatically

the state president will not be happy with us. We have made calls now for him to visit the informal settlements.

43:25 S'bu: What appeared as a response, he was seen discovering a new white shack settlement somewhere in Pretoria, where the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) made a picture of him visiting the new white shack settlement that we didn't know that there are white folks living in the shack settlement. So he kind of want to pretend that he is going to the shacks, but he will not go to those who are making noise. So that is the strategy so that you blame yourself for speaking out, you pay a price for speaking out. He would rather go to those who have not asked him. I mean what we see is obviously a failure of taking decision and have to follow the structures, the systems that are already there. The public servant strikes have really been a turning point in the history of South Africa. It is very interesting how the labor movement, Cosatu, can bring the economy of the country to a standstill. That's the power of the people, the power of organizing. And again, Zuma was not here. [He had] to take the flight to somewhere in China. But unfortunately[for Zuma] the workers will not back down, you have to come back and confront it. And make some compromises, private deals.

45:20 S'bu: So, again, the class struggle, the working class also has its own challenges that the Congress of Trade Unions, for instance, would invite social movements to their protests to add into masses that are necessary to shake ad change. But when we march and invite Cosatu to support us, suddenly COSATU is nowhere to be found. All the leadership of Cosatu, suddenly they are too high to be reached: "Who the hell are you?" That's their game. But we believe the labor movement could bring about change because of their numbers and their masses. But what has been very problematic is when Cosatu had to come into an alliance partnership with the ruling party. Now the trouble is that alliance, the Africa National Congress, the South African Communist Party and Cosatu are married. So the Communist Party is no longer a Communist Party because they are also part of government. Their language has suddenly changed. The same communists are buying big cars and obviously Cosatu, obviously with the exception of its General Secretary, who sometimes shows that he is their leader, he will speak his mind, he will always be called into order to be disciplined. So, that is the unfortunate part that the labor movements have all been co-opted into one government. So their voice outside government is not that powerful.

47:22 S'bu: Obviously schools have a role to play and are playing a role, especially the tertiary institutions. We have a good working relationship with students from the University of Cape Town, for instance, the University of KwaZulu Natal, Rhodes University, through student's movements, like students who are doing law—the student for law and social justice and student from the University of South Africa. Also, there are community outreach programs. It's with the high schools that we have not had any relationship. But I do think it will really work. And obviously, we work with churches, particularly the Anglican churches. They have supported us, they have suffered with us, they have been subjected to all sorts of criticism.

48:32 Q5: I just wanted to ask whether you felt that your movement has been successfully in its beginning days allowed for a sense of security and support in either the new members or people that (unclear). A lot of organizations (unclear) and what you would advise people that would like to start a social movement or a young social movement to do to create that sense of (unclear).

49:06 Q6 It looked like from a scene in the video that there was a certain amount of education that was going on as members of the movement were helping other people when their shacks were torn down and I wondered whether you could talk a little bit about what kind of self-education is being done within your movement and where you see the value of that education, in terms of building a movement.

49:41 S'bu: Thank you. Our strategy starts from the ground, it starts in action. Through meetings we learn. In our leadership meetings, a lot of learning takes place. There are mass meetings of this nature. There are also camps where the movement sits the whole night, from 6 pm to 6 am, because in these usual meetings sometimes they don't have enough time. One or two hours time is nothing when you are suffering. So a committed movement, part of its program, is that it will have these camps in the whole night. It's not only a question of land and housing in the city that gets discussed but the broader political ideas of what makes us poor. What are the systems that keep us in this poverty?

50:51 S'bu: And again, we call this popular education. Abahlali has come up with the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, our own home-made university. What a wonderful space, where there are no teachers, there are no lectures, but leaders and facilitators. Through the University of Abahlali, also, its not only

politics but also learning of computer literacy, trainings. The University of Abahlali also serves as a referral where we send shack dwellers into the formal universities through the universities' community outreach program. Universities have a responsibility as well. If there are organized (unclear) it's easy for that to happen. So a lot of learning takes place but also we have a year calendar where we align ourselves with the national events like the Freedom Day, which we have turned into the UnFreedom Day. We cannot fool ourselves and celebrate and say we are free while we die in the shacks. We host our big events on the 27th of April. Every year we have a big rally where we mourn the loss of our freedom. And we feel shame when some of us, who are as poor as we are, are used by the politicians when they have to escort the politicians because there are free buses, free t-shirt, free food only for that day. That freedom comes in one day, on the 27th of April. For us we talk of a freedom that comes every second, every minute, every hour. That's the permanent freedom we are looking at, not a once off because someone has been impressed with something.

52:59 S'bu: So, and obviously June month is the youth month in South Africa...to commemorate the Soweto uprising. So again, leading to a youth month, youth also have their own activities, so we have Abahlali Youth League, a separate space to build youth leadership and involvement. The youth should also take responsibility. It takes a very strong and courageous youth not to sit back when their parents are being made to suffer. That political consciousness happens in action, through protest we learn. Obviously, something to learn bro(unclear), the first day you take a membership of our movement, we educate you so that if you've made a mistake you better don't join us. When you take a card, you take a membership card, you have a responsibility to check your neighbors or your families, if they are not going through the same difficulties that you face. We consider your humanity and personality not complete when you're alone, in isolation to others. Your humanity becomes complete when you have others surrounding you. So then you have a responsibility to recruit. We only consider a community to be member or a branch of Abahlali when there is, at least, about 50 members. When there is a minimum of 50 members, then we consider you as a branch. That's how our membership is able to grow that quick. And then we talk to communities when they join Abahlali, that they are taking a risk of all sorts. But what is important when you join, around education, we also stress to people that we are not going to struggle for you but that

we struggle with you. We're not going to stop any eviction for you but we will stop some eviction with you. We're not going to do anything for you but we will do things with you.

55:31 S'bu: So you are not going to take membership card and relax at home and our leadership in our office does not save, as in, some kind of consultants when people are threatened with evictions they run to the office. The strategy is not in the office. So you better wake up from today, you are going to defend yourself. Your neighbors will help you to defend yourself. I think building from that, really helps people to be aware of the risk they take from the very same day they join, the responsibility that goes with that, the commitment that goes with that.

56:20 Q7: You talk about shack dwellers and people in the rural areas and I think what you said is that those groups are somewhat new to the movement. And so I was wondering if you could talk about what kind of historical social divisions there are (unclear), I'm assuming there are, between the rural communities (unclear) and the shack dwellers and how you build a movement to have those different groups of people aligning with each other

57:00 Q8: Given the emphasis on allowing the poor speak for themselves, can you comment on negotiating your relationship with documentary filmmakers, photographers, journalists, people that want to...portray a picture of what your movement is all about, what you're doing (unclear)

57:19 S'bu: Thank you. I think that's a very important question. I mean, just to add on that, our relationship also with middle class people, you know, with academics, with NGOs for instance. We've also been very clear that we will not be co-opted and we want to speak for ourselves. To people that are joining us and people that are supporting us with all kinds of resources, even the lawyers, just to make a typical example of the Slums Act, of how we instruct our lawyers. When the Bill was presented to us, not because we were smart but because, I mean the state is required by the law that the Bill should go for public comments, public hearing. Then they brought it to us, then we had to, within the movement, task individuals from the movement to read through the bill. It was the very same young folks, the Mazwis the Mnikelos, those that were on video, that were tasked, you know the special task team, that will read through the Slums Act, the Slums Bill. And they read it, sentence by sentence, made sense and presented their analysis to us, to the movement and we've discussed it and we've

discovered that it was not only an attack on our movement but an attack on the poor. It's only then when we had requested this support of resource people, you know lawyers for instance, to have a second thoughts and eventually instructed the lawyer to add for us.

59:22 S'be: But all the way to the constitutional court, we've been giving the back up to our legal team. I think they were very courageous also to have these kinds of clients who give them back up all the way. And they could easily point out in the court, Pierre (unclear names), this is what this Bill will do to my clients, here they are. And again, when we ask people to be...to support us, all resourced people, we ask people not to use or to abuse that opportunity. Often, resourced people for instance, will hijack the struggles of people. You will find them commenting, on the radio for instance, on behalf of the people. In the name of help, they often disempower. They want to do things for us, without us, and not with us. So again, we encourage people to be careful how they kind of support, especially if they are not comrades but friends of resourced people. So we say people should talk with us, not for us. They should help us to fish ourselves, not to fish for us because they will come and they will go, they will leave us suffering. So in the process of empowering, we ask people to support us side by side, not behind us, not to lead us, because that often disempowers and it imposes. So that's how we work, you know, with resourced people.

01:01:15 S'bu: Filmmakers, we all, I mean, they are open, we discuss these issues with them. They don't take decision for us or think they are too smart for us. It's good to work with humble people who will always ask, 'but how can I help?', 'this is what I can offer', 'how can we do this?' But if they come as masters, then often it becomes problematic, in the name of help. You know, some do it unintentionally, they just want to help. But the way they help, they disempower in the process, or they hijack those struggles. And the very same voice is undermined and it collapses. It's a fragile situation to maintain. That's why it must be clear when people want to join whether they want to be comrades, they want to be friends, or they want to fund us, for instance, it must be clear.

01:02:10 S'bu: In terms of different groups, you know, from the shacks, from the flats, from the traditional communities, I mean it's been very clear that there is one struggle. Again, South Africa has a history of this segregation. There's poor black townships there, coloreds there, whites there. And it's taking the country so long to integrate and the country talks so much about an integrated

society. The demarcations that are there have made it clear for us that it's not going to go away today. But what has happened really is that, as much as the country talks so much about inclusive cities, what has become clear is that it is no more a color question. I'm not saying it's no more there but it has become a question of how much do you have. For instance, I mean, government will build these homes and will expect all sort of people, the rich and the poor, that's what they're trying to do, build an integrated society, not around color but around socio-economic backgrounds. But again, you know, people who earn differently are unable to live together because some people tend to see that those who are poor are devaluating the value of their property. And it's always a clash that sometimes I cannot pay services and someone else has to pay services and it's not fair. So there's so much that gets said about this integration but it's not working. And slowly, slowly, the poor are getting pushed out of cities for number of reasons. Not in terms of color now, I'm not saying that has been sorted out, it's not yet sorted out. But at least that has helped us to understand the need to define ourselves, to know the people in the same class in which we are. Therefore, living in the municipal owned flats, for instance, and living in the old traditional homes, it really doesn't make any difference with us.

01:04:36 S'bu: They're in our movements, they're our own comrades while we suffer evictions, they are also complaining about water cut-off, no electricity, evictions, they cannot afford to pay this rent because sometimes with this public housing of subsidy scheme they are sweet when people have to enter but when people are inside, then suddenly the rent goes up. You know, it's a very smart system of chasing those who cannot pay. They'll have their water shut down, their electricity cut off. We faced the similar situation. It's not only a question of shelter, but other necessities surrounding that.

01:05:27 Q9: You talked a little bit about...continuing to build your organization with people committing in hard (unclear), organizing with your neighbor and your comrades but I guess I wanted to bring it back to the gentleman's question who asked about some of the, like in the beginning, when you referred to (unclear) your whole reason (unclear)

01:05:52 Q10: Are there people who live in your shack community or other shack communities who oppose maybe (unclear) movements and object to some of the things you do?

01:06:02 S'bu: Who?...oppose

01:06:05 Q10: – people who live within the shack communities who oppose the movement and how you handle that.

01:06:12 S'bu: Yes...for simple reasons. For party, political...the party politics. So I think in our movement we make a very clear distinction between a party politic, which is an electoral system, and the living politics. You know, a living politics is a politics that everyone understands, you know. Simple politics that I have no water, no light, yet my life need water. I don't need light but my life needs light. So we call that a living politics that does not need any big boss in theory to understand. A politics that says I am poor but my neighbor is living in a 1.5 million house [and it is] clear that [the same] system puts us together. Party politic really has, you know, been a popular license to participate in any future development...So, again, a concept of a social movement is not a new concept in South Africa. During the struggle for liberation, the way the United Democratic Front that united outside apartheid politics was in our social movement it was in the civics. But again, it was of the new teaching, people have been taught that to become active citizen, you got to have, you got to join a certain political party. It is your only license to participation, to any development that affects you. It is their only license, through party politics.

01:08:12 S'bu: So as a result, when we started the movement, obviously it was not easy for people to understand. They thought it was another new political party that was trying to oppose the current government, and so on. But again, it takes a very strong courageous leadership to keep this kind of education so that people become aware that, in fact, what divides us is this party political affiliations. So South Africa is a very interesting typical example of a country where people think that if I am this party A and you are this party B, then, automatically, this makes us enemies. And people have been killed for that, that you are not in my party, people have died for that, and people are still dying in South Africa, just for being in a different political party. Then our teaching in our movement, which has really not been appreciated, is being able to also integrate and to do away with that kind of mentality. Again, part of our recruiting strategy is to say to people, leave your party politics at home. We don't need it here. You are entering a different terrain. So in our movement you will have people from all different party political backgrounds but they are able to speak in one voice because now they can understand what brings them together. And

they are the witnesses that my party didn't help me. My party is not building homes for me. My party, even if it is in government, it cannot even provide electricity. So why should I continue with that? So I think that suffering is also able to bring people together to do away with party political thinking, as if that is the only license for your voice to be heard or to participate in the economy of the country, or political situation.

01:10:28 S'bu: So I think it's not been easy to...to deal with that. But at the same time, the teachings of the party political systems still insists that if you are not in my party, then you are my enemy. As a result, the party political systems are able to say to some of the shack dwellers that are in the same location, neighbors, that the movement is actually trying to oppose us. So that's why you may have seen some folks from the shack settlements protesting against the shack dwellers. But we know the game. Some of them were paid to do so, local drug lords and shebeen owners are the main culprits that serve as a vehicle to pretend that people can turn anger against one another. I think the system is very smart to use the very same poor to tend their anger. Also that this community can be seen to be unruly, then, a mediator is needed. And they are smart to maneuver and deal with that so that you are looked as stupid, fighting against one another when there is no need. To start a movement obviously is not an easy thing and I'm saying that in our movement there were no cleaver individuals that sat down and thought of building a movement.

01:12:08 S'bu: It was through anger, hunger, and frustration. A piece of land was promised to the residents of Kennedy Road and a meeting was set up in the same piece of land. The Department of Housing officials were excited to come in and arrest people after it was discovered that that piece of land was sold to a business, a local businessman, yet it was promised for housing. And instead of officials coming, they send the police. And then the community jumped into the street and the road was blockaded. Through that road blockade, and again, many of us were not aware that by blockading a road, that on its own was a political act. Up until, 14 people were arrested, beaten, and tortured in prison. It's only when we realized that we were playing this dirty game politic, it's only when we realized that in fact, we are playing with fire. But again, through courage and strength of the people, we marched the next day to demand that those who were arrested be released or all of us be arrested because they were charged for public violence.

01:13:34 S'bu: Now, which public, because we are the public. (unclear) charged for us then it doesn't make sense to us. Rather, take them out because we are the public that should have been the victims of their act. But if you cannot release them then arrest us. And again, the protest in the next day was also dispersed with... guns and so on. The movement grew up like that. It was not easy. It's only when we started seeing that, in fact, we were entering a different terrain. Obviously other neighboring settlements who felt the same, they did not come to support us because they were living in similar conditions, they [came because they] thought that the struggle was theirs. So we are not here to support you but our fight is the same, we are here for ourselves. That's how the struggle grew up. Many settlements joined and I remember 2005 was declared as the year of action. It was fulfilled all over the country. That's how the movement was formed. We had to coordinate that and then sit down now and the movement was born. So I think that, in the way that we already do, it may be easy to connect, collaborate and (unclear), making tonight that these different organizations that are struggling their own isolated dark corners, their struggle is so hard, it will not be won by individualism. S'bu: Down individualism, down. (audience: down). Down capitalism, down. (audience: down). (audience laughter)

01:15:32 Dara: Unfortunately, we are out of time (applause) thank you so much (applause continues)... Any last closing statement you want to make?

01:15:55 S'bu: Thank you so much. I am humbled, again, when I occupy the space I take it very humbly but firmly. My message obviously would be that we all have a role to play as brothers and sisters in our own small ways and I invite you to create the very same precious space I have spoken about. Some of you are already busy building that space. And my discoveries here have been an excitement and a passion, the willingness to build this precious space, a space where everyone counts, where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Again, it is our duty to go out and do our duty to our country...to build a fair society. Let's again try to leave this Earth a better place than we found it. Thank you.

17 NOVEMBER 2010

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Onogada Badinga Ukudibana Ukusuka Ezantsi Ukunyuka

Mhlawumbi kufanelekile ukuba kukhunjuzwe abantu ukuba apho kukho inkqubo yelizwe elawulwa yimali, amakapitali basoloko bexhaphaza abasebenzi ngaphezu kwento yonke onokuyicinga kule mihla apho izinga labangaphangeliyo liphezulu. Abantu bafotele ukuxhatshazwa. Kodwa kufuneka siqonde ukuba yinkqubo engaqhelekanga le. Asikho isizathu sokuba wonke umntu angabinasidima sakhe.

Ndisebenze njengonogada iminyaka eminzi. Ndandisoloko ndicinga ukuba lomsebenzi ulungileyo ngoba sisoloko sibabona onogada bencumile. Kukho imfuneko yokuba amagosa karhulumente abe nento ayenzayo ngomsebenzi wonogada. omnye wenkokheli zethu wathi urhulumente bekumele ayilungise lengxaki onogada bajongene nayo. uRhulumente bekumele aqinisekise ukuba lomsebenzi ube phansi kwemithetho karhulumente kwaye baqinisekise ukuba lomithetho ikwimfuno zabasebenzi. Kakade xa kubekwa etafileni imithetho nemimiqathango yalomsebenzi onke amakapitali asoloko ekhalaza ngoba bayoyika ukulahlekelwa yimali, ekugqibeleni kungabikho ogqiba ekuxhaseni urhulumente. Yindlela ekusetyenzwa ngayo le. Abantu banyula urhulumente ukuze urhulumente athobele abantu, kodwa urhulumente umamela amakapitali. Yiyolonto abantu kwamanye amazwe behlangana ukuze bakwazi ukuzama ukunzela urhulumente abamamele.

Akumandanga ukuba ngunogada. Sisebenza ngemivuzo ephantsi. Ubusuku nemini sisoloko silapha silindele umntu esingamaziyo nokuba uza nini okanye uzakuba nohlobo olunjani lompu. Singabantu abahluphekileyo, kwaye sibeke ubomi bethu emngciphekweni imihla ngemihla ngokugada izakhiwo nobomi bezityebi. Isininzi sendawo esisebenza kuzo azinandawo yokufihla intloko (amagumbi onogada), kulendawo ndibhala kuyo ndihleli elangeni. Akukh'onto ngoku, kodwa xa kukho umoya nemvula ndizabe ndisahleli kule ndawo inye. Xa ndigula abancedisi nangesenti. Ndim onoxanduva, kwezinye indawo kukho

nencwadi yeziganeko xana ufunda into ebhalwe kuloncwadi kubonakala ngathi kungafika umntu akubulale kungekho nomntu oyakwazi nanye into ngawe.

Naxa sicela abaphetheyo kurhulumente wethu ukuba bangenelele bathi masiphindele esikolweni. Kodwa ngaba ukusebenza njengonogada lolunye uhlobo lesohlwayo ngenxa yokuba ungafundanga okanye kumele ukuba ngumsebenzi? Kodwa ke ngubani othe oonogada abafundanga. Ngubani othe abo bangagqibanga esikolweni okanye abo bangakwazanga ukufunda emva kwe-sikolo lityala labo. Kukho into ebizwa ngokuba yimbali yengcinezelo eye yenza abanye abantu bahlupheka kakhulu. Abahlali baseMjondolo bacinga okokuba izityebi namahlwempu enziwe kwayilendlela kuqhutywa ngayo abe kulemeko. Ngamanye amaxesha xa ukhalazela into ethile usoloko usiva abo bacinezele oonogada besithi "ayindim othi sanukuya esikolweni". Eyona nto ndiyicingayo ngamandla yeyokuba kufuneka sithethe ngobomi nangemfundo ngoba umntu akangomntu ngenxa yemfundo.

Efundile engafundanga umntu uyohlala engumntu. Xana sixelelwa ukuba sivotele kwa ababantu banye abasibuzi ukuba sifunde kangakanani na phambi kokuba sifake ivoti zethu. Ngemini yonyulo kuyakhawulezwa ukubona ukuba siyalingana. Ngosuku olulandelayo yonke into ibuyela esiqhelweni siphinde si-bonwe thina bahluphekileyo singezozinto.

Ukuba awunabo ubudlelane nabaphezulu kwipolitiki, udinga imfundo ukuze ufumane umsebenzi. Ukuba sidinga imfundo ukuze sisebenze kakuhle, kutheni ke kungekho mfundo engahlawulelwayo khona ukuze wonke umntu axhamle. Kutheni urhulumente enganagalelo eluntwini? Khawufane ucinge ukuba bangaphi abantu ebengefunde isakhono okanye ibhizinisi ngexabiso lokwakhiwa kwebala lebhola ngalinye. Andikwazi kuqonda ukuba kutheni abantu beyekiwe bengafundanga xana imfundo ibaluleke kangaka.

Eyona ndlela enokusenza sikwazi ukwenza utshintsho kwinkampani kukwakha inyunane ziqine. Kodwa nezinye inyunane ezilungileyo ziyinxalenye yalendlela. Inyunane zidinga ukutshitsha. Inyunane kufuneka ziqiniseke ukuba abantu ekufuneka basebenze ngengxaki zabantu kufuneka ibe ngabo bazinikeleyo ekuncedeni abantu. Kufuneka babe ngamakhoboka abantu, nabantu abenze utshintsho, abo benza utshintsho lokwenyani, nabo bathetha utshintsho kumabonakude. Kufuneka babengabantu abathatha ingxaki zabantu njengezabo

Uninzi lwenyunane zikwimeko embi. Andifuni kuthetha kakhulu kodwa baba ziikati ezityebileyo ngokuthatha imali zethu kovimba bethu mahala.

Inyunane zisuke zaba lolunye uhlobo lwebhizinisi. Zisuke zasebenza kunye nabaphetheyo, azabalwela abasebenzi. Ukuba sizama ukulwela amalungelo ethu sisuke sigxothwe kungekho nto kodwa uninzi lwenyunane aziwenzi umsebenzi wazo. Ezinye zezinyunane zisuke zoyike njengabaphetheyo xa zibona ukuba abasebenzi bazama ukumanyana kwindawo abasebenza kuzo. Ngamanye amaxesha uye ubone ukuba ujoyine inyunane wenza izinto zibelula kwiinkampani bazokwazi ukukugxotha. Imbi kakhulu into yokuba abantu bagxothwe ngenxa yenyunane emva koko inkampani iphawule ukuba ibe sisiphoso ukukugxotha bakucele ubuyele emsebenzini.

Kubo bonke oonogada masibebanye sakhe umbutho wonogada ngonogada. Lo mbutho inga ungenziwa kodwa ungabi ngumsebenzi osisigxina kuzo zonke iifisi. Apho singaxoxa zonke ingxaki esijongene nazo, ezongxoxo zigaqala kuthi, izigqibo esizakuzenza zizakube zenziwe sithi, sizenzela thina. Kulemibutho singasa iingxaki kwinyunane ukusuka apho sizise kwa CCMA kodwa lo mbutho uzakusoloko ulapho lonke ixesha. Asisoze sinikele iingxaki zethu kwinyunane. Sizakwenza imanyano ngaphandle kwenyunane ukuze sikwazi ukuzilawula inyunane ezantsi. Inkokheli zenyunane ezinobuqhophololo zizakuphela, bonke abasebenzi bazakuhlonitshwa ngabaqeshi nabathengi.

Enkosi ku Jama, Stadu, Zizi

Mna lindela 'Mashumi' Figlan ndandisakuba ngusihlalo weKennedy Road Development Committee ndasebenza njengo sekela prezidanti wabahlali baseMjondolo. Uye wabalixhoba lokoyikiswa ngokufa esidlangalaleni oko kwaqala uhlaselo kubahlali baseMjondolo eKennedy road ngo Septemba 2009. Ngoku uhlala kwimikhukhu yaseCato Crest ukusebenza njengonogada Claremont.

13 JANUARY 2011

Report · S'bu Zikode

A Report Back on the US National Tour: Building Living Solidarity among Movements to End Poverty and Ensure Dignity for All

The invitation to visit the US came after the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) invited Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA to participate in a series of leadership building seminars in the US. I was honored by Abahlali when the general meeting decided to send me into the USA. The aim of the visit was to learn, to share our experiences with other struggling organizations, to express our solidarity with other struggling organizations and individuals and to contribute in leadership building in the US.

Although my first contact was with NESRI, Picture The Homeless, the Poverty Initiative, Sleeping Giant and Abahlali friends, particularly Kerry Chance, Toussaint Losier and Richard Ballard in Chicago and Raj Patel and Nunu Kidane in San Francisco. But during my visit I had met many friends, Institutions, organizations and general public. I received and enjoyed comradely hospitality from friends and families who welcomed me in the comfort of their homes. Some of these friends were Kerry Chance, Toussaint Losier, J R Fleming and Richard Ballard while in Chicago. In Ithaca, there were Alicia Swords, Tim and Liz Theoharis and little Sophia. In New York City Darya Marchenkova, Jean Rice, Owen Rodgers, Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza. In Philadelphia it was Desi Burnette and Carmen Cuadrado. In Los Angeles was Debora Burton, Becky Dennison, Thelmy Perez and Davin Corona. In Maywood Leonardo Vilchis and Elda. And in San Francisco it was Jennifer Friedenbach, Jamie Spector, Nunu Kidane and Raj Patel, Mini Kahlon and little Jahan just to mention the few.

As this was a national tour my first stop was in Chicago where I was hosted by the Chicago Anti Eviction Campaign folks who took me around their neighborhoods. I was welcomed by the Central District Organizing Project (Gary IN) and South Austin Community Coalition. They showed me many homes that

had been foreclosure as well as empty buildings and policing blue lights (these are cameras placed on the street corners as surveillance mechanism) in some of the poor black neighborhoods. They also took me to Whittier Parent Committee, the School where I met a Chicago Latinas women group who were busy sewing as part of their craft work. They narrated their story about the occupation La Casita (The Little House), a building on the ground of the Whittier Elementary School, for over a month saving it from demolition by the Chicago Public School (CPS) after a serious confrontation with the police. Las mamas (the mothers) continue to negotiate with Ron Huberman, the CEO of CPS, for what the La Casita is really worth. It is already used as a Library for the children, and for other activities like GED, English and Sewing classes. I was immediately reminded of the strength of the women in our communities and movements. Without the strength of our women our oppressors would have crushed us long ago.

I was also hosted by the University of Chicago, co-hosted by the African Studies Workshop, the Human Rights Workshop and the Human Rights Program of the University of Chicago with Dr. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations and the College. The public talk was attended by many students, some from the University of Cape Town, South Africa and alumni. On my first Sunday I attended a mass prayer in the Back of the Yards Church with Duff Morton, Jeff Frank a lawyer and friend of MST. The service was attended by about eight hundreds congregants who prayed for Abahlali. I was touched and deeply honored by this and carried the strength of this honor with me through out my tour. I also visited Cabrin Green, and spoke to some residents there and was blessed by the strategic conversation I had with Padre Melo, a Jesuit priest and resistance leader from Honduras. I had some Radio interviews in studio with WVON, WBEZ "Worldwide" Radio and Black Agenda Report.

Ithaca was my second stop, and I was invited to give a public talk at Ithaca College and Cornell University. In both these institutions I noted the presence of students, alumni and professors. I met young activists from Action Reflection Circle (ARC), a grassroots organization working for social and economic justice. I cannot forget how late I and members of the ARC had to discuss some of the challenges faced by this organization in making change and serving justice. The high level of commitment from ARC is a hope for many of us to realize

Housing as a Human Right for all. Meanwhile in Tompkins County, 1 in 3 families struggle to afford adequate housing.

I flew to New York City my third stop where I was welcomed by leaders and staff from NESRI, PTH, Poverty Initiative and Sleeping Giant. I had an opportunity to meet with the young and energetic Darya Marchenkova who worked tirelessly in organizing the whole trip in such a successful manner. This was not an easy work but she managed to put together a very tight schedule for me, trying to satisfy everyone. The biggest salute goes to her. The comrades from PTH, Jean Rice and Owen Rodgers, took me around their neighborhoods in West Harlem, showing me the vacant buildings, homes foreclosure. I was also shown some big building bought and owned by the Colombia University. I was told how wealthy that University had become. The comrades took me to their offices for some discussion and reflection. Their office was a hope and a home for so many homeless folks. I was satisfied by the manner in which the issues of homelessness were taken so seriously. Abahlali notes with high respect how PTH and many organizations had protested at the South African Embassy in New York in solidarity with us in South Africa when we were under attacked by the state.

I had an opportunity to participate in the protest in solidarity with restaurant workers in New York. I also had an opportunity of meeting Domestic Workers United. These mothers were amazing. I was inspired by how their fight for the rights of domestic workers has grown from strength to strength for the past ten years. I was honored to be part of their ten year anniversary. Their work inspired me as it reminded me of my own mama who for the rest of her life worked as a domestic worker without any organization that protected the interests of domestic workers.

I had an opportunity of having a strategic conversation with Rob Robinson and Max Ramou from Take Back the Land. Take Back the Land has put forward a proposal for a future working relationship with Abahlali which is still in discussion.

I also had an opportunity to participate in the Poverty Initiative Scholarship Program in the Theological Seminar. This is an annual scholarship program that draws hundreds of leaders from around the country. The 2009 seminar

was held in West Virginia and attended by Rev. Mavuso from the Rural Network and Mazwi Nzimande from Abahlali in South Africa. The Poverty Scholars Program is coordinated by Willie Baptist. The first day of my participation was a lifelong learning. Willie Baptist spoke on Re-Igniting the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Poor People's Campaign: Uniting Leaders, Uniting the Poor, Abolishing Poverty. The First Step: Uniting Leaders-So As To Unite the Poor-Across Color Lines. The global perspective, theory, linking and solidarity were highly informative and led to excellent discussions. On the other side a powerful view on Political Economy was shared and facilitated by Chris.

I have always begun my presentations by a Sneak Peek of the film *Dear Mandela* and here in New York this was facilitated by Christopher Nizza of *Sleeping Giant*, one of the film makers. The video helped US audience to create their own understanding of the context of South Africa's shanty towns. I was introduced by Christopher Nizza. I talked about what Abahlali are and what our movement stands for. I elaborated on how we organise. I spoke more about how each member is encouraged to take Abahlali membership with families, friends and neighbors. That, the emphasis is more of promoting collectivity as opposed to individualism. That when Abahlali launch a new branch we promote independence and empower communities. We insist that, the movement will not struggle for its members but that it will struggle with its members. Our Executive Committee or office will not do anything for communities but it will always respond to a request to struggle with them. Whether there is an eviction, threats, protest or even negotiations with the state. We are clear that the role of the movement is to support each community to struggle for itself. We are also clear that the struggle is not in our offices but in the communities. The office exists to support the communities not the other way around. That is why an individual may not cope on his or her own. Each branch and each community needs others to support their course. One depends on the other. As each grows stronger we all grow stronger. Here we say 'talk to us and not for us' and we say there is 'nothing for us without us'. Everyone knows that we say it to the government and to the regressive NGOs. But what many people don't understand is that we also say it with in the movement. We teach each branch that they must say it to their leadership at all levels. To lead with honor is to lead by honoring. To lead is to inspire self confidence and to share resources and skills

and networks so that leadership and obedience can be the same thing. This is the politic of dignity. It starts and ends with reality that everyone thinks.

There were more questions about how we organize especial how we build leadership among young people. This was in reference to Zama Ndlovu, Mazwi Nzimande and Mnikelo Ndabankulu whose leadership role is clearly shown in the *Dear Mandela* film. Our movement began with many young people taking a leadership role so this was never something that we had to struggle to achieve. But it may be something that we will have to struggle to defend as our movement continues to grow, to win victories and to be seen to be successful and more older people who already have some power in their communities enter the movement. But in response to the question I explain that the struggle of Abahlali is thought from the ground, it is thought in action i.e. through the collective discussion of the experience of the oppression, community solidarity, protests, meetings, various campaigns, library, and camps. I explained that our living politic does not start with theory or a struggle bureaucracy and then impose these on living struggles in a top down way. I explained that our living politic does not require experts in struggle and that it moves from the experience of ordinary people and is discussed and developed in their languages and in their communities. I explained that our living politic starts from the reality of human equality with the aim of forcing the realization of this reality in the material and political world and so it welcomes and respects everyone irrespective of age. I explained that it aims to enable everyone to be an expert in their own struggle and to have the same right as everyone else to shape the struggle. The idea of the camp was found to be very interesting for the participants. For Abahlali our camps are about commitment in action as they run from 6 pm to 6 am. They are part of our popular education work which is part of the University of Abahlali that aims at building our own cadres. They give us an opportunity to be together while we discuss important issues with the collectivity, slowness, respect and care that is needed for such discussions.

I explained that, there was a need to stimulate and encourage the culture of learning within the movement. I also explained that, with the support of our comrades in the universities, we could send some shack students to the University of KwaZulu/Natal to study computer literacy training and that this has helped expose shack dwellers to the formal institutions. Not to mention the two year program, the Certificate in Education Participatory Development offered

by the University of KwaZulu/Natal Pietermaritzburg campus. I explained that some delegates to this course also participate in Living Learning Sessions. These sessions were created to reflect on the theoretical work studied at the University and to ensure that it stayed in a living conversation with the praxis at the community level.

While in New York City, I had an opportunity to meet with staff and management from the Centre for Constitutional Rights and the Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice. Here the commitment to issues of human rights was such that already there was a draft proposal on the way forward in solidarity with the victims of the Kennedy Road attack. In taking the matter up the CCR has already sent a letter to the U.N Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders. Abahlali believe that this will be very useful for the movement especially the victims of the September 2009 attack. I also raised the matter of the appeal for support of the establishment of the Independent Commission of the Independent Inquiry into the attack under the leadership of Bishop Rubin Phillip of the Anglican Church here in Durban. The Kennedy 12 trial began on the 29 November 2010 and, after the first week of the trial, we are confident that the truth will emerge in the combined weight of the two processes of the trial of Kennedy 12 and then the Independent Inquiry into the attack.

I was invited to speak at the City University of New York Graduate Centre's Center for Place, Culture and Politics with Professor David Harvey. This platform was very important for Abahlali to be able to address our academics friends, learn from their wisdom, warn and help them to understand their role in movements or struggling communities. They are part of us, but sometimes some of them do not see it that way. There are still a few of them who think that it is their duty to do the thinking for the poor. They think that there are above us and apart from us. They look at the ugliness of our material poverty and think that we also suffer the very same ugliness in spiritual and intellectual poverty. They do not recognize that we are also people that think. This is why the slogan 'We are poor not stupid' was developed. This slogan is aimed directly at the regressive universities. Academics skills are so needed to confront the power of neoliberal policies and the systems that produce injustices in our world. But we cannot accept the authority of those academics that demand the right to dictate to our movement from outside our living politic, those academics who think

they can buy our movement by making deals with individuals. In this discussion I alluded to participants how some academics use their skills to assume the right to talk for us without assuming the duty and the risks that come from talking to us and struggling with us. They have been able to get away with this because they have monopolized email networks, publishing and the ability to travel around the world. But we are now invading and occupying these spaces.

Philadelphia, was my fourth stop, I was hosted by the Media Mobilizing Project an organization that exists to unleash the powerful combination of communications, media making and organizing. I had found this very interesting as community organizations can not rely on main stream media. The organizations that work with MMP are lucky to have their stories and activities told in their own media. Unlike in South Africa we do not have this privilege as we have to fight for all kinds of propaganda reported by both the state and corporate controlled media. The MMP also organized a public event in the United Methodist Church at which I spoke. The leaders took me for a tour in their neighbourhoods. I saw that more buildings were empty, industrial buildings were empty too. Some homes remained under threat of foreclosure. I was also taken to some historic museum including the Liberty Bell. My salute goes to Desi Burnette and Carmen Cuadrado of the MMP for such organizing and leadership wisdom. You went beyond your call. Thank you.

I had some conversation with leaders of United Taxi Workers, working to unite all taxi workers in order to fight for fair working conditions. These militant workers seek to organize the taxi industry across color lines.

Back in New York City, I attended a leadership meeting of the Movement for Justice in El Barrio. This is Mexican immigrant-led multi-issue organization fighting for justice in East Harlem. The organization describes itself as the sister organization of the Zapatista Movement. They have two short videos: "The Struggle of the People's Front in Defense of the Land of San Salvador, Mexico" and "Our Mutual Fight for Justice". Their activism was more informed by the reality of our world and their democratic practice. I noted that one of their membership requirements was that one does not belong to any political party or participate in any party political system. A lot was shared with me about the fact that land is not for sale – it is to be loved, occupied and cultivated to produce food. Here a lot was shared about politicians and the state political system whereas with most other movements discussions had been more about the

banks and sheriffs. We discussed how the politicians always take the side of the big companies, banks and corporate which all unite against the poor people. What really struck me was when they said that party political system is destroying their culture. For me, this was a real fight in war, not what we mistakenly call as repression in Mexico.

While in there I had a pleasure of meeting Raul Zibechi of Uruguay in Manhattan. In a conversation with him on a strategic questions I was personally interested on how older movements have survived state repression. He had some interesting light to shine on how the state goes beyond direct repression at the hands of police but also initiates and helps the drug lords and criminal networks to rule our neighborhoods. Raul explained that in the battle that arises while movements try to deal with this the state finds its opportunity to jail leaders or even kill them. This reminded me of the current situation in our beloved Kennedy Road Settlement, that once became a hope for many. This was an activist who has experienced all these kinds of movement organizing and failing.

Los Angeles was my fifth stop and was I hosted by the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN). Here leaders took me for a Downtown community tour. Here a lot was said about the police deployment and brutality on the poor. There was a lot of unusual behavior, as members of the LA CAN had to patrol the streets of LA Downtown to guard for the police abuse on the poor with cameras and note books, to take notes and photos of any abuse by the Police Department. It was sad how poor pedestrians get tickets, just like motorists, especial taxi drivers in South Africa, who are subjected to similar daily harassment from Metro Police. Here pedestrians get arrested just for crossing robots or even just for what they call as loitering. Here you are advice to always carry your identity book, failing which you will remain in jail until your identity is confirmed. On our evening walk people were sleeping on the pavements, some right on the cement. This was a shock for me in the city known for producing super stars in the world. In this situation, the work of LA CAN is so crucial. Seeing that their offices are so full of community members who come for legal advices and help of various issues associated with homelessness, including how the sheriff conducts his/her business in carrying out evictions, was a wonderful experience.

In LA, I met the Los Angeles Right to Housing Collective Community with Union de Vecino in Maywood. Here at the community and leadership meeting

with elderly people some people were touched by the Sneak Peek of Dear Mandela in to tears. They explained about their struggle and its challenges that included police harassment, contaminated water, documentations as most members are immigrants from Mexico and their successes included closing down the police department and successful mobilizing to put up their own mayor of this city. Here, I had emphasized the importance of working together, the strength and unity that come with it. Here I wish to salute the style of organizing to a point of beating the majority of the city by able to put your own mayor and close the corrupt Police Department and replace it with a cooperating and an understanding sheriff. Again it was clear and true that, "the people united will never be defeated".

The City of San Francisco was my sixth stop, I met the Coalition on Homelessness, SF in Turk Street. Jennifer, the Executive Director and Jamie Spector of the San Francisco Community Land Trust took me around this neighborhood of the Tenderloin. Poverty, homelessness, use of drugs, police harassment and mental desperation were the signs of the day. This was a moment of many questions to my mind. A community sense was all there. People could still smile and greet at us as we walked pass with these local leaders who have become hope and homes for this neighborhood. On the other side of the road there was a long queue of men, women and children queuing for food from a neighboring church. When I walked in the offices of this organization a hope was restored. There was a grand welcoming as I put my feet in that hall. Clapping of hands and smiling faces carrying a lot of love and surprise. When glancing up there, there was a big banner written: Coalition on Homelessness, SF has a pleasure of Welcoming Mr S'bu. Zikode. A short program was set up. More families joined and this was another family moment, a moment of Thanksgiving. We all ate and shared and more families came with more food, mind you in South Africa this day is not celebrated. Jamie Spector then took me to China Town in the offices of the San Francisco Community Land Trust where she works and met with her director Fred Lambright. We had a strategic dialogue and shared our work. This was my first contact with an organization that talks about land in the US thus far.

I had a Public Event with Paul Boden of the Western Regional Advocacy Project and Sarah Short of the Housing Rights Committee San Francisco in

Bayanihan Center. This was the last public event and was attended by Anti-Apartheid Activists, Kiilu Nyasha (former Panther) the Palestinians citizens, IDEX, Bay Area pan-African allies Berkeley, media, students, families and senior citizens. While in the Bay Area, I had an opportunity to be interviewed by Walter Turner on the KPFA-Africa Today. In Oakland I had a conversation with some folks including a representative of Onyx Foundation that supports the Abahlali library with books from C.L.R James. In New Field Foundation, I had some discussions with Sarah Hobson the Executive Director.

In the City of Richmond, I had an opportunity of meeting Gayle McLaughlin, the Mayor and Marilyn Langlois and Nicole Valentino who are both Community Advocates and Rev. Phillip Lawson of the Interfaith Program Director of East Bay Housing Organizations. I was very honored by the Mayor's welcoming after managing to secure that meeting in two days. I was moved by Mayor McLaughlin when she alluded how at the recommendation of Richmond's Human Rights and Human Relations Commissions their City passed a resolution last year declaring Richmond, California to be a Human Rights City and adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the guiding principle. I also mentioned in the meeting that I have tried to meet my own black Mayor of my City in Durban for at least five years to no success. The question has always been who the "hell are you that you think you can meet the mayor". I was so grateful to learn that other mayors can treat us as human beings. The Richmond Mayor had offered to write a letter to Mayor Obed Mlaba of Durban, South Africa to raise concerns I had raised in the meeting. I am happy to announce that, that letter was written and sent on the 8 December 2010. In that letter Mayor McLaughlin also acknowledged the fact that, Richmond, California also has issues of poverty and homelessness but that it is a high priority for them to seek ways to empower communities to assure good jobs and a decent life for all. Although I have not heard of any response or acknowledgement of that letter from Durban Abahlali salute Mayor McLaughlin for taking this matter forward. On the other side Rev. Phillip Lawson was going to mobilize Inter Religion Conference and raise these issues of Human Rights in South Africa.

It is worth noting the Public Talk I have had with various Universities that included the University of California Los Angeles, coordinated by UCLA Law School Public Interest Program, University of Southern California, sponsored by Partnership for Equitable LA. There were a number of mainstream media

interviews including the Grit TV, Al Jazeera TV, KPFA's flagship intellectual programme, "Against the Grain", WBEZ, etc.

Noted in all my talks there were many Abahlali friends and that some of them had to drive miles to come to my talks. I wish to acknowledge these friends with high respect. I have not forgotten how some of them would help victims of shack fires in Kennedy Road Settlement while in South Africa conducting their research as students and how some connected Abahlali with some food distributing NGOs. There were also important intellectual friends like Nigel Gibson who also travelled miles to meet with me in New York.

Here are my Reflections:

Many people I have met in the US seemed to believe that everything is ok in South Africa since the release of Nelson Mandela. They have good reasons to believe this such as that: the country fought so hard to end apartheid, that the country is led by black majority so all or many blacks must be happy, the Rainbow Nation, the Government of National Unity proclaimed by Nelson Mandela, the most progressive constitution in the world and obviously South Africa's successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup. Although people were deeply disturbed by learning from my presentation about the conditions of poverty, homelessness, state repression and attack the unwillingness of the state to engage with the poor also viewed from Dear Mandela video cleared any doubt. Noted also were activists who were part of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in many of my talks.

There were many people who were supporting, following and keeping almost up to date with the struggle of Abahlali. Some had already met Rev. Mavuso of the Rural Network and Mazwi of Abahlali in West Virginia so an interest was developed from there. I am convinced that Abahlali will continue receiving support from many organizations, Abahlali friends and people from the general public that I have met. We urge all our movements to offer the same support to the movements in the US too.

There were some ordinary residents who believed that issues of homelessness, unemployment and poverty were issues of only big corporates. The general thinking was that only the banks, the Universities such Colombia University and big companies that should answer for poverty. There was little or nothing said about the role of the state in this regard. This was very worrying for

the nation to think that this has nothing to do with politic or political economy. For us oppression is a system and it's not just about one corporate. It is the system that allows an organization like Colombia University to do the damage that is doing to society. Of course people have to mobilize against accessible targets. It is not possible to march against capitalism but it is easy to march against Colombia University. But while it is important to keep this reality in mind it is important to keep the bigger issues in mind too. I have thought that the state has been very smart to depoliticize its citizens. The danger of such thinking is that the state may not take responsibility not just for delivering services to its citizens but also for encouraging active citizens' participation in the decision making.

I have advised that in South Africa comrades are very responsible not to allow any vacant buildings or vacant well located lands that could easily house the homeless. I have explained that we do not invade lands but occupy them. I explained that even with some basic services such as water and electricity, we often do not wait for city officials to deliver these services but that we connect these services for and by ourselves. This voluntarily and self-organization has played a significant role in serving our people's lives. Poor shack dwellers are often killed in shack fires because cities would not provide electricity and enough water. We have refused to be burnt in the shack fires just as we refuse to vacate the lands of our ancestors. It will not just be politically immature to have homeless people in homeful cities but immoral.

Sometimes I had the feeling that there has been a lack of community sense in the US with the result that people do not talk to each other especial on issues of socio-economic rights. It is not only the rich that live in gated communities. There are many kinds of walls and gates and gated communities that make it difficult to have community meetings and they depoliticize poverty. They lead to individual behavior that can be very damaging as some people may blame themselves and think it is their own fault not to have access to all kinds of socio-economic amenities. There are many people who are involved in different struggles who see themselves as supporters of these struggles rather than seeing themselves as directly affected by injustices. They see themselves as being completely detached from the daily realities of life. I had the feeling that building bigger movements in the US will require a much bigger sense of community.

There are so many organic intellectuals with great global perspectives in the cities I have visited. There are many ordinary people who have good analysis of our world. There were many people who talked to me about building a global movement. This is great idea but that it may not be easily achieved. My response was motivating this idea but insisting on the practical realities that must be considered. It is the reality that we need to build our struggles in the cities and nationally before becoming global. For me global solidarity can only work when we are able to organize, locally and nationally, with real effectiveness. While we are thinking big we should be walking on the ground and doing small things that can really be achieved. When you build a house you are aware that you need a roof but you start with the foundation and not with the roof. Right now we should be supporting each other when and how we can build and protect the better world where we live. Our struggles have always been in communication. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, the great rural and shack dwellers' movement, the Abahlali of the 1920's, was partially influenced by American sailors who came to our ports. In our own time the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign was partially influenced by the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign from Cape Town. Picture the Homeless in New York has adopted and adapted the Abahlali Slogan "Talk to us, not for us". All that I learnt from the US struggles on this tour will become part of Abahlali. We need to keep this communication and solidarity alive while we build the foundation of our struggle in all our cities in both our countries. If we can succeed with that then we can start with the walls. If we start by trying to raise a roof across the oceans it will just collapse.

Abahlali's living politic explains this much easily. It explains that a struggle must be owned and shaped in thought and in action by ordinary men and women. It explains that every struggle must start from the ordinary lives of people and recognize the logic that if people do not have homes they need homes, if people do not have water they need water. And of course we have to continually discuss the bigger meaning of our struggle.

Comrades were very keen to understand how Abahlali organizes and how we sustain our struggle. They especial wanted to know how it is possible for us to have a membership of thousands. Here I talked about promoting collectivism against individualism. During protests, the number of marchers does not seem to border anyone in the US, while in SA the number of marchers does count.

Our numbers in unity are our strength and with that we are taken seriously. A few hundreds of us are not taken seriously. I explained that commitment to us means that, sometimes we do not have to sleep and that we should have all night camps running from 6 pm to 6 am. But this amazed people and raised serious questions to those who claim to be committed to struggles of justice and social change. They may not be committed enough.

Some comrades in the US have a deep faith in Obama, just like the faith that some South Africans have in Jacob Zuma (SA. State president). They expect changes to come from the top. Some of us also celebrated the election of Obama in South Africa. But we know that while the system can use colour to lock some people out and to divide them, the system at its heart knows no colour. It knows only money and power. Perhaps the next film that Dara and Chris make should be called Dear Obama. If people that elected Obama had remained united and mobilized as a movement after his election then they could be a real organized force against some of the pressures that have confronted Obama in office – pressures from the corporates and from right wing. If there was a real movement to guide Obama from below then maybe things would have been different. We have learnt the hard way that changing the people at the top of the system is not the way to build a just society. Justice will only come from popular political empowerment. Humanizing the world is a bottom up process and not a top down process. It is good to have disciplined allies at the top but power has to be built at the bottom of society and the direction has to be given from below.

It has become clear to many of us that poverty and homelessness are not natural but political. Anything that is political can be challenged by the committed will of the people in action. So, we all have power to end all forms of inequality and injustices in our cities. It is our duty to God and to our countries that requires us to strive for what we believe is fair and just for all.

On behalf of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA I thank everyone in the US and promise to offer the same hospitality in South Africa to all the comrades from the US.

S'bu. Zikode, Durban, South Africa, 12 January 2011.

11 FEBRUARY 2011

Speech · S'bu Zikode

The Politic of Land and Housing

Cape Town, 11 February 2011

I have been asked to speak on the politic of land and housing in our cities. 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 the University of Chicago African Civilizations Program for this platform.

The churches have rallied to our struggle in difficult times – after fires, after arrests, after beatings and of course after the violent attack in Kennedy Road settlement in September 2009. We know about the role that the churches have played in Brazil, Italy, Zimbabwe 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.

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 or Sun Cities. 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 and our world.

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 and its councillors to keep us quiet in the name of a future revolution that does not come. We do not allow some NGOs or academics 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 our place in the board rooms and sometimes we take our place in other countries as we believe there are no human boundaries. Sometimes we take that place in the courts. Sometimes we take it on the radios. Today we take it here.

Our politics starts from the places we have taken. We call it a living politic 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.

Today we need to talk about the politics of land. We need to talk about the politics of housing. We need to talk about a politic of the poor – about a living politics thought, organised and owned by ordinary people.

We need to talk about the politics of fire. We need to talk about the politics of toilets. We need to talk about the politic of class. We need to talk about the politics of AIDS, the politics of xenophobia and the politics of rape.

To think about all this we must start with the history of where we come from. Who are we and what type of society we want to build.

It has become clear to us that whenever 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, less educated. 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 and Blikkiersdorp once they are finished building for the attraction of foreign investments. It is the same poor people that wash and iron for the rich while living in shacks where it is very difficult to wash and iron their own 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. It is the same poor that look after the children of the rich as they grow to become even richer. This is wrong. We need democratic cities. We need fair cities. We need welcoming cities. We need cities for all.

Every child that is born into this world has the same right to grow in safety and to reach their full potential and to shape their world in equality with all other people. When you take this seriously your politic does not impose ideas on people – it imposes people on ideas. Taking the value and dignity of every person seriously – and taking it seriously now and not after services have been delivered, development achieved or socialism built – is a simple politic. But it is also a dangerous politic. It is threat to oppression which is always justified by making some people count for more than others. Anyone who threatens oppression will find that they are called criminal, violent, unpatriotic, short minded, treasonous and more.

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, men or GLBTs. This new togetherness must also understand that the world, what God has given to us all, must be

shared by us all. The earth should be recognised as God's gift to humanity and not something to be fenced in and bought and sold for private profit.

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 whenever we voice out our concerns. The enemies that hire the thugs to attack us. The system talks a lot about democracy, but it does not practice democracy. The system talks more about all the rights, gender equality and justice but does not make any of this real. Progress in courts and conferences doesn't always mean progress in ordinary people's lives. We continue to insist that the real lives of people, all people, must be the measure of progress.

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. Grassroots 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 cannot 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. They

are failing to understand that our politic is actually based on a demand for dignity and equality. Our demand for active citizen participation is just a demand for democracy. In fact citizen participation is required by any democratic state yet it is seen as act of violence. The fact that our demand for dignity is taken as violence means that we have to accept that change may not always be easy or sweet. We will be beaten, we will be demonized. Some of us will be killed. Right now these realities lie before the whole world in Tahrir Square in Cairo in Egypt.

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 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 shacks. This is not a matter for the police and the National Intelligent Agency (NIA). The reason for this is not that shack dwellers cannot 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 are to be serious and respecting of those that they call 'beneficiaries'.

It is very sad that some businessmen, 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 the country 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, New Hanover, and Tumbleweed in Howick just to mention a few. The old settlements, which were founded by land occupations, are now safe. But the new occupations are still at risk of eviction. We have seen this recently in Motala Heights and eMmaus.

The shack dwellers believe that land and housing in the cities will bring about a 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. In all our cities 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 these cities into a caring cities.

One of the biggest mistakes when planning development in the cities 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, the no electricity provision 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 serve and 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 drunk or that we do not want to move from filthy conditions.

People are often confused about what our movement stands for when it comes to land and housing. Today I want to suggest a list of ten demands on the political 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 came out of years of discussion in our movement. We would be very happy if you could discuss them in your own university and organizations so that we can, together, start the work of shaping a new vision for our cities and our world.

- 1. There must be no more homelessness and poverty.
- 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. Unused land must be expropriated from big corporates or rich individuals 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, tent dwellers or farm dwellers have a right to disagree with the government, big corporates or NGOs.
- 10. Shack dwellers have a right to organize themselves outside of the political parties and outside the state control.

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, political party or individual. 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 hope that this is clear.

In recent days comrades have been arrested in Mandela Park, here in Cape Town, and in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. We stand in solidarity with these comrades.

We also, together with people all over the world, stand firm with the comrades in Tahrir Square. We are far apart in distance but close in spirit. Their courage is an inspiration to us all.

I thank you all.

S'bu. Zikode

18 MARCH 2011

Essay · Zimasa Lerumo

Telling the Untold Story

I WAS BORN 1990-27-09 IN CAPE TOWN, IN A VERY BIG HOSPITAL CALLED GROOTERSCHUUR BUT I GROW UP IN EASTERN CAPE IN A SMALL RURAL AREA CALLED EDIPHALA IN [WHITTLE SEA] AT THAT TIME LIFE WAS VERY EASY BECAUSE I WAS RAISED UP BY BOTH PARENTS AND BOTH GRAND PARENTS IN BOTH FAMILIES, BUT THINGS GOT CHANGED WHEN MY PARENTS GOT DIVORCED AND MY MOTHER LEFT MY FATHER AND SHE DECIDED TO LEAVE EASTERN CAPE, SHE WENT TO JHB TO WORK SO THAT ME AND MY BROTHER CAN HAVE A BETTER LIFE.

SHE LEFT ME WITH HER YOUNGER SISTERS [MY AUNTS] WHILE SHE WAS LOOKING FOR A JOB. THEY WERE TREATING ME VERY WELL, BUT AS A LITTLE GIRL GROWING UP WITHOUT A MOTHER LIFE WAS NOT EASY FOR ME. WHEN I WAS IN GRADE 4 SHE CALLED ME TO JHB, YES LIFE THERE WAS MUCH BETTER BECAUSE WE LIVED IN SUBURBS IN A FLAT, WENT TO WHITES SCHOOL, APPARENTLY WHEN I STARTED MY HIGH SCHOOL MY MOM LOST HER JOB AND LIFE STARTED TO BE DIFFICULT AGAIN BUT I MANAGED TO FINISH MY GRADE 8.

MY AUNT TOLD MY MOTHER THAT I MUST COME TO CAPE TOWN AND LIVE WITH HER. LIFE IN CAPETOWN WAS HORRIBLY AND DIFFICULT FOR ME BECAUSE I WAS NOT USED TO THE SITUATION IN WHICH SHE LIVED UNDER OFF.

SHE'S LEAVING IN A SMALL SHACK WITH THREE FAMILY MEMBERS AND I'M THE FOURTH ONE, IN A VERY SMALL AREA CALLED QQ SECTION ON A DIRTY ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU COULD NOT EVEN GO TO THE TOILET, YOU HAVE TO USE A PLASTIC BECAUSE THERE ARE NO TOILETS. WE THROW OUR DIRT IN A PLACE WHERE WE CALL [INYHUNYHU] A DIRTY PLACE ACROSS THE STREET AND WE GET SICK EASILY BECAUSE THE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT CLEAN ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS BECAUSE THEY PLAY NEXT TO IT CAUSE THERE'S NO PLACE FOR THEM TO PLAY.

I MET NEW FREINDS THEY WERE QUIT GOOD BUT MOST OF THEM THEY WERE NOT GOING TO SCHOOL BUT I HAD A CLOSE FREIND LUCKLY SHE WAS STILL GOING TO SCHOOL.

WE DID BAD THINGS E.G WE USED TO DRINK WHILE WE WERE WRITING OUR MATRIC EXAMS,GO TO PARTIES AND SOMETIMES DONT STUDY,OR STUDY ON THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXAM.SADLY I GOT THE DRINKING RESULTS I FAILED MY MATRIC BUT LUCKLY I GOT A CHANCE TO WRITE THE TWO SUBJECTS THAT I'V FAILED.

WHILE I WAS WAITING TO REWRITE MY SUPPLEMENTARY EXAM I HAD NOTHING TO DO EXCEPT FOR PREPARING MY EXAMS,I USE TO SIT THE WHOLE DAY,UNEMPLOYED BUT THANKS TO ABAHLALI BASEMJONDOLO [ABM] ORGANISATION.

I GOT INVOLVED ON THIS ORGANISATION THAT WORKS ON TRYING TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE FOR PEOPLE WHO LIVES IN SHACKS.THEY ARE TRYING TO PUSH GOVERNMENT TO DO THE WORK THAT PEOPLE EXPECT THEM TO DO,BY BUILDING THEM HOUSES WITH ELECTRICITY,CLEAN WATER AND TOILETS IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND I THINK THATS A GOOD THING FOR ME BECAUSE IM ALSO TRYING TO MAKE A CHANGE ON PEOPLES LIVES AND MY LIFE TOO, BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING NOTHING ABOUT IT.

THE ONLY THING THAT THEY DO IS TO TELL US TO VOTE.SO I TOLD MY SELF THAT IM NOT GONNA VOTE CAUSE I DONT SEE THE REASON OF VOTING BECAUSE IT DOES'NT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE, INSTEAD OF MAKING MY LIFE BETTER, IT'S MAKING IT WORS. THE ONLY THING THAT THEY DO IS LYING TO US TELLING US TO VOTE BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY THERE IS NOTHING HAPPENING THEY KEEP ON MAKING EMPTY PROMISESS, GIVING US HOPES THAT WILL NEVER BE TRUE.I TOLD MY SELF THAT I WILL NEVER VOTE IN MY LIFE WHILE I STILL LIVE IN SUCH A STATE, NOT WHILE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA STILL LIVING IN HELL BECAUSE IT'S NOT LIKE THE GOVERNMENT DONT HAVE MONEY,THEY WASTING MONEY ON UNNECESSARY THINGS SUCH AS BILDING NEW STADUIM, BUSSES, GAUTRAIN AND ETC.

27 APRIL 2011

Speech · S'bu Zikode

Inkulumo yoSuku lokuNgakhululeki, 2011

UnFreedom Day rally, 27 April 2011

Mqondisi wohlelo, Sekela Mongameli waBahlali, Sihlalo waBahlali baseMapulazini, Baholi bezenkolo, Izinduna, Kennedy 12, Church Land Program, Streetnet, CHOSA, UPM, South Durban Environment Community Alliance, Student from the SIT, Foreman Road Development Committee, Bahlali baseMjondolo.

Namhlanje sihlangele la ukuzolila ukufa kwenkululeko eNingizimu Afrika. Namhlanje sizogubha iminyaka engu-17 uhulumeni wencindezelo nebala elimhlophe anikezela uhulumeni omnyama futhi naye osasicindezela. Ushintsho olukhulu esilibonile ukushinstha kobuso obumhlophe kuya kobumnyama. Ngakho-ke ngabe siyazi khohlisa uma singathi sikhululekile uma kuse nje. Futhi kungabe kasilithandi ngisho neZwe lakithi uqobo uma singaqhubeka nokuvotela osopolitiki abangazi nje nokuthi kuxhunyanwa kanjani nemiphakathi ngaphandle kokuzicebisa bona. Singeke sayivotela inkohlakalo kungakenziwa lutho ngekade siyibika. Siyayazi futhi siyiqonda kahle inkangiso yentando yeningi. Ngalokhu siyazi qhenya ngelethu ivoti siyalazi ukuthi linothe kanganani. Ukuvota kwethu kuleminyaka eyedlule akusisizanga ngalutho, bekufana nje nokufaka ivoti emfuleni lihambe namanzi.

Namhlanje sizovuselela uMkhankaso wethu nabobonke abantu abanganakiwe eNingizimu Afrika othi “Awukho umhlaba nezindlu! Alikho nevoti! Azikho izidingo nenqala sizinda Alikho Ivoti! Ayikho Imisebenzi Alikho Ivoti!” Namhlanje sithi akubuyiswe isithunzi sabobonke abahlali base eNingizimu Afrika, kubuyiswe inhlonipho ukuze sibe yisizwe esinakekelanayo. Uma singakahlonipheki kosopolitiki nakuhulumeni alikho ivoti. Sineqiniso neqholo lokuthi kakusiyo inkululeko le eyalwelwa wo-Steve Biko, Robert Sobukwe, O.R. Tambo, DKT Nelson Mandela nabanye abaholi abaqala lendlela. Ngakho-ke ngabe asigcini nje ngokukhohlisa izwe lakithi uma sithi sikhululekileku ngabe sizikhohlisa nathi uqobo, ngabe siyaxoka.

Iningi lethu kalisebenzi, iningi lethu lilala lingadlile, iningi lethu kalina-muntu elikhala kuye, iningi lethu liyaxoshwa ngendluzula ezindaweni elihlala kuzo nguye uhulumeni, nangosomabhizinisi nabanini bamaplazi. Iningi lethu liyashaywa, lidutshulwe ngamaphoyisa uma sizwakalisa ilungelo lethu elikumthethosisekelo wezwe. Uphi u-Andrias Tatane namhlanje wase- Free State? Uphi u-Teboho Mkhonza wase Ntabazwe? Uphi u-Vukani Shange? Uphi u-Thembinkosi Mpanza base-Masangweni. Uphi u-Monica Ngcobo wakwa E eMlazi? Uma ikhona intando yeningi. Iphi i-Kennedy 12? Iphi i-KRDC nezihlobo nabangani nabobonke abahlukumezeka kuhlaselo lango-Septemba 2009 e-Kennedy uma ikhona intando yeningi? Kusuke sekwenzenjani uma sifuna ukukhuluma nabaholi bethu osopolitiki bese bethumela amaphoyisa? ngisho bona laba abamatasa namhlanje asebekwazi ukungena ngisho emijondolo yethu. Kusuke sekwenzenjani sithumela uhla lwezikhhalazo kuhulumeni lingaphendulwa nokuphendulwa wuhulumeni wentando yabantu?

Namhlanje sifisa ukucacisela uhulumeni nabezindaba ukuthi lemibhikisho ethe chithi saka izwe lonke akusiyo nje eyokukhalaza ngokulethwa kwezidingo emphakathini kodwa ingeyokungafezwa kwezithembiso zenkululeko, hhayi nje yezidingo. Ukuhluleka ukuxhumana nemiphakathi nezakhiwo zentando yeningi, ukuhluleka ukubandakanya nokubambisana nemiphakathi ngendlela enenhlonipho nesizotha ekwakhiweni kwezwe lethu yikhona kanye okudala lemibhikisho. Lokhu kuyinkomba yokuthi ukwakhiwa nokuthuthukiswa kwezwe lakithi kwenziwa umsebenzi wedlanzana labathile. Ngakho-ke ukulethwa kwezidingo kubantu kuyinkomba nje yokubacabangela abantu kwintando yeningi nezithelo zokuba yinxenye ngalesikhathi kusahlelwa ukuthi yini edingwa ngabantu, bayidinga kanganani, kuphi, kanjani. Impumelelo yokulethwa kwezidingo iyokwenzeka uma abantu beyinxenye yokwenza lokhu. Yingakho sithi “akukho okwethu ngaphandle kwethu”. Abantu mababe yinxenye yezinguquko nezinqumo ezizothinta bona, yileyo-ke intando yeningi. Lokhu kungamsiza kakhulu uhulumeni ukuthi angagxekwa nomphakathi uphendule uma kukhona onganeme. Okwamanje uhulumeni uvale ngisho izithangami eziyinxenye neziqinisa intando yeningi.

Akusithusi-ke ukwehla kwesasa lokuvota kuloyaka kuze kuphoqeleke ukuthi kukhokhelwe imisakazo nomabona kude ukuthi bakhuthaze abantu ukuthi bayovota. Bathi yilungelo lakho leli, uma usufuna kufezwe lezithembiso usuyisitha, abasabonwa bonke labo abaseka lemikhankaso kwazise phela bayakhokhelwa

ukukhohlisa abantu. Usufuna lezizethembiso zifezwe bayanyamalala bathumele amaphoyisa. Sithi namhlanje ngeke niphinde nikhohlise abahlali, sithi isikhathi sokukhohlisa abantu siphelile, sithi kubaphathi bamaphoyisa, amaphoyisa awabhekane nezigebengu, abhekane nezigebengu zosopolitiki ezihluleka ukwenza umsebenzi wabantu zizibandakanye enkokhokhweni, mawahlukane nababhikishi abophe labo abayimbangela yemibhikisho.

Ngala mazwi Bahlali, masisukume siwuqinise umkhankaso wethu. Singapheli amandla, singesabi sithande izwe lakithi, silwele intando yeningi eneqiniso nakubantu ababuthaka, singathuli izinto zonakala, singavumi ukufudulwa ngendluzula ezweni lokhokho bethu, sivikele umthethosisekelo wezwe ukuze negazi lamaqhawe afana no-Andrias Tatane lingachithekeli ize. Siyazi noMkhuzi wamaphoyisa kuzwe lonke uJene Bheki Cele uthe “Lokhu kugcinile igazi lakhe lisifundise okukhulu” siyazi ukuthi baningi abafela ezandleni zamaphoyisa umehluko ngo-Tatane ukuthi yena ufe ebonwa yizwe lonke ku-TV, amahlathi okucasha aphelile, ukube ibingekho i-TV ngabe “asazi sonke asazophenya amaphoyisa” wona la ambulalile noma bamfumbathise isibhamu esingekho emthethweni kulezi abahlale beziqoqa la emalokishini bese bethi uyena odubule kuqala ebhekise emaphoyiseni ase emdubula. Futhi siyazi ukuthi umyalelo wokudubula amaphoyisa awuthola kubo osopolitiki abangobasi bawo, kwabanjalo nase-Kennedy. Njengoba sazi ukuthi nezindlu asizitholi nje la eThekwini kungenxa kasopolitiki oyinhloko ophikweni lezindlu kumasipala weTheku nokuthiwa ubazonda la behambe khona Abahlali, lokhu kufakazwa nangabasebezi baloluphiko. Bayeza abahlali nesando sokuvula wendoda evale intuthuko eThekwini nakuso sonke isifundazwe nezwe lonke.

Njengoba imiphakathi eminingi inganeme ngentando yeningi yakuleli, sithi sizwelana nayo yonke imiphakathi ekhishwe inyumbazane kuleli. Sizwelana naBahlali baseMjondolo eNsthalanga Kapa osekuyisonto lesithathu leli besemgwaqeni belwela ilungelo labo. Namhlanje baneNgqungquthela yokuthola isixazululo senje bomvu (umlilo) (Shack fire Summit). Njengoba namazwe omhlaba esiseka emizameni yethu yobulungiswa nathi sidlulisa ukuba seka emhlabeni wonke abacindezelwe njengathi, sithi umzabalazo wabo ungowethu.

Ngiyabonga,

No Land! No House! No Vote!!!

13 MAY 2011

Talk · Zodwa Nsibandé

Can Youth Show the Way?

Democracy Forum, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 13 May 2011

Yes we can. In isiZulu we have a saying that says “Inkunzi isematholeni” – The bull is in the calves. If we are talking about the youth that have made a mark in our history we should not end the conversation without talking about the youth of 1976. And then you will ask the question “Where are youth of today?”. You will get the answer within the blink of the eye, “They are in the taverns”. Yes some of them are there. But they are not all there by choice. Many are there due to this capitalist system that is governing our country and puts some of us in heaven on earth and others in hell on earth. Many people are drinking to dull their pain in a world that offers them no future. But there are others who are committed to uplifting their communities. In our movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, and in many of the struggles around the country that have made the rebellion of the poor young people have been in the forefront.

In our days being involved in the struggle for change is no longer as popular as it was before simply because many people believe that because we had got rid of the oppressive government everything is now ok. But freedom was never just a case of replacing a white government with a black government. It was a case of building a different kind of society – a society that put human beings at the centre, a society in which there would be decent homes, decent work, decent schools and decent health care for everyone. It was a case of building a participatory democracy in which everyone’s voice and life would count the same irregardless of whether they were a woman or a man, black or white, gay or straight or poor or rich. In fact it was a case of building a society where poverty would be ended.

Those who think that the time of struggle is over are forgetting that we are still living under a kind of apartheid but that in this apartheid the difference is the people are divided by class. The gap between those who have and those who don’t have is huge and it is getting worse. Those who say that we must be

patient are forgetting that things are getting worse for the poor and not better. We are now the most unequal country in the world. The people's revolution of the 1980s was hijacked and privatized. Patience will not get us houses or jobs or a police force that is there to protect the people. Patience will only drive more of us into the taverns.

The majority of the people who are suffering are youth. It is said that fifty percent of young black people have never worked. They cannot progress with their lives. They are stuck. If people talk about the youth of today they refer to us as the "Lost Generation" why because we don't want to be involved in the work that will make us dirty or unpopular. Many young people have the voice but lack the courage to speak out. Many of those who happen to speak lack the ears to listen to the voices of those who you are not able to speak out in public.

But if we as the youth can be able to take up the initiative and be the change that we all want to see in our society, indeed we can show the way.

In our days democracy is being portrayed to us as being limited to the power of X. Democracy is being portrayed as being limited to choosing which elites will represent us. To me democracy is deeper than that. It's about taking charge of our destiny. In the communities that we are living in there are many problems that are facing our own communities. We need to involve more young people in the development committees in our communities. Instead of complaining that there are no jobs why don't we as the youth take the challenge and help our own communities towards changing our society? The youth of 1976 that even today we are still remembering didn't become famous because of how big is their wallet. They became heroes because they fought against the oppressive system.

Democracy is not just about voting every few years. Democracy is a day to day practice. It is about democratizing our communities. It is about building our own power as the poor and as youth.

All the political parties are anti-poor. They are all capitalist. They all support evictions. They all support transit camps. They all send out the police to attack the poor. There is not one political party that has taken a side with the poor. There is not one political party that has joined the rebellion of the poor. There is not one political party that has encouraged young people and poor people to really build their own power for themselves and by themselves. When the police come to evict us or to attack our protests the political parties are not there. We

only see them at election time when they come to lie to us. Then they disappear again.

But our families, our friends, our neighbours, our communities and our comrades are always with us. We have to reply on each other. We have to organize ourselves and build our own power so that whoever is elected will be forced to answer to the people. Karl Marx called this “subordinating the state to society.” Which is why we say: “No land, No house, No dignity, No Vote”.

So as the youth of today let us stand up and be the change we want to see in our society. We as the youth of today we need to make the history that the next generation can learn from, like us as we heard a lot about the youth of 1976. We are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society. We must recognize that we cannot solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power. This means a revolution of values and other things. We must see now that the evils of racism, sexism, economic exploitation, economic exclusion and militarism are all tied together. We cannot get rid of one without getting rid the others. The whole structure of South African life must be changed. South Africa is a hypocritic nation and we must put our own house in order.

In the new film about our movement that is called *Dear Mandela* Mnikelo Ndabankulu says that when we die we mustn't have a small obituary that says you were born, you ate and you died. You need to be counted as a man amongst men. Mnikelo is right. Life is a precious thing. We have to make it matter. We have to be men amongst men, women amongst women, heroes amongst heroes. We have to be a generation of young people that can proudly take our place in the history of the struggle for a just and democratic South Africa in which every person's life and voice counts the same.

9 JULY 2011

Presentation · S'bu Zikode

Presentation at the Fanon Colloquium

Fanon Colloquium, Rhodes University, 9 July 2011. Rough transcription.

The idea that shack dwellers can think and that Abahlali can sustain its autonomy has created a crisis. There is a price to be paid for such thinking, for such autonomy.

The university is slowly opening spaces for grassroots organizations and some of us have fought hard for a relationship of equality between grassroots organizations and the university. We appreciate that Nigel Gibson has brought Fanon into conversation with us, with our struggle and our thinking. The conversation has been very rich and also difficult. We speak of Fanon from our own working environment. What hasn't been covered in these 4 days is that Fanon was an activist, committed to daily work with people, talking with people.

Each time we travel, we give hope to the people in Abahlali, we report back. How do I report back and make this colloquium meaningful to ordinary men and women, especially in the shacks and rural communities? It is a tough task.

Fanon said that each generation has to discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it. This is being done in the shacks. We had to discover ourselves, take our own step into struggle, and then we meet friends and comrades in struggle. We discovered that we didn't count and that it didn't matter to anyone. In learning we began to define ourselves before someone else from somewhere else defines us. We then said this is who we are, this is where we are, this is what we want and this is how we want what we want. The assumption has been that poor people do not think. The assumption has been that if we do think we only think about survival, about food, that our thinking only revolves around hunger and starvation. Others come and try to represent us and to make decisions for us as if we cannot think.

We come from the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo which is never heard or seen because the university is the struggle. What we have learned here we have learned in the struggle. We have learned from old mamas and gogos;

really learned from below, learned with those who really wants to learn. Thinking takes place in the meetings, protest marches, rallies and in the camps. We read Fanon in parallel with what we are doing. Fanon is in the shacks. Fanon is part of the broader struggle thinking with the people. For us there is no point in using one theory to evaluate another theory. We try to bring every theory of a living freedom, every theory of real equality, every theory of a living communism into a conversation with our living politics.

When Abahlali began in 2005 with the road blockade, we had no idea it was a political act. It was only the next morning that we realized that we were playing with fire because we should “know our place”, in the shacks. We thought the streets were ours but in vain. When we were told that we were disrupting public life and charged with public violence, we said, we had thought that we are also part of the public. We realized that the public were others. We realized that it was considered threatening and criminal for us to take our place in the public – on the street, in the discussions.

Then a politics of fear emerged. Every peaceful and polite effort that we made to build our country was called out of order. Ours became an out of order politics. We had to accept this and to continue with our out of order politic.

We are fighting for land, housing and freedom in the cities. AbM is not a single issue movement. Our struggle is reduced to service delivery as an effort to silence the people and to make us not question the government and our society because allowing these debates will speak to reality of our society. It will be interesting to know how Fanon would behave with the politic of fear masterminded to silence the thinking and voice of ordinary people.

AbM also speaks about a living politics in the shacks, a living practice. A politics understood by ordinary people who have not set forth in school. A politics of water, of school, of electricity, of rebellion against exclusion from participating together in decision making. A politics of the simple fact that either we all need electricity or we all don't need it. And it is clear that our lives, all our lives, need electricity, as our Media Liason Officer Mnikelo Ndabankulu has said. We have seen how language is used to exclude and confuse people. Living learning sessions are used to transfer skills to communities and break theory into practical and meaningful contributions. We use experience as a starting point. We reflect, together, on our experience of suffering and our experience of struggle. Shack intellectuals are being produced in this fashion. We have camps from 6

p.m. until 6 a.m where the old and the young discuss politics and their children's futures. As a social movement we see change and are agents of the change we want to see.

AbM refuses to be told that we are free. Instead of celebrating Freedom Day we created unFreedom Day. This is not to disrespect the struggle and the sacrifice made by those who came before us, but rather not to fool ourselves that we are free. Leading up to unFreedom Day every year we have a series of serious discussions about many issues. Fanon would be part of these discussions. It doesn't mean that we have all the answers. We are always all learning. The important thing is that we must keep learning together and that our learning must remain a living learning, a learning in the practice of struggle.

We are being tested about our commitment to what we want to see – a world where everyone is equal, where everyone is recognized. Some civil society organizations do not like shack dwellers thinking. "Who the hell do you think you are?" they say. For them we are not part of the public, we have no rights. Highly educated people confront us with the idea that we shouldn't have a say. It is not only the government and property owners that oppress us.

AbM has been researched, perhaps over researched. Our struggle is important for our lives, for our children. We are not a professional organization. We are not paid to struggle. We always have to organize in the middle of crisis – evictions, arrests and fires. We have had to keep organizing through serious repression. We welcome students and researchers that are willing to negotiate a partnership with us, a living solidarity. But it is not right that the movements of the poor must always be expected to make time for those researchers that only take and make no contribution in return.

We have been kept busy in the courts and in workshops to make sure that the streets are not ours. The system that keeps us apart is so smart. Everyday the system is ahead with its plan and thinking. This venue truly must confront the smartness of the system. Our agendas are always being diverted to something else and our struggle diverted from the direction of the movement. There is a syndrome of criminalization of people's struggles and trials in criminal courts rather than political courts that divert us from our struggle where everyone counts. We have to think in the midst of all this. We know that Fanon developed his thinking in the midst of the Algerian revolution.

AbM is not a perfect social movement. We have our own challenges and live in the same world of errors. But we have created our own space. Part of the victories we have won is the space that we have managed to create and defend. It is a precious space and despite homelessness, despite poverty, despite repression we are able to think together. While creating this space we appreciate that Fanon is alive in our shacks. We must also see Fanon as an activist – not a professional but a participant in what has to be done where our thinking together can change the world in practice. I invite you to the shacks, to our rural homes, to our struggle – you have a role.

We have lost great comrades who have been co-opted. Great minds have been lost into something else, and not just into money. Other comrades have been with us on every step that we have taken, in every danger that we have faced. It goes back to your humanity, to refuse to be co-opted. How do I enjoy a house when others are homeless? What does a position mean when others are not recognized? The real question for each of us is ‘What constitutes you and humanity?’ There is a high price for every commitment. How many of us are prepared to risk our lives in defense of humanity?

6 SEPTEMBER 2011

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Socialism Needs Those Who Really Need It – The Poor

Socialism is such a big word. It should belong to the people. It should be part of their living politics. But most times it belongs to those who want to define themselves as if they are the masters of everything. This is a serious problem because in socialism you can't think that everything belongs to you. In socialism all the people need to be given a space. Socialism is not supposed to be like any other political movement. Socialism needs more participatory engagement. It does not need those who think that they can decide for the people on the ground. Socialism has no racial discrimination, no sexism and also no inequality. In socialism everybody is equal and no one is regarded as Mr., Mrs. or Miss know it all.

Socialism and its progress can't stop if someone else who thinks he is the master is not there. The people are just there all the time to support one another and so socialism must belong to the people. Socialism is not about how big and good English words you are using. It's about sharing views, irrespective of which race you belong to. The problems that we are all facing bond the people as brothers and sisters.

Socialism does not need those who are big headed because some within their social movement they regard him/her as a monarchy. There can be no kings and queens in the struggle for equality. Everyone has to humble themselves.

Some people have decided to talk two languages, the language of Capitalism and the language of Socialism. Why are these people begging others to come back to Socialism if they are busy enjoying the fruits of Capitalism? Why are they talking about socialism when they have spent their time becoming rich rather than associating themselves with the struggles of the poor? People are sometimes just using the shortest way to climb the trees. When people want to get somewhere in the Parliament, or wherever, they use the language that the poor are using. They know that sometimes the poor trust too much in such a

way that they don't see a difference between the really Socialist and the truly Capitalist. All those who are using the poor to define themselves will talk a different language when they find the place they were aiming to. There should be no need to be asked to come back to the struggles of those whom they have betrayed. We should only trust those who have never left the struggles of the poor. We should only trust those who are constantly with us in our struggles. Let me stop that because it will look like I'm fighting some very big political leaders.

There is a slogan that says: 'Socialism is the future built it now'. How can the people get this slogan as reality? The people that are using this slogan are not in the struggles of the poor. In fact they are condemning the struggles of the poor from above! All this slogan really means is that we should trust the politicians even though things are getting worse and not better.

And how can Socialism go further if all these sub-socialist movements decide to stand away from each other instead of coming together and forming one strong voice of all the socialists? What I really notice is that if all these socialist movements don't swallow their pride and come into agreement of how they can work together they won't pass. If they are continuously reacting the way that they are then Capitalism will dominate our lives for ever.

Capitalism is such a big Giant and the entire capitalist class are together irrespective of their political differences. If you fight the capitalist thinking and plan to stop it the entire Capitalist will unite to fight any resistance to their power. It does matter if those Capitalist came during the Apartheid era or afterwards but they are Neoliberals now and their wishes will be the same and closely equal.

I'm so concerned about the naive thinking of every socialist movement in S.A. without even choosing one. The fact and the reality is how can they stop capitalism while they are defining themselves separately whereas they have the same purpose? The only problems with the social movements is that people are too busy protecting their individual positions rather than seriously looking to find ways to join together to eradicate capitalism from its roots. I'm not fighting with the social movements but I have to use harsh words to show my dissatisfaction about their reaction against Capitalism.

However, I must appreciate the fact that over this weekend of the 13th and 14th of August 2011, the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA (of KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape), the Anti-Privatization Forum, the Landless Peoples Movement in Gauteng and the Rural Network in KwaZulu-Natal met,

along with the telephonic participation of the Unemployed Peoples Movement in the Eastern Cape, to discuss my criticism of the divisions amongst the Socialists in South Africa. Our meeting discussed various strategic ways in which we can build living solidarity and a real unity. Working together as opposed to competing with one another was a dominant theme of the two day meeting. In this meeting part of the conclusion was the commitment of the movements to also identify one national program in which all the movements will participate and to join hands to build a united front against all forms of injustices. If we can united all the social movements without interference from the NGOs that have always tried to control and divide the movements that will be a big step forward.

But I think that without the support from the working class socialist thinking will never go any further towards becoming a reality. The workers are the ones who can push the ideas of Socialism without fearing anything because the wealth of the country belongs to them. The Capitalists depend on the workers. It is therefore very hard and very disappointing to find that the workers of the country are supporting Capitalist thinking. It looks like the workers are betraying the poor people on the ground. When ever there is a major strike COSATU asks us for support. But when we are facing repression or campaigning on important issues they are nowhere to be found. This is a very sad reality of life in South Africa.

During the time of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) Socialism succeeded in making a revolution in Russia because the working class supported the struggles against the Tsarist regime. We all know that that victory soon turned sour because the people who want to be masters of all struggles seized that struggle from the people. The workers and other poor people should have kept control of their struggle after the revolution by insisting that the Soviets and not the Communist Party remained in charge of Russia.

Here in South Africa the workers are aligning themselves with the Capitalist thinking. So it means there is a need of a strong working class federation which really will support all the struggles of the poor irrespective of their political affiliation. We need trade unions that will support social movements even when they organise outside of the ANC. Some choose to organise outside of the ANC and some are forced by repression to organise outside of the ANC. But either way unions should be supporting the struggles of the poor.

In South Africa there are strong social movements and those social movements can drive this country into greener pastures but their problem is the way that they are handling their problems. Good thinkers decided to join Socialist thinking because they know that is where you can express yourself without fearing any feeling of being like you are fighting somebody who should be your comrade. Can all the social movements find ways to promote the spirit of togetherness and forget about plotting about other comrades? Yes I know that out there there are some social movements who are pretending like they are working for the people whereas on the other side they only need popularity. Some people are only exposing themselves to the public in order to be recognized as the peoples' martyrs.

I really don't know what we can do because in some instances the true leaders of the struggles of the poor find that once the political parties notice their capability they woo them to join their political parties. Once they join them those leaders are very much warned that this is a well known organization with its polices and you can't just go and express your feelings in the media without the authority from the party. So that means that activists that were very strong now have very limited powers. This is one reason why the Socialist movements are not going any further. There is also another tendency where the political parties are even noticing the people like myself who are always busy writing articles. They can ask these people to join them but once you join the party they are going to remote you and then you will see how sweetly you must write articles in their favour.

Also most of the social movements like to depend a lot to the NGOs and those NGOs sometimes they make sure that their views are being implemented by that social movement. This separates movements from their members because direction is coming from above and not from below. This makes movements to be weak. Also some NGOs are getting their power and their money from their relations to movements. This is one reason why they try by all means to retain control over movements and to divide movements from each other. They try to ban 'their' movements from working with movements that are guided from below and not from above by NGOs. Sometimes if you are in struggle there is a need of harsher decisions and some of those decisions will never be accepted by some of the NGOs. But if you want to set yourself free you need to call a stone a stone. It is understandable that some NGOs are not behaving

the same as others. Some are supporting the struggles of the people and not trying to control the struggles of the people. But these NGOs are the exception. I know that there are people who are going to interpret my article badly but no comrades let's face the reality. Let's stop what we are doing and also, if you notice that my views are not the same as yours, please let's find ways to agree to disagree.

Also let's stop doing silly plots and petty betrayals on a racial way. Let's fight together because the capitalist system doesn't care about our racial differences. They care about profit which is why they all support each other for the purpose of keeping their unity in order to keep exploiting the people.

Also I'm aware that some they are really desperate in such a way that they can involve themselves with corruption. I'm sorry comrades I know the truth is bitter but now is the time to speak the truth. There is no other way besides facing reality as bitter as it is.

Please let us be wise and think more about the enemy we facing. Let's make sure that we all understand that each and every plot we are doing in our spare time against each other can haunt our capability to advance the struggle for socialism.

Also I want to warn all those who think that they have a right to make decisions for the people that we are poor but not stupid. We will not allow these people to continue to divide our movements, to weaken our struggles and even to criminalise them when they try to remain democratic and to take direction from their members. Anyone who wants to join the struggle for socialism is welcome but they must accept that power in our movements must remain with the members of our movements and that movements will take their own decisions in their own meetings. We want comrades, not masters. If you have some popularity in a struggle that does not give you the right to become the master of that struggle or even that town. If you are elected to a position that position is not for life. If you have some education and a job in an NGO that does not give you the right to become the master of any struggle. Those NGOs that want to control the struggles of the people must learn from the middle class comrades that have joined the struggles of the people as comrades, debating and discussing freely in our meetings, and not as masters giving instructions from outside. All people must count the same on every step of the way in a struggle for Socialism otherwise, even if we defeat Capitalism, we will end up with new oppressors.

Those are my words to encourage meaningful talks between the social movements. I don't say that the people must change the names that they call their movements but there is a need to understand and to form a real alliance of the poor. Yes I know that there is already an alliance of the poor but the question is how can we make it work for all the people and ensure that all social movements are involved. We really need to put the idea of socialism and the struggle to make it real in the hands of the people. We can't do it if we are not united.

Former AbM VICE PRESIDENT

Mathol'anyongande kukudlelana

11 SEPTEMBER 2011

Speech · S'bu Zikode

South Africa's Great Change

Thirtieth anniversary of the 1981 protests against the Springbok tour, Auckland, 11 September 2011

I wish to thank Global Peace and Justice, in Auckland, for inviting me to New Zealand to speak on the progress of post-apartheid South Africa and the birth of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA. I also wish to thank Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA, the movement that I am part of, for trusting me with the responsibility of representing it.

I also wish to extend our deepest gratitude to the anti-apartheid movement here in New Zealand who stood firm with the people of South Africa in the fight against apartheid. Many of our older comrades remember watching, on TV, the protests that you organised against the Springbok tour in 1981. There were thousands of you, many thousands of you. You were attacked by the police. Many of you were beaten and arrested. Your protests were a deep shock to the racists in South Africa. It made them realise that although Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher accepted their racism ordinary people in New Zealand did not. Your protests also gave courage to the people struggling against apartheid in South Africa. You were workers, priests, teachers, housewives and students. You were men and women. You were old and young. You were people in New Zealand who made people in South Africa know that they were not alone in this world. The comrades who were of that generation remember how your brave protests made their hearts sing with joy and hope back in 1981.

As a movement we have always called for a living solidarity; a real solidarity between people, a practical solidarity, an active solidarity, a solidarity between equals. You have shown what can be achieved. Thirty years later your struggle still stands as a real inspiration.

Abahlali also note, with great pleasure, the refusal of the Govan Mbeki Award from the government of South Africa by John Minto in solidarity with Abahlali baseMjondolo and all other struggling poor people's movements in

South Africa. This was a powerful gesture, a gesture of great integrity and a gesture which we celebrated. We were honoured to welcome John Minto to our country, to our city and to the Kennedy Road shack settlement. The Poor People's Alliance salutes John Minto's profound integrity.

It is with great sadness that today you will hear unpleasant news. Today you will hear how your struggle here for freedom in South Africa has been betrayed to free some few individuals and not the people of South Africa. Since the end of apartheid the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer. Many politicians and their families have become rich. But the politicians that rose to power on a people's struggle have become new oppressors in the name of a democratic state. Your efforts, just like other people's efforts around the world, just like the efforts of people in South Africa for a free and just country, have been reduced into lousy service delivery.

We appreciate the progress made by millions of South Africans and people around the world in defeating apartheid. Our first democratic election in 1994 brought hope for millions of South Africans. We had high hopes that racism was coming to an end, that political violence and political and economic intolerance were coming to an end. We had high hopes that good education, health care and a decent income would be basic rights. Of course the shack dwellers had high hopes that housing would be a basic human right. In his first state of the nation address Nelson Mandela proclaimed the right to housing and committed his government to build housing for the poor, through the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). A remarkable number of houses have been built but they have been built very poorly, they are very small, and they are built far away from cities. The houses built by the ANC are smaller and further away from the cities than the houses built by apartheid. When allocated they are given to friends, family members of local councillors and comrades of the ruling party. Houses and other development go to party supporters so that the party can exploit poverty to win votes and remain in power.

Land has not been fairly redistributed. The economy continues to exclude and to exploit. Millions are without work and millions are working but still poor and without security. Most of the land and the economy remains in the hands of rich whites. They have been joined by some rich blacks but the poor, the majority, remain locked out. The great change we have seen over the past

seventeen years has been the change from a white government to a black government but this black government is not a government of the people. It is led by a few wealthy individuals who continue to enrich themselves in the name of democracy. Corruption in governance has become the norm. Politics has become a new economic path and a career for the young members of the ruling party. Politics means access to tenders, access to wealth and control. Politics is not about serving the people.

We had thought that the new government would replace a system of exclusion and inequality with a just society. But what they have actually done is to simply take their place in that system of exclusion and inequality. They have not tried to transform that system. We are told that now that the system is under black management we are free. We have refused to accept this. When the government celebrates Freedom Day in the stadiums every year we mourn un-Freedom Day in the shacks.

Millions of people remain in shacks. In fact the number of shacks is growing. Shack dwellers live like pigs in the mud, with rats, in homes that leak in the rain and are often in flames. People are burnt to death in shack fires because we are denied electricity and have to use candles and gas stoves. But when we connect ourselves to electricity the municipalities come with guns to disconnect us. Sometimes shack dwellers are treated like children. Sometimes we are treated like criminals. We are rarely treated as citizens.

The housing backlog was 1.5 million in the 1994. It now stands at approximately 2.1 million. That means that approximately 12-million South Africans are still in need of decent shelter. The number of shack settlements in South Africa has grown from 300 in 1994 to 2 600 in 2011. This is unfair in a state that claims to be democratic. Most shack dwellers are black. This is unfair in a state that claims to have liberated black people.

These shack settlements lack basic services. There is often no sanitation and very little access to water. There is no electricity, no road access and no refuse collection. Those in power do not consult when making decisions. There are very few jobs and government jobs are given to party members, friends or family members. The poor are living under constant threat of eviction. In these evictions some are left homeless and others are forcibly removed to human dumping grounds outside the cities. No one can say that this is freedom.

Abahlali baseMjondolo, the shack dweller's movement, realised that politicians can no longer be trusted. It was clear that our government has betrayed us; that the political leadership that we most trusted has betrayed the poor. It was at this stage that we began organising ourselves as shack dwellers, unemployed people and farm dwellers. It is on the basis of this that Abahlali was formed to fight for, protect, promote and advanced the interests and the dignity of all the shack dwellers and other poor people in South Africa. We are a movement of the poor, for the poor and by the poor.

Abahlali has refused to accept that the poor should be passive receivers of services. We have refused to be locked in poverty. We have refused to sit quietly while clever people discuss our future without our presence. We have refused to know our place in the important discussions. We have refused to keep to our place in the shacks and in poverty. Yes we have refused to be treated with disrespect and indignity. Our politic is very simple – we believe that everyone has the same right to shape the future of our cities and our country and that the land and wealth of the country should be shared equally by the people of the country.

Our everyday struggle has confirmed how strong we have become when thinking together, walking together and resisting evictions together. Our struggle has threatened politicians, the state, businesses, the regressive left and some academics and some civil society organisations who think it is their job to think for the poor and to represent the poor. It has become clear that there is no political will to respect and accept shack dwellers as human beings who can think by both the state and some civil society organisations. Our movement is committed to campaign for a society in which every human being counts the same. We see a society in which each person counts as one, in which all people are treated the same, as a normal society.

Our movement has fought many battles and won many victories. We have successfully stopped many evictions in our cities. We have fought against transit camps. We have fought for the electrification of shacks in Durban. We have fought the Slums Act. We have fought against the criminalisation of shack activists. We have fought to defend the right of shack intellectuals to be able to think and discuss with all other intellectuals. And of course we have fought to keep the spirit of Abahlalism alive. We have faced serious repression – arrests, beatings and the destruction of our homes – but our movement has survived.

While we remain in our shacks we are proud of our struggle and we will continue to confront all forms of exclusion and oppression.

Today we are appealing once again to all New Zealanders to stand in solidarity with the shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo, to stand in solidarity with all the poor people's movements in south Africa – the Anti-Eviction Campaign, the Rural Network, the Landless Peoples Movement and the Unemployed Peoples Movement.

We have tried to be in solidarity with people struggling in other countries, like the people of Haiti. If there comes a time when people in New Zealand need support from people in South Africa we will do what we can to support your struggles. At a deep level all our struggles are the same. We are all trying to insist that every person is a person, to build the power of the poor and to reimagine how power can work in our societies. We are all trying to humanise the world.

The struggle in South Africa, like in so many countries in the world, is far from over. But people are struggling all over the world. The struggle for human dignity remains at large in South Africa and in the world. Hope remains at large in South Africa and in the world.

I thank you all. You are all warmly welcomed to visit us if you are in South Africa.

Amandla!

S'bu Zikode

New Zealand, 11 September 2011

29 SEPTEMBER 2011

Speech · S'bu Zikode

Upgrades v Evictions

Misereor and Berlin University meeting, 29 September 2011

I wish to thank Misereor and the Habitat Unit of Berlin University for inviting me to speak on 'Upgrading Urban Shack Settlements' at this meeting on people centered upgrading approaches. Abahlali baseMjondolo has a lot of experience on this important issue and I will do my best to share that experience with all of you here today.

Before I begin it is important for me, on behalf of Abahlali baseMjondolo, to thank Klaus Teschner and Misereor for their support when we were facing serious repression. One of the great weakness of our democracy is that the legal system is commodified. This is one reason why the state is often happy to force the struggles of the poor into the courts. It is very easy for the state and other elites to isolate the struggles of the poor by criminalising the struggles of the poor. If we enter the courts without good legal representation, which costs money, we are in a very dangerous situation. Misereor has enabled us to enter the courts with good legal representation and this has meant that we could get a fair hearing there. We also want to thank Klaus's comrade, Knut Unger, who has hosted our comrades here in Germany and has done so much to organise political support for our struggles, especially when we are facing repression.

I also wish to thank Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA, the movement I am part of, for trusting me with the responsibility to represent it here today. I have come here today with a mandate to participate in this important discussion. But I have also come here with a mandate to personally thank Knut Unger for his solidarity and to thank Klaus Teschner and Misereor for their support for the Socio-Economic Rights Institute that gave us legal support in the case of the Kennedy 12.

We imagine cities where politicians, policy makers, engineers and urban planners think with us and not for us. We imagine cities where the social value of land is put before its commercial value. We imagine cities where shack settlements are all offered the option of participatory upgrades and where people

will only move elsewhere when that is their free choice. We imagine the quick improvement of local living conditions by the provision of water, electricity, paths, stairs and roads while housing is being discussed, planned and built. We imagine cities without evictions, without state violence being used to disconnect people from electricity and water and without any repression of organisations and movements. We imagine cities without the transit camps that have become the permanent alternative housing solution for many poor people since the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations. We reject, completely, the way in which the Millennium Development Goals have reduced the measure of progress to the numbers of 'housing opportunities delivered' when in fact progress should be measured in terms of people's dignity as this is understood by the people themselves. Transit camps are a disgrace, an insult. They are what happens when development is not participatory and people centred. We imagine cities where our children can access good education, where we can have good public health care centres, where there are parks, sports fields and libraries. We imagine cities where women can walk safely, even at night. We imagine cities where we can all have well paying jobs or a guaranteed income. Most importantly we imagine welcoming cities, cities where everyone counts the same and where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

One of the reasons why we are failing to make these imaginings a reality is that most of the people with power think that the solution is for them to retain all the power to themselves and then, one day in the future, they will be able to deliver dignity to the people. In fact you have to start by recognising the dignity of the people, and then work with the people if you want to end with cities that respect that dignity. Dignity is not something that can ever be delivered by the people at the top of society to the people at the bottom of society.

In the 1970s and 80s millions of poor black people were able to occupy a place in the cities. This created a crisis for apartheid because they were out of place to apartheid. But the ANC promised to recognise their right to the cities. Some people even said that the shack dwellers were 'the urban spearhead of the revolution'. We insist that these land occupations, this taking of a place in the cities, is seen as political, as part of the struggle. All the work to keep these settlements going, a lot of it women's work, must be seen as political. The work that has gone into all these land occupations and the creation of communities must be recognised.

But when the ANC took power they stopped seeing the popular occupation of the cities as political. They started to see the shack settlements as a problem. People found that, again, they were considered to be out of place. The ANC began to evict people either leaving them homeless or taking them to human dumping grounds. Mnikelo Ndabankulu calls this reruralisation.

When Abahlali began to resist evictions it created a crisis. But when we began to take our place in the in the discussions and political life in our cities that also created a crisis. It created a crisis because we as shack dwellers should have known our place. We should not live or think or speak or act outside that place.

Abahlali's refusal to be confined in the dark corners of our shacks did not only create a crisis for the state. It also created a crisis for some civil society organizations, regressive lefts and some few university trained intellectuals who believe that its their duty to think, act, represent and decide for the poor while we suffer in obedient and grateful silence. If we are serious about really trying to find a way to replace forced evictions with human centered participatory upgrades we have to take this reality very seriously. The repression of the poor does not only come from the state.

Abahlali's experience tells us that one of the main factors hindering a move to people centered upgrading is the political unwillingness of the authorities to take upgrades seriously. They talk about upgrades but this talk never becomes action.

There is an incompetence of those empowered to serve the public. This is often caused by cadre deployment. In February this year, 2011, some of the South African provinces, including KwaZulu-Natal where I come from, had to return almost R200 millions from the provincial housing budget that had gone unspent to the National Treasury while millions of people are living in shacks. So, clearly, the failures of the government are not always a question of budget constraints or the legacy of apartheid which are the excuses that are used when politicians and officials fail to perform their duties in governance. Abahlali raised concerns over the return of that money for housing and even wrote a letter to the national Minister of Human Settlements to help him understand this failure. But his office has since been beating about bushes and has never met with us.

The upgrading of shack settlements also fails because of the very high corruption in governance in our country. Housing has become a way for people in the ruling party to become millionaires. But this corruption is not just about

money. It is also about political control. It is about the ruling party keeping a monopoly of power. Public services such as housing have become highly politicised from the top to the bottom with the result that Abahlali members are excluded because of our political activism.

Everyone can see that in South Africa apartheid planning patterns and spatial development that promote class segregation continue. For as long as the commercial value of land is made to come before its social value this problem will persist. Government has to take responsibility for its failure to think about land ownership and use democratically.

Government also has to take responsibility for the politicians that profit from developments that are based on land being something that is bought and sold rather than something that is used to meet the needs of the people. Government also has to take responsibility for those politicians that do not want poor people in cities and are happier for us to be dumped far from the cities. But the problem here is not only with government. It is also with many other forces in society including rich people who speak like they are victims when poor people live near to them. The media often support this view.

To overcome this failure we should not pretend as if these failures are only caused by technical difficulties when in fact they are deeply political. There can be no solution that is based on improving policies when policies are ignored from the top to the bottom and the development that does happen is corrupted from the top to the bottom. There can be no solution that is based on any technocratic development strategy when the politicians take every project and bend it to their own interests and when no one is willing to put people before profit.

The root cause of the failure to move from evictions to upgrades is not in the laws or the policies. It is not in a lack of capacity in the state. It is not in a lack of understanding by the state and other development professionals. The root cause of this failure lies in the fact that the poor lack power in South Africa. This is why other people are always talking for us and deciding for us. This is why the interests of politicians or other rich people always come before our interests.

There will be no progress without the political empowerment of the poor. That is why Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA, the Western Cape Anti Eviction Campaign, the Landless People's Movement, the Rural Network, the Unemployed People's Movement and the Anti-Privatisation Forum are organizing the unorganized, the unemployed and the shack dwellers, to build our

own power and to work with the university trained experts on these important questions on the basis of equality. We are working to build the power of the poor from below so that we can actively contribute in building our cities and our world from below. Without these efforts of mobilizing and empowering the community organisations and movements there will be no success. We cannot achieve what is meant to be ours without our involvement. Relying on experts when they don't have any political support and backing will not take us anywhere. No experts can contest the power of the politicians and the rich on their own. If experts want to make real change they need to locate themselves inside the struggles of the poor.

Under these circumstances we see the role of the German development co-operation sector, churches, progressive NGOs, urban planners and experts being to support democratic formations such as poor people's movements and community organisations struggling for social justice in our society. Your most important role is to be in solidarity with our efforts to mobilise and empower our communities. In doing so, do not think for us, but think with us. Do not decide for us, decide with us. Avail yourselves. Render your professional services and skills. Avail resources for campaigns and awareness that can be shared equally amongst all the movements. Transfer skills in a manner that is empowering in the process. Above all gather your strength and raise your voices in defence of our right to organise. Stand with us when we are under attack. Some German activists, organisations and churches are already doing this. Misereor is already doing it in building the capacity of the poor not for, but with Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA, a movement of the poor, by the poor and for the poor. The poor should be able to be proud of deciding their own future and to be a living part of the great society that we all imagine.

We believe that this is a great conversation and that we should be able to continue to have it in our countries without fear of losing our jobs and facing repression. These conversations must be taken very seriously because they have to do with people's dignity, with the equal value of every human life that must not be compromised whatever the circumstances are. When we are thinking about just and democratic cities, about upgrades rather than evictions, we must start and end with the equal dignity of all people.

Aluta continua!

I thank you all.

S'bu Zikode

8 OCTOBER 2011

Talk · Bandile Mdlalose

Climate Change and Poor People's Struggles

World Development Movement, October 2011

I wish to thank the World Development Movement for inviting me to speak about Climate Change and how the Abahlali baseMjondolo experience relates to this important topic. I also wish to thank Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement S.A, the movement that I'm part of, for trusting me with the responsibility to represent it here today. I have come here with a clear mandate to speak about the political challenges of linking different kinds of crisis together and to meet with poor people's organisations here in England, like the London Coalition Against Poverty, as well as our many comrades in London. I will report back on all the meetings here to my comrades in South Africa.

Climate change is a threat to everyone everywhere. But like all disasters it will be worse for the poor. For this reason it is essential that poor people's organisations are included, equally, in all the discussions and struggles around climate change. This is not happening. In fact in South Africa the discussions on this issue have been dominated by the rich and their organisations on one side and middle class civil society on the other side.

We all know that attempts to stop disasters, or to provide relief after disasters, are often exploited by the rich and powerful to push their agenda. In the chaos of a disaster people with power can often force their own agenda through without proper discussion. This even happens with local disasters like shack fires. It will be much worse with a world wide disaster like climate change. This is another reason why it is essential that poor people's organisations are included, equally, in all the discussions and struggles around climate change.

One of the problems with the way that climate change is usually thought about is that it is seen as a coming crisis that we need to organise around now to avoid in the future. This is true. But around the world millions and millions of poor people are living in a very serious crisis right now. People are not working

and do not have houses. They are not recognised by their governments. They are facing evictions, disconnections, fires, sickness and repression.

When we talk about crisis as if it is only in the future we fail to recognise that for most of us the crisis is already here. If the climate justice struggle is going to make sense to most people in most of the world it has to start from the understanding that for most of us a crisis, a very serious crisis, is already here. This is another reason why it is essential that poor people's organisations are included, equally, in all the discussions and struggles around climate change.

Often civil society in the form of NGOs and academics think that they will represent the poor people of the world against the rich and powerful in the struggle for climate justice. But you can't be paid to really oppose the rich and powerful. Real struggles do not take place in conferences. Real struggles are dangerous. Real struggles take place where people live and, if they are lucky, where they work. People get arrested, beaten and slandered. They are called criminals. They are put in jails and driven from their homes. Real struggles are driven by ordinary people and not professionals because real struggles must be mass struggles. Most poor people's organisations do not want to be represented by experts. What we want is to take our own place in the world. We want solidarity and not charity or people that will speak for us without speaking to us. This is another reason why it is essential that poor people's organisations are included, equally, in all the discussions and struggles around climate change.

South Africa is one of many countries in the world that has a high rate of poverty and inequality. We have 43% people who are unemployed and about 2.2 million shacks housing approximately 12 million people. The rate of HIV/AIDS is very high. The burden of this crisis has fallen most heavily on young people.

In 2005 some activists in the shack settlements in Durban decided to form an organisation called the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement of South Africa. Abahlali baseMjondolo means the residents living in shacks in my language, which is Zulu. It is an organisation that fights for, protects, promotes and advances the interests of the poor in South Africa. The main goal of the comrades that formed the movement was to struggle for the dignity of the poor. Everyone was clear that the struggle itself has to be dignified if the goal is dignity. Dignity is the road and it is the destination too. We have struggled against evictions and disconnections and for land and housing in the cities. Our struggle has always been democratic. At every level in our movement all positions are elected. At

every level the role of leaders in our movement is not to decide for the people but to facilitate democratic participation by the people. We have faced a lot of repression from the government and some other elites, including some in civil society, that think that the poor must know their place.

The big NGOs often think that they are the experts of struggle. But they have failed to organise the poor in South Africa despite all their money, education and international connections. The main reason for this failure is that most of these NGOs do not respect poor people. Abahlali baseMjondolo succeeded to enable the poor to organise ourselves with no money. The reason why our movement has succeeded to enable the poor to organise the poor, and why we have been able to survive repression, is that from the beginning we were committed to a living politics.

For us a living politics is a politics that can be understood by everyone. It is a politics that comes from the people's lives and is shaped by the people. It is a politics that starts with the urgent needs of the people – housing, water and so on. It is a bottom up politics. It is a politics that starts and ends with the equal dignity of all human beings. It is a politics of the poor, by the poor and for the poor. Our movement is not perfect. We make mistakes. We don't achieve all that we want to achieve. Sometimes differences emerge. But a living politics is a strong politics because it stays close to the lives of the people. Our movement does not ever struggle for people. It only struggles with people. We do not come to people with all the big words and the isms. When we are asked to come to a new community we come as other poor people who are willing to listen, to discuss and to work out a way forward together.

If we ever move away from our living politics and let NGOs rather than our members direct our politics and set our agenda we will very quickly lose all our strength as a movement. Many of our members are living in crisis everyday. They are facing shack fires, evictions, transit camps, sickness and repression. Many of our members do not even have enough food to eat. If we bring the climate justice struggle into our struggle in a way that is not directly connected to the daily struggles of the people it will weaken our movement.

Our comrades in other poor people's movements that have existed for longer than our movement have warned us about the danger of letting NGOs and donors set the agenda for our struggle around big international conferences. These conferences are very important for some NGOs and donors but too much

of a focus on organising around these events can take a poor people's movement away from the urgent concerns of its members and do real damage to a movement.

For us the big challenge is to discuss and act on issues like climate change and this big conference, COP 17, which is important, in a way that doesn't take us away from the urgent issues that confront our members every day. We have to find a way to link the crisis that we are already in with the coming crisis of climate change.

In our movement we always stress that the same system that has made the rich to be rich has made the poor to be poor. This is very important because the poor are always being blamed for being poor when in fact we are the victims of this system which is known as capitalism. Capitalism has its roots in slavery and colonialism. It has always been a violent system that is obsessed with wealth and power. It is unable to recognise the human dignity of all people because it always puts profit before people. Capitalism has been and remains a disaster for most people in most of the world. Even here in the UK many people are suffering in this system.

We have great plans for our communities but yet they are not implemented because our government is distancing himself from us. Our government prefers money to us. Our government sees us as a problem. Since 1994 we all have the right to vote but voting has not brought political power to the power. We are still treated as criminals or as children by all kinds of elites. There will be no progress until this top down system is replaced with a bottom up system. When we say that everyone counts we don't only mean that everyone needs a decent house. We also mean that everyone has the same right to make important decisions about society and to shape the future as everyone else.

We are already under great pressure and stress. When we lose our loved ones in shack fires the government does not want to take responsibility for the shack fires. All that happens is that there are some workshops and meetings that are set without our presence so that other people can express our grievances for us. Now we are going to be struck by climate change too. It is not the time where the government should take decisions for the people but the people themselves need to take decisions because they are the one that will be affected.

I have been representing my movement in a civil society forum in Durban that is dealing with climate change and this conference. There are some very

good organisations there, like the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), and we are always happen to work with an organisations like SDCEA. But civil society remains dominated by the middle classes and most poor people have been excluded from the preparations for the climate talks that will be happening in Durban in November. We are the most at risk of being harshly affected by climate change and we must play a huge role in identifying how the government meets its international and national obligations. We must ensure the government fulfils its obligations to minimize the impact of climate change on people in South Africa, especially on those made vulnerable to climate change by their circumstances. But we also have to ensure that this is done in a way that reduces the crisis of unemployment. The super rich of this world have become as rich as they are by damaging the environment. It is them, and not the poor of this world, that must pay the price for fixing this damage.

I would urge that the Community Based Organizations and those Civil Society Organizations and Faith Based Organizations that are willing to work with the organisations of the people must come together and tell the government what needs to be done and what needs to be prioritized first. Mostly a stop must be made to prioritization of the top down approach from the government.

We do not trust the World Bank. Everyone knows that it has been a tool for the rich countries to dominate the poor countries. The World Bank gets countries in debt and then controls their economies and forces them to enact policies in support of the rich. We cannot allow the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund or their NGOs to find a solution to the climate crisis. The people have to find a solution and that solution must be to end this top down system and to put people before profit. That solution must recognise that most people in the world are already living in a crisis. It must take this crisis very seriously and act to end this crisis. We cannot continue with a system where millions and millions of poor people around the world just don't count to their own governments or internationally.

Many middle class people in our own country are scared of climate change. Many middle class people in the rich countries are scared of climate change. They are scared of the crisis to come. Most people in most of the world are poor and are already living in a crisis. The crisis that is already here and the crisis that is to come are both caused by capitalism. Maybe this fact could be the

foundation on which we can build some unity in the struggle for the full and equal recognition of the dignity of all people everywhere.

Our movement will be marching, with other organisations, like SDCEA, on the COP17 conference. We have been holding workshops to discuss climate change and the conference. We would like to keep discussing this important issue and to keep discussing, with all our comrades around the world, how we can best find a way to link the coming climate change crisis with the global crisis that the poor are suffering now and to find a way forward that takes both seriously.

Together can fight this.

Thank you.

2 DECEMBER 2011

Paper · S'bu Zikode

Poor People's Movements and the Law

SERI seminar, Wits University, 2 December 2011

I wish to thank the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa for organising this seminar to discuss the law and social movements. I also wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA, to extend our deepest gratitude to SERI for all the legal struggles they have shared with us in support of our right to organise for our rights to land and housing, our right to the cities and our right to human dignity.

Abahlali has a lot of experience to share on this important topic. It is true that in Abahlali we are working very hard to build the power of the poor from below. It is true that doing this through organising and mobilizing is not easy. It is also true that this kind of work needs a lot of popular education through a new spirit of Abahlalism. We need to build a spirit of political and economical consciousness through constant discussion and reflection on our situation and our struggle. A spirit that recognises that we are poor because we were made poor and that we must work hard to unite the poor in order to resist this poverty imposed on us. A spirit that we can win this battle against all forces that refuse us land and freedom, forces that want to keep us confined in the dark corners of our society.

The main teaching that we have developed amongst our struggles by and for the poor is that we all count the same in our society. Therefore we must carefully work out the best ways to keep us together in order to build our power based on the principle that every person deserves a chance to live a decent life. We must build a power that will have a full force to resist and destroy all forms of repression, exclusion and disregard for human dignity.

It was through this collective force that Abahlali, CALS and many others were able to destroy the then 'Slums Act'. This was a great legal victory. It stopped the state from turning towards an open attack on the poor. But there is a world outside of the courts and our movement was attacked in the Kennedy

Road settlement just before this judgment was read out in the Constitutional Court. People were killed, injured, arrested and displaced as a result of this attack. The ANC leaders that came to the settlement the morning after the attack were very clear that they considered it completely unacceptable for us to have taken the government to court. They told people that it was our court action that was keeping them in shacks, that we were to blame for their suffering.

You can win in court but be destroyed outside the court. It is very important for pro bono legal work to develop a serious focus on defending the right to organise outside of the courts and to defend people when they are under attack. We had to go underground after the attack, regroup and rebuild with a carefully worked out political and legal strategy. We continue to admire the work of SERI and the way that they supported us in these difficult times. Our comrades, the victims, their families, the movement and our partners and friends cannot forget.

Often people fail to recognise the need to balance media strategy, political strategy and good legal strategy with organising on the ground. We think that the way our movement survived this repression is one of the best examples we can share with our society about how to organise in the space of unfreedom in which the poor live in this country.

There was an Italian communist called Antonio Gramsci. He wrote in prison. He said that the legal country is not the real country. This is also true in South Africa. The law may protect you against eviction or repression on paper but in reality, if you are poor, councilors, landlords and the police all treat you as if you are beneath the law – as if you don't count to the law. Poverty is treated as criminality, as ignorance and criminality. When it is politicized from below it is treated as treason. It is very important that progressive lawyers recognise that while the law is a very important terrain of struggle the way life is lived beneath the law is very different to how the law looks in the books.

It is also true that the struggle of the poor is often diverted to courts because it is known that this is where the poor are weak. We are weak on this terrain because the legal system disallows us to meet with the standard set to exclude the poor. For as long as the legal system is commodified it will be strongly biased towards the rich and powerful. We all have to struggle to remove the legal system from the rule of money. But sometimes these weaknesses have also taught

us a lot of different lessons which we can use to confront this reality. The Western Cape Anti Eviction Campaign has demonstrated very well that since the law cannot always serve the interest of the poor sometimes it is better to delay or even frustrate the working of the law than it is to appeal to the law. If the enemy forces us into courts the poor can still use certain tactics to aid the poor.

The state has used its criminalisation of activists to force the struggle of the poor into the courts. This has been very clear in the Kennedy 12 case after the attack on our movement in September 2009. This attack was not just an attack on Abahlali. It was also an attack on our hard won democracy. If it was not for SERI's commitment and experience in the field of social justice, our movement could have been defeated and destroyed.

We are proud to have a partnership with SERI. Many pro bono legal organisations are not willing to take instructions from poor people. They often want to take over poor peoples' struggles and to decide for and not with the poor. Sometimes they even try to tell us that we mustn't protest while a case is before the courts. Sometimes they are more worried about the law then the people, the living human beings, that they represent.

Our partnership with SERI confirms that the law can be used to advance the interest of the poor. But this possibility can only be realized when the poor are organised and have recognised their power. Today Abahlali in Tumbleweed, Howick, in KwaZulu-Natal, salute the work of SERI. The threatened eviction of this community by the uMgeni Municipality may be far from over but what impressed Abahlali is how the municipality has been forced to negotiate with us. This intervention by SERI has made comrades there to feel proud as they feel their dignity is being recognised with a certain degree of respect when the municipality has to negotiate with the community and our legal team. In Motala Heights SERI's defeat of Ricky Govender has given people confidence and defended the space to organise. The Richmond Farm and other matters supported by SERI are also paving our way to reclaim our dignity. A dignity that in fact shack dwellers and the poor count the same as others in our society. A dignity that in fact people that have been herded into transit camps must be engaged with respectfully and seriously.

One of the reasons why SERI has been so successful in providing legal support to Abahlali baseMjondolo is that their ideas and their approach fit into the

needs of Abahlali. But this may not have power on its own. This strategic approach can only move into the real world and start to change it when it has the living force of Abahlali behind it. Any legal strategy that is worked out between the organised poor and legal experts will have living force behind it when the poor accept it as their own.

However the law can be very dangerous for the organised poor when it demobilizes us. It is very dangerous for the poor to think that the law will provide all the answers to political questions. It is very dangerous for people to think that they can stop struggling because now they have a lawyer. It is very dangerous for people to allow lawyers to decide for them instead of with them.

It can also be very dangerous for the legal system and lawyers to think that law on its own can advance all socio-economic rights of the poor without the organised struggle of the working class, the poor, women, people born in other countries, LGBTI people, people living with AIDS and all other oppressed groups. Victories in court are not always victories in reality. It takes sustained mass based organisation to turn a legal victory into a real victory.

When the law fails the poor the poor are left with no choice but to struggle for political solutions. But sometimes when we lose a political battle a legal solution is the best route. Radical lawyers need movements and movements need radical lawyers. Our relationship with SERI shows how well this solidarity can work when it is based on mutual respect and when lawyers understand, as SERI does, that the legal struggle doesn't replace the political struggle.

The organised poor stand a very good chance of using law to advance our struggle. Radical lawyers can join our struggle to advance our law in general. We want a legal system that can promote a society where everyone counts the same. We want a society in which every human being is treated with respect and dignity. We want a society where everyone is treated as equal before the law and everyone has the same ability to access the legal system. Until the legal system is removed from the rule of money movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo will have to depend on radical pro bono law firms like SERI when we decide to take a struggle into the courts or when we are forced into the courts by the criminalisation of our struggles or the use of the law to oppress us.

20 APRIL 2012

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Our Aims Will Never Be the Same

People are born not the same and they will die not the same. Although people got united to achieve one goal, which is an equal and democratic society, the gap between the haves and the have nots is not fading away. In fact it is growing.

People got united and we thought that we had the same purpose and aim but for sure there are some for whom their intentions were to make sure that their own plans are achieved. Those with their own intentions are not here to sustain what is making the people to be together. But on the other hand some are working tirelessly without even noticing that there is a wolf that is also waiting tirelessly and patiently for good results so that it can seize the victories for itself. People pretended as if they were freedom fights while they were freedom robbers. They were wolves wearing the attire of the Freedom Charter and so we thought that they were lambs. But no where are they? Some come rushing past us in their blue light convoys. We see some of them in expensive hospitals and in places like Qalakabusha waiting to restart their plans to destroy this country.

Really I want to know how we are supposed to call those who steal the money that is supposed to go the poor? How are we supposed to call those who steal the money for houses, even for social grants? Are we still supposed to call them “comrades”?

At home my mother (MaRadebe) taught me to call a spade a spade. How can I call somebody a comrade when I know what he is capable of? How can I call somebody who got rich by stealing from the poor a comrade? How can I call somebody who is always jeopardizing the status of my country as a comrade?

Why in such a good country are there people sleeping on the roads while billions does missing from the money set aside to develop the people? Even now, even with everything that we have seen, with the mansions and sports cars and Johnny Walker Blue on one side and old ladies looking for rotting food in rubbish bins on the other side, when people are arrested for stealing from the people others will come with placards written ‘innocent until proven guilty’. But at the time when that person was committing the crime he or she never

thought anything about the people. Is politics now just about each little group supporting their own thief so that they can get something too?

Are we really free? Democracy has made some of us multimillionaires but these multimillionaires are not even willing to help those that are suffering. Was this country and its resources created for them? The Freedom Charter said that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it”. It didn’t say that “South Africa belongs to the whites now but in the future it will belong to the rich.”

Those who have become rich are trying to redefine freedom and democracy to suit themselves. Those who have remained faithful to what freedom and democracy really mean, to what they meant when the people got united, are labelled as traitors of our new democracy. If you say in 2012 what you said in 1994 or in 1984 or in 1976 or in 1960 you are a traitor. This is really amazing.

What is this Bato Pele thing? Is there anyone proud of what he or she was fighting for? Does anyone really believe that this is freedom? Where is the equality that we have been dreaming of? How on earth can you sleep peacefully when you know exactly that the people that elected you to develop them are sleeping on the road?

There is a very disappointing thing in South Africa which is that people tend to be so unhappy if you are seeking the truth. These people that are ruling us know they told us that there is not even one country in the world that has got such a good Constitution like our country. But now they are planning to amend it. They say that the Constitution is the reason why the poor are still poor! In fact the real reason is that poor people are using the Constitution to know the truth. We are using the Constitution to defend ourselves.

They say that they want to change the Constitution and that they are the real custodians of human rights and the people’s dignity. They say that they are the ones that really want equality. But where are the views of the people on the ground? Have they ever visited the people to seek their views? We have not forgotten that they told us that there will be nothing that they will do without the people.

But when they say ‘people’ who are they referring to? Do they just mean the people like them, who are becoming richer as the rest of us become poorer? One thing is for sure. If you do not belong to a political party and you believe in a living politics, if you believe that poor people can think and that we should all make this country together then it means that you are not a human being.

Why all of a sudden is there this plan to amend the constitution? The government has been in power since 1994. Is it because corruption is escalating and because protests are escalating? They didn't start with the Constitution. They started with the newspapers. They wanted to make sure that the newspapers are not exposing their secrets. Some of these same newspapers exposed our struggles while we were under white minority rule but now that we are under rich minority rule they want to cut their wings. What is it that they are intending to do to us? Why do they want to ensure that we don't have all the information that we need to understand things properly? It was the newspapers that exposed how the bosses of Aurora Mines were getting so rich while they were not paying their workers. People on the ground must ensure that they oppose this autocratic thinking and that they stand as united as against the rule of the rich minority as they did against the rule of the white minority. Democracy is the rule of the people. It is not the rule of a rich minority instead of a white minority.

We thought that as our involvement in the struggle to liberate ourselves we would harvest the fruit of our toil. But it seems as if we were just wasting our time and energy for those who now think for us. These days it looks like the politicians think that they can do whatever they want. But we still remember that they were supposed to be taking our agenda forward. They were supposed to be working for us, not stealing from us and repressing us. While they are planning to amend the Constitution we are dying in shack fires, from floods and from AIDS. Many of us are looking for work every day and are becoming exhausted and depressed. Some of us that have work are not treated as human beings at work and still have to live in shacks because the pay is so bad.

During the World Cup so much money was wasted to make things for the visitors from all over the world. COP 17 was another big problem. Our government loves to impress rich people from other countries but we don't count to them. They are ashamed of us. In fact we must be evicted so that we can be hidden away from international appearance. But of course when the elections come then these same people will be needed to vote.

We are still living under minority rule. The minority passes the laws that it wants, it uses its muscles to force the people to accept its domination. The rule of the rich minority is very similar in some ways to the rule of the white minority. Instead of trying to eradicate racism in South Africa the government is

just making sure that no one will stand in their way so that they can do what they like. Whether we like to talk about it or not Africans are still regarded Africans, Indians are still regarded Indians and whites are still regarded as whites. The government is not looking for ways to change this so that we can all just be South Africans. We are still treated according to the colour of our skins. Some racists are using poor African security guards to do their dirty work. This is even happening in the shopping malls which are supposed to be places in which all that counts is your money. We really have a gift for ignoring things that are truth but that will create division. *Sithi ke thina za sithetha inyaniso ikrakra* (truth is bitter).

There are only a few people above that we can put our trust to. One is the honourable Dikgang Moseneke. This man stands for the truth and for the poor. Another is the honourable Thuli Madosela. It seems as if she is really the one that doesn't like corruption and all these unacceptable actions against the poor and against the country. Everywhere you go people are saying "Viva Thuli Viva!"

Now is the time for us all to realise that there is a struggle inside every struggle. Now is the time when we must stop being used as the tools of the capitalists and make sure that what belongs to the people must go to the people.

AMATHOL" ANYONGANDE KUKUDLELANA

Lindela S. Figlan (JAMA KASIJADU IZIZI)

21 APRIL 2012

Speech · Mzwakhe Mdlalose

‘This is how we do it’

The Foundry Theatre, New York, 21 April 2012

I wish to thank The Foundry Theatre for giving me this opportunity to share Abahlali's gift and contribution to our world. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA, (the Shack dwellers Movement), the movement that has entrusted me with its mandate to share with you how shack dwellers in post-apartheid South Africa have struggled to survive neoliberalism which is a very modern kind of new apartheid. In this new form of apartheid we are still divided into those that count and those that do not, those who can live in the cities and those that cannot, those that are allowed to speak and those that are not, those that must burn and those that are safe.

I am honoured to be among comrades from all around the world. I know that I will learn many important lessons from all the comrades here. For years NGOs and academics would represent the struggles of poor people in South Africa at international forums. It has been a long struggle for us to get to the point where we can represent ourselves in these spaces. We wish to be very clear that some of the NGOs and academics have resisted our demand that we be able to think and to speak for ourselves with as much hatred for our humanity as the state. Some of them want to be our bosses and not our comrades. Some of them have tried to destroy what they cannot control using some of the same tactics as the state. They have presented us as criminals. As people that can't think for ourselves. As people who are being used. We draw a clear line between those who are willing to struggle with the poor, to become part of us, to think with us, and those that insist on their right to think and speak for the poor. We are not looking for new bosses in the name of our own freedom. We draw a clear line between that part of the left that thinks that it has a right to rule the oppressed and that part of the left, that, however they were born into this world, works with the oppressed day after day, and year after year, to build the power of the oppressed.

Abahlali was formed out of anger, hunger and frustration. It developed out of a road blockade in Durban in March 2005 in which 14 comrades were arrested and charged with Public Violence. This road blockade was organized in a settlement called Kennedy Road. At this time none of us knew what the future entailed for the shack dwellers in Kennedy Road who refused to be excluded from the fruits of our new democracy and from development. A democracy that has come to serve the interest of the few while the majority of South Africans continue to live in deep poverty. The first thing the movement did after it was formed was to define itself before someone else could define us. It was already clear that we were seen as the people who do not count in our own society. It was very clear that the state and the NGOs wanted to define us. We realized that the shack dwellers are presented as people who are helpless and useless. As people that need an NGO intervention or an academic who will give us a good education in politics and even provide us with a political direction. We refused this. We defined ourselves by a process of discussing our situation and coming to our own conclusions about who we are, what we need and how we can struggle for it.

We mobilized shack dwellers and poor communities around a common goal and understanding. We started advocating for land and housing in our cities, pushing for the upgrading of informal settlements and against forced eviction. We are still pushing for the right to the city for the poor. We stage protest marches. We petition, we picket outside state or municipal offices and yes we hold candle light vigils etc. We also engage in direct action. We connect ourselves to electricity. We occupy land. The state has proven to the people of South Africa that the only language that they understand is protests. We have to force them to accept our humanity. Without organisation and protest there is no progress. That is why we have adopted the "No land, No house No vote" campaign. This is to put pressure on the authorities to listen to our plight and take us seriously. But it is also because we don't want to give our power away to politicians that use the people as ladders. We want to keep our power for ourselves. We want to build our own power from the ground up.

We believe that our struggle is our school. This is why we have created the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. This is our own political school where we learn from one another. We learn from our meetings, at our all night camps that we hold on every quarter year. We learn from the streets during protests and we

learn from the court rooms. But most importantly we have learnt from the old and young women and men. Our meetings are the center of our movement. This is where we discuss and think together. We talk things through until we come to a common understanding. Comrades from America are often shocked at how long our meetings are and at how many meetings we have. But the meetings are the foundation of our strength.

We have made alliances with those few NGOs that are willing to engage us as comrades rather than children. We hold paralegal workshops in collaboration with legal NGOs such as Socio Economic Right Institute of South Africa (SERI) and other partners but we also hold political schools that help us become who we are.

Abahlali have produced a new politic that we call a Living Politic. It is a living politic because it is understood by the old and the young, the educated and the uneducated. It is the politic that speaks to the fact that we have no water or electricity in the shacks or that it has become too expensive while in fact, as Mnikelo Ndabankulu from Abahlali puts it, “our lives need these services”. Everyone can see the justice of this politic. Everyone can own this politic together. This is the politic that drives us. This politic rejects the party political system that encourages a top down development approach that is sometimes against the will of the people. It is the politic that carried us in 2009 when the state backed gang attacked us in Kennedy Road and drove many of us, including myself, from our homes.

It is very clear that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world and that the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. We believe that the problems that we confront are political and not technical. We believe that we should build the power of the poor from below. We also believe that freedom and equality can only be achieved when the poor themselves take charge and lead themselves in their own lives.

The movement has won many victories including the victory against the ‘Slums Act’ which was a piece of legislation that was aiming at bulldozing all shacks in the province without the safe guards that all the policies and national legislation provides. It was a war on the poor. The Constitutional Court found this legislation invalid and inconsistent with the constitution. We have stopped most of the evictions that our shack communities are facing in our cities. We have won a struggle against the criminalization of activists by the state e.g. in

the case of the Kennedy 12. We have successfully protected our space for our living politic and we have made our own international connections.

However Abahlali is not a perfect movement and we have many challenges as well. Some come from inside and some come from outside. Repression has damaged our movement. Some of our members who were displaced by the violent attack in Kennedy Road in 2009 remain homeless. The state still refuses to provide services needed by our communities or even to listen for that matter. Shack fires, floods, crimes and diseases caused by neglect of the state and its agencies continue. There is still no political will from our government to oppose the corruption in governance, the politicization of service delivery or an economic system that continues to make some of us poor and others rich.

We were supposed to be quiet, to be good boys and girls, while others discussed our lives for us. We have, despite serious resistance from the state and some NGOs, succeeded in taking our place in the world as people that think and have a right to participate in all discussions. However we have a very, very long way to go before we are strong enough to stop this very modern apartheid that continues to divide us into rich and poor, people that count and people that don't count, people that must burn and people that can be safe, people that are allowed to think and to speak and people that are supposed to be silent in the dark corners. But we know that we are not alone. People are struggling all over South Africa. People are struggling all over the world. Together we are strong.

17 MAY 2012

Essay · S'bu Zikode

Rethinking the State's Housing Programme: Finding a sustainable and responsive solution to the need for adequate shelter and the right to the city

I wish to submit and insist that it will be disastrous to commit our contributions to economic growth instead of social growth and the development of the poor. The problem with this is that economic growth for the rich often does not help the poor – sometimes it happens by oppressing the poor. We cannot continue to support the rich to get richer while the poor are getting poorer in the hope that one day the poor will also get some of this wealth. We have to start with the urgent needs of the poor – with the urgent needs that people have today.

In countries where there has been real progress on urban issues there has been an agreement that the social value of land (its value to people) must come before its commercial value (its value in terms of money). In Brazil this was even made part of the law called the City Statute. This agreement came out of years of struggle. There will only be laws and policies that take the lives of poor people seriously when the poor have built our own power in society. And on their own these laws and policies will not work unless the poor remain permanently organised and strong.

When most people come to cities, they usually do not come for housing but for better paying jobs, to run businesses, access education and health facilities and for other means of survival. But while working or looking for a job a place to live decent becomes necessary. When economic growth and investment is only focused in cities then we have no choice but to continue coming to cities for better lives. Urbanization and migration is the only way to some hope for millions of people.

To solve our problems we would have to somehow think about a society driven economy, that is an economy designed and led by people. We would need an economy that goes to people instead of people going to the economy. Right

now the economy is designed to dictate our future as a society instead of society designing an economy to dictate our future.

We cannot resolve the housing crisis without resolving the economic crisis. And real progress on the housing crisis will not come until we put the social value of land before its commercial value. But there are many steps that can be taken right now to make things better for people.

Sustainable and responsive housing solutions right now must:

- 1. Ensure that all new housing developments are in well located areas.
- 2. Take seriously that participatory in situ-upgrades are better than forcing people to rural dumping grounds.
- 3. Make sure that all shack settlements are provided with services and support while they wait for housing.
- 4. Eradicate transit camps as a matter of urgency.
- 5. Ensure that all new developments are co-designed with the people that will live in them.
- 6. Ensure that officials must negotiate with democratic community structures and not ward committees.
- 7. Make sure that there are no more forced removals and evictions. No one must ever be left homeless in the name of ‘housing delivery’.
- 8. Eradicate corruption.
- 9. Eradicate repression.
- 10. Support democratic community structures and movements to engage the state at all levels.

This document was prepared in response to a request to produce a one page document as a contribution to a discussion on the future of housing policy.)

21 JUNE 2012

Essay · Bandile Mdlalose

Why Are We Still Living the Apartheid Life?

I sit back and fail to understand why there are people still staying in shacks. I fail to understand why there is so much separation in this country, why there are areas for the rich and the poor. I fail to understand why we are still living the same way that we lived in the times of the apartheid era. I fail to understand why out of all the things that we said we would have from democracy we can only point to and feel so few of them. Is this what Mandela stayed 27 years for in prison? Is that what so many people struggled for in the trade unions and in the UDF?

Why are the poor are still mistreated? Why our voices are still not heard? Why do we still not count? Why are we still voting?

As it is a youth month I sit back and look at where we have come from after all the years of struggle since the deaths of 1976. All is slowly sinking as the new government is making sure that we remember the heroes of the struggle but not what the struggle was for. Struggled is remembered only to try and make us obey the government and not to encourage us to continue the struggle. I ask myself why Hector Paterson was shot, why Mbuyisa Makhubo had to flee the country and stay in Nigeria?

How many people must die before this country changes, recently we have seen Andries Tatane being shot just like Hector Peterson. He is not the only one. There are now twenty five names on the list of people that have been killed by the police during protests after apartheid. Twenty five! For how long must we keep quite? For how long must we be killed in our own country for the truth we behold in our hands?

This time we need to be focused. It is high time that the youth of 1976 rise from the dead. We need to unite and complete the work that they have started. Their interest was simple: they were fighting for freedom which is something that we have on paper but in reality we have but unable to use it. What's the point of having the right to protest if police will be guarding us by big guns,

sometimes killing us on protests? What is the point of have the right to Freedom of Expression if the president is pushing the African National Congress is pushing the Secrecy Bill and Blade Nzimande calls political analysts 'dogs'.

As part of the South African youth of the 1980's I'm passionate enough to complete what was started by the 1976 youth. The country will change, the constitution will be implemented and everyone will be treated with respect and dignity. It's about time that we should all count the same despite the fact that some are poor and others are rich and without looking at race. Everyone should count the same in front of the law and when it comes to making decisions about their communities and the future of this country. There should be no discrimination of places where there is one area for the rich and another for the poor. The social value of land must come before its commercial value. Everyone young person must have a real right to education, an income and a place to stay.

We might not get there in the next hour. But tomorrow the light will be on. We will be celebrating the victory of unity.

Aluta continua

Bandile Mdlalose

12 JULY 2012

Paper · S'bu Zikode

The Organized Poor and Law as a Tool for Social Change

Wits Public Interest Law Gathering, 12 July 2012

It gives me a great honor to be invited to participate in the Wits Public Interest Law Gathering. I wish to thank SERI for the invitation.

It has always been clear to us that there can only be laws and policies that take the lives of poor people seriously when the poor have built our own power in the society. It has also always been clear to us that the political will to implement progressive laws and policies will only be there if the poor remain permanently organized and strong.

The law is a terrain of struggle that we cannot avoid. Because the municipalities and the land owners usually treat poor people as if we are beneath the law we have often been able to win important victories in the courts. Many people have been able to remain in their homes and on their land as a result of our victories in the courts. But access to the courts, and to lawyers that are willing to take instruction from poor people, is something that comes out of years of organization. Our litigation against the then 'Slums Act' came out of years of struggle for the right to the cities.

Most poor people do not have access to the courts. In most cases when poor people find a lawyer that lawyer will want to take decisions for the so-called clients without consulting them. In fact pro-bono lawyers often make decisions about poor people with municipalities or land owners as if the municipalities or land owners are their partners and the demands of the poor are the problem.

Abahlali has had a very good experience as to what the difference between being a shack dweller outside the organized poor and being a shack dweller amongst the organized poor. It is always much easier for the legal practitioners to work with the organized poor than to work with the unorganized poor. It is also much easier for an organized movement like Abahlali to work with the

legal institutions and practitioners. It is organization that makes real solidarity between grassroots activists and legal activists possible.

The idea that as poor people we cannot think for ourselves continues to ruin our society. We are supposed to remain silent in our shacks waiting for government, lawyers, NGOs and others to think for us, decide for us and act for us. When we insist on taking our place in all the discussions that affect us our presence creates a crisis. We find that we are treated as children or as criminals. The reason why our presence in these discussions creates a crisis is that it is thought that as shack dweller we should have known our place in the first place, and that place is in the shacks. Abahlali's refusal to be confined to the dark corners of our shacks has been challenged not only by the state but also by some civil society organizations, the regressive left and of course by some legal practitioners too. Many of these experts believe that it is their duty to think, act, represent and decide for the poor.

For these people the struggle for a better society is a struggle between different groups of experts. It is thought that as the poor our only role is to support the right group of experts. For us the struggle for a better society starts with the idea that everyone counts and that everyone has the some right to participate in all decision making that affects them.

Abahlali has recently experienced a very undermining and disrespecting treatment from a "Human Rightsorganization". We approached this particular organization to request them to assist us with a court interdict. The lawyer there made an appointment with us as clients. When the clients came at an agreed time she did not have time for her own clients. She did not even apologize for the delay. It was as if she thought that only her time was important and that poor people had no commitments of their own. In fact for some people to be late for work could mean losing a job.

When this lawyer eventually came to meet the clients she said "If the community members stop the municipality from important tasks like surveying properties and from laying sewerage pipes for no valid reasons, then please be advised that we cannot challenge things like that. You have to comply with lawful processes or there is no way any court will entertain your arguments if the municipality shows that you are interfering with or causing an unjustifiable hindrance. We cannot defend you against any unnecessary obstruction to construction work." She went on to say "when you email me please refrain from copying

other people on the email to which I have no connection in terms of this matter. I communicate directly with clients in matter.” In a case like this the lawyer that is supposed to represent us is acting in support of the system that oppresses us. If Human Rights organizations are going to be in a living solidarity with poor people they must start with the living reality and living struggles of poor people and not with the system that oppresses us. The human being has to come first. The system that oppresses us must be seen as the problem.

We warmly welcome legal practitioners, human rights organizations, churches, progressive NGOs, urban planners and other experts that want to support democratic formations such as poor people’s movements and communities struggling for social justice in our society. We warmly welcome your support in our efforts to organize, mobilize and empower our communities. But in doing so we ask you to think with us and not for us. We ask you to decide with us and not for us. Avail yourself; render your professional services and skills but render them to democratic decision making processes. Understand that your support will have to start from the realities of our lives and struggles. Where ever you can do your best to transfer your skills and access to your networks in a manner that is empowering. Come to us as comrades and not bosses.

There are already some few organizations and churches working like this. SERI and CALS are already working like this. They are working with and not for the organized poor. And they are working with us to build our legal capacity too. When NGOs and churches work like this the poor themselves can be proud of deciding their own future and taking their own role in the struggle to be part of a great society we all dreaming.

6 AUGUST 2012

Talk · S'bu Zikode

The Struggle to Affirm the Dignity of the Poor in a Society in which we don't Count

Mexico City, 6 August 2012

Before Abahlali baseMjondolo was formed the shack dwellers in South Africa were considered by government and some other people in our society to be the undeserving poor. This claim came as the result of the perception that the poor are lazy, uneducated and people who do not think and therefore do not count the same as other human beings. The general public, civil society and the media could not defend the poor against this indignity. The media had little or nothing to report on anything that surrounds shack dwellers, be it good or bad, that considered us as human beings or citizens. We were mostly seen as a threat to society – as a problem to be controlled. When shacks were on fire radios and televisions would not air or broadcast this. On the other side the state would refuse any provision of basic services to the shack settlements or to engage us as citizens. We have always been considered as people who cannot think for ourselves. Someone from somewhere else would always be hired and paid to think for us, to represent us and to take decisions on our behalf. This has been the state mentality towards the poor. It has also been the mentality of most NGOs and of most of civil society. It has also been the mentality of what we have called the regressive left – that part of the left that thinks that its job is to think for the poor rather than with the poor. The rights that we have on paper were always refused in reality. This included our rights as citizens and our rights to the cities. Whenever we asked for our rights to be respected, for our humanity to be recognized, we were presented as troublemakers, as people that were being used by others, or as criminals. Our request to participate in the discussions about our own lives was taken as a threat.

Abahlali has been mobilizing to build the power of the poor from below. We try to make sure that the poor remain permanently organized and strong. This has helped to build a strong voice for the movement. As a result of the power

that we have built from the ground up we have been able to speak for ourselves in many spaces that were previously barred to us. For us it is important that, just as we occupy land in the cities, we must also occupy our own space in all discussions.

Today, as a result of our struggle and the struggles of other poor people, we see a slow shift away from seeing shack settlements as something to be bulldozed without any sense that there are human lives in these places. There is now recognition that there are human lives in the shacks. Basic services such as water and sanitation, refuse collection, road access, electricity etc which were being denied are now being rolled out. In Durban the eThekweni Municipality has long had a policy that forbids electrification of any shack settlement in the city. Today this killer electricity policy is under review and a pilot project to roll electricity in some four settlements has begun. This progress has come through the years of struggle and the power of the organized poor.

For many years shack settlements were seen as a problem to be solved by eradication. This was the logic of apartheid but it came back to South Africa after apartheid through the way that the UN Millennium Development Goals were interpreted. In South Africa the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial government wanted to be seen as smart and leading the way in carrying the mandate of the MDGs by introducing the then 'Slums Act' which would have led to mass evictions. We took that Act to the highest court in our land – the Constitutional Court – where it was ruled unconstitutional. This judgment has a lot to say about transforming the understanding of shack settlements so that we can all see them as communities to be integrated in our urban centers. It has a lot of emphasis on the need for the state to conduct meaningful engagement with communities. This means that while shack dwellers wait for their permanent homes basic services and support would have to be provided. The new developments would have to be co-designed with the people that will live in them. Participatory and democratic development via in-situ upgrades should be promoted and supported in order to put a stop to all unlawful evictions and corruption. Well located land is to be released for housing development.

As a movement we have succeed in building a real challenge to the eradication agenda and to the eviction of shack dwellers from citizenship as well as good land. The government's approach to housing has lost its credibility through the struggles of the poor around the country. But houses for the urban poor have

not yet been built at the pace and in the manner that respects shack dwellers. Therefore our struggle has only gone half of the way that it needs to go.

But we are proud and happy that we have built communities and a strong movement. We have stopped evictions in the areas we were strong and changed the perception that development can happen in our own neighborhoods without us. We have refused just to be told what will be done to us and to be excluded from democracy and decision making. We have concluded that there will be nothing for us without us. The state and anyone wanting to upgrade or develop our communities is required to co-plan with us and have to have meaningful engagement with us on all issues. Slowly, slowly it is being understood in wider society that shack settlements are not eyesores to be bulldozed but communities to be upgraded. It is slowly being understood that if land is allocated by the market the poor will always be excluded from the cities. We are slowly building more alliances in our struggle for a conscientious society based on respect and dignity for all people.

These shifts have come after years of struggle to be counted as human beings. These shifts have come after years of discussions where we have worked out our vision for a society where real freedom, equality, justice and dignity are the rule of the day. These shifts have come as a result of our own hard won living politic. They have come as a result of our own courage to insist that everyone's life and intelligence counts the same. That everyone deserves the same equal opportunities as everyone else. That the social value of land should come before its commercial value. That all the production and gains of the country should be fairly distributed to all its inhabitants. That in dealing with all of the above we should start with the worst off. As Anglican Bishop Ruben says "the last shall be first".

However the government still shows no political will to engage meaningfully with the shack dwellers and poor people's movements. The state and its politicians impose its party opportunists to monopolize and hijack the system and politicize services so that only party members benefit. The state continues to build transit camps and force people into these places where they are left to rot. The state continues to harass, beat, arrest and even kill activists who are calling for real freedom and democracy for all. Our struggle has a long and hard road to travel before we can say that we have started to build democratic cities.

22 AUGUST 2012

Essay · Bandile Mdlalose

Marikana Shows that we are Living in a Democratic Prison

South Africa has the most beautiful Constitution amongst all countries. Its beauty is well documented and respected. But we are living in a Democratic Prison.

We must acknowledge the fight of Doctor Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko and the community struggles of the 1980s, the youth of 1976 and the workers of 1973. The struggles of the past defeated the White Boers and brought us democracy with all these beautiful rights on paper. We have so many documented rights, like the right to housing and to protest. But every day our rights are violated by the Black Boers. They vowed to protect our rights but the vow was a fake vow.

Instead of supporting the people's struggles so that we can make democracy real and make our rights real they are sending out their securities and police to evict the poor, to lock us out of the cities and to smash our struggles. Instead of working with the people to transform the society they are repressing the people to protect the unequal society that they took charge of 1994.

The politicians have not joined hands with the people. They have joined hands with the capitalists. The result of this new alliance between politicians and capitalists is that there is a 1% of elites that is taking most of the fruits of this democracy for themselves. The middle classes still have their nice lives but for the poor, employed or unemployed, things have got worse and they continue to get worse.

The arrests, beatings, torture, destruction of people's homes and killing has continued after apartheid. Now the massacre is here too. Every year the Black Boers tell us to remember 1976 but they say nothing about the repression of our struggles after apartheid. They say nothing about Thembinkosi Mpanza and Vukani Shange shot dead by the Farm Watch in eMasangweni in 2006. They say nothing about the police attacks on Abahlali baseMjondolo in 2008,

the armed attacks on our movement in Kennedy Road in 2009 and the repression of the Anti-Eviction Campaign, the Landless People's Movement and the Unemployed People's Movement. They say nothing about the police murder of Andries Tatane last year or the long list of people that have been killed by the police while protesting.

Now that the strikers in Marikana have been killed they speak as if it is a natural disaster whereas in fact it is a political disaster perpetrated by the capitalists and the politicians.

Are we going to sit back and watch each of our movements crushed one by one? How many of us must die before we are recognised and included in the society? How many of us must die before the land and wealth is shared fairly and everyone has a say in all decisions that affect them? When will the oppressed stand up and talk with one voice?

We are treated like this because we are poor. We are not allowed to practice our rights in front of the government. Rights are for everyone on paper. In reality they are only there for the rich. Our rights are well known to be documented but not implemented. The alliance between the politicians and the capitalists has created a Democratic Prison. We can vote but only for our own oppression. We can vote but the state still ignores the law when it comes to the poor. It is normal for us to be evicted and repressed even though these things are illegal. This is why the people are starting to call the politicians the Black Boers. Yes they govern the country but they do not govern it for us or with us.

For years community struggles have been attacked. Who would have known that today worker's struggles would also be attacked by the police? The struggle is spreading from the shacks to the mines and from the mines back to the shacks. Looking at the silence of Cosatu and all the partners of the Black Boers I can't stop wondering what will happen next. It seems that the poor are on our own. It seems that many of us will have to be jailed, beaten and killed before we count to this society.

I wish for each and every person to look thoroughly at this so called democracy. I wish for each and every person to ask if we are being realistic when we say that we are in a democracy or if we are really living in a Democratic Prison. It is clear that we do not have the rights and freedoms that are written in the Constitution in reality. It is clear that our governors use armed force to exclude us from society and to repress us when we resist. Look at what happened to

Abahlali baseMjondolo in 2009. Look at what happened to the Landless People's Movement in 2010. Look at what happened to Andries Tatane last year. Look at what happened to the Unemployed People's Movement recently. Look at what happened to the Marikana strikers.

Let's not fool ourselves and say we are in a Democratic Country while we are in a Democratic Prison.

The Black Boers think that we the poor are "Dom". They think that by letting us vote for them and reminding us of the struggle against the White Boers we will think that we are "Free". We were only liberated from the apartheid regime and the rule of the White Boers but the same system that makes some people rich and others poor still exists. The same system that locks the poor out and represses our struggles still exists.

It is clear that this country is led by the Bloody Hand and that it was taken by the same Bloody Hand and that we will continue to shed blood. But we as the poor need to put a stop to that and to liberate ourselves in a way that our kids will be happy to live in our country. We must shape our own future because the one we are living in is the future of the Black Boers. We need a country with no more Boers of any colour. We need a country where we are all just people, people who all count the same and have the same rights.

No one will deliver Freedom to us. We will have to fight to take our own freedom into our own hands. But the politics of the Bloody Hand is the politics of the Boers, black and white. Our politics must be different and better. Our politics must be a politics of an organised, united and determined people.

28 AUGUST 2012

Paper · Thina Khanyile

Churches & the Organised Poor

IUM-SiCiLi Barefoot Consultation, Pretoria, 28 August 2012

Abahlali baseMjondolo is an egalitarian and democratic organisation of the poor. It is dedicated to the self-improvement and self-education of people who have been made poor by an unjust economic system. We organise ourselves to be able to discuss and understand our situation better and to be able to struggle for justice.

AbM is not a political party. We are an independent poor people's organisation. We accept people regardless of the political parties that they are coming from but we keep party politics out of the movement and all our leaders must agree to remain independent from all political parties.

AbM was formed in the year 2005. Shack dwellers of Kennedy Road in Clare Estate in Durban were angry and concerned after living for a very long with empty promises from the local councillor and the municipality. People were demanding services and proper development in the area which is close to work and schools. However the municipality wanted to destroy the settlement and move everyone to Park Gate which is one of the human dumping grounds far outside the city. People in Kennedy Road organised a protest in March 2005. After that people in Kennedy Road started to work with people in nearby settlements in places like Sydenham and Reservoir Hills. The other neighbourhood areas played a huge and crucial role when the movement was formed in October 2005.

AbM was formed for the following objectives:

- To fight for, protect, promote and advance the dignity of the poor.
- To improve the lives and living condition of the shack dwellers especially by asserting the human dignity of shack dwellers. Although shack dwellers are the primary focus, AbM also works with the poor people not living in shacks like flat dwellers, street traders etc

- To take forward the struggle for equality and justice, by working to bring about a free and open society, based on respect for all in which men and women operate on an equal ground to pursue their happiness, nourish their values and appreciate the spiritual intangibles which make life a unique experience and a divine gift
- To oppose all forms of injustice and inequality, to democratise all forms of decision making and to replace the current top down system with a bottom up system and to struggle for equal rights to the cities and equal distribution of land, wealth and other resources.
- To assist its members, branches and affiliated communities in establishing the culture of self help and self reliance in their families to improve their immediate social and economic conditions.
- To ensure that the poor are aware of their rights under their South African law and are able to access these rights and to defend them from violation.
- To work towards meaningful engagement between Government structures and grassroots structures.
- To offer a maximum support to the poor living in and affected with HIV/AIDS.
- To actively oppose all forms of prejudice within settlements including sexism, racism, xenophobia, ageism, tribalism and prejudice against people living with HIV and AIDS
- To engage in public protest against the oppression of poor people when and where this is necessary.

AbM primarily sustains itself by membership fees but we do receive some other support too which is important for running the office etc. The movement does not accept any funding from governments or any funding that will compromise its autonomy in any way. It has found its most committed support from churches in South Africa and elsewhere.

Each year we draw up a calendar of events and commitments for the year but we also have to respond to crises as they happen.

Our movement had grown considerably since it was formed and we have experienced and learnt a lot from the struggle. Our experience tells us that the inhuman lives that shack dwellers are living is not just caused by a lack of service delivery. Often service delivery makes people's lives much worse! For example

if people are forcibly removed from a shack that is close to friends and family, to work and schools and dumped in a government shack (which is called a 'transit camp') in the human dumping grounds outside the city that is service delivery but it is exclusion and not development. Many policies are highly regressive and so we can't simply demand that they are implemented with more efficiency. And even when service delivery is good it is undermined by cadre deployment, comradeship and the way in which delivery is used to support local party structures rather than the so called 'beneficiaries'.

We have successfully fought some regressive policies. We defeated the Slums Act of Mabayakhulu which was meant to eradicate the shack settlements in KZN. We have also overturned the ban on providing electricity to shack settlements in Durban but so far it is only going to very few settlements. We still have to struggle for a full roll out of electricity. We have also stopped many, many evictions and this is forcing the City to realise that they will have to upgrade settlements in the city rather than to forcibly remove people outside of the city.

To begin our discussion, 'EDUCATING NGOs and CHURCHES to be BAREFOOT'

We do not see the role of NGOs as taking decisions for the poor and without the poor and then paying and bussing in poor people to support their campaigns. For us this is just another kind of exploitation. It might sometimes say that it is against the economics of neo-liberalism but it is not against the politics of neo-liberalism. We do not believe that NGOs can change the world on their own. They have no power, no mass support. Neither the government nor the capitalists fear an NGO meeting. What can change the world is the power of organised people. Therefore we see the role of the progressive NGOs and Churches being to support democratic formations, such as poor people's movements and communities struggling for social justice in our society. Speak to us and not for us. Think with us and not for us. Organise with us and not for us. Work with us to build the power of the oppressed. Avail your selves to people in their difficult times especially when facing obstacles of injustice, eviction, arrests, fires and other factors that affect their living condition. When we are under attack use your power to protect us from repression so that we can continue to organise safely. Amnesty International has played a very important role in supporting us when we have faced repression.

There are already some church leaders and organisations that are willing to work with poor people on the basis of equality and within the logic of what we call a living solidarity such as Bishop Rubin Phillip and the Church Land Programme.

We often find that all kinds of NGOs want to come and educate us. However the starting point for any discussion about education must be that:

- 1. We are poor not stupid.
- 2. We are poor because of oppression and injustice and not ignorance.

However we welcome any shared learnings that respect our intelligence and our experience and is orientated towards working out, together, how to better confront injustice. We call this a living learning.

Right now the Anglican Church, Diocese of Natal, is working with us and SERI to run workshops in partnership with AbM and other poor people's organisations and movements that are a space where we can share our knowledge about how to use the law in struggle.

Each year the Church Land Programme supports us to elect five AbM members to attend a course on Participatory Development at the Pietermaritzburg campus of UKZN. They also facilitate discussions where these learnings can be analysed by the movement and shared with the movement. In this way the opportunity to access formal education is not privatised.

Poor people come from different places and so they not normally experience the same suffering. Therefore Churches and NGOs would be better if they made more efforts to see for themselves the context that people are living, suffering and struggling in. A living solidarity becomes much easier when you are with people, when you are part of their struggles, their meetings and events. It is important to be there when there are fires, floods, arrests and whatever others problems might arise. But always the point is not to do things for the poor but with the poor. Working with us to build our own capacity is the most important thing.

Because Churches, unlike NGOs, have local denominations they could really help to facilitate connections between people in different localities and to provide space for developing a broader movement for transformation rooted in strong local communities and struggles. In doing so the principle should be respected that the leadership and direction remains in the hands of poor people rather than the Churches speaking on their behalf. But church leadership in

genuine solidarity with the poor and unafraid to assume its prophetic role of 'speaking truth to power' can be a very powerful ally in the difficult but urgent struggle for an end to hunger, poverty and oppression of the poor – the struggle for life and freedom.

Finally I wish to call upon the NGOs and Churches for help with the comprehensive challenge of the displacement in 2009 of AbM leaders and their families, together with other AbM members, from the Kennedy road shacks settlement, who are still now homeless. Their issue has been given very scant attention by the Durban municipality and the Department of Housing. Some Churches have land that they own and we are sure that they can find way of turning this sometimes embarrassing and burdensome legacy into a resource for transformation.

I thank you.

22 OCTOBER 2012

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Land is at the Heart of our Struggle

Yes I have to be bold and proud to be a South African. But I'm not proud because our lovely country belongs to the wrong hands. Our struggle began with the question of land and land remains at the centre of our struggle today.

In the old days the people in this country were so united. Even those who were not interested in politics they ended up in politics. This unity came from the fact that they were crying for the land of their forefathers that had been confiscated by those who thought the land was supposed to be under their authority. The people's land had been stolen, fenced and sold.

The land issue is really serious and it is really dangerous. When the minority government were pressurised on the land issue they often decided to shoot and kill our fathers and mothers. Some they died on the streets because of the struggle for land. Some their limbs were amputated because of the struggle for land. Some they lost their eyes because of the struggle for land. There were so many struggles for land. There was the war of the heads in 1906. There was the struggle of the women of Cato Manor in 1956. There was the battle on Ngquza Hill in 1960.

When Mandela returned and then became President there were so many speculations among the people. They were expecting the government to do miracles about the land issue. But up to now they are still crying the very same tears they have been crying before. People are still crying for land in the rural areas and in the cities. People are still struggling for a place in their country. That struggle remains serious and it remains dangerous.

When our movement was first formed one of Inkosi Bhambatha's grandson's joined our struggle. He was living in the Jadhu Place settlement. One man whose mother was in Cato Manor in 1956 also joined our struggle. He was living in the Arnett Drive settlement. My own father was on Ngquza Hill in 1960. I was living in the Burnwood Road settlement. All of the settlements that joined our movement were founded by land occupations. In some settlements people had been defending those occupations by resisting evictions for twenty years or more. The history for the struggle for land was a living history inside our

movement. When we formed the Poor People's Alliance we aimed to unite the rural and urban land struggles.

The land struggle is not the only struggle. People are also struggling for houses, for better wages, for good schooling and against the councillors, BECs and unions that are controlling the people. But the land struggle is the foundation of many other struggles. This is why we say 'Land & Freedom!'; 'Land & Housing!' and 'Land, Justice & Dignity'.

People are still being evicted in rural areas. The government is trying to strengthen the power of the chiefs in the rural areas. The bantustans remain bantustans. And people are still being evicted from the cities. They are being left homeless or dumped in the transit camps.

And struggle remains dangerous. If you join the struggle you will face violence from party members and the police. We can lose our lives if we are not careful. After the attack on Kennedy Road in 2009, the murder of Andries Tatane in 2011 and the Marikana Massacre in 2012 is there anyone who can still say that they will get shocked if what happened before 1994 can happen again now?

Our government is a capitalist government. It is a government for the rich. It is making some people very rich and it is slowly changing the colour of the people who are rich. It is always saying that there is a problem with the colour of the people that are rich but it never says that there is a problem which is that the rich, all of them together, have too much land, too much money and too much power.

On my way of understanding, I won't feel shocked if more of us are killed in the struggle for land. Now that the government is losing the confidence of the people in the cities and on the mines it has decided to use violence to silence us and to intimidate us. This government wants to defend the system that is making them and their families rich while everybody else is suffering.

When the Kennedy attack happened in 2009 it was so clear that the government was supposed to take that attack very seriously because most of the people who most lost their homes regarded it as an attack to those who were not born in this province. Instead they were arrested while they were running away from those who were shouting "PHANTSINGAMAMPONDO". The government did nothing to stop this. When the headlines on the papers came as "ETHNIC TENSION BOILS OVER IN KENNEDY" they quickly tried to stop those headlines. But those who came to my shack made it clear that those from

other provinces must go back. The government said that the problem was just that we were 'criminals'. Even now we are still suffering with nowhere to stay while the government is not even trying to meet us half way.

Andries Tatane died the same way that the people were dying before 1994. He was not the only person to be killed like this but the whole world saw this murder on TV. We were promised that after 1994 everybody will freely practise their rights without being intimidated by the police. But the police in South Africa are still behaving the very same way as they were behaving before 1994. We were busy blaming the government of those days for how the police behaved towards the people while on the other side this government is doing the very same way. Some of us made the mistake of blaming the apartheid government because their colour was not the same as ours. But really it is about humanity. People tend to forget that we were not really against anyone's colour but that in fact we are against the system that they were using. That system is commonly understood to be the same to the present one.

The Marikana Massacre was the most terrifying one. When our President gave a speech about this massacre he sung a song called "SENZENI NA" before he delivered his speech. That song we used to sing it even before 1994. But even now we are still singing the same song. Why? When that song continues there are words that are said which say that "OUR SIN IS OUR COLOUR". Are we still sinned even to the government that we fought for? There must be something very, very wrong.

If the government cannot recognise our humanity than we have to recognise our humanity for ourselves. Please let's make sure that even under threatening conditions like these lets go forward to claim what belong to the people. Now is the time for all those of us who are landless to show that really mean to fight for land in the rural areas and in the cities. With land we can start to be counted as citizens of this country.

Land has to be distributed according to social need and not according to who has money.

We need to fight jointly to make sure that we defeat this demon which is embracing our country. But if those who are suffering are not showing anything, how will other people know that they are supposed to join the struggle and to support us? Every land occupation is a small step towards making this a country for all who live in it and breaking the power of money over land.

Lindela S. Figlan

24 OCTOBER 2012

Talk · Lindela Figlan

The Politic of Human Dignity

London Anarchist Bookfair, 24 October 2012

The meaning of dignity is often misunderstood. Many people only think of dignity in relation to the economic status of those who are better off. This is understood to mean that a person with no money is taken as a person whose life and voice does not count and is therefore a person with no dignity. It is also understood that a person with money does count and is therefore a person with dignity. But no amount of money can buy dignity.

Money can buy many things. With money you can live in a house that will not be demolished without warning, that does not leak in the rain, that has water, toilets and electricity. With money you can even give your children their own rooms. With money you can buy your children education and know that if they fall sick or meet with an accident they will be well looked after.

But money does not buy dignity because to be a person with dignity you must recognise the dignity of others. No person is a complete person on their own, that is without others. In isiZulu we say “umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu”. This means that a person is a person because of other people. Rich people are always demanding that other people show respect to them just because they are rich. They are always forcing us to show respect to them. The politicians are the same. But there is no dignity in forcing other people to show respect to you. There is dignity in respecting the humanity of others and in being respected back.

As poor people we do not live in dignified conditions. In fact when it rains we live like pigs in the mud. Our shacks are always burning. We do not have toilets. We are disrespected by politicians and, when we have work, we are disrespected at work. Security guards and domestic workers are often treated as if we are not fully human. Sometimes we are also disrespected by NGOs, academics and other people that think that they have a right to lead the struggles of the poor and who get very angry when we explain that for us solidarity must

be based on talking to us and not for us and thinking and deciding with us and not for us.

But poor as we are we achieve our own dignity. Some people achieve dignity in their churches. Some achieve dignity through culture, in something like a choir. And we achieve dignity in the togetherness of our struggle. Our struggle is a space of dignity. Here we can express our suffering, we can think together and we can support each other. Our struggle is also a tool to fight for a world in which our dignity, and the dignity of all people, is recognised. Our struggle gives us dignity now and it also aims to create a work in which land, wealth and political power are shared amongst the people. S'bu Zikode first called this a living communism, a communism that is fully in the hands of the people. Therefore our struggle is based on the idea that defending our dignity now is the best way to create a world that respects everyone's dignity in the future.

Our struggle is a living politic. It is a politic that everyone can understand and which is owned and shaped by the people. It is rooted in our lives as we live them everyday. We do not see politics as something that should be left to political experts or dominated by political experts.

Before Abahlali baseMjondolo was formed the shack dwellers in South Africa were considered by government and some other people in our society, people in NGOs, universities and the media, to be the undeserving poor. This claim came as the result of the perception that the poor are lazy, uneducated and people who do not think and therefore do not count the same as other human beings. The general public, civil society and the media could not defend the poor against this indignity. The media had little or nothing to report on anything that surrounds shack dwellers, be it good or bad, that considered us as human beings or citizens. We were mostly seen as a threat to society – as a problem to be controlled. When shacks were on fire radios and televisions would not air or broadcast this. On the other side the state would refuse any provision of basic services to the shack settlements or to engage us as citizens. We were always considered as people who cannot think for ourselves. Someone from somewhere else would always be hired and paid to think for us, to represent us and to take decisions on our behalf. This was the state mentality towards the poor. It was also the mentality of most NGOs and of most of civil society. It has also been the mentality of what we have called the regressive left – that part of the left that thinks that its job is to think for the poor rather than with the

poor and that tries by all means, including calling us criminals and supporting state propaganda and repression, to ruin what it cannot rule.

The rights that we have on paper were always refused in reality. This included our rights as citizens, our rights to the cities and our rights to respect and dignity. Whenever we asked for our rights to be respected, for our humanity to be recognised, we were presented as troublemakers, as people that were being used by others, or as criminals. Our request to participate in the discussions about our own lives was taken as a threat. It is important that everyone understands that in this regard civil society and the left was often no different to the state.

Abahlali has been organising and mobilising to build the power of the poor from below. We do not organise people. We organise ourselves. When people want to join our movement we explain that they must organise themselves and that we will struggle with them and not for them. We ask them to think about this seriously, to discuss it with their neighbours and, if they accept that we will only struggle with them and not for them, then we welcome them into the movement. It can take a long time to join our movement. You must understand it well and you must be serious.

We do not support any political parties or vote in elections. Politicians are always using the people's suffering and struggles as ladders to build their own power. We have therefore decided that we will not keep on giving our power away. We build our own power in our communities and encourage people to also build their own power where they work, study and pray. Where possible we govern our own communities ourselves.

Our struggle started when we rejected the authority of the ward councillors and decided to represent ourselves. Today a new struggle is starting as workers on the mines reject the authority of the trade unions and represent themselves. We are hoping that the struggles in the shacks and on the mines and in other work places can come together. But struggle is very dangerous. As the poor, in the shacks and working in the mines, we are not allowed to think and act for ourselves. It is seen as criminal, even as treason.

We have learnt that this order is one that cannot respect our humanity. In fact this order is based on our exploitation and exclusion. This order is designed to oppress us. Therefore we have understood that, as Mnikelo Ndabankulu first said, it is good to be out of order. We are not loyal to this order. We are loyal to

our human dignity and to the human dignity of others and when that requires us to be out of order we are prepared to be out of order.

We have dedicated a lot of our energy in building a University of Abahlali where we can discuss and learn together. Here we educate ourselves to refuse to be co-opted into a system that promotes the indignity of others. We educate ourselves to refuse to be shaken by the politic of fear created by the political parties and the police. In 2009 our movement was attacked in Kennedy Road and in Pemary Ridge. Many of us lost everything and had to flee. Some of us had to go underground. This attack was aimed at destroying our movement. A senior politician by the name of Willes Mchunu said that a decision had been taken to 'disband' our movement. However we are still here. We continue to exist and to struggle in the province where warlordism and assassination is the order of the day. We continue to try to make sure that the poor remain permanently organised and strong. This has helped us to build a strong voice for the movement. As a result of the power that we have built from the ground up we have been able to speak for ourselves in many spaces that were previously barred to us. For us it is important that, just as we occupy land in the cities, we must also occupy our own space in all discussions. This is the only way that we can take our struggle out of the shacks and into spaces from which the poor have been excluded. Of course this requires us to break the protocols that maintain power in certain circles by depriving others an equal chance to participate in these circles.

Today, as a result of our struggle and the struggles of other poor people, we see a slow shift away from seeing shack settlements as something to be bulldozed without any sense that there are human lives in these places. There is now recognition that there are human lives in the shacks. We have stopped evictions in many settlements. In some settlements we have won agreements to upgrade these settlements with proper services and houses instead of forcibly removing people to the human dumping grounds called transit camps. Basic services such as water and sanitation, refuse collection, road access, electricity etc which were being denied to us are now being rolled out. In Durban the eThekweni Municipality long had a policy that forbids electrification of any shack settlement in the city. The result of this is constant fires. Today this killer electricity policy is under review and a pilot project to roll electricity in some four settlements has begun. To survive day by day these services are needed and they are important

steps on the road to winning material conditions that accord with human dignity. To talk about an equal and a just society without land, houses and services for all is bizarre. This progress has come through the years of struggle and the power of the organized poor. Of course we still have a very long road to go. And with state repression getting worse all the time that road is a dangerous one.

As repression gets worse solidarity becomes more and more important. We see the role of NGOs and progressive forces being to support and strengthen the work of what we call our amabhuto and the NGOs call social movements – to work with our movements in a way that respects our autonomy. We urge the NGOs to be responsive and to learn from those who are struggling about the best way to support them without assuming that we need to be given political direction or creating the dependency syndrome. In order to do so you will have to familiarise with the practices of the movements. War on Want and the Church Land Programme are some of the very few organisations that have demonstrated this culture over years. They have had to revisit their strategic planning and to remove the red tape that prevented them from being able to offer effective support when comrades are in jail and in need of lawyers, bail money or facing death threats and in need of safe homes. They have not wasted our time with donor requirements and protocols that sometimes undermine and compromise our struggles. They have never tried to impose their own agendas on our struggles. They have understood that the struggle for human dignity is often criminalised. They have understood that they oppressed have every right to lead their own struggles.

We know that here in Britain the working class and the poor are being made to pay the price for the greed of the rich. We know that you are under attack from a government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich. We know that you are resisting. We are in solidarity with you and with your struggles. If there are ways that we can support you please let us know. You are all welcome to visit us in South Africa. There are some ways in which are struggles are very different. But we face a common enemy in the form of the system that is known as capitalism.

7 NOVEMBER 2012

Essay · Thinabantu Khanyile & Bandile Mdlalose

We Demand that the Manase Report be Released

Everybody knows that in Durban housing development does not really operate to meet the needs of the people. In reality it has three main objectives. One is to remove the poor from the city to the human dumping grounds. The second is to make poor people dependent on the state and thereby the ruling party. The third is to enrich people that are loyal to the ruling party. Everybody knows that corruption is rampant in housing from the top to the bottom. Low-cost housing has made some people millionaires. Everybody also knows that housing and other services are going to party members. This, along with repression and co-optation, is one of the main ways that the ruling party tries to break independent organisation. For instance if there is a fire they often try to prevent people from rebuilding on their own and then replace the people's shacks with government shacks (amatins) which are only given to party members.

For many years Abahlali baseMjondolo has struggled against corruption in Durban. We have done our own research, issued many statements, raised issues in court, raised issues in the media, organised numerous protests and tried to engage with the eThekweni Municipality. The struggle of AbM contributed to a groundswell of concern that led to the investigation of the corruption in the eThekweni Municipality. It was the struggles of the poor that forced the government to act. But it was not easy. We remember the March on Jacob Zuma that we organised on 22 March 2010. We were demanding that the President of South Africa come and look at the evidence of corruption but he did not even consider our demand or reply to us, even though we were thousands, because he was protecting the image of his corrupt comrades. Always the interests of the party are put before the people. Comradism is destroying people's faith in democracy.

Now that an investigation has been done into corruption in the eThekweni Municipality it is very disturbing that our movement, other struggling communities and the residents of the city as a whole are being denied access to the Manase report. As citizens in a country that still calls itself a democracy we have

a right to know what is in this report. Corruption is one of the reasons why the poor are remaining poor after apartheid. It is also one of the reasons why development always becomes about the interests of the party members rather than the so-called 'beneficiaries'.

Jacob Zuma recently told the nation that the ANC is not corrupt. We all know that that is not true. And we all know that protecting corruption is one reason why the President has supported attempts to privatise information. They say that they need to privatise information to protect us against spies from other countries and that they are opposed to corruption but here is a report on corruption and they will not make it public. The ANC shows no respect to the law or the constitution. They act as if they are more superior to the law. They have also shown no respect to poor people. Everywhere we treated like children, like animals and like criminals.

We acknowledge the run of Helen Zille in this debate on why the Manase has not been released but she is not innocent herself. We are aware that the elections are around the corner and that she is trying to score some votes in this coming election. However she needs to lower her speed and focus more on the undeveloped Cape Town where KwaLanga residents also need her intervention to the corrupt TRAs and misallocation of housing. We noted that in The Times Live she was quoted saying "They cry that they will be sued if they release the report. If people continue to vote for a corrupt government they will remain poor," said Zille. We say as the people of South Africa, as members of Abahlali baseMjondolo, that if people continue to vote for any political party instead of building their own power from the ground up they will still be poor. The Freedom Charter says that "The people shall govern". It does not say that "The people shall be governed" so therefore we must demand the implementation of that Freedom Charter and have powers where we live, work and study without voting for others to govern us. If the Zapatistas managed to do that what can stop us to govern our country without putting people on top and letting them taking decisions for us? Why should power be privatised? Why should information be privatized.

If the ANC government is not corrupt then why did the eThekwin Mayor James Nxumalo say "At no stage have we ever said that the report will remain secret. I want to reiterate that we remain committed to our under-taking to release

the report once all the processes have taken their course, including the disciplinary processes". As residents of this city we see no stage where we should wait for those processes to take their course. We should know NOW. The longer it takes to release this report the more damage will be done.

This report must be released now. Those who are planning to vote in the election have the right to know exactly what kind of organisation they will be voting for. If the ANC is not a corrupt organisation, if it is innocent, then it should have nothing to hide and should be confident that the report can be released now. If it continues to fail to release the report we will all know that that is because it has a lot to hide.

27 MAY 2013

Paper · S'bu Zikode

The Power of Organizing the Urban Poor to Advance Tenure Security

UN Special Rapporteur's regional consultation on tenure security, Johannesburg, 27 May 2013

It is always a pleasure to write and speak on the organising strategies and tactics of Abahlali baseMjondolo. I wish to take this opportunity to thank SERI and the Ford Foundation for including our movement in this special consultation. More importantly I wish to thank the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, for calling this meeting. We had a very good relationship with the previous Rapporteur, Miloon Kothari, who we hosted in the Kennedy Road shack settlement in Durban in 2007. We are happy to welcome Raquel Rolnik to South Africa. When we formed our movement in 2005 we made it very clear that talking about us was not the same as talking to us and that we were determined to take our place in all discussions about our lives and futures. We are a democratic membership based organisation and we can take our place in a discussion like this in confidence that we represent our members rather than donors, projects or narrow political agendas.

The most serious problem when it comes to dealing with the poor from above – from government, NGOs, universities etc – is the perception that we cannot think for ourselves. This problem has even led some individuals and other sectors of our society to think that it is their own job, a job that they must be paid for, to think, represent, speak and decide for the poor. When we ask to represent ourselves or explain that we will think and decide for ourselves we are often treated as children, as criminals or as people who are being used by the Third Force. And these days in Durban, when councillors, and other people trying to get rich from public housing, are often gangsters there is always a risk of violence – including torture and murder.

We are not supposed to want anything more than to just be passive receivers of services. When we want to discuss our own future it is said that we are being

political and it is made clear that this is unacceptable. It is not surprising that the poor are being violently pushed out of the cities in the name of delivery.

It is always said that our Constitution is the best in the world and that we have good policies on housing. But the reality is that these laws and policies are just ignored by the government when it comes to the poor. And there is no difference between the ANC and the DA. They both break the law and subject us to violent intimidation with impunity. The rights that we enjoy on paper are not enjoyed in reality. We would like to ask everyone here to please base this discussion, and any action that comes from it, on the reality of our lives and not on rights that are only enjoyed on paper.

We have won some important victories in court that have made a real difference to people's lives. But we have also seen that victories in court don't always translate to victories in reality. For example in Durban we won a Court Order that forced the City to provide housing to people forcibly removed to a transit camp in Richmond Farm. The City just ignored that court order. Even when the law is in our favour and a court recognises this there is no guarantee that the government will do what the law and the courts say that it must do. And there are also examples where we have lost in court but won victories politically. For example we lost in court on the matter of evictions in Shallcross but, so far, we have won this struggle in reality as those people are still living in their houses. In fact when we started our movement in 2005 all the settlements in Sydenham, Clare Estate, Sherwood and Reservoir Hills were supposed to be evicted but they are still there. People are still working and children are still attending schools. In fact these settlements are growing. This is due to years of organisation and mobilisation.

For these reasons I have decided to insist on basing my contribution on the dignity of the poor and the need for this to be expressed politically ahead of technical arguments. We want to win victories in reality and not just on paper and that requires us to remain organised and mobilised.

The politic of dignity is vital. We must all learn to see poor people as ordinary human beings who are also productive and who count the same as all other people in our society. The dignity of the poor is the starting point of our politic and it must also be the starting point of any living solidarity with our struggles. Any action that says that it is in solidarity with us but that does not start from a clear recognition of our dignity can only add to the oppression that we are already facing even if it says that it is about human rights or socialism. When

we are talking about the urban poor we are talking about human beings who can think. No intervention that is said to be for us should be without us. Talk with and not for us. Think with and not for us. Plan with us and not for us.

A serious problem is that many poor people have lost hope in the state. It is clear to our movement that the state is no longer representing the interests of the poor. When the state owns a piece of land it no different to when a piece of land belongs to a corporate. There is no accountability to the people. This is dangerous in a democratic country. The state should own whatever it owns for the people or on behalf of the people. But the state has become a monster. It is untouchable. It represses the poor with intimidation and violence and it offers those who are willing to sell their souls an opportunity to gather wealth and power by collaborating with our exclusion from both the cities and the political life of the country. There is no democracy for us in the state. The only democracy for us is that democracy that we build for ourselves.

We have always recognised the fact that none of us has all the solutions to the problems facing the urban poor. We welcome people and organisations that can share their expertise within our struggle. But we have always warned that any idea that is not grounded in our everyday lives and supported by popular mobilization is likely to fail. We have always advocated that the problems of landlessness, evictions and security of tenure can only be overcome when we have built the power of the poor from below. For us it is clear that the problems that we face are not primarily technical. They are primarily caused by our lack of power. Therefore our primary strategy is always to build the power of the poor and to reduce the power of the government and NGOs to dominate us.

Organizing and mobilising ourselves requires us to stand together and to demand an equal place in our society even when this is very difficult. It means that we must survive repression. This can mean arrest, torture, eviction, loss of jobs and even, for some comrades, death. It also requires us to refuse co-option. This can mean that people have to have the strength to refuse co-option from the parties, the government and NGOs even when their own families have nothing. It also means that we must continue to define ourselves and to develop our own analysis of landlessness and poverty. It means that we have to constantly develop our understanding of the forces that create poverty and that want to defend the status quo.

The state has failed to make land available to the poor. They have decided to commodify land and unless this changes we will continue to have no land for the

poor. The social value of land must come before its commercial value. People must be allowed to occupy unused land. It must be understood the land is owned by the people. Abahlali have won many struggles to remain on occupied land. We continue to occupy unused land and we will continue to occupy unused land and to defend all existing land occupations. However we have not been able to force the state to upgrade our settlements in partnership with us. We have won this on paper but it has never become a reality. The state is not prepared to go ahead with any development that is not delivered through the structures of the ruling party.

Our own recognition of our own dignity leads us to organisation and mobilisation and mobilisation is the basis for all our victories. Even when we have won victories in the courts these are also rooted in organisation and mobilisation. It is only when a community or movement are well organised that they can build real partnerships with lawyers and other experts. And it is only by sustained organisation and mobilisation that we have been able to win and hold our place in the discussions in the media.

But mobilisation is criminalised and repressed. When we protest we find that instead of being listened to we face violence from the police. We find that councillors are 'leaders' during the day and become 'izinkabi' (hitmen) during the night. They do this without accountability. The situation is very bad in KwaZulu-Natal. Political murders are becoming normal.

The ruling elite keep quiet. They say nothing. And most of civil society and most the media don't care about the repression of poor people's struggles and organisations. We require ongoing solidarity from lawyers, human rights organisation and academics that are able to humble themselves to build a living solidarity with us so that we can defend ourselves against repression and to keep the space open for organisation and mobilisation.

Abahlali baseMjondolo has brought hope back to its members even when the question of land remains unresolved. This question will not be resolved legally or technically. It will be resolved politically. And it will only be resolved when poor people count the same as all other people in our society. This will not happen without sustained organisation and mobilisation. This is why our demand for the recognition of our human dignity comes before demands for service delivery and even land security.

14 JUNE 2013

Paper · S'bu Zikode

Building Hope & Defending Dignity in the Rural Areas

Colloquium on Rural Development in KwaZulu-Natal, 13–14 June 2013

Some politicians have spoken about migration from rural areas to cities as if it is a criminal matter. Others have said that people from the Eastern Cape are undermining development by coming to Durban and Cape Town. It has even been said that migration to the cities is a matter that must be investigated by the intelligence services as if it is part of some big conspiracy.

The position of our movement is that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and so we all have the same right to move to any part of the country. If a young person from Babanango or Flagstaff wants to move to Durban because she wants to live in the city that is her right and it is a right that we will defend.

However it is true that many people would prefer to stay in rural areas but decide to move to cities because they have no other choice. If there is no economic opportunity, no education and no political freedom many people will feel that they have no choice but to leave rural areas. But if rural areas and cities can both be developed in a democratic manner, putting people before profit, then we will start to have real choice about where and how we want to live.

Our movement has its base in the cities and towns. We are struggling for the right to the cities – to live in the cities, for land and housing in the cities, and to be able to shape the cities from below. But many of our members come from rural areas and we work closely with the Rural Network in KwaZulu-Natal.

This is a colloquium on rural development. We have learnt to be very suspicious of this word 'development'. For us it means land, housing, water, electricity and schools. For some other people it means that we must be evicted from the cities, left homeless or taken to the human dumping grounds outside the cities so that shopping malls or factories can be built where our shacks were. We have learnt that if development is defined without us it will not be for us.

It is clear to us that there are three very important issues when it comes to rural development. They are land, democracy and opportunity. Secure access to land comes before questions of production. There is a real difficulty that comes when we all continue to pretend that the issue of land is not political. Until we accept that the issue of land is political we will continue to add more and more confusion. We need serious land reform that will put land in the hands of the people. We do not want to replace big white commercial farmers with big black commercial farmers. We don't want to see good agricultural land going to rich people and politicians to be used as weekend homes. We want to see big land holdings broken up and shared between the landless poor. We do not believe that land should be treated as a commodity. The social value of land must come before its commercial value in the cities and in the rural areas.

It is clear that there is not enough agricultural land in South Africa for everyone to make a living from the land. But it is also clear that the agricultural land that we do have is not fairly distributed. The trend of sprawling growth in our rural areas shows that we will have even less agricultural land in the near future. It may be worth considering systematic rural development planning, development projects and decentralizing access to all socioeconomic amenities so that a new planning for a new and more just era may begin. But without fair debates and open spaces for such conversations by all, and at all levels, this may not be achieved or, if it is achieved, it may not be achieved in a way that is just.

Many rural people are still waiting for democracy. Some are living on white farms where the farmers don't even recognise them as human beings. When you are not even recognised as a human being you can't be a citizen. Some are living under traditional leaders that are oppressive. We need a serious campaign to democratise the rural areas. Traditional leadership must be respected but it needs to be democratised. It needs to be transparent. In some areas the relationship between traditional leader and councillors is a cause for concern. This is very clear in eMangangeni, KwaNdengezi, where the councillor acts like a gangster and disrespects the Inkosi who is respected and trusted by his people. In every rural area all men and women should be able to participate freely in decision making and no councillor or traditional leader should be able to intimidate or oppress the people. Democratizing rural areas will enable democracy for everyone, a democracy from below that will make it possible for people to fully participate in defining and taking forward development without fear or favour.

Most young people do not see opportunities for themselves in rural areas. Cities are seen as places of hope and rural areas as places of waiting and waiting for nothing while life slips through your fingers. As bad as the shacks in the cities are they are seen by many people as places of hope compared to rural areas. This is because economic and educational opportunities are much better in cities. This is one reason why people are fighting so hard to occupy and hold land in the cities. We need a serious programme to bring life and energy to rural towns. People must be able to study and to access economic opportunities in these places. We need to see serious reform of our budgeting to direct more money to rural towns. Small rural towns should become economic harbors for rural communities.

Many people agree that what went very wrong in our society was when business profit was put ahead of human value. Some will accept that this means that the social value of land, urban and rural, must come before its commercial value. But the other big mistake that we made in our society was when we decided that development was only the job of the few clever technical people who are meant to think about development for the majority. We do not accept this. Development must be democratised. Grassroots organisations such as Abahlali baseMjondolo are strongly opposed to this top-down approach to development that sees people as nothing else than helpless individuals who cannot think for themselves. In this view the work of the poor is to vote when we are told and then to be passive receivers of services the rest of the time.

One cannot begin any meaningful discussion of the rural crisis while the poor continue to be excluded from the conversations that are meant to build a new rural order that is for all. This discussion can only begin once the dispossessed, those who do not count, start to count. We decided long ago not to accept the situation where some people talk about the poor and even for the poor without ever speaking to the poor. We have paid a serious price for this decision but we will always stick to it.

There is no doubt that the work of the intellectuals, rural and town planners, engineers, architects and other professionals is critical. We do need their skills. But for as long as they remain on their own their knowledge is very fragile. We need to plan our rural future together. I remain convinced that if all the work of the rural experts is done in isolation from the poor, those who are meant to benefit from it, then it will not solve the problem. The first problem is that

despite all their education the experts are often really ignorant of the real needs of the people. The second problem is that expert ideas, even good ideas that fit with the needs of the people, have no power on their own. An idea can only move into the world and start to reshape the world when it has a living force behind it. An idea that is worked out between the organised poor and rural experts will have a living force behind it when the organised poor accept it as their own.

Some of us have already lost our homes in the land of our birth as our punishment for struggling to access the well-located urban lands. It has been very evident to us that well-located urban land will never be brought before us by aircraft, but by sweat, beatings, arrests, lies, water cannons, firing of live ammunition and even death. This is also the price which those who are serious about the prize of A New Rural Order must be prepared to pay.

Of all the people in society the demands of the poor are the most legitimate and the most reasonable because we are living in the worst conditions. The demands of those with the most money and power are the least legitimate. Logic as well as justice is on the side of our struggle to put the will of the many against the will of the few which is the only way to turn our imaginings of a new rural and urban order into reality.

What will really help us is when the state, experts and civil society learn to speak to us and not for us, when they learn to think with us and not for us, when they learn to work with and not for communities. We understand very well that this learning by the state, experts and civil society will not happen for as long as the poor remain weak. For this reason we continue to see the organisation of the poor, for the poor and by the poor as the only road to a future where the dignity of all people is respected.

Umhlaba!

Ubulungiswa!

Isithunzi!

2 JULY 2013

Presentation · S'bu Zikode

Upgrading Informal Settlements in South Africa – Abahlali baseMjondolo supports a Participatory and Democratic Approach

Department of Human Settlements national meeting on the upgrading of informal settlements, Cape Town, 2 July 2013

Apartheid denied most of our people an equal place in the cities. It denied most of our people decent housing. The restoration of the dignity of our people requires that we build democratic and inclusive cities in which there is decent housing for all.

The Promise

The Freedom of Charter of 1955 declared that “All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security.” When the ANC was unbanned in 1990 their posters said “Occupy the Cities!”. When the election came in 1994 we were promised houses. The new Constitution of 1996 insists that “Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing” and makes evictions without an order of the court illegal.

The Crisis

Today in 2013 we face constant illegal evictions, life threatening conditions in shack settlements, forced removals to peripheral human dumping grounds, being sentenced to life in transit camps, blatant corruption in housing construction and allocation and the delivery of houses that are unfit for human beings. When we protest about this and ask for what we have been promised we face serious repression. It is said that we are being used by the Third Force or that we are criminals and we face arrest, assault, torture, prison, the destruction of our homes and even murder.

Any honest discussion about housing in South Africa must start by taking this crisis seriously. There are good reasons why people are protesting across the country. However we remain willing to negotiate and to work with government to try and resolve this crisis. For this reason Abahlali baseMjondolo were delighted to be invited by the National Department of Human Settlement to share our position and experiences with the upgrading of informal settlements.

A Participatory and Democratic Way Forward

From the beginning our struggle was to be included in the process of making decisions that will affect our lives. This is why we have slogans like 'Talk to Us, Not about Us' and 'Nothing for Us, Without Us'.

Our position has always been that the residents of each shack settlement should be able to decide the future of that shack settlement in partnership with government. Decisions should be made with people and not for people. We want to be treated as citizens and not as criminals or children. We are confident that most of the problems that are leading to increasing protest can be resolved through negotiations and democratic forms of engagement. We agree that democracy is slower and more complex than the top down rule by technocrats and politicians. But it is the only way to develop solutions that have the real support of the people that are affected by development. It is also the only way to shift the balance of forces towards the poor.

Upgrades are better than Relocations

There are some cases where residents of a shack settlement might choose relocation to a nearby and well located site chosen with and not for the residents. This might happen if, for example, people are living on a dangerous site such as on a river bank or on a site with which they are not comfortable, such as a graveyard. However in most cases people prefer in situ upgrading to relocation.

In fact there are often cases where people will resist relocation and would rather stay in their shacks than accept forced removal to houses out in the human dumping grounds far from work, schools and other services and opportunities. When this happens government often says that these people are opposing development, that they are criminals or that they are being used by the Third Force. But people have very good reasons for not wanting to accept forced removal to human dumping grounds outside of the cities. It often happens that children drop out of school and people lose their jobs or livelihoods when they are taken away from the cities. Sometimes communities are broken up and people find themselves amongst strangers. This might make them feel unsafe or leave them with no one to help them to look after their children. For these reasons relocation can be a disaster for people even though government will count it as housing delivery. Relocation often makes poor people to become even poorer. It is right and rational for people to resist this.

As a movement we are very clear that we are not only struggling for houses. We are struggling for decent houses in the cities. We are struggling to ensure that the social value of urban land is put before its commercial value and that our cities are democratised by being turned into inclusive places. When housing delivery is separating the poor from the rich, and expelling the poor from the cities, it is

not a democratic form of development. Democratic forms of development need to take the right to the city seriously.

Participatory Planning

Upgrades should be participatory and not top down. Upgrading should mean that shack residents fully participate in planning and building their new neighbourhood and houses. This will also help residents to learn skills and thus to develop livelihoods. The open and transparent participation of local residents in development also helps us to fight corruption as people cannot steal from their own houses. This means that there will be no cement, blocks, sails or any other building material going missing and resulting into shockingly bad quality houses. The participation of shack residents also unites us and builds a society where there is a sense of sharing and progress.

On our side we understand that participatory planning is not possible when there is no democratic and credible organisation in a community. However councillors and BECs are often threatened by democratic organisations and so it is important for the Department to support communities to organise themselves democratically and to take a clear position against gangster councillors. No one who has not been elected by a community in an open and fair process held in that community should be able to claim to be a leader in that community. And just as politicians should not be able to claim that they are the only legitimate leaders NGOs need to stop giving money to individuals and then claiming that those people are elected leaders in communities when they are not. Each community must be able to choose its own leaders. Political parties and NGOs cannot impose leaders on to communities. When leaders are elected their role must not be decide for communities but to work to create a politic where communities can decide for themselves.

Housing Lists

The allocation of houses is a major cause of conflict. We have called for one house per family and not one house per shack as there may be more than one family in one shack. There may be families renting from the main shack owner who are often excluded from upgrading. In fact in both upgrades and relocations shack renters are often left homeless and houses only go to shack owners. This is a serious problem. No one should be left homeless during an upgrade.

Another serious problem is that often councillors only give houses to their friends and their comrades in the ruling party. In Durban our experience in Siyanda, Cato Crest, Shallcross, Uganda and KwaNdengezi is that the allocation of housing takes place at night, usually by ANC councillors. In one instance one house was allocated to two families because allocation took place at night on the

bonnet of the councillor's vehicle. The role of councillors in the construction and allocation of houses is a serious cause for concern. Some of these councillors are really just gangsters. In many cases people who are not members of the ruling party are being excluded. There are also many cases where houses are openly sold.

When databases of residents are created it is always better when municipal officials work hand in hand with democratically elected residents' committees to avoid any exclusion. When the list of beneficiaries are compiled it is better that copies of such lists be held at the community level and at municipal and provincial level and that they are open to the whole community. This will help to avoid all kinds of misallocation and corruption during the allocation stage. It is better when democratically elected community structures and not political party structures or NGOs represent the community during the allocation stage.

Some provinces and cities in this country have no housing waiting list. The reason is clear: politicians want to reserve houses for loyal party members and their families and to do so in a way that will not make them accountable. There must be lists and they must be compiled in an open and democratic manner.

Transit Camps

A very serious problem with upgrading is when people have to be moved to transit camps or TRAs. People are often told that they will only live for six months or eighteen months in these places only to find that they are left to rot for many years in these transit camps. We all know that transit camps are like prisons, they represent the apartheid regime. Even when people have agreed to move to transit camps while their homes are finished to be built they often find that some other people from somewhere else are brought to occupy those homes. This corruption results into fighting and killing of residents. This is currently the case in Cato Crest Durban. We encourage communities not to accept any relocation to a transit camp on verbal promises but only on a legally binding agreement openly negotiated with a democratic resident's association.

National and Local Government

The reality is that local government and municipalities are opposed to the national government's informal settlement upgrading programme. Even if they do talk about upgrading what they really do is contrary to what the Housing Code provides. When upgrades do happen they often exclude local residents and work with the ruling party structures. These structures are often not elected by local communities and are often highly corrupt. Sometimes they use violence to protect their corruption from residents. This must come to an end.

National government needs to educate the provinces and cities about Chapter 13 of the Housing Code and about in situ and participatory upgrades. National

government also needs to stress the important of building houses for the poor in the cities on well-located land and that the market should not determine the allocation of land in a democracy.

Our Struggle Continues

Abahlali believe in a democracy from below. We know that when communities are not organised they are very vulnerable to forced removal and corruption. We will continue to organise ourselves to struggle against forced removals and for democratic and participatory in situ upgrades. We will continue to struggle for decent housing. What we are struggling for is what we have been promised by the Freedom Charter, by the ruling party and by the Constitution. What we are struggling for is not criminal. What we are struggling for is basic to the recognition of our human dignity. Whenever the government extends its hand to offer real partnership we will respond positively. However when the government comes to us with armed force to evict us, to make us homeless, to force us into transit camps or to repress our right to organise ourselves and to speak for ourselves we will resist. Our own respect for our humanity and for our children leaves us with no other choice.

12 AUGUST 2013

Essay · Lindela Figlan

Freedom is Not Real if People Don't Feel Free

Shorter version in the Sunday Tribune and Daily Maverick ('Time to stop feeding the parasites', 12 August 2013)

How can you declare from above that people are free from while they themselves talk from below of feeling unfree?

It is true that freedom comes with so many responsibilities. There are responsibilities from above and from below. Freedom is not just about expressing yourself as happy or not happy. There is no real freedom without justice, equality and democracy. Justice, equality and democracy require that people respect each other's dignity and that society is organised around people's dignity. If we were really free every citizen would feel part and parcel of a country that respected their dignity. They would experience this dignity at work, at home and in all the discussions about the future of each community and the country. They would be able to organise and to express their views in safety.

It is not just the politicians who declare that Abahlali baseMjondolo are wrong to deny that we are free. Some political analysts do the same even as we are voicing our concerns about the scarcity of freedom in South Africa. It seems that some political analysts are hired to come on TV and radio and condemn whatsoever the poor are saying about the country. When what is called debate is just a discussion between the politicians and these analysts we are excluded once again. Really it is quite amazing that in a country that says that it is a democracy it is taken as normal for people to speak about the poor while we are denied the right to speak for ourselves. It is as if being poor makes you a permanent child, a criminal or a traitor. We are only taken as citizens when it comes to voting and even then we are threatened that no development will come to those who do not support the ruling party.

The time when the politicians could hide behind apartheid has gone. People are sick and tired of the politicians chasing numbers in their search for power while ignoring the fact that we are human beings. You cannot lie forever and

continue to be believed forever. The time of the liars is running out. This is why the politicians are now killing us.

Every weekend Abahlali baseMjondolo has to go to two or three new areas. People are rushing to join the movement because they notice that struggle is the only way to live. Without struggle you will be evicted from your shack or end up in a transit camp. The truth is that the government has no plan to house the people. They are only interested in using the housing budget to make their friends into millionaires. Fraud and corruption are everywhere. Houses that are said to be for the poor are given to people like police officers and teachers, people who are close to the ruling party. At the same time our children are dying of diarrhoea in the shacks, women are being raped because there are no toilets and the fires keep coming. The Constitution says that we have a right to housing and that we can't be evicted without a court order. The councillors don't care about the Constitution. They just evict the people. If you resist you will be arrested. You might be beaten or tortured. You might even be killed. And people are losing jobs each and every day and the government has no plan for them.

It is clear that we cannot trust those in power. Just look at the Manase report. This is so disappointing. There were so many excuses and procrastinations. The politicians do everything in their power to protect other politicians, and their officials, while expecting poor people to go and vote for these thieves.

How can people be said to be free when they are not involved in their own development? How can people be said to be free when the law does not apply to them? How can people be said to be free when they must face violence when they stand up for the rights, for what was promised to them? Yes we have scars from apartheid. But we are still bleeding today. We are still getting new scars. We are still being denied what is basic to human life. We are still under attack. We still live under oppression. Our rulers tell us that they are heroes. But we have really noticed that they are opportunists of worst kind. This is why we call them the black boers. An oppressor is an oppressor no matter what colour they are. This is the truth and we tell it bravely.

At home in Flagstaff my mother used to feed the two pigs with one big walking dish. One day I noticed that she was no longer feeding the pigs from one big walking dish and that she had separated one pig from another and was using two walking dishes. I was so stressed because what I noticed with those pigs was that while they were both in need of food, and they were both screaming

with the same voice and thereby showing oneness, one was getting thin and one was getting fat. I asked my mother about the decision to feed the pigs separately while they were sharing this oneness while looking for food. She told me about the parasites. She told me that you can do whatsoever you like with a parasite but once what you have been struggling for is in front of you the parasite will show its signs and its true colours. That is why I saw one pig becoming bigger and the other one became too thin. The thin pig had a parasite that was eating it from the inside.

This is a very big example of what is happening today in South Africa. We fought together. Some ran away from this country while others preferred to die in this country. Today we all notice that those that decided not to leave the country of their mothers and fathers, they are mostly the ones that are suffering more. When freedom was in front of us there was a parasite inside us, eating us from the inside. We were not freed by MK. Apartheid was defeated by the struggles of the people in rural areas and in cities, in factories and mines and in communities. But in this struggle we were so focussed on the boers that we didn't notice the parasite inside us.

It was so easy for the First Man (President) to sing "letha umshini wam" to the people, asking them to bring him his machine gun. Some people they were so happy to give their power to him. But now he is singing "Inde lendlela" telling the people that this war is too long. Some people they gave him the machine gun that he asked for but now he is trying to convince them to be patient even though he is carrying that heavy machine gun.

It is true that sometimes struggle is long. But it is also true that it didn't take long for the First Man to secure the wealth of his family and his friends. It didn't take long for him to build his own home. It didn't take long for the people's struggles to be repressed. We have to ask ourselves what the First Man has been doing with that machine gun that some people were so happy to give him.

Millions of people have no work. Others they are working for R60 per day through the labour brokers. Yet the tenderpreneurs, those who are close to the leaders of the ruling party, are earning millions and millions. The so-called comrades that lead this country are hypocrites. They are parasites eating the people's struggle from the inside. It is time to stop feeding them. It is time to separate the real people's struggle from the parasites. It is time to stop giving away our

power to politicians. It is time that we look after our own struggle and keep it separate from the politicians and their tenderpreneurs. It is clear that some who were fighting the boers were doing so in order that they could become the new boers and not because they loved justice. These are the same people that came with the so-called Slums Act which shows that really they don't care about poor people and that they don't even want us in the cities. They are the same people that are repressing our struggles by burning our homes, locking us in prison, torturing us in the police stations and killing us. They are the same people that are working with the imperialist system. We notice that poor people are struggling all over the world and we are waiting for the day when the imperialist systems will fall down and be replaced with a system that is in favour of the poor. In fact we really need a system that abolishes poverty so that we are all just people.

Some they think that it is a wise decision to align socialism with capitalism. Even Lenin in Russia looked at all the wars and decided to make a compromise between socialism and capitalism. In South Africa we have a Communist Party that is in full support of capitalism. They even support the bosses and the police against the workers. Just look at what happened in Marikana. Look how that Minister behaved. It was so disappointing. She behaved really badly. People need to analyse what happened in Marikana very carefully. We need to analyse this situation for ourselves. We don't need analysts to come from above and tell us what happened there like they tell us that we are wrong to say that we are not free.

During the Marikana tools down one of the capitalists was admitted to a luxurious hospital for emotional distress. But the workers must suffer on their own after the massacre. Some are committing suicide. Even the money for the funerals of the workers was sometimes corrupted. We are told that this is a democracy but the reality is that people were killed like flies. Witnesses have been tortured and killed too. If you are a poor person or a worker your humanity means nothing to the imperialists and it means nothing to the parasites in the ruling party that want us to call them our comrades.

The police went onto the mountain to kill the workers in Marikana just like they went onto the mountain known as Ingquza to kill in 1960. Really we have to ask ourselves what has changed for the workers and the poor?

It is good to see that Advocate Mpofu decided to represent the workers. Those who tried to kill him were trying to strike a big blow against the workers. Middle class people who stand with the workers and the poor will also come under attack. Those who are patiently waiting for the results of the commission should remember what happened to the trial of the police officers accused of murdering Comrade Andries Tatane. His bones cannot rest in peace and they will never rest in peace until the truth is exposed to the world. However we cannot trust the courts to expose this truth. They have become so politicised. The parasites are inside that system too.

It is a warning when the trade unions are on the side of the government that is ruining the state and leaving workers to be exploited by labour brokers. But the union that will stand on the side of the workers is very good. Those who see a union that stands on the side of the workers as a betrayal of the struggle must rethink their position. The time when NUM was on the side of the workers has passed. Justice is for ever. Organisations rise and fall. They are corrupted. Organisations must only be supported when they are on the side of justice. It is only loyalty to justice that must be forever. NUM aligned itself with the bosses and with imperialism. NUM was oppressing the workers. It was NUM that started the violence in Marikana. AMCU really needs to be praised because it shows that whatever the conditions it is possible to take the side of the workers. It shows that it is possible to organise outside of the ruling party. Those churches and law firms that are supporting the workers in Marikana also need to be praised.

We really need the workers to take the side of the poor, to join with us in our struggles. We all know that this is impossible for so long as the workers are controlled by COSATU which is under the ANC and influenced by the SACP too. But now that some workers they are organising themselves autonomously from the ANC, like we have done in Abahlali baseMjondolo since 2005, it might be possible for the workers and the poor to struggle together. When we are struggling it must not be for our names. It must be for our country which is under the control of an organisation that is being eaten from the inside by parasites. A country that is drowning in corruption. A country where violence is becoming normal. When we are struggling it must be for justice.

Some of our fathers were in the mountain committees. Some of our brothers are in the strike committees. Our wives, our sisters and our daughters are in the

shack committees with us. We know that more of us will be arrested, tortured and killed in this struggle. But we will stand strong in this struggle. We will oppose all attempts to divide the poor. We will reject the opportunists that are only coming to the people's struggles now that they have been pushed out of power.

Corruption is not legalised in the law as it is written but it is legalised in reality. Most of those in the ruling party and government who are against corruption are under attack because they are disturbing the parasites. The government and the ruling party say that they represent all the people but they are just there to take for themselves in the name of the nation. They are happy to work with the imperialists as long as they get something for themselves. They are liars and hypocrites. They are eating the people's struggle from the inside. When we resist they oppress us. A country of this nature is not for all the people who live in it.

If natural resources remain under private ownership more people will be killed. If organisations like NUM and the ANC are happy to support the imperialists and repress the people more people will be killed. If organising outside of the ANC is considered to be treason more people will be killed.

The apartheid regime separated the people in so many ways. This separation crippled our humanity. It was a very big and destructive weapon. Today we are still being separated from each other. Some of us really hate people from other countries in Africa. We are calling them with many names. We are doing this even though people in those countries provided those of us who went to exile with land to plough, with safety and with training. Most of the Africans from other countries are not even looking for jobs here but are creating their own ways of surviving and yet some people here want to blame them for everything that is wrong. There is also hatred of people from other races and people that speak different languages and are coming from other provinces in South Africa. There is prejudice against women too. You will even find this discrimination in political parties. You will even find it in churches, NGOs and social movements.

This is a warning to all social movements and struggles by workers and poor people. We must do away with xenophobia, racism, discrimination against people from other provinces and sexism. These divisions are the most destructive weapon that we face in our struggles. We will only realise our truth strength

when we are united. Our mission is to unite the hungry, the homeless, the exploited and the poor. Those who come preaching division amongst the poor are our enemies. Let us be clear where the real parasites in our society are. The parasites are those who have privatised our struggle for their own gain. The parasites are those who are growing rich while we are getting poorer. The parasites are those who send their police or assassins to repress us when we organise. We need to stop giving our support to the organisations that are hosts for these parasites. We need to build healthy organisations, democratic organisations, honest organisations. We need to build organisations that can build the power of the workers and the poor.

We need land and housing. We need decent work. Our children need good education. Our demands are clear – the land, the wealth and the power must be shared fairly. Every person must count the same. If this is called communism then I am a communist.

Alutta! Jama. Sjadu. Zizi.

19 AUGUST 2013

Essay · Bandile Mdlalose

Is Nkululeko Alive, Dead or Risen from His Grave?

It has been almost three months since Nkululeko Gwala, a leader and activist of Cato Crest, was assassinated for speaking the truth.

Nkululeko was labeled, named and framed for being a bad leader and leading the protest which led to the burning down of the councilor's office which took place on Tuesday 25 July 2013 at night. Of course this accusation was not true. But the politicians always think that they have got the answers to everything. Their role is to label activists who speak the truth, and to destroy their reputation. They always protect the system of oppression that makes some of us poor and others rich.

Nkululeko was one of many activists with a passion for bringing change from below. He had the love of the people in heart, and loved his country. He had a vision, and a dream to see a better South Africa, a South Africa of justice and equality. However all his dreams were taken away from him because of leaders who hide information because they want to continue with corruption.

Cato Crest is one of those settlements where development does not involve the people. Where the councillor dictates. Where councilors govern the community as their home, or as Spaza shops where they will do any how because they have the final word.

Nkululeko knew his rights, and was very vocal into opening the eyes of the poor Cato Crest residents and giving them the confidence to rebel. Of course this was not good for the dictator, also known as the ANC councilor in the area, because he was losing the trust of the people, and people were now able to stand for themselves and speak out. Intimidation started to occur as Nkululeko passionately took the lives of Cato Crest people to the upper level where they insisted that they must count in their own development.

People started demanding what is theirs. Nkululeko tried to engage to the councillor to beg him to stop blinding people and listen to what the people want

to say. Unfortunately the councilor of the ANC, as many others of this party, decided to continue his dictatorship and ignore the pressure coming from below.

On the night of 25 June 2013, while Nkululeko was at his home, which was confirmed by many other residents, the councilor's office was burnt down by unknown protesters. It is assumed that they reside in the same and nearby community. The following day the Mayor of eThekwin James Nxumalo, with MEC Dr Dlomo and others came to the community and called a meeting which was meant to mediate the conflict that has occurred between councillor and residents. The agenda changed and was about Nkululeko, where he was accused of leading this protest and burning the councilor's office. And it was said that his feet needed to be washed and that the Mayor must take him home the following morning. As the words were said Nkululeko Gwala was murdered in the same night after the meeting was called. He was shot 12 times by the izinkabi.

The politicians, who were at that meeting were very sure that Nkululeko is the one who burnt down the office of the councilor. It is strange that on the night of 13 August, months after he was murdered, the hall where the councilor's office is was burnt down. I am left with a question: is Nkululeko Gwala alive, dead or risen from his grave?

When will the politicians stop taking a passion for justice as treason or crime? When will they stop making accusations against activists that lead to them being forced out of their homes, arrested, tortured or killed? I passionately believe that the speech made by MEC Dr Dlomo had everything to do with Nkululeko's death.

Nigel Gumedé and Willies Mchunu have also made statements that have justified repression of activists. These people are not democrats. If he had not accused Nkululeko of being a trouble maker and said that his feet must be washed and that the Mayor must take him home none of this would have happened. Nkululeko would be still alive. Now the office and the hall is burnt again. Which activist will be accused next and follow Gwala to the grave? Or has Gwalarisen from his grave to burn again? Some people must answer for Nkululeko's death. The first one is MEC Dr Dlomo and the second one is the Mayor of eThekwin Municipality James Nxumalo.

10 OCTOBER 2013

Essay · Bandile Mdlalose

Seven Days of Thoughts in Westville Prison

A version was published in the Daily News

On June 3, 2010 when I became the General Secretary of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement S.A. I vowed to die where Abahlali members die. I vowed to protect my country. I vowed to be loyal to the poorest of the poor. I vowed to uplift the Constitution of South Africa in respect for all those who fought for this country. I vowed to take forward the struggle for land and housing in the cities, to make sure that land, cities, wealth and power are shared.

As upon my vows I stand firm to implement them. No judgement, imprisonment or bullet will silence me while we, the poor, are being oppressed by those whose daily bread is the poverty and blood of the poor. I REFUSE to be silenced by any judgement of those who never gave themselves enough time to understand how it is to live in poverty. I REFUSE. I refuse to allow the silence to take control. The price of silence keeps me going because the price of silence is oppression, suffering, wasted lives and death. The price of rebellion is less than the price of silence.

When I was intimidated in Cato Crest on September 17, 2013 by S'bu Sithole who is the Community Liaison Office of Cato Crest no law, judge or police protected us. Instead of us being protected by the South African Police Services they chose to protect the municipality and support the African National Congress members in Cato Crest who are led by Mzimuni Ngiba who is the Ward councillor who is a leader during the day and a "hitman" at night.

When I was arrested on Monday 30, 2013 for being in solidarity with the family whose child was killed by the Station commander Mnganga in the Cato Manor Police Station, known as Kito, it was a way to silence me and others who were protesting against the murder of Nqobile Nzuza. No one has been arrested for the murder of Nqobile, or the murder of Nkululeko Gwala or Thembinkosi Qumbela.

And yet people protesting against murder are beaten and I was arrested. I REFUSE to keep quiet and tell the people who really fought hard for me to have a Constitutional Right of Freedom of Expression. I REFUSE to keep quiet and tell the people who are being evicted, beaten, shot and murdered in Cato Crest.

When I was in Cato Manor police station I was isolated from other woman prisoners because it was said I will corrupt their minds. Basically they feared that I would open their minds into reality. I was kept in a cell with no water. It was smelling and had dirty blankets. They kept bringing in food which I did not eat because I suspected it might be poisoned to finish me off.

When they opposed bail on Tuesday I was not worried about myself who was going to be in prison for the first time. But I was worried about the reasons behind it. I was worried that the Municipality will continue demolishing houses in Cato Crest without respecting the constitution, the law and the orders of the court. I was worried that the police will continue to violate people's rights of having a peaceful protest and will attack them so it will be called a violent protest in the media.

My seven days in prison gave me time to think as I did not have enough time to think in the outside world as I was too busy. I had to think back and ask myself why did I join this movement. I had a chance to back off but once something is inside you, once you live it, once it is injected inside you no one else can stop it. Ubuhlali runs in my veins. I am unable to distance myself from it anymore. I don't need ubuhlali but my life needs it. It is what I live and breathe and what I am proud of. I had some time to think of how can I strengthen this struggle and this activism and realised that I need to do what I was doing before I was arrested ten times more. There is no turning back now. I have to fight much harder with the truth and for the truth than before.

When I came into the dock I was not alone. None is alone in this movement. Evictions, beatings, arrests and murder are not suffered alone if you are in this movement. This makes us strong. And as repression gets worse it drives more people into the movement. It makes us stronger and stronger. When I was locked inside there were road blockades around the city every day. So many poor people have decided that enough is enough. The politicians won't stop us now.

I wish to thank all Abahlali members for their solidarity as well as everyone else who has been in solidarity with our struggle as we face repression including War on Want, the Dear Mandela crew, Amnesty International and the solidarity that we have received from New York, Rio, London and Harare. I wish to thank all the famous intellectuals who have signed statements in solidarity with us. I also wish to thank the Socio Economics Rights Institute, the Church Land Program, the Diakonia Council of Churches, the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council, my family Amanyanda Amahle, friends from Facebook, Twitter and all those who believed in me, supported me and stood by me through this experiential time. It is true that it is a LIFE LONG LEARNING.

No judgment will keep me quiet. I will speak outside Westville Prison and inside Westville Prison. I will continue to mobilise in or outside Westville Prison. The choice for them is only where they prefer me to organise.

A luta Continua – Amandla Awethu Ngenkani!!!!

Bandile Mdlalose

30 OCTOBER 2013

Essay · Bandile Mdlalose

The Housing List versus the Death List

We are supposed to be living in a democratic country, a country of justice, a country where everyone should be treated as one. Yet there is a huge inequality. That inequality is economic, it is spatial and it is political. We remain divided into rich and poor. We continue to be allocated to different kinds of places that are meant for different kinds of people with different kinds of opportunities, different kinds of lives and different kinds of rights. We continue to be divided into those that have the freedom to express themselves and those that face all kinds of intimidation and repression if we commit the crime of telling the truths about our lives.

For the poor this country is a democratic prison. We are allowed to vote for our prison warders and managers but we must always remain in the prison. We must remain in silence when our shack settlements are illegally destroyed leaving us homeless. We must remain in silence when we are forcibly removed to transit camps that are only fit for animals but not for people. We must remain in silence when we are told to return to Lusikisiki or taken to human dumping grounds far outside the cities. We must remain in silence when we are threatened, beaten, shot and killed. The politicians think that when we refuse to be silent, and when we resist repression, they can silence us by throwing some meat at us. After all these years they think that we are dogs. We are not dogs. We are people. We will continue to rebel until we are treated as human beings.

It is a shame that we living in this democratic prison country. It is also a shame that this country is respected highly in African Countries yet we are led by black Boers. This is a country in which the politicians have no humanity.

This is a country with the greatest and most respected Constitution but unfortunately it is documented but not implemented. The reality of this country is that everywhere you look there is police brutality, corruption and fraud and no justice is taking place.

This is a country which is supposed to be leading in development but it only leads on documents and not in reality. When we speak we are ignored. When

we protest legally we are ignored. When we block the roads then the government will give us their documents about their plans for development. But what is written on paper is never what happens in reality. We want real change in our communities, our lives and our cities.

On paper all people that have been made poor by oppression are supposed to be on the housing list. When we discover that we are not going to get houses, or that we will even be evicted from our shacks or forced into a transit camp, and we raise our voices against injustice we find that we are on the death list.

When I grew up I was taught my rights. I never thought practicing those rights could put me on the death list. I always thought that my name was on the housing database list but unfortunately now I find that it is on the death database list. I am not the only one. Mnikelo Ndabankulu was even threatened with death on iGagasi FM. We have to take the death list seriously. Our government fails to deliver houses but it does not fail to deliver deaths. Already three comrades have been killed in Cato Crest. The politicians can give the order for your death in the afternoon and you can be killed that night. When it comes to the death list delivery is very quick and it is very effective. You can be shot 12 times just to make sure that you are really dead.

Thembinkosi Qumbela and Nkululeko Gwala were assassinated months ago. No one has been arrested for these murders. No accountability took place. There was no investigation. It was the same when Mr. Govan from the Land Invasions Unit shot Nkosinathi Mngomezulu four times and when the police shot Nqobile Nzuza in the back of her head. The person who took Mngomezulu to the hospital in his car was arrested but not the person who shot Mngomezulu. I was arrested when we marched on KwaKito to protest the murder of Nqobile. But even though witnesses have stated which police officer murdered her no one has been arrested for the murder. At the same times our struggle is being criminalized and we are being arrested all the time. Sometimes we are beaten in the police stations too.

The criminalization of our activism is increasing even though we have done nothing wrong and are just practicing our rights. We have evicted no-one, we have beaten no-one and we have killed no-one. Yet we are shown to the world as the criminals. It is clear that it is considered criminal for us to take democracy seriously, to take our rights seriously and to take our lives seriously. It is clear

that it is considered criminal for us think that we are human beings and not dogs.

We do not beg for our rights. Our rights are rights that we already have because we are human beings and they are also written in the Constitution. We will not crawl to anyone and beg for our rights. However we will implement the Constitution ourselves and make use of our rights.

We are fully aware of the price that has been paid and that will be paid when we take our rights seriously. But as we have said before we are also aware that the price of silence is higher than the price of rebellion. For this reason we will continue to rebel.

Everywhere people are saying that there is no turning back now. We have shown our power and our determination. The comrades in the Marikana Land Occupation in Cato Crest have rebuilt their shacks nine times despite three murders, two shootings and many beatings and threats. We have organized a march of thousands on the City Hall. We have organized eight road blockades, some with more than 500 people, at the same time.

We will take our struggle forward until there is a real housing database that is used to provide decent and well located housing to the people. We will take our struggle forward until the death database has been eliminated and democracy has been extended to everyone who lives in South Africa, rich or poor.

Bandile Mdlalose

Abahlali baseMjondolo General Secretary

12 NOVEMBER 2013

Essay · S'bu Zikode

Despite the state's violence, our fight to escape the mud and fire of South Africa's slums will continue

Published in The Guardian, November 2013

Our movement of shack-dwellers – Abahlali baseMjondolo, representing some of South Africa's poorest people – was formed in 2005 in Durban and now has more than 12,000 members in more than 60 shack settlements. We campaign against evictions, and for public housing: struggling for a world in which human dignity comes before private profit, and land, cities, wealth and power are shared fairly.

When Abahlali baseMjondolo members take our place in cities we take it humbly, but firmly. We have won many important battles in court, including the overturning of the anti-poor Slums Act – but the law has not bought justice. Despite that victory, thousands of shack dwellers were forcibly removed to make way for developments ahead of the 2010 World Cup. Most were dumped in transit camps, left to rot without basic services. Some camps – such as Isipingo, south of Durban – were built on flood plains.

Promises were made to rehouse these people using a state-assisted housing programme, but cities refused to fulfil these promises. Instead, corrupt politicians benefit from these housing programmes by allocating funds to loyal members of the ruling African National Congress, and getting kickbacks from the building contractors to whom they award contracts. Homes are poorly built as a result, and corruptly allocated. If you are too poor, you cannot pay the bribe to get rehoused; if you are from the Eastern Cape, and not an ANC member, you will be excluded; and if you are an active member of Abahlali, you will not simply be denied housing – you may well be arrested, tortured or killed.

Therefore we continue to take direct action to move our rights from paper to reality, from abstract to concrete.

When we are denied land we occupy unused land. The state and the rich call this a criminal act; we call it the democratisation of urban planning and the realisation of our right to the city.

When they evict us, we rebuild. We have rebuilt nine times at the Marikana land occupation in Cato Crest, Durban.

When we are denied water and electricity, we connect ourselves. When we are disconnected, we reconnect. Recently nine people were shot during a disconnection in a shack settlement in Reservoir Hills, Durban. Two people, Malizo Fakaza and Nhlanhla Mkhize, were killed.

When our legal marches are ignored, our court orders are ignored and the constitution is ignored, when we are treated as dirty people who do not count before the law, then we engage in the politics of disruption. We organise road blockades across the city – we recently organised eight such blockades on a single morning during rush hour.

It is a tough time for our movement. The rich and the state have decided that they should unite to drive us out of the city. Our membership is multi-ethnic, but includes many Xhosa speakers from the Eastern Cape. Increasingly the ANC in Durban and the province of KwaZulu-Natal presents such non-Zulus as outsiders who should “go back where they come from”, and so the idea that South Africa belongs to all who live in it is being replaced with a dangerous and divisive new politics.

The state is so threatened by the poor – especially the organised poor, the strong poor – that it has abandoned the rule of law. A politics of blood has replaced the politics of peace. The police have been militarised, and municipalities are setting up militarised units to stop land occupations. We have been evicted, driven from our homes by party thugs, beaten, tortured and shot by the police. Nqobile Nzuza, a 17-year-old schoolgirl, lies in her grave, shot in the back of her head on 30 September. Witnesses allege that she was shot by a senior police officer, but no arrest has been made. Nkululeko Gwala died after being hit by 12 bullets on 25 June. Thembinkosi Qumbela was gunned down on 15 March. All these murders happened in one community, Cato Crest.

We believe that the reason for the absence of arrests is that these killings were political, carried out with the support of top politicians. Senior politicians on Durban City Council and the KwaZulu-Natal legislature have acted and spoken in a way that was widely understood to be in support of murder.

Political assassination of government critics is now a routine feature of life in the city, and has given rise to a new profession: the hitman. There is a very high rate of unemployment in Durban, and no shortage of young people willing to take this blood money.

The recent Manase report exposed massive political corruption in the eThekweni municipality, which includes Durban, and yet no one has been arrested. Indeed, Obed Mlaba, who was mayor of Durban when corruption became the order of the day, has been tipped to become the new ambassador to the UK. The British government will welcome him, but the British people should know he is a disgrace to our country.

Much is at stake. If South Africa's urban poor do not win this battle, our cities will become ATMs for the politicians and the rich. They will become cities of walls and guns, of blood and fear. In Durban and beyond, Nelson Mandela's vision of dignity for all has already been lost. His promise of a universal right to free housing, free education and free healthcare has not been realised. Thabo Mbeki's administration was too high to descend to the ground; Jacob Zuma's relies on violence to silence opposition.

We have learned that by demanding decent housing we make enemies, and that by occupying land we make those enemies even more ruthless. But we cannot wait in the mud, shit and fire of shack life for ever. Voting did not work for us. The political parties did not work for us. Civil society did not work for us. No political party, civil society organisation or trade union is inviting us into the cities or into what remains of democracy in South Africa. We have no choice but to take our own place in the cities and in the political life of the country.

But we are under no illusions. There will be more evictions, more beatings, more torture, more shootings and more killings. But to be poor in South Africa is already a living death and so we have no choice but to keep going forward.

6 DECEMBER 2013

Essay · Bandile Mdlalose

Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom has come to an End

Our hero, the light of the nation, the father off all who feared nothing when it came to his children has now left us in pain. Our tears flow. Nelson Mandela's long walk to freedom has now come to an end.

Our long struggle for freedom is still beginning. We will be guided by the spirit of Nelson Mandela as we confront Zuma, who does nothing for the people and only takes what he can for himself and his family. We will be guided by the spirit of Nelson Mandela as we confront Pieter van Dijk and all those who want to use the police to crush our struggles and make sure that the Constitution does not work for poor people. We are highly aware that more of us will be killed by the police, and the assassins, in the years to come. The killing of the youth in struggle that started in 1976 is not yet finished.

The Black Boers have privatized the people's struggle and they have turned our country into their own personal ATM. The times where English and round tables can take this country further have gone. Protocols have bought us nothing but shame. The Black Boers have made their intentions clear. They will ignore the courts and they will beat, arrest, torture and kill us so that they can keep filling their pockets. We need to fasten our takkies as the new era of oppression is just beginning. They have already killed us in the Free State, in Marikana and in Cato Crest just as the generation of 1976 was killed.

They kill us because they fear us. They fear us because we are the living truth of their betrayal. They fear us because we do not accept their lies. They fear us because we know our own power. They fear us because we have seen how they killed Andries Tatane, the Marikana Miners, Theminkosi Qumbela, Nkululeko Gwala and Ngobele Nzuza and yet we refuse to be intimidated and we continue to occupy land and to go to the streets.

To hell with protocol. The only way for our generation to fulfil Mandela's dream is to take power into our own hands. Together we must turn this country into a revolutionary democracy.

Mandela once said that if the ANC does to this country what the apartheid government did the people must not fear to do what the ANC did to the apartheid government. This country was not given to ANC by votes. Voting was a bonus but it was fought for very hard. There was a huge struggle from below. There was bloodshed and arrests. We do not believe that voting will win us our freedom. We will win our freedom when we as the poor build our power from below in struggle, when we build a revolutionary democracy from below.

The way to go is for us to unite and put on our takkies and go to streets. That is how we will show out loyalty to the Hero Nelson Mandela.

Lala Ngokuthulala baba ube yiqhawe kithi. We shall continue where you left off.

The struggle is just beginning.