

Abahlali baseMjondolo Replies to Bandile Mdlalose¹

We first became aware of the article published in *Politikon* under the name of Bandile Mdlalose² on the 23rd of December via an email sent out from Mdlalose's email address to a very large number of people. This email included the *Politikon* article as an attachment and it made, although by implication, a clear and very serious allegation against our movement. It implied that we were responsible for the murder of a man called Dutch Faku. As *The Daily News* reported the next day³ there is no dispute about who murdered Faku. He was killed, in

¹ The first draft of this response to the *Politikon* article was developed at a six hour meeting of ten comrades, all mandated to represent the movement on a special task team, and held on the 4th of February 2015. At that meeting we also discussed and drew on a previous document drafted at an all-day meeting held on the 6th of January 2015. The draft was then edited to get it as close as we could to the length recommended by *Politikon* and approved on the 6th of February. On the 17th of February *Politikon* sent us two reviewers' reports. *Politikon* had published an article in which dishonest and malicious statements are made about our movement, and about individuals in our movement, without any evidence being offered to support these statements. Taken together the reviewers wanted us to avoid any kind of personal critique and to provide detailed evidence for all kinds of things, even including matters such as the repression that we have faced, which have been widely documented in the media, academic articles, human rights reports and court proceedings. The second reviewer also felt that we should not be allowed to place the *Politikon* article in the context of the well-known history of hostility to our movement that goes back to 2006. It was also stated that we needed the services of a language editor. We have no problem with the request to provide evidence for our claims, and to avoid personal attacks (although we felt that our first draft was an account of important facts that needed to be explained rather than any kind of personal attack). However we do note that the original article was not required to avoid personal attacks or to provide any evidence for the claims that it made. There is a clear double standard here. The problem is not with the demands made to us, it is that no such demands were made in the case of the article published under the name of Mdlalose. We were only given until the 20th of February to make changes to the article and, as usual, we had to deal with matters like a court case, a protest, arrests and so on during this time. We have expanded the original article to give more evidence on the points where this has been requested or where the reviewers didn't understand the importance of the points we had made (such as the broader context to this article and our bad history with the Centre for Civil Society). We have also sought academic support to make the language that we have used acceptable to *Politikon* and to provide references where requested. This support have been given under the direction of our movement. The references have all been printed out, read, discussed and approved by the movement. The second version of the article was approved by our movement on the 20th of February.

² Bandile Mdlalose worked from the AbM office from the 26th of June 2010 until shortly before her expulsion from the movement on the 6th of April 2014. A number of us worked very closely with her in that time. This work often included the production of written material. Not one of us that worked closely with her in that time believes that this article was written by her and we do not recognise her ideas, words, experiences or interests in this article, or in much of what has been stated in the series of emails sent from her address to a very long list of academics around the world after her expulsion. We also do not recognise our movement in this article. Positions are ascribed to us that we have never held in words that we have never used. However we do recognise the same ideas, words, obsessions and dishonesty that have been mobilised against us from within and around the Centre for Civil Society, where Mdlalose is now physically based, since 2006. Of course it is not unusual for activists, be they in parties, unions or other kinds of organisations, to have speechwriters or to work with others to produce statements. We do not deny Mdlalose the right to work with people of her choice to produce statements or articles. However there is an important difference between an activist deciding to work with someone to be able to most effectively express their views in a space that is new to them and an activist deciding to offer the use of their name in support of a long campaign of slander against a movement. We feel that we have a right to state that in our view this is a case of an activist deciding to offer their support, including the use of their name, to a long campaign of slander.

³ Sihle Mlambo & Lee Rondganger 'One of Durban's most wanted shot dead', *Daily News*, 24 December 2014 <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/one-of-durban-s-most-wanted-shot-dead-1.1799124#.VJuMfWGAIE>

a purely criminal attack, while on duty as a security guard. One of his attackers was arrested and the other was shot dead by the police.

According to our understanding the reason why the *Politikon* article was attached to this email was to make Mdlalose seem like a person who had important and credible things to say about our movement. However we are not aware of any person or organisation having taken this widely circulated allegation against us seriously. But although we are not aware of any person or organisation having taken this allegation against us seriously it was extremely reckless and a clear attempt to defame our movement that was made without any regard for the truth. We believe that it is important that the readers of *Politikon* understand that the credibility of the journal has been misused to make a very widely circulated and defamatory allegation against our movement that is both gravely serious and entirely untrue.

Mdlalose was expelled from our movement on the 6th of April 2014 after a duly constituted disciplinary hearing found her guilty of charging membership fees at an inflated price and keeping the money for herself. The disciplinary process was carefully documented and we have been willing to share this documentation. We are not the only grassroots organisation that has felt unable to continue our relationship with Mdlalose. After she was expelled from our movement she went on to set up her own organisation with, she told many people (affidavits can be provided in this regard), financial backing from Patrick Bond, the Director of the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She has since been physically based at CCS and has held meetings in the CCS seminar room (affidavits can be provided in this regard). The only community of any size to join her new organisation was in the Mandela Complex in Newlands. On the 29th of December last year the residents there issued a statement declaring that they were no longer willing to work with her. They declared that “Bandile has not done any justice to us, she has collected a lot of money from us pretending to be doing something good for us.”⁴

After Mdlalose was expelled from our movement emails started to be sent from her address to our entire mailing list of more than three thousand people, and to a long list of academics, making a series of dishonest and malicious statements about our movement and individuals in our movement. Our lawyers have confirmed that these statements constitute a clear case of defamation and they are currently subject to legal action.

In order to be properly understood these defamatory statements need to be placed in their full context. That context has two parts. One part of that context is Mdlalose’s own anger resulting from her expulsion and the break down in personal relationships resulting from the expulsion. This anger is real. However it is also important to note that Mdlalose has found a new job and a new political home via the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The significance of this goes back some years before Mdlalose joined our movement. In the first email to be sent out to our mailing list following her expulsion Mdlalose explicitly allied herself to Heinrich Bohmke. Bohmke has produced a series of self-published attacks on our

⁴ Mandela Complex in Newland West Community ‘How Bandile Mdlalose betrayed us in Mandela Complex until we were evicted from Newland West flats’, *Mandela Complex in Newland West Community Press Statement*, 29 December 2014 (This statement can be made available on request)

movement over a number of years. We are not the only grassroots movement to have been targeted by Bohmke and, in the case of the Unemployed People's Movement, legal opinion has found his writing to be defamatory. Bohmke's writing can easily be found online. Bohmke's has a history of involvement in defamation, and serious intimidation too, that, as far as we can see, is first documented in 1995⁵ when he was involved in serious intimidation against left wing academics and students in Durban.

The origins of Bohmke's hostility to our movement go back to 2006 when our movement, together with the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, walked out of an NGO controlled meeting hosted by CCS at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and then staged a protest against NGO domination of movements at the university.⁶ Since then Bohmke, along with a number of other people including Devanathan Pather and Khadija Sharief, all linked in various ways to CCS, have issued attacks on us that we consider to be plainly dishonest and malicious.⁷ None of the people that have produced these attacks have ever participated in our movement, attended its meetings or done any real research on our movement. Anyone who reads these attacks will immediately recognise that the same themes and obsessions are present in the emails sent out from Mdlalose's email address and are also present in the article published in her name in *Politikon*. Anyone who reads all of this writing together will see that it has constantly been alleged that we, as impoverished black people, do not have any real politics of our own, that we are really under the control of a white man and that our entire movement is some kind of giant conspiracy involving ourselves and a large network of other people that relies on a fraudulent website as well as extensive academic and journalistic fraud and is really aimed at making money and advancing the careers of a few individuals.

We do not recognise our movement in the article that has been published in *Politikon*. What we do recognise is the long history of how our movement has been misrepresented by people associated with CCS. We do not think that it is irrelevant that since her expulsion from our movement Mdlalose has been closely associated with CCS.

In the past this defamation from people linked to CCS in various ways primarily circulated on the Debate email list managed by Patrick Bond.⁸ But now similar claims, still untrue and still malicious, have been given the dignity of publication in an academic journal. In our view the article is deliberately and maliciously dishonest. In our assessment it is being used to try and legitimate serious and potentially dangerous ongoing dishonesty and defamation, as well as a long history of dishonesty and defamation, in a context in which our movement faces serious repression, including assassination.

⁵ Karen MacGregor 'Blame laid squarely at COMSA's door', *Sunday Tribune*, 8 June 1997
<http://www.samedia.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/getpdf?year=1997&refno=4062&topic=25>

⁶ There is a media report on this online. We do not feel that it gives an accurate picture of events but it does provide clear evidence of the history of conflict between our movement and CCS. Niren Tolsi *On the far side of left Mail & Guardian*, 8 December 2006 <http://mg.co.za/article/2006-12-08-on-the-far-side-of-left>

⁷ They can easily be found online and have often been circulated on the Debate list which is archived online.

⁸ As noted above postings to this email list are all archived online and any interested reader can examine them for themselves.

We had a six hour meeting on the 4th of February 2015 to discuss the article and produced fourteen pages of notes on the various dishonest statements made in this article. It was not possible for us to address each of the dishonest statements and implications in the article in the short space that we had been given. We therefore decided to focus on a limited number of issues that seemed to be particularly important. Since receiving the reviewer's reports from *Politkon* we have expanded our explanation of the facts in those cases where more detail was required and sought assistance with language and with adding in references where required. However we wish to state on record that we reject this article in its entirety and see it, as do many others, as part of a much longer and larger project of slander, much of which is clearly racist, going back to 2006.

In this article it is stated that Mdlalose resigned from our movement because she was opposed to the decision taken by our movement to make a tactical vote for the opposition (Democratic Alliance) in KwaZulu-Natal in the 2014 election. However she was expelled from our movement on the 6th of April 2014.⁹ The decision to make a tactical vote for the opposition was made on the 1st of May 2014. The process of making this decision only began on the 25th of April 2014 and no one knew what the outcome would be until the 1st of May 2014.¹⁰ On the 10th of July Mdlalose took us to the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) and demanded, without success, that she be re-instated to her position.¹¹ It is therefore dishonest to claim that Mdlalose resigned from our movement on a point of principle whereas she was in fact expelled after being found guilty by a duly constituted structure within our movement of serious impropriety relating to membership fees before any decision was taken about the 2014 election and tried, and failed, to be reinstated to her position by the CCMA after that decision was taken.

This article seriously misrepresents the decision to make a tactical vote for the DA. This was a democratic decision that was made by vote after long discussion in two separate meetings.¹² The suggestion that this decision was unilaterally taken by S'bu Zikode is dishonest. Our movement did not join the DA, our members decided, via a democratic process, to make a tactical vote for the DA in the hope that this would put pressure on the ANC to stop the campaign of serious repression against us.¹³ Because we did not join the DA this decision did not, as this article claims, go against our constitution. As we have explained

⁹ As noted above this process was carefully documented and we have been willing to make this documentation available.

¹⁰ The process via which this decision was made has been outline previously. 'The ANC Must Be Removed From Office', *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, 6 May 2014 <http://abahlali.org/node/13681/>

¹¹ 'Settlement Agreement in the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA)', *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, 22 July 2014, <http://abahlali.org/node/14519/>

¹² The discussion and process of voting was recorded on video by a staff member of the Church Land Programme and can be made available.

¹³ Our position has been made clear. At the time we issued a statement that clearly stated that "We will not take membership of the party, we do not endorse its policies and we will continue to insist that no one can hold a position as an elected leader in our movement if they join a political party." 'The ANC Must Be Removed From Office', *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, 6 May 2014 <http://abahlali.org/node/13681/> S'bu Zikode also made it clear, in an interview with *GroundUp*, that we had not joined the DA. 'Why Abahlali endorsed the DA: S'bu Zikode speaks to GroundUp', Sibusiso Tshabalala, *GroundUp*, 5 May 2014 <http://groundup.org.za/content/why-abahlali-endorsed-da-sbu-zikode-speaks-groundup>

it is dishonest to say that Mdlalose resigned from our movement in protest at this decision. It is also not true that our former spokesperson resigned because of this decision. He was a very strong supporter of this decision and often stated this in writing.¹⁴ It is true, though, that our former Deputy-President was very unhappy about the decision. He was hoping that the movement would decide to support the Economic Freedom fighters (EFF). Of course it is true that our policies are much closer to those of the EFF than to the DA but the majority of our members didn't think that the EFF would be strong enough in KwaZulu-Natal to effectively oppose the repression that we were suffering at the hands of the ANC.

In the article Mdlalose also seems to imply that she joined AbM in 2008, or soon after 2008. In fact she first made contact with AbM in February 2010 when Mazwi Nzimande bought her to an event at the Anglican Cathedral in Durban. It is very important to be clear on the date at which Mdlalose first made contact with our movement because our movement was subject to serious violent repression in 2009 which affected the movement in many ways and changed it in many ways.¹⁵ No one can have any proper understanding of our movement without taking the repression of 2009, as well as the repression of 2013¹⁶, very seriously.

For instance the article states that "What happened to AbM was that we slowly transformed from a movement into an NGO. Once we operated from the community, but now we began operating out of offices in town" (2014, p. 351). From 2005 until 2009 the movement had its office in the Kennedy Road shack settlement in Clare Estate. From 2010 we have had an office in central Durban. But to present this as a case of the movement choosing to move away from communities and becoming an NGO without explaining the reason for this shift in where our office is located is dishonest. We were attacked by the ANC, acting with the support of the police, in the Kennedy Road settlement in 2009. People were injured, killed, arrested, detained and tortured. Many of our leaders' homes were destroyed, there were open death threats against our leaders and our office was ransacked and turned into an

¹⁴ We are referring here to conversations on WhatsApp. These can be made available if required.

¹⁵ For more information on the very serious repression that we suffered in 2009 see Kerry Chance 'The Work of violence: a timeline of armed attacks at Kennedy Road', *School of Development Studies Research Report*, 83, July 2010, <http://sds.ukzn.ac.za/?3,6,684,4,0>; 'Abahlali baseMjondolo and 52 Others v Minister of Police and Others ('Kennedy Road')', Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, 2012 http://www.seri-sa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35:abahlali-basemjondolo-and-52-others-v-minister-of-police-and-others-kennedy-road&catid=19; State v Limaphi and 11 Others ('Kennedy 12'), Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa, 2011 <http://www.seri-sa.org/index.php/19-litigation/case-entries/85-state-v-limaphi-and-11-others-kennedy-12>; Tolsi, Niren 'Kennedy Road Olive Branch a Sham', *Mail & Guardian*, 11 October 2009 <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-10-11-kennedy-olive-branch-a-sham>; Malavika Vartak, 'Report: Experiences of Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban, South Africa', Development Planning Unit of University College London, 2009 <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-SAfrica&month=0912&week=b&msg=W/SUMqooLIQQ7RyZ8XEs2Q>

¹⁶ Here we are referring to sustained intimidation and violence against us from party and state structures including the assassination of one of our leaders, Nkululeko Gwala on the 26th of June 2013 and the police murder of Ngobile Nzuza on a protest organised by our members on the 30th of September 2013. These murders are both widely documented. See, for instance, Moore, Nikki 'KZN: Anatomy of an Assassination', *The Daily Maverick*, 31 July 2013 <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-07-31-kzn-anatomy-of-an-assassination/#.VOB1yPmUdxh>; Patel, Khadija 'In Durban's Cato Manor: Death by protest, death by dissent', *The Daily Maverick*, 1 October 2013, <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-10-01-in-durbans-cato-manor-death-by-protest-death-by-dissent#.VOB1dfmUdxg>

ANC office.¹⁷ This attack did serious damage to our movement. Some of our comrades are still traumatised by what happened to them and their families. After this attack many of our leaders were left homeless, some had to go underground and for a while every meeting was held in a different location – a funeral parlour, then the parking lot of the Jesus Dome and so on. In 2010 we received support from the churches to rent modest offices in town. The decision to re-open our office in town was taken because it was no longer safe for us to have an office in a shack settlement where we had been attacked, and have continued to be attacked since then, with impunity. We moved our office to town for safety. But there are some important advantages to having an office in town. We have more reliable access to electricity (in Kennedy we were often disconnected), better access to the internet and there is no longer a risk that the movement will be seen as being closer to one particular settlement. This is very important in order to maintain unity. But the main advantage to being in town is that it makes our office far more accessible, in terms of transport, to most of our members than it was when it was in Kennedy Road. All of our members can easily get into town and back to their homes. When our office was in Kennedy Road most people would have to travel from their settlements into town before taking a taxi to Kennedy Road. We remain a membership based and democratic organisation. Having an office in town does not make us an NGO.

There is the same disregard for the truth in the various statements in the article about bodyguards. There is a difference between hiring a bodyguard because you want to look like a big man and a movement taking a collective decision that it is necessary to have security in certain particular situations where there is clearly serious danger. We never had security before 2013. At some events we will be accompanied by religious leaders who often dress in suits while the rest of us are in red shirts. Some middle class people have previously confused pastors with security guards but this is a completely mistaken impression. The reason why we started to ensure that we had security at some meetings in certain areas was because death threats were being made against our leaders and our leaders were being assassinated. For instance Thuli Ndlovu, our chairperson in KwaNdengezi, was assassinated on 30 September 2014.¹⁸ The assassination came after a number of death threats against our members in the area and so we decided that security would be required at the memorial which we held in the community. To leave out this context of serious repression

¹⁷ Kerry Chance 'The Work of violence: a timeline of armed attacks at Kennedy Road', *School of Development Studies Research Report*, 83, July 2010, <http://sds.ukzn.ac.za/?3,6,684,4,0>; 'Abahlali baseMjondolo and 52 Others v Minister of Police and Others ('Kennedy Road')', *Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa*, 2012 http://www.seri-sa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=35:abahlali-basemjondolo-and-52-others-v-minister-of-police-and-others-kennedy-road&catid=19; State v Limaphi and 11 Others ('Kennedy 12'), *Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa*, 2011 <http://www.seri-sa.org/index.php/19-litigation/case-entries/85-state-v-limaphi-and-11-others-kennedy-12>; Tolsi, Niren 'Kennedy Road Olive Branch a Sham', *Mail & Guardian*, 11 October 2009 <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-10-11-kennedy-olive-branch-a-sham>; Malavika Vartak, 'Report: Experiences of Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban, South Africa', *Development Planning Unit of University College London*, 2009 <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-SAfrica&month=0912&week=b&msg=W/SUMqooLIQQ7RyZ8XEs2Q>

¹⁸ Abahlali baseMjondolo, 'Thuli Ndlovu Was Assassinated Last Night', 30 September 2014 <http://abahlali.org/node/14311/>; Asmal, Fatima 'Tensions flare after 'hit' on shack official', *Mail & Guardian*, 3 October 2014 <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-10-02-tensions-flare-after-hit-on-shack-official/>

misrepresents the reality of our situation. A movement has no choice but to take security seriously when it faces violent and at times fatal repression.

In the article it is stated that “in 2012, the protests we undertook were less about real anger or real resistance. They became more about impressing funders” (2014, p. 346). This is not true and we cannot see any logic or truth in this statement. In 2012 we organised some legal protests, as we have always done since 2005, on community driven issues and there were also road blockades in various parts of Durban including KwaNdengezi, Shallcross, KwaMashu, Clare Estate, Puntan’s Hill. There is no funder that we are aware of that is impressed by a road blockade. An organisation that was trying to impress funders would organise around issues like climate change, human rights and freedom of expression. It would also stay very close to the most powerful NGOs. We continued to organise around the demands of our members and we continue to organise autonomously. Our press statements from 2012 are all on our website. They speak for themselves. In 2013 we organised more road blockades than ever before. We also fought a huge struggle in support of the Marikana Land Occupation in Cato Crest. Three people were murdered during this struggle.¹⁹ There is no funder that is looking to fund land occupations. Of course like any organisation we take care to communicate carefully with all of our allies and to keep them informed about what we are doing and the changing situation in which we find ourselves. But there is nothing strange about this. We did not acquire any new funders in 2012 or 2013 and we cannot understand the logic of the claim that in 2012 we started to orientate our action to our funders instead of our members. No one in our movement has ever made this claim.

There is also an implication in this article that our leaders now live in suburbs. The ANC has said the same thing.²⁰ This is not true. All our leaders live in modest homes in poor and working class black communities.²¹ It is true that some of our leaders have been temporarily accommodated in safe houses, with the support of Amnesty International, when an independent risk assessment has found that their lives are at serious and immediate risk. We make no apologies for this. We make every effort to keep our members safe. After the murders in Cato Crest in 2013 Mdlalose was, at her own request, one of the people who was temporarily housed in this way. This is not a matter of living the high life. Temporarily staying in a safe house is usually a very isolating and depressing experience for people.

There are various allegations about funding in this article. The ANC has made similar allegations²² and we have responded to these in some detail. Our response is on our

¹⁹ The third person to be killed in this struggle, Thembinkosi Qumbelo had been well known to us for some years but was not a member of our movement. Nene, Nkululeko ‘Cato Crest community leader gunned down’, *Daily News*, 18 March 2013 <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/cato-crest-community-leader-gunned-down-1.1488319#.VOb6CfmUdxg>

²⁰ Hans, Bongani & Manda, Sihle ‘Shacks pop up in Durban land grab’, *The Mercury*, 6 October 2014 <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/shacks-pop-up-in-durban-land-grab-1.1760398#.VOb8JfmUdxh>

²¹ We don’t publicly disclose where people living under the threat of death are living but would, for instance, be happy for the editor of this journal to visit the homes of any of our leaders as long as there was an agreement that the location of their homes would not be published.

²² Hans, Bongani & Manda, Sihle ‘Shacks pop up in Durban land grab’, *The Mercury*, 6 October 2014 <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/shacks-pop-up-in-durban-land-grab-1.1760398#.VOb8JfmUdxh>

website.²³ In the limited space that we have here we would merely like to note that we have always been completely open about the funding that we do accept, that we do not accept funding from any organisation that would like to restrict our autonomy and that has never been any suggestion of any impropriety from any of the people that have supported us. We have employed an external bookkeeper and will be audited this year.

It is true that when Mdlalose was a member of our movement three members were paid a modest stipend²⁴, mostly via church support, for full time movement work. We have lost many of our best comrades because they need to make a living and, when we can, offering people a stipend for full time work is an important way of allowing people to remain politically committed without failing in their obligations to their families. This is not unique to our movement. In fact we are not aware of a sustained grassroots movement anywhere in the world that does not try and secure some sort of income for people doing fulltime work for the movement over many years.

Just as the *Politikon* article discusses the move of our offices from the Kennedy Road shack settlement to the centre of town without mentioning that our Kennedy office was ransacked and then taken over by the local ANC after a violent attack the discussion of the stipend paid to S'bu Zikode does not mention that he never received any sort of stipend for his work from 2005 until 2012. In this time he was forced out of two jobs by the ANC as punishment for his political commitment and in 2009 his home, along with many other of our members' homes, was ransacked and destroyed with the result that he and his family lost all their possessions. Moreover it also fails to note the various expenses that come with trying to live safely under the threat of death. It also fails to note that the decision to pay a stipend was taken democratically. The article also fails to note that the Secretary General before Mdlalose did not earn a stipend and that the current Secretary General does not earn a stipend but that Mdlalose's first act after she was elected (via a block vote mobilised by her mother who had a support base on Siyanda) in 2010 was to request a stipend.

International connections have been very important for us, especially in times of repression. They have been of huge help in keeping us safe. Often the media will take a protest against repression at the South African embassy in New York or London far more seriously than a protest in Durban. International connections have also been an important way of sharing ideas. But in this article they are presented as if they are somehow a problem.

²³ When our movement began we had no external funding. As soon as we started to receive some support from organisations like churches and previous members of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States we put a list of all our funders on our website which was updated as necessary. We have recently issued a statement that details our current sources of funding in response to a set of dishonest statements from the ANC. Anyone who is interested in knowing which organisations fund our movement is advised to consult this statement. Abahlali baseMjondolo, *From Assassination with Bullets to Assassination with Words*, 17 October 2014 <http://abahlali.org/node/14403/>

²⁴ One of the *Politikon* reviewers has queried the use of the term 'modest' and said that we must disclose the amount. We feel uncomfortable with this demand in light of the fact that no such demand has been made to Bandile Mdlalose to disclose her income from her job at the university and that no such demand is ever made to academics or NGO professionals. However we have consulted a trade union research institute and can confirm that the stipends paid by our organisation are all a lot lower than that of a skilled worker in unionised factory.

We have always mandated and rotated comrades tasked with the responsibility of travel and we have always extended the same welcome that we have received to comrades visiting our country. Yet this article, which ignores the fact that Mdlalose travelled internationally as a representative of our movement, describes meeting with comrades in other countries as “the high life” as if it is just a matter of selling out. These trips are not holidays. They are important and often exhausting political work that involves sleeping in a different house most nights and travelling and speaking most days. Comrades doing this work are mostly hosted by other grassroots organisations including community organisations, tenant’s associations, trade unions and political organisations. In most cases they will be hosted in the homes of comrades in the countries that they are visiting. To describe this as living ‘the high life’ is dishonest and malicious.²⁵

Soon after our movement was formed it became clear to us that it was often assumed that we as Africans should receive solidarity but that we should not give solidarity. We rejected this from the beginning as racist and as disrespectful to our dignity as human beings and we have always stuck to the principle that solidarity should be based on equality. This was made very clear in a letter to our German comrades where stated that: “We welcome all solidarity with real gratitude but we do not want to always be the ones that are receiving solidarity. We also want to support your struggles. We would like to discuss how our struggles can support each other.”²⁶

When people have supported us when we are facing repression we have done the same for them when they are facing repression. This article is dishonest about these relations. For instance in this article a dishonest account is given of how we came to issue a statement in support of the philosophy department at Middlesex. This article is equally dishonest about our decision to issue a statement and make a small symbolic protest in solidarity with comrades facing repression in Istanbul. The article claims that our support for our comrades in Turkey was imposed on us by a white academic. It states that “the AbM statement supporting the students in Turkey was all his work. People in Turkey could mistakenly think that they were on the agenda of SA shack-dwellers, when they were not concerned but the academic was” (2014, p.347). In fact our movement has a long relationship with activists in Turkey which is well documented on our website. That relationship began in May 2006 when Fazel Khan²⁷, an academic who worked closely with our movement at the time, travelled to Istanbul to screen two films that he had made at the International Labour Film and Video Festival. One of these films, *Breyani & the Councillor*, was about our movement. Fazel was hosted by an organisation called Peoples’ House and a comrade called Çiğdem Çıdamlı. While he was in Turkey he was also invited to screen the film about our movement

²⁵ Often the people that have invited us to visit them have raised money by organising events rather than by going to donors. Organisations that have hosted our members in other countries include Picture the Homeless in New York, the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign in Chicago, Global Peace & Justice in Auckland, the tenants’ association in Wuppertal and many others,

²⁶ A Letter to Our German Comrades, 19 June 2010 <http://abahlali.org/node/7106/>

²⁷ We find it very interesting that the black academics that work with us, and the black university trained intellectuals that work with us, are always ignored as if they just don’t exist in the attacks that are made on us from within and around CCS. On our understanding this is one more example of the racism that is always present in these attacks.

in a number of shack settlements.²⁸ The trade union organisation Sendika began to translate our statements into Turkish and to publish them on their website.²⁹ This solidarity continued through the years. In June 2007 S'bu Zikode was invited by Çiğdem Çıdamlı to speak at the People's Rights Forum in Istanbul.³⁰ While he was in Turkey he met a number of activists and also visited shack settlements including residents of the Dikmen Valley shack settlement in Ankara who were engaged in a major struggle against eviction.³¹ In October 2007 the organised residents in Dikmen Valley issued a statement of solidarity with our movement after we faced repression and they organised a march on the South African embassy. This was not unusual. When relations are formed between organisations in struggle they often support each other. For instance in the same year our comrades in the Combined Harare Residents' Association issued a statement in support of us after we had hosted two of their members in the homes of our members.³² At that point our solidarity with our comrades in Turkey did not go beyond sharing information about their struggles on our website. In 2010 Zodwa Nsibande, at that time our Secretary General, visited Turkey where she also met a large number of activists and visited shack settlements. On the 7th of June 2013 we received a request from Çiğdem Çıdamlı for urgent solidarity with the comrades that had occupied Gezi Park. On the 9th of June 2013 we received a political declaration from the occupation at from Çiğdem Çıdamlı. We discussed the matter and our first response was to place the documents that we had received on our website. We also called an urgent meeting at which we decided to draft and issue a statement which we did on the 10th of June 2013.³³ A large part of that statement was based directly on the information and positions that we received from our Turkish comrades. The statement also made it clear that we were reciprocating solidarity that we had already received from comrades in Turkey and that our Turkish comrades were the first people from another country to stand in solidarity with us. On the 11th of June we received an urgent email from Çiğdem Çıdamlı stating that their comrades were under attack. We had a second urgent meeting and on the 14th of June 2013 we organised a small, symbolic picket outside the Durban City Hall. On the 16th of June we received another urgent email from Çiğdem Çıdamlı requesting solidarity with Turkish comrades under attack. The solidarity between our movement and our comrades in Turkey is real and has a history that is well documented on our website and on the Sendika website. It is also not just about two organisations. For instance on the 17th of August our statement in solidarity with the people struggling in Marikana was translated into Turkish.³⁴ On the 18th

²⁸ Fazel Khan *Report from the first International Labour Film and Video Festival held in Istanbul*, 13 June 2006, <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,40,5,1046>

²⁹ Their website is at <http://www.sendika.org/>.

³⁰ The programme for this event, together with some photographs taken at the event, is online at <http://abahlali.org/node/1602/>

³¹ Leyla Almufti Karadag and Eren Buglalilar *Dikmen Valley: A Story of Resistance from Turkey* Monthly Review, 2008, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/kb091108.html>

³² CHRA in solidarity with Abahlali Base Mjondolo march for land and housing, Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), 28 September 2007 http://archive.kubatana.net/html/archive/locgov/070928chra.asp?sector=URBDEV&year=2007&range_start=1

³³ Abahlali baseMjondolo *"We are all Turkish democrats": A Statement of Solidarity with the Turkish Struggle*, 10 June 2013 <http://abahlali.org/node/9760/>

³⁴ Abahlali baseMjondolo *Solidarity with Mine Workers at Marikana Platinum* 18 August 2012 <http://abahlali.org/node/9032/>

of August there was a protest in Turkey in solidarity with the mine workers massacred at Marikana.³⁵ We shared information about this protest in South Africa. This kind of solidarity between organisations in different countries is not some kind of scandal. It is something of which we are proud and which we remain committed to keeping alive and strong.

The statement of solidarity that we prepared for the Philosophy Department at Middlesex University in England was drafted at a meeting held in our office on the 22 May 2010 and delivered, by hand, by Bishop Rubin Phillip to Peter Hallward from the Middlesex Philosophy Department on 26 May 2010. Mdlalose only began to participate in the affairs of our movement after the 26th of June 2010 and was not a participant in this meeting. She has no personal experience with regard to how this statement came to be drafted. The statement that we issued at the time, which is on our website,³⁶ clearly explained that we were reciprocating solidarity (invaluable solidarity) that we had already received. An important moment in the development of that relationship of solidarity was when, after our movement was attacked in 2009, Peter Hallward, then at Middlesex, mobilised a number of leading intellectuals to sign a statement of protest.³⁷ This statement was hugely helpful in getting elites in South Africa to take the repression that we were being subjected to seriously. The Church Land Programme had it printed as a poster and it still hangs in our office. Mdlalose would have seen it every day that she spent in our office. It is often discussed in the office. This fact is one reason, among many others, why we are confident in saying that there are many points in the *Politikon* article in which it is clear to us that Mdlalose had very little input in the process of drafting the article

We have always found it interesting that both Bohmke and the ANC, and now this paper published in *Politikon*, have been made very uncomfortable by our website. It is always presented as though it is some sort of crime for us to have a website for our organisation. The *Politikon* article implies that our website is a fraudulent misrepresentation of our movement. This is outrageous. Our website primarily contains our press statements as well as articles written on our movement in newspapers and other publications. Occasionally we will publish other kinds of documents, such as statements from other organisations, but nothing ever goes onto our website without it being approved by the movement.

Every press statement that we issue is open to scrutiny by the media, by the ANC and by anyone else. We have often taken position and actions, like land occupations and road blockades, to which the ruling party and elite society in general is extremely hostile. If we were not being honest in our statements our many enemies would have sized on that a long time ago. In fact one reason why we have won the respect that we have in the media, and in other spaces, is because we always strive to issue statements that are as factually accurate as is possible. Obviously the process for producing press statements differs according to circumstances. In some cases it can take a number of meetings over a month, in others it

³⁵ Protest by militant Turkish trade union against South African government

‘Murdered workers are our class brothers’, 18 August 2012, <http://abahlali.org/node/9036/>

³⁶ Abahlali baseMjondolo, *Letter of Solidarity from Abahlali baseMjondolo to the Middlesex Philosophy Department*, 26 May 2010 <http://abahlali.org/node/7053/>

³⁷ Chomsky, Noam et al ‘Statement in support of Abahlali baseMjondolo’, *LibCom*, 9 October 2009 <https://libcom.org/library/statement-support-abahlali-basemjondolo>

can take one quick meeting and be concluded in an hour. In some cases it can include a large number of people, in others it will include much fewer people. But we have always been open about this process and visiting academics and activists have always been free to witness it. No statement about a branch has ever gone out without it being approved by that branch and no statement about the movement has ever gone out without being approved by the movement. Effective communication with the media has been one of the real strengths of our movement and it is vital for protecting us against repression and for us to communicate our struggle clearly so that we can win more allies to our side. We have often, although not always, invited university trained comrades to participate in this process. In some cases the role of a university trained comrade will just be to offer assistance with grammar and spelling. In some cases we have invited a trusted university trained comrade to participate in the discussion and formulation of ideas. There are some people who think that the politics of poor black people is only authentic when it takes the form of a riot. In our view these people are part of the system of oppression that wants to confine us to the dark corners to which oppression has assigned us. We have the same right as anyone else in this society to form alliances with whomever we choose and to do so on our own terms.

The comment in this article about photographs on the website being used to raise money has also outraged us. The photographs on our website are almost all taken by our members, on their phones, and they represent nothing more or less than the day to day realities of our struggle as seen by our members. We have never once used a photograph in any communication with our funders. The statement about 'juicy quotes' also disturbs us. These so-called 'juicy quotes' are the slogans that we worked out in the early years of movement. It would be very strange if a political organisation didn't include its own slogans on its own website.

The claim that we have not had the password for the website is also not true. In recent years we have had constant technical problems with the website. It is often hacked and the password is always changing. But we have always had the passwords. After we shifted the website from Drupal to Wordpress Mdlalose was personally trained on the new system in the office. There were a number of other people present at the time.³⁸ We also have written evidence of the communication of the password to her.³⁹ Despite having the password and being trained in how to use the new system, Mdlalose, unlike the previous Secretary General, chose not to upload anything on to the website. Like many young people she preferred to make use of our Facebook page, to which she did load material at her personal discretion, and which, in fact, is read much more than our website.

We have been very pleased to have *pro bono* technical support with our website. There is nothing strange about this. Most organisations separate the editorial and technical functions

³⁸ This training included the use of the password, which were saved on the computer she was using. The other people present in the office at the time are all willing to make affidavits confirming that this training took place.

³⁹ We are willing to make this available to the editor of *Politikon* should it be required.

with regard to their websites. We repeat that nothing has ever gone onto our website without our approval.

This article also claims that we have not been forthright about the size of our membership. The first point to make here is that it is the Secretary General's responsibility to present an audit of the numbers at the AGM. Mdlalose failed to do this. In the absence of a firm figure provided by the Secretary General it is not surprising that different numbers appear from different people at different times. Some of the numbers that have appeared in the media have not even come from us. Membership has to be renewed annually, for individuals and branches, but membership and support are not the same thing, and some people take membership and then don't participate in the movement while others don't have a membership card and participate regularly in meetings, gatherings and protest actions. If you count the number of people living in settlements affiliated to our movement you will get one figure. If you count the people that actively support the movement by attending meetings you will get another figure. If you could count the number of people willing to participate in protest actions you will get another figure. And if you count the number of people that hold membership cards you will get a different figure. We currently have twenty two branches in good standing in KwaZulu-Natal, and one in Cape Town, and just over 11 000 individual members in good standing.

We are really disturbed at the malicious way in which our current president is misrepresented in this article. The only time in which he ever stopped visiting communities was the period after the attack in 2009 when he had to go underground for some months. It is dishonest to say that he has ever stopped visiting communities at any other time. Any member of our movement, and anyone that has visited our movement, will immediately recognise this as a malicious lie. There is an extensive photograph record of community meetings on our website. There have been constant meetings in communities since 2005, and often three mass meetings on a weekend. Everyone knows that the leadership style of our current president has always been to facilitate collective decision making and not to make decisions for the movement.

We are equally disturbed at the way that our white comrade is misrepresented in this article. This language of 'outsiders' is not our language. This is the language of Bohmke and CCS. This comrade, who has been under severe personal attack from people in and around CCS since 2006⁴⁰, is one of us. He has been struggling with us in the shacks since before our movement was launched. Whatever he does in our struggle he does as a comrade with a mandate. We make no apology for our position that the work of the intellectual is with the people in the struggle. We have been shocked at the implication that he did not discuss his PhD with us. It is true that Mdlalose was not at the meeting where he first discussed his PhD work with us because it happened in 2008, before she joined our movement. She was also not at the meeting at which he presented us with a copy of his PhD for our library and

⁴⁰ There is a long written record of this, some of which has been widely circulated and some of which has been sent to his employers, colleagues and students.

discussed the work with us because it happened after her expulsion.⁴¹ However Mdlalose is well aware that this comrade has never written anything about our movement, whether in academic journals, websites or newspapers, without first discussing it with us and without sharing the work with us when it is published.

The article claims that things started to go seriously wrong in our 2013 AGM. We didn't have an AGM in 2013. We had to postpone it until 2014 due to the repression in Cato Crest, which included a police murder. There were tensions at this AGM.⁴² There were also tensions at the 2010 AGM. We have given an account of these tensions.⁴³ The account given in the *Politikon* article is not honest. We have never denied that we have faced some real problems in our movement, particularly in 2010 and in late 2013 and early 2014. We have never tried to hide this. In fact we invited the media to both AGMs although we knew that there would be tensions. We have always welcomed an honest discussion of the way forward. But, like anyone else, we do not welcome dishonesty.

We find it very interesting that this article makes the claim that our movement was being used to fight academic battles that “shack-dwellers had no knowledge in and I feel I must add, no interest in” (2014, p. 347). This statement is made in relation to the Middlesex issue where, as we have explained, the movement had a real and urgent interest in sustaining a vitally important relation of solidarity. Anyone who goes through all our press statements, all archived on our websites, will see that less than one percent of our statements make any reference at all to academic matters. However it is clear to us that most of this article, published under the name of Mdlalose, as well as a very large proportion of what has been said in various emails in her name since her expulsion (including both public emails and the many private emails sent to a long list of academics), is clearly an attempt to settle academic scores. All of us who have worked closely with Mdlalose know her as a person who never had any interest at all in academic matters. Since her expulsion and her development of a close relationship with CCS the statements issued in her name have shown an obsessive interest in academic matters, an interest that follows, exactly, the long campaign of defamation against our movement by Bohmke and others.

Some of the NGOs are always saying that we don't have political direction as if we don't have brains to think. Our politic and our philosophy comes from our daily lives and it has allowed us to build a real movement that has survived very serious repression. We note that despite all the money that the NGOs have they have never succeeded to build a sustained movement with a mass base.

⁴¹ The PhD was presented at a meeting held at the Hindu Surat Hall in Prince Edward Street in Durban on the 24th and 25th of May 2014. There were about two hundred comrades present and lots of people took photographs and recorded parts of the meeting on their phones.

⁴² We consider these tensions to have been serious but we would like to note that the tensions that emerged in our movement in late 2013 and continued into early 2014 were much less serious than the tensions that have plagued many political parties and trade unions recently. We were also, despite the pressures that come with repression, able to handle them much better than many other organisations. We held a successful election in 2014 in which both factions were able to count the votes.

⁴³ Abahlali baseMjondolo, *Abahlali respond to allegations*, 6 June 2014 <http://abahlali.org/node/14055/>

According to our understanding what this article is saying, and what the writing from Bohmke and others linked to CCS has always said, is that we should not have a website, we should not be in solidarity with comrades in other countries, we should not have comrades in the university, we should not take our own ideas seriously, we should not engage the media carefully and effectively and we should not take precautions with our security when we are facing assassination. The demand that is being issued here is that we must remain the dark corners to which oppression has assigned us. We must always be people who live without names and ideas, people who never step out from behind a burning tyre, people that can be killed with impunity, while other people speak for us and represent us and travel the world in our name without a mandate. This is the logic of oppression. It is also a racist logic and we reject it without apology.