

**YOU'LL NEVER SILENCE THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS  
CRITICAL VOICES OF ACTIVISTS IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research has been to explore how and why former liberation activists have continued to speak out against the government since the African National Congress (ANC) transitioned from a liberation movement to a ruling party. These individuals highlight the importance of having a voice, and making that voice heard by the government. They also provide a plurality of opinions that are just a sampling of the sentiments held by South Africans today.

The objective of my research is to better understand what is wrong with the ANC and South Africa, possible causes, and how they can be changed. More specifically, I examine the roles of the government and civil society, how they interact, their strengths and weaknesses, and guesses at what their futures may hold.

The final section of the paper consists of my reflections on the research I have done and a discussion of some themes that stood out. This paper has no thesis because the opinions of people in South Africa are varied and complicated, and cannot be simplified into a concise argument. Instead it provides a space, albeit small, for just eight of their voices to be heard, and the beginnings of a discussion on the government and civil society.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this research has been to explore how and why former liberation activists have continued to speak out against the government since the African National Congress (ANC) transitioned from a liberation movement to a ruling party. These individuals highlight the importance of having a voice, and making that voice heard by the government. They also provide a plurality of opinions that are just a sampling of the sentiments held by South Africans today.

When I began learning about South Africa, I was surprised to find that the ANC as a government is far different from what was as a liberation movement. The ANC's rise from a movement in exile to a political party with approximately 70% of the vote shows the power of activism. The rebels who spent years in jail, hiding from the police, or in exile in other countries for the rights they believed in so strongly are now the rulers. The evolution of the ANC from a liberation movement to a political party is simultaneously a source of hope and disappointment. It shows that a social movement really can make a difference and achieve goals, yet as a political party in control the ANC is failing to deliver on the rights listed in the South African constitution.

Though there are more protests per capita in South Africa than in any other country, it is a very vocal minority that is trying to enact change. The majority of South African citizens seem to have slipped into complacency since the end of apartheid, and the youth see the struggle as a thing of the past. If people accept the notion that the liberation of South Africa was completed when apartheid fell, the future of this country is quite bleak. To transform South Africa into a developed and democratic nation, citizens must create a space for their voices to be heard.

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the roles of the government and civil society, how they interact, their strengths and weaknesses, and guesses at what their futures may hold.

The paper is organized into three main sections. This first consists of the basic elements of an academic paper, with an introduction, background information on relevant movements and organizations, methodology, and research limitations. There is no literature review because there is no way to create a comprehensive summary of the published material on current critical opinions in South Africa. The second portion consists of eight stand alone pieces, one for each person I interviewed. This format allows each person's voice to be heard in a pure form, in their own space, untainted by my analysis and considered separately from the opinions of the other people I have interviewed and the works I have read. The final section consists of my reflections on the research I have done and a discussion of some themes that stood out. This paper has no thesis because the opinions of people in South Africa are varied and complicated, and cannot be simplified into a concise argument. Instead it provides a space, albeit small, for just eight of their voices to be heard, and the beginnings of a discussion on the government and civil society.

## **Background Information**

Many of the people I interviewed are affiliated with these three organizations: Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Church Land Programme, and the Treatment Action Campaign. The information on each of these groups is provided to better understand the statements made by members and employees in the interviews.

### **Abahlali baseMjondolo**

The Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack Dwellers) movement began in early 2005 when 750 shack dwellers blocked a major road in Durban for four hours (abahlali.org; Gibson 2006:Zabalaza). They were protesting the sale of a piece of land near the Kennedy Road settlement that had been promised for shack dweller housing (abahlali.org). In just over two

years, Abahlali has grown to be “the largest organisation of the militant poor in post-apartheid South Africa” (abahlali.org). Since its creation, Abahlali members and supporters have suffered over a hundred arrests, in addition to police assaults, death threats, and various other forms of intimidation (ibid).

In 2005, 5,000 people from 14 informal settlements joined Abahlali (Gibson 2006:Zabalaza). The movement now includes tens of thousands of residents from almost 40 settlements in the Durban area (abahlali.org). Each informal settlement that has joined Abahlali must follow the movement’s democratic principles. This involves hosting general meetings that are open to all adults, subcommittee meetings, communicating with other settlements, and listening to others so that decisions are arrived at by consensus (Gibson 2006:Fanon). Members of Abahlali come from a variety of anti-apartheid organizations including the ANC and United Democratic Front (UDF), but these histories had little to do with the formation of the movement. According to academic Nigel Gibson, “What was important instead was the autonomous democratic culture that had developed in the settlement, and it is indeed this that remains central as the movement has grown and incorporated and re-appropriated other struggle languages, even anti-capitalist discourses. And as Abahlali has developed, its discontinuity with the earlier struggle has morphed into a sense of continuity with the earlier struggle’s unfinished character” (2006:Zabalaza 18).

Since the beginning of the movement, Abahlali has been concerned with maintaining their political autonomy and operating without dependence on external funding, though they have received some practical support from individuals and some NGOs. (Gibson, 2006:Zabalaza) Other movement and organizations with money have tried to co-opt Abahlali, however the people have resisted on the grounds that their movement is one of the poor, and cannot be bought (Gibson 2006:Fanon).

Abahlali has “fought for an end to forced removals and for access to education and the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, health care and refuse removal as well as bottom up popular democracy” (abahlali.org). Beyond the struggle for basic human rights, the movement has also made a case for human dignity and liberal democracy. According to Gibson, “It has most vigilantly insisted that the voices of the poor not only be heard but that the poor be respected as thinking and actional human beings. This has helped engender a profoundly democratic spirit in the Abahlali branches and settlements.” (2006:Zabalaza 24)

One of Abahlali’s chosen methods of protest has continued to be road blocks like their first one in 2005. But that is not their only way of being heard. The movement has “occupied and marched on the offices of local councilors, police stations, municipal offices, newspaper offices and the City Hall in actions that have put thousands of people on the streets” (abahlali.org). During the local government elections in 2006, Abahlali carried out a boycott using the slogan ‘No Land, No House, No Vote’ (ibid)

Though the government has yet to respond adequately to the plight of people living in informal settlements, Abahlali has created democratic governance at many settlements, gained access to schools, prevented development of land promised to Kennedy Road, stopped evictions, and compelled a variety of officials and projects to ‘come down to the people’ (abahlali.org). Furthermore, the movement has succeeded in setting up support for people living with or orphaned by AIDS, and community projects including gardens, sewing collectives, a football league consisting of 16 teams, and music competitions (ibid).

### **Church Land Programme**

The Church Land Programme (CLP) was founded in 1996 by the Association for Rural Advancement and the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (all of the information on the CLP used in this section comes from Church Land Programme). CLP is an independent NGO that was created to help find solutions for land reform that go beyond

the state's process. Funding for the CLP comes from long-standing donors and church clients. According to the organization's website, "The mission of CLP is to improve the quality of life of communities involved with land issues and/or with church owned land, paying particular attention to marginalised groups, including women and the poorest. CLP works towards the sustainable use of church owned land for the benefit of the various stakeholders and their future generations."

The majority of the NGO's work has been focused in KwaZulu-Natal, though they have been involved all around South Africa. CLP works with communities, churches, and civil society organizations to create a dialogue that allows these groups to unite and work to effectively. By joining these groups, the CLP helps to create environmental and economic sustainability that benefits both the land and the people who live on it. CLP also works with various government departments when their involvement is necessary.

South Africa's lack of land reform since the end of apartheid has been telling. As the CLP website explains, "the distribution of land to people in South Africa is unsustainable. Even though our democracy is more than ten years on, land ownership and use are still structured according to a history of apartheid dispossession. South Africa has one of the most unequal societies in the world, with land being an ongoing area of conflict." The majority of CLP's work involves rural land, as its resources and the ability to farm on it are necessary for survival. The organization helps churches, and particularly missionary churches, to better understand their roles as land owners, beneficiaries of past injustices, and current advocates of South Africans.

### **Treatment Action Campaign**

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) was founded in Cape Town in December 1998 and is now considered the most successful social movement in South Africa (TAC.org.za; Friedman et al 2006). Though the number of people living with HIV/AIDS was

growing drastically, unemployment was rampant and thus many people were unable to organize without a formal workplace (Friedman et al 2006, p. 24). Thanks to the ANC's rise to power in 1994 there were major changes in the political environment and social conditions that made them more open, but with fewer grievances (ibid).

Despite the movement's mass success, TAC represents a very small percentage of the population with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Part of this is because people are reluctant to be associated with the movement out of fear of being stigmatized for their HIV/AIDS status (Friedman et al 2004). Many of those involved with TAC have activist backgrounds from the apartheid era, and are continuing their work from before in a new environment (Friedman et al 2006). TAC has an unconventional internal structure, which makes it hard to distinguish between members, activists, supporters, and volunteers. Women are more likely to be infected, and predictably most people involved with TAC are women and they also are more active in their branches. However women make up only half of staff members and a third of officials (Friedman et al 2004). TAC is very aware of the disproportionate leadership, and is working to change these ratios.

Part of the movement's success is due to the support of elites and other important figureheads (Friedman et al 2006). After leaving office, Nelson Mandela joined TAC's campaign by announcing that HIV causes AIDS, he had lost a niece and two of his nephew's sons to AIDS, and on one occasion wearing one of the movement's "HIV POSITIVE" shirts. (Power) For the former president, and symbol of the new South Africa to take such a strong stance and put himself out there by wearing the shirt helped to significantly decrease the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS.

Another reason for TAC's success is their extensive networking nationally and globally with similar movements (Tac.org.za). It is part of the AIDS Consortium, a network of AIDS activism in South Africa, and also works with several international organizations

(Friedman et al 2006). They stress the importance of creating alliances and strive try to find common ground with those who differ, though they realize that such alliances have a cost (ibid). COSATU is one of many groups in South Africa that has worked with TAC. According to Theodora Steel, Campaigns Coordinator at COSATU, the union, “passed a resolution in 1998 to campaign for treatment. It was clear to the labour movement at that time that its lowest paid members were dying because they couldn’t afford medicines. We saw TAC as a natural ally in a campaign for treatment. We passed a formal resolution at our congress to assist and build TAC” (Armstrong). TAC is not affiliated with a political party, though it tries to maintain a relationship with the ANC in order to further communication and negotiation (Friedman et al 2004). However TAC has clearly stated that they support people with HIV/AIDS, not the government (Friedman et al 2006).

TAC’s goals are relatively simple. Their main objective is to treat people with HIV/AIDS and reduce new infections. More specifically, they seek legislation that provides equitable access to social services and affordable treatment (Tac.org.za). The movement seeks to inform and empower people living with HIV/AIDS and provide them with representative and non-discriminatory leadership. In order to achieve those ends, TAC considers it necessary to redistribute social power and resources (Friedman et al 2006).

When TAC was founded their target was the pharmaceutical industry, not the government (Friedman et al 2006). Over time they have directed their action towards a wider variety of organizations, and their methods of action have grown to use both the courts and the streets. TAC feels that movements need more careful strategies for success in a democracy, and are very mindful of the actions they take. As a result TAC engages with the government using both cooperation and conflict (ibid). They challenge the government “by means of litigation, lobbying, advocacy and all forms of legitimate social mobilisation, any barrier or obstacle, including unfair discrimination, that limits access to treatment for

HIV/AIDS in the private and public sector” (Tac.org.za). Though the movement participates in civil disobedience and street demonstrations, which were traditionally revolutionary, TAC does not want to overthrow the present system or be viewed as anti-government (Friedman et al 2004; 2006). In fact, they are sometimes attacked by critics and other social movements for working too much inside the government and bureaucratic framework, but this shows that TAC accepts the legitimacy of the new system and is trying to work within it (ibid).

Some of TAC’s greatest successes are the mother-to-child transmission prevention program, antiretroviral (ARV) treatment program, and the treatment literacy campaign (Tac.org.za). In 1999 they publicized the forty-thousand babies born to HIV positive mothers each year. This campaign allowed TAC to humiliate the manufacturer of AZTs, a drug that halves a baby’s chance of inheriting the virus, into lowering the price of the drug (Power). In 2001 TAC put pressure on pharmaceuticals to abandon court action that would have prevented the government from importing more affordable generic medicines (TAC 2001). Thanks to TAC’s work, in 2003 the government finally made a plan to roll-out ARVs to people with HIV/AIDS (TAC 2003, Friedman et al 2006). Despite the government giving in to TAC, and Mandela’s support of the movement, current ANC leadership still does not embrace the cause, and thus TAC continues to fight for people with HIV/AIDS (Friedman et al 2006).

In addition to their material successes, TAC’s principles have benefited the people involved with movement. One of the TAC’s greatest strengths is that the moral consensus of the people is a permanent and central part of the movement (Friedman et al 2006). Furthermore, TAC helps democracy because it enables citizens to participate democratically (ibid). The movement has also been successful at cooperating across race barriers and avoiding racial divisions (ibid). These successes within TAC have helped the movement to thrive and to preserve its reputation.

## **Methodology**

My main method of research was one-on-one interviews with individuals who are critical of the ANC. I supplemented these primary sources with secondary sources consisting of books, articles, and website information. Most but not all of the people I interviewed were activists before the democratic turnover. I interviewed people who are involved with a variety of organizations and occupations. My interviews were with eight individuals of different races, ages, and sexes. Five are male, three are female, five are African, two are Indian, one is White, and their ages range from late 20s to 80s. I tried to seek-out people with different political experiences, locations, and opinions. All of the people I interviewed were recommended to me by my advisor Richard Pithouse, the SIT: Reconciliation and Development Academic Coordinator John Daniel, or another person I interviewed. I was based in Durban for the duration of the ISP for monetary reasons, so my research was confined to people in the Durban area.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, each chosen by the individual I was interviewing. All of the people I interviewed were asked the same guiding questions (see appendix A), and I occasionally added questions for further clarification or when something they said stood out. While all of the same basic questions were asked, the order changed with each interview to follow the flow of the conversation. All of the interviews were tape recorded and I also took notes by hand, both of these resources were used for my interview write-ups.

One of the questions I asked in my interviews was, “what leaders and authors have inspired you, or helped you to understand South Africa?” The answers to this question dictated my reading list during the month I was conducting interviews and writing this paper. Though not all of the articles and books I read are referenced in this paper aside from when

they are mentioned in the interviews, they provided me with a framework to better understand the perspectives of the people I interviewed.

This paper is organized in a non-traditional sense in order to create a space for the voices of these eight individuals. While conducting my interviews I realized that the more I tried to analyze their words, by comparing, contrasting, and questioning, the more I would take away the potency of their voices. That is why each individual has their own space in this paper, to let them simply speak for themselves. My discussion and reflection at the end of the paper does not serve to summarize or conclude what people have said or my own opinions, for this would jeopardize the integrity of my research. I hope to engage with what has been said in a way that encourages others to find their voices, and make them heard.

### **Research Limitations**

This research project has two major limitations. One was that English was the second language of several of the people I interviewed, and though it was seldom an obvious limitation, this factor cannot be ignored. The second limitation is that I interviewed eight people in the Durban area, who by no means constitute a representative sampling of the nation of South Africa. They were all recommended to me by my advisor, my program's academic coordinator, or someone I interviewed. While I managed to achieve some artificial diversity by seeking people of different sexes, races, socio-economic statuses, and ages, these factors do not imply true diversity. Also, my interview with System Cele was rushed, due to an Abahlali meeting that started during the interview. I asked all of my interview questions, but there was pressure on both of us to be quick so we could attend the meeting.

## **They Forget Why They Got In**

### **Harriet Bolton interview 26 November 2007**

Harriet Bolton was born in the Transvaal, and her family moved a lot when she was growing up; her younger brother and two younger sisters were all born in different provinces. They eventually settled in Durban, and Harriet has lived in Durban most of her life. Harriet's mother was a housewife, who only taught her daughters to cook, set the table, arrange flowers, and keep the house tidy. On the other hand, her father was a shipwright and worked in construction. He was a great teacher who taught his children to lay bricks, mix cement, and put up wallpaper. Harriet also witnessed her father treat people of different races equally while she was growing up, though the significance of his actions did not strike her until later in life.

He was a rare man, I didn't think about it at the time, but I've a lot thought about it sense and wish I'd asked him. He employed Coloureds and Africans and some Whites, for the draw string and the brick laying, but his foreman was an African. And I did the wages for him, but I've only thought about it afterwards. I wonder how he got a Black man to be the foreman and he employed Coloureds and Whites and African laborers, and that man was the foreman. I've often wondered about it and how it was overlooked in those days, but they did. They fly the flag when they complete a house, when they put the roof on, they fly the flag, and then they used to have a little do. My mother used to bring meet, and my father had a portable braai, and the whole building force of eleven people, as well as us, and my father of course, all went to the braai. In those days you didn't really mix you know, so my father was obviously a very open-minded man. But you know you didn't think about it, you just accepted it. South Africa was terribly racist in those days because of the old government, the old nationalist government, that's why everyone was so welcome to the ANC.

Though, "trade unions were not supposed to be involved in politics, we're supposed to keep clear of politics," Harriet's introduction to politics and activism began when she started her first job.

I started work in 1944, business college sent me there and I worked for the printers union, the typographical union... Next door to us was the garment and furniture workers union, and I got to know the girls working there. Their secretary was away on active service so they said to me, the woman who was in charge of the office is now active secretary and she needs some help, so would I just come and do things like do the minutes for meetings and things,

which I'd been doing for the printers union anyway, and booking their hall because they hired their hall out. I went there and I did mainly the minutes of the meetings and the typing.

This job also had a major impact on Harriet's personal life.

I did that for about 3 years until the secretary came back and he was parted from his wife, she'd gone off with somebody else during the war evidently, and they have two girls, and I got to know him, and eventually in 1949 we married. I went on working, I worked all my married life even though I've got six children, and I had his two stepdaughters. Then my husband died, we hadn't been married all that long, my youngest child was two when my husband died.

Her husband's death was a major turning point in Harriet's involvement with the union.

Then the garment workers and furniture workers said would I like to go on working for them and be their secretary because I was just helping, I was the acting secretary while he was ill, because he was ill for a few months, and he had pancreatitis. So I did that, and I worked for them for about thirty odd years, and so eventually we made it into one national union, it was the Transvaal garment workers and the Cape garment workers and the Natal, the furniture workers, we made them into one national union, and all the clothing workers into one national union.

Creating a national union helped the workers to unite on a different level, and created a network with more power to challenge the Nationalist government to provide workers in South Africa with decent wages and working standards.

The Nationalist government required many stringent regulations for trade unions, but the workers were able to achieve a lot through this structure.

You were allowed to [have trade unions] but you were allowed to do it in certain areas and you had to negotiate. The employers had an association and the unions had the union, and you had to meet and you could negotiate wages, and then the government published them in a gazette, if they agreed to the wages. The clothing industry had very low wages, but then prices were much less and much cheaper. We negotiated every second year, and we made an agreement for two years, the government wouldn't publish one year. We made an agreement for two years, and sometimes three if it was fairly decent, and then we negotiated higher wages again and better conditions. We had a funeral benefit society, a free clinic for clothing workers, and we had the industrial council in our building, so when the workers registered they came straight over to us and we explained the union and what it was all about to them. They had to join the union before they could work in the industry. We had all that in our agreement that the employers could only employ people that belonged.

One of the union's major achievements was protecting the rights of African workers, who were not allowed to join the unions.

Africans couldn't belong to the unions in those days, so they only worked as tea makers and delivery people and so on. But we battled and battled until we eventually got them covered as well. There was just one factory... close to the native reserves and things, and they employed mainly African workers, but we made them pay the wages we negotiated. We insisted on that in an agreement with the employers, although the government wouldn't publish the African wages, they just published workers wages, you know machinists, ironers, cutters, and designers, they all were covered by our agreement, and whoever did those jobs had to be paid the wages we had laid down. It was always extended to [that factory], even though they had African machinists. Then later on when we managed, you know clothing workers were mainly Indian and Coloured, and they went into other things, like working in shops and so on, and then it was harder and harder to get workers, and then they started to take in African workers, but we made it a condition that they've got to be covered by our agreement, and then eventually we formed an African Union, and I must say Gatsha Buthelezi was wonderful in that, people have got a lot to say about him but he was very good. He came and addressed the Africans and told them to join the union, and said the union is good, and we would look after them, and they would be covered by our sick fund and clinic and all the rest of it, and they did. And we forced the government eventually to recognize them because Thompson and Savage and various other factories they couldn't find Indian and Coloured workers anymore, White workers had long gone out, they were maybe the cutters and designers, but they'd long left the industry. The Indians and the Coloureds were all beginning to go to other industries, all lucrative industries, or getting better education and going to work in other places, or serving apprenticeships.... The unions grew and grew and grew until, it was the new people who took over the union after I retired they didn't agree with putting a tariff on imported clothes, and all the rest, of course the industry's much diminished now, but it's still there.

The risks that the African workers took to be involved in the unions were especially inspiring to Harriet. She says, "There were a lot of activities, a lot of altercations. And the workers were very brave, the Africans. They didn't have much, and they were very brave." Due to the large amount of workers the union represented, they were able to put a lot of pressure on the government.

The trade unions put a lot of pressure on the Nationalist government, because of the numbers of workers and they had their voice. We had one huge meeting to negotiate our agreement, we never had it on a Saturday or a Sunday, we had it on a working day, and that was our protest. We had it at Currie's fountain and it was a massive meeting. Every single worker except

one small factory whose shop steward got the wrong end of the stick, they came on the wrong day, but they were just a small factory. The whole clothing industry was at the meeting and I think it shook the government to a certain extent, so they relaxed a little after that.

The union also fought to protect their industry from foreign competition.

When we were in the union movement we did have several meetings on a working day, complaining about the old government's oppressive attitude towards workers, and also about foreign companies.... They let foreigners into the clothing industry like Taiwanese and Chinese into the outside areas and they started clothing factories which were then a threat to our industry, very not good. But we harassed the government so they put a fee on imported clothes so they weren't a better price than our local clothes, just on a par, price wise, which saved the industry. But the latest clothing people said that wasn't necessary so now there's hardly any clothing industry here. The membership has fallen drastically.

Harriet's activism was not limited to her work in the union. She gives one small example of a friend's son, "When he was a little boy I used to take him, they're Indian people, I used to take him to the baths with my children, the paddling pool, and just put him in there, let him swim. They weren't allowed to swim in those days, the Indians weren't allowed in the paddling pool, but I let him. Nobody said anything because I sat there." After her husband died, Harriet was left to raise her six children on her own. Luckily she had help from, "Some of the boys that I worked with long ago from varsity came down, the late Rick Turner, he was assassinated, but he advised them to come down. They were studying psychology or labor relations or whatever, he said, 'go and help Mrs. Bolton,' and they did, they all helped me, but they were all banned at that time." These men included David Hemson, Mike Murphy, Halton Cheadle, Johnny Copelyn, and David Davies. They were each banned for five years, and came, "to observe the trade union and labor movement and the workers movement and they helped me a lot. Some of them stayed on after I left, Johnny Copelyn who was the secretary of the union for a bit."

One of the men, David Hemson, was actually banned to Harriet's house because he was using her address.

I was stuck with him. And then all the other banned people who weren't supposed to meet other banned people, they couldn't be with more than three people at a time, used to come and visit him there, and I used to be hysterical in case, we had locks and things put on the door, and they had to escape out the back in case the police came, because they used to check on him. They used to count the teacups to see how many people had been in the room, because they knew he was banned to my house. [They would check up on him] about once every two months or so. That was the old police, thank God when the ANC got it, oh I was so relieved when all that stuff went. It was so awful. And David Hemson, my children used to take him to the drive-in cinema, they used to put him in the boot of our car, and drive out, and they would let him out at the drive-in cinema and then smuggle him back in, because he wasn't supposed to leave the house. His parents used to come and see him there, and his brothers, and he was only supposed to have two visitors at a time, but I mean his parents and the brothers were two and two, they were accepted. Other banned people used to come and see him, my God, I used to really panic about it, but I had a good back door and side door put in so if the police came to the front they could run out the back and down the hill and into the main road at the bottom by the tennis courts. Or if the police came to the back they could come out the front, or otherwise they could hide in my bedroom under the beds. Quite a business."

Around the same time, Harriet's older children developed their own interest in politics.

They'd been to an illegal meeting at Currie's Fountain and the police arrested all the people leaving and charged them a 30 rand fine. But my one daughter had got out of the car as they were leaving, that's how the police managed to nab them. I was down at Port Elizabeth at a conference, but my children went to the meeting. She pushed and punched a policeman. They just said to her, 'please pay the 30 rand fine, it's very little.' The police came to our house, and she said, 'no, I want to say what I was doing and why.' Actually what she was doing is this police man was bending over a woman with his baton and she had this baby on her back, and she hadn't even been to the meeting, and my daughter pushed him and punched him, and she said, 'I want to go to the court and say what I was doing and why.' Anyway she felt quite justified, but then eventually after more than a year they didn't put the case down at all, didn't bring it to court, so my daughter then went to see the magistrate and said, 'I'm going overseas for a trip, I've got a return ticket, I'll show it to you, I'll give you the address where I'm staying in England, and my mother's got my address, and I can come back at any time that the case is set down.' She had no sooner gone than they set the case down and they issued a warrant for her arrest for not being there. So then I took all my children overseas, enough's enough.... One shot, we went in a ship, I sold my house that I had, and I took them all overseas.

At that time David was only two years into his five year banning to Harriet's house. She went to the police and said, "I'm selling my house, and what do I do with him? Do I sell him

as furniture and fittings with the house or what are you going to do with him?" The police rebanned him to his parents' house, and he eventually fled from there to Swaziland.

Harriet's late husband was from England, so all of her children had British passports. Yet Harriet was not a resident, and thus she was not allowed to work for the six years they were there.

I had to do gardens, picking apples and pruning trees, which the guy taught me on the apple farm to do, and harvesting potatoes and cabbages, and planting radishes and all sorts of things, lettuce, anyway I quite enjoyed that, it was quite fun, and then I came back here to retire. Well actually, after I had been there a few years, as I was leaving, the guy said to me, 'you know you can apply to live in England now.' I said, 'well, I don't want to now, when I needed to you wouldn't help me, I had a twelve year old child, and later on when I came to stay with my daughter, so now I'm going home.'

Rather than return to South Africa right away, Harriet went to Zimbabwe to stay with her eldest daughter. She had married a Zimbabwean who was exiled because he was working for their liberation movement, but when Zimbabwe was free the couple returned and took Harriet with them. Harriet lived in a little cottage and worked doing books for people.

When Zimbabwe became unbearable, Harriet returned to South Africa, and her daughter returned to England.

I came back here, and I applied for this [living at Benson Place] and I worked for the Chinese take away, just taking the orders, taking the money, cashing up at the end of the evening, and then they'd bring me home. But now my legs are so sore that I can't go sitting down and getting up and sitting down and going to the counter and coming back, and so I left in November, end of the year, last year. And I found other staff from here, because there's quite a lot of ladies who want part time jobs, so I found them people to work there, and quite a few of the ladies from here do one or two or three sessions, but she pays quite generously and they bring you home in the evening, and drop you at the gate, so that's quite nice.

Harriet was very excited for the 1994 elections, in fact both she and her eldest daughter traveled to South Africa to vote in the elections even though they were living in Zimbabwe at the time. Harriet still votes ANC, but does has been disappointed with the choices the party has been making.

They started off brilliantly I thought but they're just going the way of all governments now. For instance the wages that the people in parliament get, when you look at some of the workers wages, I mean alright I know you should get more when you're in parliament, and also the misuse of money to the local areas committees, you didn't ever know about that. We had area committees, but they never misused their money, they were responsible to the main people. Now the misuse of money, and there's just so many things wrong. They basically were a brilliant government when they got in, and a brilliant idea, but I think they've just gone the way of all flesh, slowly disintegrated. It you look at them at some of the meetings, I watch the parliamentary part of the television that they have every morning, they have half an hour or a quarter of an hour, and sometimes you see half of them sitting with their eyes closed, looking half asleep, and not paying attention, walking in and out or talking to each other, they're not involved enough I don't think.... The political thing that's sort of taken over which of course happens in governments. For instance, wanting to give us Zuma as the next president, God help us, the man has still got a place in criminal court. I supposed that happens in a lot of governments. They forget why they got in.

## **They Don't Even Know How It Would Feel To Live In a Shack** **System Cele interview 21 November 2007**

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

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

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

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

I see no action of development. I think they are too busy preparing for 2010, we will hear on the radio that the cement it poured and the stadium is not finished yet. They forgot about us. Even the people coming from the other countries, they won't show them here, they'll just show them inside the city where they will stay at hotels, they won't show them here because it will be embarrassing because they went to the other countries and said they are doing their job, they are taking care of the poor. ... The thing that's annoying us the most is that the people in government positions, they go to different countries saying they are going to deliver to our people, they are going to help us, they get the money and we do not know what they are doing with that money. They don't come back to us to give the report, how they are doing, what they

told the people from other countries what sort of solution they would be doing, you will see them in television and they won't even mention the names of the people living in the shacks, they will talk about the people living in the shack, they don't even know how it would feel to live in a shack. They talk about us, about our needs, but they're doing nothing for us. So that's why we're saying don't talk about us, talk to us, because we are the one who are suffering.

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

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

The members of Abahlali want the government to sit down and really listen to them, and on a regular basis. They began marching, "because the councilor didn't want to come to meetings with us." However the ANC seems to only care about shack dwellers at election time, and tends to bring small gifts to try to buy support.

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

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

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

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

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

## **Abahlali, They Are Speaking the Truth All the Time**

### **Lindelani (Mashumi) Figlan interview 15 November 2007**

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

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

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

Then one other day my auntie was working here in Durban, so my uncle just came, and he was sitting inside my father's room, they were just drinking alcohol, brandy. Then I come and I sit between my uncle's legs, and I noticed that they were planning to talk about this Mandela. I pretended like I feel sleepy, then I slept. So they talk freely about Mandela, now, telling each other all those things, and I was listening attentively. Then after that I woke up and I told my uncle that I want to go to the toilet. I go to the toilet, then after that I jump over the fence, went to one of my friends, and I started to tell him. I said, 'I heard my father talking about this Mandela.' And I told him about Mandela, all those things. So I get inspired, and the way my father was

talking to my uncle about Mandela, I was so inspired. Just because the way they were talking. And I used to open my eyes a little bit, and the way they were talking I noticed they didn't want anyone to come inside. They didn't know there was someone still listening to the things they were talking about.

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

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

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

I really believe in the principles of the ANC, but I don't believe in the rulers of the ANC, I think they are not following the principles of the ANC accordingly.... They promised many things, and our constitution, the constitution of the ANC, we used to read it and it's very fair to all the people. ... But after 1994 we noticed, the poors, that they're not really stuck on what the constitution said. So that is why the ANC, they're not really clear on their way, they were planning away from their constitution. Just because the only thing they do is to ignore their constitution.

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

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

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

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

While Mashumi participates in Abahlali's protests and "No Land, No House, No Vote" election boycott, he still likes to attend ANC meetings when he is home with his family at the Eastern Cape. Mashumi's mother was very supportive of his involvement with the ANC, "and still now, my mother, still likes the ANC too much. You can't stop her. And even if I tell her about Abahlali, she says, 'my child, don't forget the ANC.'" However the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal it is different. He expands, "Here, you don't feel like you are in the ANC meetings. And even if you put your own opinion, they listen to you differently, the way you talk. And after that, you notice that the way they answer your questions is a little bit unassertive. Just because our language is different, and they just listen to our language, they go, 'oh, just because you're Xhosa you think you're clever.'" Nevertheless, Mashumi maintains that the ANC has established the values to help the people, it's just a matter of following them. He says, "If they follow the principles of the ANC accordingly, the way it's written, the way they put it, and even those who died for it. If they can follow what the ANC was, I think it will be good, and they can fix the problem in the ANC. But if they don't want to follow the principles, they will not be able to change."

Abahlali was formed to make the voice of its members heard, in hopes that politicians will stick to the principles their party has established and start working to help the people.

While Mashumi was not at Abahlali's founding protest, he had previously discussed the need of a movement to unite and empower the people.

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

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

Abahlali operates with truth, which is a stark contrast to the lies of the ANC.

Mashumi explains, "The thing I like about Abahlali baseMjondolo is that they speak truth. If they don't know how to do something they say, 'No, we don't know how to this and this and this and this. Can you tell us what we can do?' That is what I like. They're transparent, and tell the truth, not to lie about it, just because I don't like the people who are lying." This truth is hard for the ANC leadership to handle, and why Abahlali is constantly threatened in hopes of keeping the people quiet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If our leaders, they can stop to be greedy, just because I think they are so greedy. They want to fulfill their needs, and are not there to fulfill the needs of the people, they are there to fulfill the needs of their family, their friends, cousins, and all those people. But if they want to take care of the people and

know that 'these people, they voted for us to be here, to do whatever they want us to do for them,' they can be good, and they achieve a lot and I think this country could be a better country.

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

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

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

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

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

Though Abahlali is working hard to challenge the government, and there are youth who are very instrumental in the movement, Mashumi is concerned about the younger generation. Part of this may be due to their selfishness, as he states, "most of the youngsters, for instance, they don't care about the politics, they feel like if we challenge a politician or whatever, your mind is not straight, just because you care about other people, you don't care about yourself.... The youngsters believe that if you have something, you must use it in your

own time, not to share it with other people.” It also seems that the youth respect authority more than their rights.

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

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

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

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

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

First of all he's not a greedy person. Secondly, whatever he's doing, he can feel about it. And he's always encouraging the people all the time, and the way he talks, he's not just talking anyhow to the people, he's always down

when he talks. You can't say, 'this is a leader.' You can say, 'this is a leader,' only when you see him talking. But when you walk with him, or do anything with him, he's an ordinary man, like everybody. ... Some other people they feel like they can go to town and stay in town, he always stays with the people. And he believes in what is known as humanity, he really believes in it.

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

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

## **You Cannot Think You Know What the People Want**

**Gary Govindsamy interview 20 November 2007**

Gary Govindsamy was born in Durban in 1957, where his family has lived since his ancestors came from India (De Vos). As he puts it, “I was born of humble parents. My father was a laborer in the sugar industry, and my mother was a housewife. So we were a family of seven brothers, six brothers and myself, and one sister.” While the education system was inferior, Gary attributes his decent schooling to the dedication of his parents, teachers, and community. He also augmented his learning by regularly reading the newspaper.

Of course we couldn't afford to buy the newspapers, but I would sit by the news vendor on the street corner and make sure I read the newspaper from beginning till the end. And at the end of my reading I made sure that the newspaper was folded back neatly so that the vendor could sell it. I used to do that every day without fail. And that's how, though I couldn't buy the newspaper, I insured that I got a fair amount of education about what was happening in the community.

By reading about labor unrests, SASOL, Mozambique, and youth going into exile, Gary began to understand the liberation struggle, become politicized, and develop an interest to learn more. School was another site where he became further conscious of the struggle and was able to debate issues.

It was a question about being aware and to a large extent supporting the struggle against the White system and apartheid. Of course you couldn't join any organization, but you could vent your feelings and speak about things and argue with your fellow pupil at school, and talk to some of the teachers who were a bit inclined to understand what was happening.

Gary did matric part time, and left school in 1976 when he became politicized and part of the liberation struggle. His activism was very low profile, mostly working to conscientize people.

Gary's family was not supportive of the liberation struggle (De Vos) . His father was a National Party supporter because he believed that if the White man was providing food and shelter, he should not fight against them. Gary's mother and most of his siblings remained

apolitical – they were informed but not particularly interested. Gary and his eldest brother were the only people in the family to join the struggle, and this often bothered the rest of the family.

Gary's eldest brother and his brother's wife were the first Indian victims to be killed in an MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe, translated "Spear of the Nation", the military wing of the ANC) attack, and the first MK victims in Durban regardless of race (De Vos). Though they were not the intended targets, the ANC has never come forward to claim responsibility for the tragedy, apologize, or explain what went so horribly wrong. Despite Gary's disappointment with the ANC, he remained politically active. Gary still supports the ANC today while maintaining a critical view, and he works for SABC News in Durban.

When analyzing the present state of South Africa, fairness must be exercised and existing structures, doctrines, leaders, and the quality of life of ordinary people must be taken into consideration.

I think many people understand that this is just 13 years into democracy, and 13 years is still a short time for them to get everything that they want to do to rebuild the country. But fortunately in South Africa it is not a situation like what happened in say Mozambique or India where lots of the infrastructure was destroyed. Here the liberation struggle wasn't there to blow up parliament, or to blow up the streets and blow up buildings to such a degree that we won't have a proper infrastructure when we've got liberation. Based on that, we haven't destroyed much of what we have, and we're using that as a base. There's a great deal to be done, and I think people appreciate that and understand that. But that liberation is taking a long time to come after the liberation, where people by now should be sitting back and enjoying the fruits of the liberation. The whole question of pension, the whole question of a better standard of education, the whole question of better housing, and all that's written in the Freedom Charter, is not being adhered to. And that is the problem. The Freedom Charter was supposed to have been the ideal document which would have seen people get a better life. But in most instances that document, which was adopted by everybody, is just a piece of paper thrown aside. I think it's gonna take a little while more, when the liberators are educated into understanding that they have much more of a role to play than just lining their own pockets. Because the people out there, the ordinary people out there, want to see something in their homes, they want to see something in their pockets, they want to live a decent life before they die.

When assessing the successes and failures of the ANC, Gary looks at the country, leadership, and party from various perspectives.

You cannot discount the fact that we've gone a long way in 13 years. The whole world is looking towards South Africa, like they did before as well, towards coming here and investing, there's lots of potential in the country, and the potential is there. And the ANC has done a great deal in getting investment in this country. That is the biggest factor for any country to survive. In terms of the constitution we've got the best constitution in the world. But how the constitution protects our own people is a factor to debate. We've gone a great deal forward in many aspects, but we need to relook at what we're doing and see how the ordinary people can benefit from that pie in the sky. In terms of Africa and Southern Africa, the president is doing a fantastic job at trying to stabilize the destabilized sub-Saharan Africa so that everybody below the equator can live a proper life. People are flocking to South Africa because they believe there is gold on the streets of South Africa. And as White countries have destabilized Africa for their diamonds and gold and all that goes with it, and the wars need to be stopped in sub-Saharan Africa, so the entire sub-Saharan Africa doesn't converge into South Africa and create problems here. And the president is doing a fantastic job in that. But also the president needs to see what is happening within his own backyard to insure that crime is curtailed and people are living a life where there is security and comfort for all; the basics of the Freedom Charter.

Essentially, the ANC has been successful at gaining foreign investment to boost the national economy, creating a stellar constitution, and fostering relationships with other countries in Southern Africa. Yet the economic status of the poor, the implementation of the constitution, and the government's relationship with ordinary citizens are all in need of attention.

Though the ANC's management has not been perfect, their history as a liberation movement, success in pushing other groups to the fringes and assuming their ideals and members, and the divided status of the country has secured the party's supermajority in government.

The ANC will be in power for a long time. As somebody said the other day, 'The ANC will be in power until Jesus Christ returns.' It is because of the situation. The great majority of people in the country have been politicized into believing that the ANC will liberate them. Of course there were other groups as well, but those groups have been marginalized, and they have died a natural death, from the Black Consciousness Movement, to the Pan African Congress, the Unity Movement, and those kinds of organizations. So they've all been usurped into this whole ideology and principles and policies of the ANC, which encapsulated all the ideologies and all the policies and all the

philosophies of the other organizations. The whole question of the government of national unity was so carefully planned and organized and put into practice, that it destroyed other ideologies of Black people. So the ANC will stay in power for a long time. Unless there's a coalition between more than two or three parties from the different spectra, the ANC will be in power for a long time. And for that coalition to come into being, it would be a lot of frustrating, and there would be lots of killings and lots of political assassinations, that is a problem.

The end of ANC rule will not come soon or without great violence.

The changes that are necessary for South Africa rely on transforming the mindsets of the ANC and also the people. Gary states, "The ANC was indeed a liberalization organization, and in terms of the liberation movement they had certain policies and ideologies and philosophies to follow. And they did what they did because they had to do it. Then there comes a time when the ANC and other political parties have achieved what they wanted to achieve." Apartheid has ended, and that means attitudes and actions need to be modified to work with the "Rainbow Nation".

Now that they've achieved what they wanted to achieve, they've got to politicize the people in a different form, in getting them to understand that the liberation, and lots of people died in the liberation struggle, and lots of people lost a lot in the liberation struggle. And now we need to go forward in accepting that we need to build a new South Africa. In the beginning it was a situation of we've got the liberation and, 'I don't want to speak with your sister because she's White, but I want to live the same kind of life that other people are living based on equality and dignity. I don't want to swim in your swimming pool, I don't want to live in your area, I want to live amongst my own people, we have our own culture. But treat us in the same fashion that you treat the other people. Give us the kind of education that we deserve.'

If this mindset of separate but equal persists, people will obviously remain divided. As the nation remains disconnected, disparities will increase, and living conditions for the poor will remain inferior.

The ANC will control South Africa for a long time, unless there's a dramatic shift in peoples thinking. And the poors are going to stay poor, and the rich are going to be rich, and if you've got the means to invest and to make that bold move, then you're going to be better off than most people. Even if we come to the situation where the rand has plummeted so much, and people have money stashed in overseas banks, they can take the next plane and leave, while the ordinary people will have to stay and bear the brunt and live out of

the land, if they can.... It's a question to a large degree of dog eat dog, it's a question of survival of the fittest, survival of the street talkers, and now money will go where the money is. The people who've got money will be able to invest, to reap the benefits of that, and they're reaping billions, and that money is not going to the right sources, it's going into the Swiss banks, it's going into peoples bank accounts, and nothing is going back to the people.

This situation is unfortunate because it benefits the elites who already have so much, and keeps everything from the poor who have nothing.

Unless major changes are made to unite and motivate the people, South Africans are entering a stage of political apathy.

There's definitely going to be a strict decline in the number of people who are going to the polls because people are fed up of going to the polls every so often. We have elections every little while, and the country has become so politicized that people are fed up. The ordinary folk don't want to go and spend the Wednesdays that they're supposed vote, which is normally a public holiday, to go and stand in long queues and vote anymore. They had that novelty in 1994, they did that for a few other municipal elections, and they're fed up. They want to go sit and have a braai, they want to have a beer, and spend time with their family, spend time at the beach. They're fed up with this kind of promises being made by politicians and no delivery. They don't get anything in return. So they'd rather pay their taxes, they'd rather pay their rates, and fight among themselves in their own little arguments to say, 'I don't get this, I don't get that, our street lights are bad.' Because people are indeed fed up. It is sad, but I think they've been politicized to a large degree in the beginning, and since 1994 there isn't this enthusiasm anymore. You cannot deny that almost every being, whether they were in church organizations, or religious organizations, or educational institutions, labor organizations, political organizations, they did something in terms of trying to either protect apartheid, or bring about the liberation of people.

Since every individual was involved with the defense or demise of the apartheid state, they were invested in the country of South Africa. For the supporters of the old regime, there was an immediate disappointment. Gary says, "People lost a great deal when we had liberation, White people lost a great deal. And they felt betrayed by the old order.... Even that White soldier who protected the border did something for his own people against what he believed were terrorists." They didn't think there would ever be a Black government, so they hope and interest in the political situation as soon as the ANC rose to power. But this same disillusionment has happened for people who fought apartheid and dreamed of a truly equal

South Africa. Gary adds, “And Black people also, even if they carried a placard one day in their life, they made a contribution. Even if they voiced their opinions about not wanting to pay their electricity bills in protest, they did something for the struggle.... So people are frustrated, but they believe there is some hope that one day they will have a better life.” Those who were most invested in the future of South Africa may have had the hardest time coping with what the nation has become, which has caused many of the country’s best and brightest to become so disheartened.

Lots of activists have disappeared from the scene. Many of them died as paupers after sacrificing a great deal for the liberation struggle. Many people have given up everything they had to insure that we reached 1994. I know of very senior people who had professions, and who gave up everything to the struggle, and they ended up as paupers. Lots of young activists also, but if you were in the right place at the right time you’re okay. But other people I know of as well who were dissatisfied with the way the new government was conducting themselves, and they felt that the government was doing a disservice to many people. Many people have felt marginalized – politicians, communities, races – they felt marginalized by the new situation. They felt they’re not being given their dues for their role in the liberation struggle. And that is why they want to stay as far away from politics as they possibly can. I know of many people who also emigrated, but they were part of the struggle, they were liberators to the bone. Needn’t be taking up arms, but their life was inclined towards bring about a new order, and they become disillusioned. I think many people in the hierarchy of the liberation movements stepped out because they couldn’t handle what they were seeing. They couldn’t handle that we have opportunists and cut-throats within the organization who are bent on treating their pockets and not giving back to the poor. As somebody said, ‘you take a Black man, or a kaffir (as they will say), give him a pinstripe suit, give him a cell phone, give him a house in a White area, give him an office, and you’ve got a boy, a boy who will dance to your tune.’

With so many liberation and political leaders fleeing the scene, those who remain must work even harder towards changing the nation.

Gary sees corrupt leadership as a major factor in South Africa’s current problems. The people in charge are in positions with power and responsibilities that were previously exclusive to Whites, and this novelty has created troubles.

To a large extent it’s a dream. You’ve taken people and you’ve put them in new positions in the new system, some of which don’t know what’s happening, don’t know what to do in that position. And many of them are

trying to help but don't have the means, don't have the capacity. They're handling money which they've never seen before, they've never had an idea that they were going to handle such portfolios and such large amounts of money. Our expectations are too much, so they cannot deliver, there's a great deal of theft from within organizations, in government and liberators are now starting to line their pockets. So many of them have forgotten why they went into the struggle and why they fought a war. And it's such that the war has not been won for some people, the ordinary people. People are disillusioned to a large degree because our very own liberators are now oppressing us. And that is a sad thing. I don't say that everybody in the armed struggle or in the liberation struggle are doing that. But we have a serious problem in that we cannot deliver.

Political leaders must remember where they came from, the struggle that brought them to where they are now, and focus on improving the lives of other people, not their own.

If somebody in the leadership says, 'I didn't join the struggle to be poor,' it says a great deal about their commitment and what they fought for, and their ideologies. I am concerned that that is the situation. And I'm saying again that the fight for liberation is not over. We've got another fight at the moment where we need to fight the liberators. The problem is that people are treating their pockets, and they can't allow that to happen. Understandably in any society which has just been liberated we will have a situation like that. It happened all over, where colonialists insured that they will destroy everything before they give the natives their liberty. It happened in India, it happened throughout Africa, it happened in America, it happened anywhere where the natives were fighting a war of oppression and a war for their own land. And when the colonialists give back the land, then they destroy everything. And then you've got to start building from the beginning again. Understandably, people will see things for the first time and they will take it for themselves. It is natural, and it's human, but then also we have people who should think about why they joined the struggle in the first place. And when they stood on platforms and they made those revolutionary speeches, it should be until death. But that is not what has happened in a great deal of Africa, in Asia, and other parts of the world.

Politicians must strive to live up to the standards they once judged the old regime against, and stick to their ethics when they are tempted by their new access to wealth.

For South Africa to improve, the government, ANC, or people must change. Due to the amount of power and support the ANC has accumulated, it is unlikely that another party will emerge with majority support in the near future. Gary says that it is fine for the ANC to maintain their rule, so long as the party protects rights and begins to listen to the people:

The whole question of expression and freedom of speech exists. But we have a one party state, without doubt it's a one party state, and that is what they want. To a certain degree I agree with it, because only the ANC will appreciate what the people want and what the people deserve. They're supposed so have that as a basis to ensure that everybody gets what is enshrined in the Freedom Charter. If the DA party wins an election we're going to go back to square one. And the kind of thinking in the DA is very much 'fight Black', not 'fight back'. They will resort to the same tactics that the previous government used to insure that they 'fight Black'. This is the problem, so the ANC should be inclined towards insuring that the people get what they want first.

If a viable opposition party does emerge, Gary will not be against it, but cautions that they too must put unity and participation first. He continues, "I'm not saying that there shouldn't be an opposition, but the opposition has to work with what Mandela had in mind all the time, a government of national unity, so that everybody can share and participate in the government of the day." The key to addressing South African's problems is through exactly what the liberation struggle was fighting for: Democracy. If the government ignores the people, or the people stop trying to make the ANC listen to their needs, nothing will improve.

There has to be consultation. As activists in the old days we consulted with the people. We always had meetings. People's concerns change all the time, people's wants change all the time, and if you don't talk to your people, if you don't talk to your voters, you're not going to know what they want. You're not going to know what they have in mind. Granted, the powers that be have the means to make those changes, they have the powers to make them, but there has to be consultation. We cannot imagine what they want, we cannot dream about what they want, they must tell you what they want.

Listening to the people is an ongoing process, and while ideologies can offer some guiding light, they cannot lead the way.

This whole question of socialism being an ideology that is the ideal. It's a question of people, we always have to have people first. You can talk about Leninism, you can talk about Marxism, you can talk about Maoism, you can talk about Gandhism, you can talk about Mandelism, but we have a unique country. And because of its uniqueness in terms of its people, in terms of the country, in terms of the infrastructure, in terms of the geography, we need to take issues up based on what we see with the people. That's why I'm saying without consultation with the people, you cannot go forward. You cannot think you know what the people want.

## **They Ignore Our Struggle**

### **Louisa Motha interview 21 November 2007**

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

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

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

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

Conditions for people who live in shacks have not improved since the country became a democracy, and globalization is often blamed for keeping the poor impoverished. Louisa proclaims, "South Africa's very bad. The people from outside they come in here and

make the business. The people from here they're not making the business, and people from outside they're carrying on the business on our land. There's nothing for us." Yet she is convinced that the South African government cannot continue to operate this way, and that, "When government changes their plans then I think we will have more jobs."

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

Come and see what's happening. You can say you know I'm hungry, but you never come in my house and see if I've got food or not. At the end of the day you just go to the parliament and shout, 'my people are full,' but you never see that thing. You're not coming to see the people and connecting with the people. The government does not mind about us, because for so many years we're just shouting, and nothing. We haven't got houses, we're shouting for houses, even my mother today is passing away from the shacks. Myself too I will pass away from the shacks, even my children.... They're just saying everything's nice, but at the end of the day we know it's a lie.

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

Abahlali's strength comes from their apolitical position and conviction to speak out against the ANC without becoming a political party. Louisa explains, "We're not involved

with the politics, we're just asking our demand from the government, that's it." By maintaining their autonomy from political baggage, Abahlali's voice can be heard. She continues, "We're trying to make something because we're talking. They must listen to us, we mustn't listen to them. They ignore our struggle. We came from the shacks, we know this life, we carry on with this life, but something for us needs to change. They mustn't expect to just get the vote and go away." Abahlali's *No Land, No House, No Vote* election boycott has helped to prove this point. Louisa, like the majority of people involved in Abahlali, voted ANC before participating in this boycott. She clarifies, "We are ANC supporters. But they must change the conditions; they don't know what we want.... These workers for government, they do everything nice but they're not doing nice things."

## **The ANC is Failing to Hear the Multiplicity of Voices**

### **Kiru Naidoo interview November 20 2007**

Kiru Naidoo was born in 1968 and grew up in Chatsworth region of Durban. His first political conscientization took place at home.

My father was very politically conscious if not politically active, because in the 60s and 70s there was very much a political vacuum from the country. My father's circuit were people in the Black Consciousness Movement. ... The most vocal component in Durban. So our house in Chatsworth was a meeting point for different community activists and so on. So that kind of consciousness was in there.

At a young age Kiru was aware that things were not right in South Africa, and in order to create change, one must take a stand.

If I were to recount a political act, my very first political act, I must have been in grade 4, 10 years old, and I was a member of the boy scouts. We were required to sing the national anthem which was "Die Stem" in the school assembly. And I remember that time, that was the first time I was called up to do that as part of the boy scouts, and I knew that this was not the song for us to sing. And I refused to sing it, and was reprimanded for that. So when I think about what's a conscious political act, as a child even, I knew that with my father's political education we had at home, that was not the done thing.

Growing up in the active community of Chatsworth with family members that were involved really inspired Kiru.

We're talking about the early 80s, Chatsworth was very very active. Everything from women's groups to youth organizations to trade unions. My aunts were all very active in the trade union movement, the clothing workers union. If not in the leadership, certainly as very radical rank and file members. So there was a steady diet of politics at home. I think in some ways this was unusual. The Indian community, especially in Chatsworth and Phoenix, had tended to be on the fringes, and with this upsurge of community organizations, and this almost political wildfire in the early 80s, Chatsworth was very much at the forefront of that.... The communities weren't always of one mind, because I think apartheid was very effective in its divide and rule within principally the Indian community.

Kiru's willingness to fight for what he believed in, albeit on a small scale, continued as time went on.

They had this awful prefect system here and I was the head boy at the school ... I remember in my final year of high school we were given these badges to put on of the South African flag at the time. I went so far as to threaten the

head girl not to wear that badge. I remember going to the headmaster and saying, 'send this back to Pretoria, we refuse to wear it.' ... Now those may not seem like anything radical to do, but in the context of a very authoritarian system, to be able to say and behave in that way could have been very dangerous. But those were things that I thought we had to do. There was absolutely no way we could have felt proud to wear any apartheid symbols or work in any apartheid structures.

Kiru had great conviction, and hoped to become further involved in the liberation struggle.

One of the great regrets that I look back on is that I really wish that I was more active than I was. In 1985, which was my matric year, I went with my father to Botswana. It was a happy accident almost, I'd won a trip in some competition. The idea that had always been nagging me was that if one wanted to do anything useful for the country, one had to go into exile. And we went into Gaborone in Botswana in January of 1985, and met with one of my father's friends there, one of his old friends from here who had gone into exile. And you know my father passed away earlier this year, but bless his soul even if he didn't like the things that we were thinking about, he was supportive. He said, 'I'll come with you. ... Let's go and chat with this friend of mine.' And I remember it was a store, very much like one of those curious shops in Gaborone in Botswana, and my father's friend said to me, 'What? You know you just turned 17 and you want to come here? You are of no use to us. Without an education, without any skills and so on, you are wasted here.' I remember he said to me, 'You don't even know how to hold a gun, how are you going to be useful to us? What I want you to do is go back home, go and finish school, and finish university, and if we are not liberated by then, then come back.' That trip was ostensibly our holiday, but that was the highlight in many ways. And rather grudgingly I came back, and I went to University, at Durban Westville.

Though Kiru was eager to battle for liberation, he remained in South Africa and put his education first. Yet he could not ignore the feeling that he could be more instrumental in the struggle. During his first year at UDW:

I had heard of the man who was the recruiter for MK on the campus, and went to see him in his laboratory, he was a professor of zoology. And I went to see him and he turned me away, because he was also very afraid because he didn't know how I had learned about him, and he was afraid that I had been put up by somebody to come and ferret it out. So he wasn't very helpful at all, and I think with good reason because the movement was riddled with spies and things at the time.

Though Kiru could not participate to the extent that he hoped, he enjoyed the environment at UDW.

University life was very active, and the level of politicization at Durban Westville I think was unprecedented. That university I think would rank uppermost among the university campuses that were the forefront of the liberation movement. ... My university years were characterized by university boycotts and campaigns and resistance. Every time the apartheid state wagged its fist in the country's face, the students were always the first to react. So it was a very active environment.

Kiru then channeled his enthusiasm for activism into campus organizations, which were associated with the liberation struggle but still allowed to operate.

We formed the National Political Science Students Congress, and then I was a member of SASCO [South African Students Congress], AZASCO [Azanian Student Convention], the Progressive Youth Congress, all of which were arms of the ANC. And it's a great regret of mine that I wish I had assumed more aggressive roles, particularly leadership, but then when I look back on my conduct even over the last 20 years or so, I have tended to work more actively in the background, even now I'm in a half dozen different organizations and I feel that one can be every bit as active as a backroom boy.

The political environment at UDW was vibrant and inclusive. The amount and variety of people involved were unusual at a University, and Kiru wishes this had been better documented.

And I was active in the trade unions on the campus, and this is the part I wish was better recorded in the history because in spite of their being so many scholars and researchers at the University, very little seemed to have been written about people who would ordinarily be considered very conservative in the bureaucracy and in faculty in things, but very much in the forefront of anti-apartheid resistance. I can recall the protests we organized in the late 80s marching through the streets of Durban, literally hundreds of thousands of people. Forcing our way onto the white beaches because the beaches were segregated, forcing our way into hospitals and demanding treatment, and things like that. Everybody from cleaners to senior professors were involved, and the union at the University which is still in existence is called COMSA [Combined Staff Association], and I think that organization also has a very proud role in the liberation history of the country.

While he was at University, Kiru became more involved in the Chatsworth community as well.

The way the resistance to apartheid was organized was that you needed to have a whole variety of organizations that in some ways were fronts for the ANC, but also in other ways very legitimate community organizations that represented community interests. For instance, I worked in the Woodview Civic Association, I served on their executive also, and we took up day to day

community issues, everything from bus shelters to bus fares and all those things. But there was always an overt political agenda.

Conscientization, experiences, and education all shape the way a person understands the world. Struggles in other developing countries, socialist literature, and thinkers in South Africa were all instrumental in developing Kiru's views.

We were brought up on a steady diet of Marxism and Leninism, and now a days I think it'd be more correct to say that I'm a socialist, albeit champagne socialist, though if I was so true to my credo we wouldn't be drinking coffee at the Hilton. I think that Marx in the main, and I've also been very inspired by Julius Nyerere and Ujamaa socialism. I think we can draw a lot of lessons from the Latin American freedom struggles, as a young student I was very taken by the work of Paulo Freire and his work in Brazil in the favelas there. Surely enough I was also inspired by the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet who won the Nobel prize in 1913. I think that from within South Africa, thinkers like Robert Sobukwe, and the PAC, and Steve Biko were very profound in my opinion. Strangely enough I only read Nelson Mandela as an adult. Even though his book *Long Walk to Freedom* was already published in the 1960s sometime, it was banned here and we didn't have easy access to it. That's the kind of broad spectrum in terms of thinkers. Uppermost in it was certainly Marx, because I don't think anybody has explained the human condition as strikingly and accurately as Marx did, and it still remains very relevant."

This balance of local and international perspectives, coupled with a concern for the welfare of all humans, has allowed Kiru to celebrate the successes of the ANC while maintaining a balanced and judicious perspective.

Overall, Kiru thinks that the ANC has done a good job in government in a variety of ways.

I'm just speaking a bit more forthrightly to you here, because as a researcher, and sometimes teacher at university and so on, I have to be more circumspect about my personal political views, and especially when I've taught I've tried to conceal that under the veil of objectivity as much as I could. But the reality has always been that the ANC has always been the leading force in the liberation movement. This was a struggle about choices. And I'm very pleased that my father, I, my mother, and so on already made the right choice about being supportive of the ANC. But that said, that doesn't mean that we're not critical. I think that if there were to be a report card on the ANC, I think that the ANC has done superbly well in government. Inheriting a country that was on the brink of civil war, inheriting a social and economic system that was as decrepit as you could imagine, millions of people without homes, access to drinking water, access to food, and other social services, I

think the ANC has done magnificently in that regard. In terms of governance I think that as a political liberation movement, the ANC has settled very comfortably into business of governance. It's amazing that these were former guerillas and people who had been in exile for 30 or 40 years, could just come in and assume the reigns of a very complex country as competently as the ANC has done. I think a good deal of that is credit to the depth and the breadth of talent within the ANC, and also the enormous influence that Nelson Mandela has had in guiding and channeling the thinking of the ANC. Not always the sort of thinking that in hindsight we would be very happy with, because some of the magnanimity with which Nelson Mandela approached national reconciliation and so on, may not sit very easily with a lot of people. Especially those who had the tragedy of serving time on Robben Island, who had been really messed up in detention.

From Kiru's perspective, the Indian community has been treated well by the ANC.

I think that as a proportion of the South African population, I think people from within the Indian community were by far, person for person, the largest group within the liberation movement. So I think the Indian community had a very proud role in support of national liberation, even though there were large numbers from within its ranks which also collaborated with the colonial and Apartheid states. I think that the ANC has been very generous to the Indian community, in that sense that many people from within this community feature prominently in its leadership, feature prominently in senior positions in state and civil society and business. There's often the charge that Indians have been marginalized by the democratic state, I doubt that a great deal. I consider myself a beneficiary of affirmative action. Were it not for the ANC in power, the sort of career trajectory that I've had would certainly not have been possible. So I think that what the ANC has done is open up spaces in state and civil society for the broadest section of the country's people. And that I think is a very valuable insight when we measure the value of national liberation.

In many ways the ANC has done well for the country, and particularly so for the Indian community that was so instrumental in the liberation movement's rise to power.

Though Kiru is grateful for the ANC's successes, he is aware of how his analysis of the organization has changed over time.

My own thinking has evolved with the evolution of the ANC. Ideologically and spiritually, from the very earliest days, my thinking has always been inline with that of the ANC. And this is in spite of the fact that I think my formative political influences were in the Black Consciousness Movement, which thinking was led by Steve Biko, but after the murder of Steve Biko and the constraints placed on the Black Consciousness Movement and AZAPO, that vacuum that developed after 78, led many people to naturally migrate to the ANC. ... It was a natural migration that the ANC was the flagship of the South African liberation.

By encompassing other movements and modes of thought, the ANC has successfully gained support, and shut down voices of opposition. This is likely to allow the ruling party to stay in power for decades to come.

The ANC has been remarkable in the sense that it has steadily increased its share of the national vote, since the liberation election in 1994. Every election since, both in terms of the number of votes cast for it, and the control it has over provincial legislatures all the way down to local government, this has been steadily increased. In my mind that's really uncanny, but also thinking as a political scientist I think that the expectation would have been that its support base would have dwindled. My feeling is that the ANC will solidly in power for at least the next twenty years. And the comparative cases with this, the Tanganyika African National Union in Tanzania that stayed in power for almost four decades, the Indian National Congress in India as the party that won liberation from colonialism stayed in power for thirty odd years, the Kenya African National Union had a very similar trajectory. So I think the ANC enjoys the kind of popularity that one could not have predicted fifteen years ago. And the ANC is sometimes described as a broad church, that is simultaneously right, left, and center. I think it's a good description in that it's closed down the spaces for everybody from the Pan African Congress, to the IFP, to the conservative party, and just embraced everybody. I think it's a very astute political strategy for the party, whether this is healthy for democracy and the country as a whole, I'm skeptical. I think it's killing off a diversity of ideological opinion.

By overwhelming the political environment and pushing opposition parties to the periphery, the ANC has secured their position in power, for better or worse.

The closing of space for other voices has not been limited to party politics, it has become an issue in civil society as well.

I think the ANC has effectively demobilized and decimated civil society. Now that's strong language and I'm happy to say it in that way, because I think that what the government did was to poach the best and the brightest leaders from civil society movements into government and its apparatus. So the effect of that has been that many organizations simply collapsed. The flip side of that argument is that these organizations existed to serve the cause of national liberation. And once national liberation had been won, then their *raison d'être* had passed. I think in many ways, a stronger civil society would have contributed to much sounder governance and service delivery. And I'm still optimistic that the ANC will create the spaces for our civil society to flourish.

An example that has provided Kiru with this hope that the ANC will foster the space for civil society is the Conflict and Governance Facility (CAGE).

This is an ostensibly civil society organization, but it's funded through the national treasury, doing research and setting up structures in community and things, which ordinarily should not be the business of government. And government is doing this, funding it but not interfering in how it operated, not setting the agenda for research and the like. I feel very pleased to see that, because these were university professors, who given their positions within universities would have been very happy to be critical of government, but they were people saying, 'the state has put money in this, but we have not been told what may or may not research, what we may or may not write.' ... So there was one example I saw of something being promoted where credible research is being done and a civil society organization is developing out of it.

These relationships and creation of space should extend to other realms of civil society as well, for the government can learn much from grassroots movements. Kiru continues, "I think that state departments like Health, Social Services, Education and so on would benefit from closer associations with civic movements, students' movements, women's movements, because often these bodies are the ones who have their ears to the ground." By working with civil society, the ANC can begin to understand what the people want, and engage with an array of opinions about how to improve this country.

I think in many ways the ANC is failing to hear the multiplicity of voices. There is that one body of psycho fans who will trumpet anything the ANC says. Then there's a whole body of people who are quite tuned out. And then there's a body which, I've written something where I described them as 'serial critics', they are constantly bashing everything that the state puts forward. I think that that's as destructive as the psycho fans. Very often the ANC is failing to hear this multiplicity of voices. Civil society is a very useful sounding board for government policy, and with the upcoming ANC conference I'm pleased that a lot of the policy documents through SANGOCO [South African NGO Coalition], the civic movement structures, have been fed through the local community. But whether or not those views get fed up the system, I'm skeptical but I'd like to be optimistic.

He concludes this thought simply, "I think that government tends to be very defensive, and it need not be that way. There is enough room and space for both government and civil society to flourish. I think government would be enriched if it worked more closely with civil society."

The youth of South Africa are no longer as involved in politics as their parents generation was. Kiru again sees both the positives and negatives of this situation:

It's a great lament that young people are not in the political mainstream. And depending on where you stand on it, it may not be necessarily a bad thing. I have a 17 year old son, whose pretty politically conscious, and I have a 10 year old, and every time I bring up these issues about colonialism and apartheid they'll say to me, 'that was then, why don't you move on?' I've written about this generation as the 'born frees', and being born free they need not have the hang-ups of my generation or the generations before. So the fact that they're not actively engaged in things may suggest that this is the generation that's going to build the country into the future, and they don't carry with them the baggage that the rest of us do. And in many ways born free is that they're born without sin, and so they don't have to have the sins of their fathers. So in that sense there's a clean slate for the youth. But I have my skepticism about that, because we're not yet on an even keel in the country. The disparities in terms of access and income and opportunity, well if one can state it between Black and White, are still quite vicious. The youth in my mind, and I say this reservedly, are marginalized in the sense that not everybody has equal access for opportunities like education and the like. Unless there is active engagement, campaigning, involvement in youth structures, involvement in civic structures, that voice of the youth might never be heard. What we've seen is a very uncomfortable thing to be seen, is that youth take to the streets when they're unhappy with the marking of their exams or burden down schools or classrooms, or harassing teachers, often sort of violent harassment of teachers. Now when you have active student structures these are breeding grounds for these sorts of things, so I think especially in a country with a history like ours, I think it's important that we have organized and disciplined structures for which these needs and demands and grievances can be voiced.

These structures are things that can the state can promote, like the Umsobomvu Youth Fund, which helps young people start their own businesses. Kiru's older son has accessed the fund's website, and with the help of the government received start-up funding to create his own advertising business. This is great, yet Kiru's son is in an upper middle class family with the means to get him connected to such resources. Kiru explains, "So the fund is geared towards helping the poorest of the poor, but often the poorest of the poor don't get access to it because they don't have the commercial and intellectual wherewithal to tap those things." The target of these government funds needs to be on helping the really poor youth. By working to help the impoverished youth create their own job opportunities, the government

can begin to fix South Africa's unemployment problem. Thus far, the ANC has done little to create job opportunities for those who need them.

I think that their record has been plain atrocious, if I had to be really vicious about it, I think it's just been creating jobs for friends rather than meeting the agenda of national priorities related to the youth. So you have CEOs on massive salaries, and whether the job is being done on the ground is quite another thing. So I think that if the Youth commission, Umsobomvu Youth Fund, and so on were close enough on the ground, then they will have an impact.

Working from the ground up, rather than the current top down model, will give youth the tools to improve their own lives.

The social networks and structures necessary to reach and empower the people on a ground level are in place, the ANC just needs to utilize them.

I think that with a nation given our particular history, especially the resistance history, people will be generally receptive to being involved; you've just got to create the opportunities. So if for instance a church were told, 'you are doing good work in setting up vegetable gardens, and the state is prepared to put some money into this thing,' that would be a way of people doing things for themselves. Churches and other religious organizations, often founded in very poor communities that don't have the resources. But what they have is the legitimate structures, and authority structures and credible structures, that the state should feel confident to put money into. We have a very wealthy country, we have an amazingly wealthy country, and I think that we really ought to be putting those resources to better use through the civic structures, like religious and other structures.

The networks are there, the ANC just needs to use them so that it can move the country forward by engaging the youth and civil society.

## **It Doesn't Feel Liberating; You Don't Get the Sense of Freedom** **David Ntseng interview 28 November 2007**

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

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

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

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

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

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

I got in as a researcher. It was after the elections, and already they new ANC led government was looking at this whole issue of land reform, because that's the thrust of South African politics, or African politics as it were, what to do with land that people were dispossessed of, in the 1800s and prior, let's say the whole era of colonialism, imperialism, the system. So the South African government that took over in 1994, the priority as far as one hoped, was that you redressed land. Of course they introduced land reform policies. The organization that I work for, at that time observing what is happening, farmers expected to make available their land or government expropriating some land, it was concerned to the fact that all this is happening and nothing is said or done about land that is owned by churches. We are talking about Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, all these missionary originated churches. They in their introduction took quite large amounts of hectares so that they can establish missions, schools, you name it. Now the new dispensation, if 1994 is anything to refer to, already people are settled down on these farms and they are settled there in large quantities, in terms of family numbers, and they equally don't have security on those farms. They are as vulnerable as anyone else in the country. Now the organization said someone must look into this issue of land that is owned by churches. I was then employed to do an internship to look at how many each denomination owns. I looked at the Methodist, I looked at the Catholics, also Lutherans, and of course with history in South Africa, quite a number of properties have been expropriated from these churches, especially in those homeland systems parts of the country, the Transkei and others. I remember in Transkei almost about 80% of land was declared state land because the Transkei government of the time wouldn't allow private ownership, except on those coastal belts near the sea... So I came in doing from 1999, in 2002 I started working with one community which is near Verulum, that's like 20 kilometers north of Durban. This community was part of land reform and they were dynamics there around the issue of rights, the issue of sovereignty, in as far as who decides what has to

happen in the communities. Is it elders from the community, is it government, is it private companies, in this case sugar cane growers, the small and medium enterprises around that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Likewise social movements that will look into forming partnerships with the state, affirming what the state is doing, looking up to what the state is

promising even if it doesn't offer. That social movement of course will be legitimate the eyes of the state. Now to me that says any organization or social movement that does the opposite, that breaks away from the state politics or state projects, then it's launching an offensive to the state, and they will be treated by all means as an enemy, and be crushed.

For someone employed by an NGO, involved in a social movement, and educated in activism, this situation is unacceptable. David declares, "It's so not on, so not on.

It's unethical; it's not supposed to be that way. It's immature, both at the level of politics and at the level of governing the country. So it's not allowed to be like that."

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

I doubt that there will be a time when the ANC will actually try to listen, because if you listen carefully to the national leaders of the ANC are saying, they talk about the ANC tradition, often time when something comes up as a crisis in the ANC they say, 'the ANC tradition says...' That ANC tradition goes back to Lusaka as the headquarters of the ANC of the country, or headquarters of the ANC in exile so that they can always give direction to what happens in the country and everywhere else in the universe as long as people are part of the ANC. So what is that tradition? That tradition is the tradition of obedience, of capturing, grasping, and internalizing the word, the direction, as coming from the headquarters, or as coming from the national executive council, if not the national working community. So anything that looks disobedient or deviant to that word is anti-ANC and it's anti-traditional. It will be difficult to imagine the ANC that believes in the voices from the margins, the voices from the grassroots, it will be difficult to imagine the ANC that does that. Of course at branch levels there are discussions, but those discussions are so much about what is the word from the national headquarters, and how is that word communicated to the branch level, and how then do the branches dialogue with it in a way that they show they have internalized it, they understand what the word is.

David backs this analysis up with practical examples:

People of Khutsong have declared on a number of occasions that they don't want to be removed from Gauteng, they want to remain in Gauteng and they don't want to go to Northwest. No matter what the reasons are, the least you can do is to listen. But it's not what has happened. Another example, Abahlali baseMjondolo. Their politics is simple, it's politics of life: all we want is homes, decent homes, where we're living because it's next to where we work. All we want is jobs, all we want is safe water, proper sanitation, we want to be treated as decent human beings like everyone else. Now that's difficult to stand as the ANC because it doesn't code the word from the national headquarters. Actually, it works against the word from the national

headquarters because at the moment the word from the national headquarters is the BEE, the ensuring of economic growth being GEAR. Now if you have people who are forcing you to account and actually put them in a picture that says as the country this is how you transform ordinary people's lives, it doesn't offer that opportunity. And so, the ANC tradition then suggests you silence those voices because they are disobedient to the word. So it's hard to imagine a transformed ANC.

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

This to me is just the beginning, there's more to come. If more and more people believe in their own power, believe in the power of their own intellectual resources, their own strategies, their thinking capacities, their dreams, because that's what's how you drive them to a better future, to believe in the actualization of their dreams, their dreams to be human beings, that's what they want, it's nothing more than that. If movements like this one make that more and more visible to anyone and everyone, surely people will want to do the same. At the moment to me Abahlali are like a cloud of witness that need to convince everyone that as an ordinary person you can still make your voice heard, or you can force your voice to be heard. That will begin to allow other people to gain conviction and do likewise.

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

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

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

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

there was the first national elections in 94, some were far from getting IDs, but they can tell that someone is consciously deciding to make life hard for some people.”

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

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

Obviously the ANC has had the legitimation by virtue of its history as a liberation movement, way back from how it began, the fact that most of its members went through exile, were forced to exile, imprisoned, some longer like former President Nelson Mandela. All of that legitimated its identity in relation to Black people in South Africa and all people concerned with the liberation, irrespective of their race. Come 94, everyone was sick of national apartheid government. Now the alternative is this people’s movement, national liberation movement as everyone understood it at the time, and what it represented. What happens in government, especially say in 1996, the open declaration of economic policy in the form of GEAR was for many concerned people alarm bells ringing, to say something big is coming, or something has happened and it caught us off guard. No one expected the turning point of 1996. Of course some want to do connections with even the vision of the RDP document as one that had been used to ensure that all disadvantaged South African enjoyed freedoms, some want to make connections that even there were elements of neo-liberal policies, it’s just that the language was so disguised that you wouldn’t pick it up the first time, but come 1996 with GEAR, it was so obvious that the main thrust here is to that the government has an open way for the neo-liberal agenda. That started making things for almost everyone. The lack of service delivery, they were the beginning of talks around privatization of water, and actually the trials of implementing some of those projects, retrenchment in numbers of people who had been working, some for state or parastatal companies, privatization of almost every asset that the state owned. That was the beginning of the end of hopes for freedom and liberation, and that was the end of looking at the ANC as this liberation movement as it were. These guys, seemingly they are not that different from what we’ve been through, it’s just that this time it’s done by people of the same color. There’s a lot of disillusionment I’d say, there’s a lot of disillusionment. It has never changed, instead it’s aggravated, it’s picked up speed, I mean in every sector that you can imagine where one would have expected government to have taken advantage to launch real programs of reform: land reform is going nowhere, restitution in particular is going nowhere. I think the dates for actual completion of restitution programs have been shifted 3 times now. The first was by 1999, 30% of land in South Africa

would have been transferred from Whites to Blacks, it was pushed to 2004, and it was pushed to 2008. And until now only 4%, and it's been over ten years, it's been 4%. Now this thing of halting poverty by 2014 then becomes a dream, a far fetched dream just to lure people into hoping, hoping, hoping but nothing actually takes place on the ground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **I Really Had to Find Myself a Space Where I Could Engage With the Government**

**Xolani Tsalong interview 19 November 2007**

Xolani Tsalong was born in Durban and has lived there most of his life. He joined the ANC Youth League in 1985 or 86, when he was 14 or 15. This decision was influenced by his education, for he says, “I think one learned some form of activism in schools.” Xolani’s aunt was a political activist, and so while growing up his house was visited nightly by police looking for her, and this also inspired him to become involved. He went to Lamontville for matric, then he began studying lower level management at what is now called the Durban Institute of Technology, but got bored and transferred to what is now called University of Durban Westville. He studied political science and philosophy and completed honors in philosophy.

In 1994 Xolani became involved in the Youth Development Forums in Lamontville, but did not stay with the organization for very long. He explains, “Immediately after 94, when the ANC won the elections, there was this sort of admission by the ANC to say now it’s time for you to focus on youth development issues and sort of forget about politics.” The YDF was focused on sports functions and “lousy debates”, which engaged the townships somewhat, but failed to address the topics Xolani wanted the organization to cover. He thought that their time would be better spent focusing on the transition into a new environment and finding a new identity in post apartheid eras, looking at career paths, and that genre of youth issues.

In 1996 the ANC adopted GEAR, which brought the neo-liberal agenda to South Africa. Xolani became suspicious because of his knowledge of how international economics work, and knew that this new policy would hurt poor people and fail to create employment opportunities. He states, “That’s when I resigned as a member of the ANC, because I really had to find myself a space where I could engage with the government, with the ANC, not just

part of the ANC, but a critical point where I could criticize them, it was going to be difficult for me to do while I was still a member of the ANC.”

Xolani’s view of South Africa has been influenced by liberation struggles of countries around the world and a variety of literature. Algeria, Nigeria, Venezuela, and Brazil as some examples of nations South Africa’s leaders and citizens can learn from. The works of Frantz Fanon, Albert Camus, Steve Biko, and Lauren McClain have also inspired his activism.

Look at, for example, Frantz Fanon, *the Wretched of the Earth*. Which basically for me, this one book that has inspired me so much that it’s sort of created this understanding of what things would look like in the post-colonial era, and how our former liberation movement leaders would behave, and how they would be disconnected from the masses. It is exactly what is happening in South Africa today, what Fanon projected at the time. ... It’s one important book for every activist to read, it’s really inspiring.

The everyday afflictions of South Africans have also been a major factor in Xolani’s activism.

I think what really keeps me going is the fact that I’m exposed to people who suffer gross social injustices every day. And their condition seems to be worse than better. I go to bed every night with that in my mind. Also believing that I could make some change; I could help in one way or another to make the conditions better. I think that’s what motivates me the most.

Xolani started volunteering for the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in 2001, and got a full time job as the National Organizer in Cape Town in 2003. In 2005 TAC was unable to find a good leader to fill the position of Provincial Coordinator for KwaZulu-Natal, so Xolani volunteered to return to Durban to take the job. He then resigned from the TAC staff in 2006 to pursue a masters in Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), though he still works for the TAC as a volunteer to help create partnerships.

Since it’s founding in 1998, TAC has engaged with the ANC in the streets and in the courtroom, and won several battles. Yet there is more than meets the eye with the relationship between the ANC and TAC.

It would seem that the relationship is very hostile between the TAC and the ANC. But we have found that there are people within the ANC who support

the TAC and the things it's doing. But unfortunately some of them cannot come out and support TAC publicly.... Certain leadership of the ANC doesn't agree with TAC. So they don't want anyone from the ANC to come out and support TAC.

So TAC does have support from certain individuals in certain provinces within the ANC, though these sentiments cannot be announced publicly as they are not accepted by the party.

To further complicate things, the majority of TAC members are ANC supporters, however

In 2003 we embarked on a civil disobedience campaign just to force the ANC government to adopt the initial treatment plan, which was a clear indication that those members of TAC who were ANC supporters were not entirely happy with what the ANC government was doing at the time.... Immediately after that, late 2003, the government adopted initial treatment plan. I think that the pressure that we exerted on them really worked.

While this was a major success for TAC, the government has not followed through and provided the adequate resources to implement the treatment plan.

Another example of a major success for TAC that the government failed to apply was a court case regarding the Westville Correctional Centre. It ruled that the government must provide ARVs to prisoners so that they wouldn't die of AIDS in jail. However the government hasn't followed the ruling even though several years have passed, and the Human Resources Council has not stepped in to hold the government accountable. Xolani states, "We've been going through difficult times in terms of our relationship with the government, how government looks at civil society, it's been really really difficult. But at the end of the day we really work together and then you achieve what you wanted to achieve." TAC is an organization with several major achievements under its belt, and years of work ahead.

As long as HIV/AIDS continues to exist, there is of course a need for TAC to continue to exist as well. The TAC basically works as a watchdog of the government on HIV/AIDS legislation.... There needs to be a watchdog to say, 'this is what the government promised us, these are the things that were adopted in the latest policies.' The delivery is not there, so we demand delivery.

It appears that neither HIV/AIDS nor the ANC government will be leaving the South Africa anytime soon, which means TAC will be around for a long time.

It is difficult to analyze how the ANC's successes and failures as a governing party, and everyone will have differing opinions.

Depends how you look at it, and where you're sitting, but from where I'm sitting, I'm not very happy.... If I look at the situation of poor people of South Africa today, because I think that's how I need to measure the successes of the ANC, I will say that I'm not very happy. The conditions of poor people continue to be worse. The conditions of poor people in terms of health are becoming worse. Looking at how sometimes the government handles those problems, particularly in terms of protest, it's not very impressive.

Much of this relates to the government saying one thing, but then acting counter to what they have pledged.

The ANC did not promise too much, they promised things that are possible to deliver, but again, what they promise is completely different from the policies that they are adopting. If you promise to create employment, but at the same time you create policies that take away people's employment, it's a different story together. Making those promises that they've made is fine, they're not ambitious, they are good promises. But the problem is the implementation.... The issue of service delivery is still a major issue here in South Africa. It's going to continue to be an issue as long as we continue to have these policies.

Despite the ANC's inability to help the poor, Xolani does not think any of the opposition parties have the necessary qualities to help South Africa. He adds, "People will continue to vote for the ANC because there isn't really a strong political party of opposition." But even if the majority continues to vote for the ANC, fewer people are going to the polls because they are losing interest and excitement. Xolani rationalizes, "There are no fruits, they are not benefiting from this process. Once we go to the polling station to vote, we expect some kind of change. When that change doesn't happen, what's the reason to go out there?"

Many of the ANC's failures can be blamed on the inability of the leaders to stand up to global pressure.

Corporate globalization is basically contributing to the social injustices in developing nations. The World Bank, the IMF how they seem to be operating to make situations worse for people in poor countries. ... As long as we

continue to have these institutions operating the way they are, we will continue to see some form of pressure exerted on our leadership in developing nations.

Leadership must be dedicated to eliminating social ills, and not bow down to the pressure of corporate globalization. So long as there is not proper leadership, social injustices of all kinds will continue: the poor will remain poor, fewer will access education, and there will be more orphans. For example, the ANC has built 2 million houses since coming to power, but they are only concerned with the numbers, not the quality or location of the housing. Xolani continues, “You need a strong leader to say enough is enough, I am definitely not bowing down to this pressure, and who will of course identify other leaders so that they can work together.” One method Xolani suggests African leaders could use to build this strength is by joining together like South America has.

Another way South African leaders can gain strength is by listening to the ordinary people of the country. When democracy was created the government worked to silence civil society, and the nation has paid for it. “I think the government missed an opportunity to work with civil society in addressing some of the major service delivery problems in the country. Civil society is desperate because we didn’t accommodate it.” The ANC tried to hard to keep civil society silent due to its liberation tradition, but that should no longer apply.

Civil society is independent of government and is therefore able to be critical of government. Some people wouldn’t take that positively. Some people look at it as an effort to criticize the ANC government. That has been a major problem.... We’ve been received as anti ANC government because of being critical. It goes back to the theme of being loyal to a post development organization, being loyal to a liberation movement, because the ANC was a liberation movement, so it expects therefore people to be very loyal to it. It becomes a different story altogether if you are critical of that movement in a post-apartheid or post-colonial era.

Luckily civil society has begun to grow stronger to counter the ANC’s efforts to silence the people. Xolani tells, “In the post apartheid era the civil society movement began to find its voice and its space.... Civil society in South Africa has been very vocal in the past few years.

I think it has demanded space, and it continues to demand its space, and the government is beginning to listen. Even though listening is one thing and delivering is another.” There were about 5,000 protests in South Africa last year, and this is a clear indication of how few up South Africans have become. Xolani continues, “With the socio-economic conditions the South African people are facing today, lack of employment, HIV/AIDS, and so forth, it really forces people to unite and be vocal about these issues. ... People forge alliances, united fronts, to demand their space or demand service delivery.” This provides great hope, as Xolani says, “I believe that if we have a strong civil society movement that really exerts pressure on the government, there could be some change.”

While civil society as a whole has started to make their voice heard, the youth of South Africa don't seem to be as concerned.

Look at the past five years or so, youth have been very ignorant about politics. It's kind of different of the youth that we've seen before 94. The post apartheid era has been very silent. That has been really troubling.... I think party it's because they have never been involved in any of these things. I think it's much better for us, who were involved in anti-apartheid movements. We understood the idea of a citizen. We understood the idea of politics. So the youth of today has no experience whatsoever of those kinds of activities and politics. For them the important thing, those who are in fortunate positions, is to complete their degrees, do their education, and to find a job. For them that is the ultimate goal. There is nothing that exists beside that.

In fact it seems that the only youth who do speak up are those who don't see a good education and job as possibilities in their future. Xolani affirms, “You only see the youth that is acting in politics, is the ones that come from the disadvantaged communities.” For the youth who aren't struggling to survive, complacency sets in.

There's been this culture that everything's fine now. We've got politics. All that the youth needs to do, is to get their education, and the get job opportunities. That's it. I think that it's been the mission of the ANC to silence the youth in the post-apartheid or post-colonial era. Because really if you look at power that the youth has, it's very potent. It's got huge power in influencing policies and politics, which it did before 94, ANC Youth League has been very influential in politics. But it became a different story after 94, to say, ‘things are fine now’.

## **Reflections and Discussion**

The eight people I interviewed are highly respected for their work, and shared many similar statements as well as unique ones. These are by no means cohesive or conclusive, and I am sure that if I had spoken to a different set of eight people I would have gotten a different set of responses. In this section of the paper I hope to shed some light on just seven of the major themes that came up in many of my interviews.

### **Teach the Masses that Everything Depends on Them**

The first step towards solving a problem is understanding that things are not right. The people of South Africa who fought for liberation became aware of the mass injustices of apartheid in different ways. Several of the people I interviewed mentioned school as a location of their political education, coming from both teachers and classmates. The home was also a place where many learned from older relatives about South Africa's problems, and that they had the power to fight against the government. For Gary Govindsamy, the newspaper was a way to learn about what was going on and provide himself with the political education he was lacking at home. Mashumi Figlan can trace his awakening to an exact moment, when his father was beaten by the police and his classmates told him not to worry, Mandela was coming. Others gradually developed awareness, citing the sources of their education, but no profound experience.

Regardless of when or how conscientization happens, it is the essential prerequisite for action. Yet many youth in South Africa seem unaware or impartial to the condition of their country. Their political education, or lack thereof, will impact their actions and thus the future of civil society. Frantz Fanon defines this crucial understanding:

Now, political education means opening their minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence.... To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is not such thing as a demiurge, that there is no

famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people (97).

During apartheid this understanding of personal power and responsibility was fostered amongst those who fought for liberation. But the country's youngest generation is lacking this awareness, and until something changes the youth will be partially to blame for their nation's problems.

### **The ANC Will Stay in Power for a Long Time**

Though the ANC has disappointed many people in recent years, it seems that they will continue to get the majority of the vote, and enjoy their position as the ruling party for years to come. There are a variety of factors that contribute to this theory. From a historical standpoint, Kiru Naidoo explains that liberation movements in Tanzania, India, and Kenya have stayed in power for several decades after coming to power. These movements may provide a reasonable prediction for how long the ANC will retain their power, yet even though history repeats itself, it is not a guaranteed benchmark for the future. The people of South Africa must continue to vote in favor of the ANC for the party to retain its power, and this may happen for several reasons.

To begin with, the ANC's reputation was established during the liberation struggle, and South Africans have been supporting the movement for a long time. David Ntseng explains:

Obviously the ANC has had the legitimation by virtue of its history as a liberation movement, way back from how it began, the fact that most of its members went through exile, were forced to exile, imprisoned, some longer like former President Nelson Mandela. All of that legitimated its identity in relation to Black people in South Africa and all people concerned with the liberation, irrespective of their race.

While the ANC's past has played a major role in the party's political success, this is not the only reason people continue to vote in support.

Gary Govindsamy says that many people feel there is no better party to vote for, as the ANC has made itself the only viable option. He elaborates:

Of course there were other groups as well, but... they've all been usurped into this whole ideology and principles and policies of the ANC, which encapsulated all the ideologies and all the policies and all the philosophies of the other organizations. The whole question of the government of national unity was so carefully planned and organized and put into practice, that it destroyed other ideologies of black people. So the ANC will stay in power for a long time.

Kiru takes a similar standpoint when he explains that some people refer to the ANC as a broad church. He continues, "I think it's a good description in that it's closed down the spaces for everybody from the Pan African Congress, to the IFP, to the conservative party, and just embraced everybody. I think it's a very astute political strategy for the party, whether this is healthy for democracy and the country as a whole, I'm skeptical." The only viable opposition party Gary can imagine would come from a coalition of several other, diverse parties. He warns, "for that coalition to come into being, it would be a lot of frustrating, and there would be lots of killings and lots of political assassinations, that is a problem." As of now, there is no party in South Africa that has proven to be a realistic alternative to the ANC. For an opposition party to gain enough power to seriously challenge the ANC, it is likely that they will need to create their own space to avoid being co-opted by the ANC's ideology, or unite with various other parties and utilize violent tactics in order to take over.

The sense that there is nowhere else to go was repeated by David Ntseng, but in a different sense. He says people are not only frustrated with the ANC, but with party politics in general. David clarifies, "what I can see is that people have realized that party politics really doesn't go anywhere, it doesn't yield any results to expect political parties to make changes. That's part of the disillusionment that we've gone through with the ANC, which was most trusted. Less and less people believe that political parties will yield something."

This could mean that the end of the ANC's rule might not come simply from another party getting the majority of the vote, but through a fundamental change in the governmental system.

### **We Want to be Treated as Decent Human Beings like Everyone Else**

The South Africans who are critical of the ANC are not asking for much, just the ability to live a decent life and maintain their dignity. System Cele and her children deserve a decent house with adequate facilities, as does everyone in South Africa. David Ntseng explains, “[Abahlali’s] politics is simple, it’s politics of life: all we want is homes, decent homes, where we’re living because it’s next to where we work. All we want is jobs, all we want is safe water, proper sanitation, we want to be treated as decent human beings like everyone else.” The Church Land Programme fosters relationships between communities, churches, civic organizations, and the government so that people can live off the land in a sustainable way. The Treatment Action Campaign works to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and provide adequate treatment to people living with the deadly disease. These desires are not extraordinary, they are basic human rights. Gary Govindsamy echoes this sentiment, “Ordinary people out there want to see something in their homes, they want to see something in their pockets, they want to live a decent life before they die.... [They] want to live the same kind of life that other people are living based on equality and dignity.” These are reasonable requests, in fact most of these rights are guaranteed in the South African Constitution and the Freedom Charter, yet this does not seem to be enough of a reason for the government to listen to what the people want.

### **Just a Piece of Paper Thrown Aside**

The ANC's unwillingness or inability to adhere to their governing doctrines was discussed in several interviews. South Africa may have the most progressive constitution in the world, but that does not mean the ruling party, politicians, or police follow what is

written. Louisa Motha explains, “When we march, they just send the police to just hit us, for nothing, for no reason. The constitution it says we can march, but they’re hitting the people, oppressing the people, it’s not a good thing.” Mashumi Figlan was thoroughly involved with the ANC for a decade through COSAS, the ANC Youth League, and the time he spent canvassing for the 1994 election. His knowledge of the ANC constitution is solid, as is his respect for it. He tells, “To treat the social movement and all other people the way they treat is not what is written in the ANC constitution. Just because we know the constitution of the ANC, we read the constitution of the ANC, and I think the constitution of the ANC is in my head. But the people who are in power, they don’t like to follow it through and through.” The ANC constitution is not the only document meant to enshrine human rights that the government has disregarded. Gary Govindsamy adds, “The Freedom Charter was supposed to have been the ideal document which would have seen people get a better life. But in most instances that document, which was adopted by everybody, is just a piece of paper thrown aside.” The written principles of the ANC are highly revered by the people I interviewed, and much of their disenchantment with the ANC came from the way the party has ignored its own doctrine.

### **The Tradition of Obedience**

While the ANC principles are highly regarded by supports and critics alike, their traditions and past as a liberation movement have created problems for the people of South Africa. Pdraig O’Malley explains, “The ANC never had to face the consequences of its own failures as a liberation movement. Whenever it engaged in a reexamination of the way it conducted the struggle, it failed to implement corrective policies and regressed to old, entrenched habits. ... In government, the ANC is still immune to external criticism and is responsive only to itself” (491). The party’s inability to listen to critics has become a major grievance for those who are trying to work with the ANC to improve the country. Xolani

Tsalong agrees, “It goes back to the theme of being loyal to a post development organization, being loyal to a liberation movement, because the ANC was a liberation movement, so it expects therefore people to be very loyal to it. It becomes a different story altogether if you are critical of that movement in a post-apartheid or post-colonial era.” The loyalty of members of a liberation movement in exile is crucial to the group’s success. David Ntseng explains:

ANC tradition goes back to Lusaka as the headquarters of the ANC of the country, or headquarters of the ANC in exile so that they can always give direction to what happens in the country and everywhere else in the universe as long as people are part of the ANC. So what is that tradition? That tradition is the tradition of obedience, of capturing, grasping, and internalizing the word, the direction, as coming from the headquarters, or as coming from the national executive council, if not the national working community. So anything that looks disobedient or deviant to that word is anti-ANC and it’s anti-traditional.

Strict adherence to tradition made sense under the apartheid regime when the ANC was banned, but now South Africa is a democracy and the ANC is the ruling party. As Mac Maharaj says in his biography by O’Malley, “This is an ANC government. We should encourage constant debate and the interchange of ideas, and we should invite public criticism, taking it as being honestly offered and meriting honest response.... Nobody, no matter how good his or her performance in the past, has a guarantee of perpetual excellence” (454). Failure to listen to the people in favor of tradition causes the leaders to become further out of touch with the needs of the people as time goes on. David continues:

It will be difficult to imagine the ANC that believes in the voices from the margins, the voices from the grassroots, it will be difficult to imagine the ANC that does that. Of course at branch levels there are discussions, but those discussions are so much about what is the word from the national headquarters, and how is that word communicated to the branch level, and how then do the branches dialogue with it in a way that they show they have internalized it, they understand what the word is.

This obsession with following tradition and top down order is preventing politicians from listening to the citizens they are supposed to represent. David concludes, “Now if you have

people who are forcing you to account and actually put them in a picture that says as the country this is how you transform ordinary people's lives, it doesn't offer that opportunity. And so, the ANC tradition then suggests you silence those voices because they are disobedient to the word. So it's hard to imagine a transformed ANC."

### **The ANC Has Effectively Demobilized and Decimated Civil Society**

The ANC's treatment of civil society is a complaint of everyone I interviewed. Mac Maharaj agrees as well, "Government and civil society have not found ways of working together without undermining each other's independence. Their relationship still simmers with latent tension, and this has taken an unhealthy form. At best, government tends to smother civil society; at worst, it is downright antagonistic toward it" (O'Malley, 448-9). The government does not want to hear what people have to say, and thus they ignore what they do not want to be told. When they are no longer able to ignore these voices, the ANC has resorted to attempts to silence the public. As Louisa Motha tells us, "The ANC they're just trying to close the mouths of everybody.... Words from everyone have to be heard. They mustn't listen to just the words of the rich, or the big people, they must listen to the words from everyone. They say it's a government for everyone, but the way they do they don't look like they're a government for everyone." The police presence, brutality, and arrests at all of the Abahlali marches and the scare tactics they have used to try to silence certain members outside of the marches are just a few examples of many.

Kiru Naidoo offers a perspective that balances a harsh reality with steadfast optimism.

He says:

I think the ANC has effectively demobilized and decimated civil society. Now that's strong language and I'm happy to say it in that way, because I think that what the government did was to poach the best and the brightest leaders from civil society movements into government and its apparatus. So the effect of that has been that many organizations simply collapsed.... I think in many ways, a stronger civil society would have contributed to much sounder governance and service delivery. And I'm still optimistic that the ANC will create the spaces for our civil society to flourish.

If Kuru is right and the ANC creates a space for civil society, or at least allows civil society to create and preserve its own space, the ANC's power will begin to be checked by the public.

This is exactly what Mac Maharaj thinks the ANC needs – a strong civil society. He says:

The check on the ANC is a healthy civil society. The check is a society that is debating. The check is a society that does not look only at corruption but also at the abuse of power, one that recognizes that the abuse of state power is a threat to freedom, one that debates the danger. The check is a society that does not say, 'Because you, the government say so, therefore it's right.' It says, 'I believe you, but I would like to be convinced.' The vibrancy of civil society that was present at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle has significantly diminished. Yet the challenge for South Africa is whether we will succeed in deepening and realizing a participatory democracy, or whether we will allow our democracy to become frozen in formal trappings and structures. Participatory democracy requires that we encourage and stimulate the development of civil society (O'Malley, 455).

With any luck, the people of South Africa have already begun to gain the momentum necessary to make this vision a reality.

### **Don't Talk About Us, Talk To Us**

A topic that came up in most of my interviews is the importance of listening to the voice of the people. This is a simple point, but something politicians fail to understand. System Cele states, "They will talk about the people living in the shack, they don't even know how it would feel to live in a shack. They talk about us, about our needs, but they're doing nothing for us. So that's why we're saying don't talk about us, talk to us, because we are the one who are suffering." It is absurd for leaders with steady incomes, houses, running water, proper sanitation, their own means of transportation, and so many other goods and resources to assume that they know what impoverished people living in shacks want. Louisa Motha further proves this point:

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

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

The more the government tries to ignore the voice of the people, the longer it will take for change to come about.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* spends much time dealing with this exact topic. He writes:

In an underdeveloped country, experience proves that the important thing is not that three hundred people form a plan and decide upon carrying it out, but that the whole people plan and decide even if it takes them twice or three times as long. The fact is that the time taken up by explaining, the time 'lost' in treating the worker as a human being, will be caught up in the execution of the plan. People know where they are going, and why. (193)

Politicians in South Africa seem to underestimate the aptitude of ordinary people, particularly when they are poor, or live in shacks. They buy into the notion that material poverty is the result of people's limited intellectual capacity, when in fact this poverty is a product of the politicians' own policies. Truly listening to the people is imperative for this backwards thinking to be disproven, and for the will of the citizens to be actualized.

Valuing what the people say and want does not have to be contradictory to ANC methods of leadership. Gary Govindsamy adds that:

As activists in the old days we consulted with the people. We always had meetings. People's concerns change all the time, people's wants change all the time, and if you don't talk to your people, if you don't talk to your voters, you're not going to know what they want. You're not going to know what they have in mind. Granted, the powers that be have the means to make those changes, they have the powers to make them, but there has to be consultation. We cannot imagine what they want, we cannot dream about what they want, they must tell you what they want.

If we accept that the government has the power, and the people have knowledge, an open partnership is necessary to improve South Africa.

Though the government may be in charge, the people are not powerless; the more they find their voice and make it heard, the stronger they become. This is not a matter of

asking the government to make changes, it is about saying what is wrong and what should be done about it, and then demanding that the government delivers. As Fanon tells us, “The masses should know that the government and the party are at their service. A deserving people, in other words a people conscious of its dignity, is a people that never forgets these facts” (198). While current civil society demands are not as strong as there were in past decades, people are once again finding their voice and their power. Xolani states, “Civil society in South Africa has been very vocal in the past few years. I think it has demanded space, and it continues to demand its space, and the government is beginning to listen.” As people speak out more, others gain confidence in their own voice, and join in the demand that the government starts listening and acting accountable. According to David Ntseng:

This to me is just the beginning, there’s more to come. If more and more people believe in their own power, believe in the power of their own intellectual resources, their own strategies, their thinking capacities, their dreams, because that’s what’s how you drive them to a better future, to believe in the actualization of their dreams, their dreams to be human beings, that’s what they want, it’s nothing more than that. If movements like this one make that more and more visible to anyone and everyone, surely people will want to do the same. At the moment to me Abahlali are like a cloud of witness that need to convince everyone that as an ordinary person you can still make your voice heard, or you can force your voice to be heard. That will begin to allow other people to gain conviction and do likewise.

The people of South Africa must become aware of the problems surrounding them, compare this to their hopes for a democratic nation, and find the strength from within to make their voices heard. As people become more vocal, others will join in, and the people’s power will grow.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

South Africa is about to enter its fourteenth year as a democracy. The country has come a long way over the past several decades, but disappointments abound. While the ANC’s guiding principles, specifically those enshrined in the Constitution and Freedom Charter, are highly regarded, the party does not seem to practice the democracy it preaches.

For those who expect more from this nation that they have fought to improve, the problem goes beyond the ANC's incomplete service delivery or corrupt leadership. The ANC's intolerance for dissent has put the party in a position where they are trying to limit the space of civil society and silence citizens. This is unacceptable in a democracy and activists are demanding, once again, that the government listens to the people. Change needs to come from the ground up, from the people who live the injustices that politicians talk about without understanding. Ordinary citizens are the voice of truth, and as they realize their power, the voice of the voiceless will be heard.

## Interviews

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2. Xolani Tsalong, former ANC Youth League member, former TAC employee, masters student in Development at UKZN, 19 November 2007
3. Gary Govindsamy, former liberation activist, SABC News Bulletin Editor for Locus FM, 20 November 2007
4. Kiru Naidoo, former member of countless ANC affiliated organizations, researcher, teacher, political analyst, 20 November 2007
5. Louisa Motha, Abahlali Coordinator, Motala Heights informal settlement resident, 21 November 2007
6. System Cele, Abahlali member, Kennedy Road informal settlement resident, 21 November 2007
7. Harriet Bolton, former Garment Workers' Industrial Union Secretary, 26 November 2007
8. David Ntseng, former liberation activist, Church Land Programme Employee, Abahlali member, 28 November 2007

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## **Appendix A: Interview questions**

1. What is the history of your activism?
2. Which groups have you been involved with and when?
3. How involved have you been?
4. What are the reasons for any changes in your activism over time, both before and after 1994?
5. What are your current feelings about the ANC?
6. What do you think the ANC has done well?
7. Where do you think the ANC has failed to deliver?
8. What do you think about the current state of South Africa?
9. What are your hopes for the future of South Africa?
10. What are your hopes for the future of the ANC?
11. What are your hopes for the future of the South African government?
12. What is your analysis of how the ANC has changed from a liberation movement to a political party?
13. What do you think about how the ANC interacts with, treats, and has relationships with social movements now, and how this differs from the past?
14. How should the people of South Africa fix current problems? (voting, activism, individual responsibility/choice, etc.)
15. What is your opinion of current social movements, created both before and after 1994?
16. What motivates your activism? How do you keep on struggling when there is so much still to be done?
17. Do you think there is too much complacency and passivity in South Africa today, and among the youth? Why or why not?
18. How long will the ANC remain in power? How will the end of the ANC's power come about?
19. What leaders and authors have inspired you, or helped you to understand South Africa?
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell me or think I should have asked about?