Living Learning

Abahlali BaseMjondolo

Rural Network

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by
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Zodwa Nsibande, Sihle Sibisi and Sbu Zikode

with guest piece by
Nigel Gibson, Anne Harley and Richard Pithouse

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Church Land Programme

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Please feel free to make use of the content of this booklet, with appropriate acknowledgement of the organisation and authors.

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Preface

The origin of this booklet is exceptional in our view. It began as a series of discussions between movement militants who are students at the University of KwaZulu Natal doing a Certificate in Education (Participatory Development) (CEPD) with the Centre for Adult Education. This book is a written record of those discussions that became known as a 'Living Learning'.

The militants who led these discussions are members of two key people's movements: some brought their thinking, their politics and their experience from the struggles of Abahlali baseMjondolo (an urban-based movement of shack-dwellers fighting for humanity, land and housing) and some from the Rural Network (a rural-based movement fighting for restoration of dignity, rights and land, and resisting the brutalisation of the poor by commercial farmers and landowners).

The main idea behind these discussions was to expand space for careful and critical reflection, and to explore the connections between the experience of being an militant, faced with real threats of landlessness and repression and abuse by authorities, on the one hand, with that of being an academic student engaging other written experiences from a range of contexts. This connection is vital because any serious and concrete project of transformation must begin and remain in popular grassroots struggles. It is reflected in the very idea of a 'Living Learning' – a label which the militants themselves coined. It is an extension of the term 'Living Politics' which S'bu Zikode of Abahlali baseMjondolo has described as a politics that:

> *… starts from the places we have taken. We call it a living politics because it comes from the people and stays with the people. It is ours and it is part of our lives. … It is the politics of our lives. It is made at home with what we have and it is made for us and by us.*
>
> Zikode, 2008. "The burning issues of land and housing": An address to the Diakonia Council of Churches.

This experiential understanding of politics is divorced or subtracted from party politics or state politics, and aims for popular control over society. In fact, Living Politics is life of the ordinary men, women and children fighting for dignity as human beings, every day, until they count. It can be understood by everyone, especially the poor, because they make and own it. All the militants are on this CEPD course

through the mandate of their movements to take their politics to the academy, and to bring back to the movements the knowledge they encounter at the academy.

In this cycle of connection and reflection, the Living Learning sessions became a space for knowledge production, and the 'living learners' thought that perhaps that knowledge could be a contribution to the world, particularly on issues relating to praxis (reflection and action) when dealing with issues of education, development, state power, people's power, etc.

What usually happens in each session is that each 'living learner' contributes to a list of issues they want to discuss, and then the facilitator finds out from the group which ones are key, so they can be discussed first. As the discussion unfolds the facilitator took notes and made them available to everyone in the group for checking and correction.

During one of these sessions in 2008, a discussion was held on what to do with these notes from Living Learning sessions – and that's when the idea of publishing them was raised.

By way of an Introduction, we have drawn from that Living Learning session in August, where the idea of a book was discussed. The main part of the booklet is the notes from all the sessions of Living Learning in 2008. After that, there is a piece called "Out of Order: A Living Learning for a Living Politics" written by Nigel Gibson, Anne Harley and Richard Pithouse. In October the 'living learners' had said:

> *We would like these comrades [Gibson, Harley, and Pithouse] to read and react to the work that's been done in the sessions of living learning, and write maybe some pages highlighting what they see as especially important. We can't really tell them what this should cover.*

And now we would like you to read and react to this wealth of knowledge produced by [extra]ordinary men and women in the struggles. Your reactions may not be included in this book, but they will always be with you in your work.

David Ntseng and Graham Philpott
Church Land Programme

Introduction[1]

For a Living Learning, the critical question was always how best to take back to our communities whatever we might gain?; how best can our communities benefit from the few of us who are lucky to have access to the course?; how will we utilise the academic skills we can gain?; how do we take this information back? It has always been the task of a synthesis and a breaking down of the University theory so that we can work out properly what we can learn from it – and so we can understand for ourselves in what way it is that different from the daily learning of struggle and life emijondolo[2] or eplasini[3]. …

Living Learning is part of a living politics. It is not about heavy things to be learned by us 'fools' from 'smarter' people. Publishing a booklet out of our Living Learning could also be there for those 'smarter' people to learn from the 'fools'. By putting some of our thinking out there in a booklet, we need of course to be tolerant and accept criticism. Critique is fine – and at least we will be walking the talk by putting our stuff out there for the world. …

This Living Learning is a living testimony and a record of how we made reflections and distinctions about what we face in life and in our learning. By having this document published, we can always reflect back – without even having to go back to the University. Surely, a booklet like this can open some of the closed doors. …

Living Learning is about what's happening in and outside of the University classroom. So we are trying to combine the two universities – the one of experience and the one of academics. … So there is a need for a good translation and interpretation to make it really a living politics. …

1 Edited from the Living Learning session in August where the idea of publishing a booklet was discussed.

2 IsiZulu for 'in the shacks'.

3 Isizulu for 'on the farms'.

The point is that it is not *our* work – it is the people's work. They sent us and we need to report. …

Knowledge is a dangerous thing! The publication will help the people where we come from because people compare these two universities – the University emijondolo and eplasini and the academic University of KwaZulu-Natal. There is this assumption, for example among the people in the shacks, that when you go the academic university you don't think about what you are learning daily in life but you are just theorising and talking *about* the people. But if this publication comes, it will show that it can be different; that the people and daily life are included by us in our Living Learning, and that the work continues. And sure, maybe there will be critique on our thinking. But you know, if a car is running, the dogs will be running alongside and barking. Anyway, if the car stops, the dog just pees on the car.

I think the publication will also be encouraging for the youth and others. They can see how important it is to challenge the mindsets of those people who want to always undermine us, and they can be encouraged not to accept this undermining.

I was talking with some comrades from my area during the week about the University course learning, and I was stressing that we are also learning with the Abahlali and the people in our places where we struggle. …

Written stuff is powerful. … It is an invitation to the world to "take your time and read it", you can learn from it, it is living – not in the distant past. It can generate and provoke debate and discussion, even critique, and even among academic intellectuals. If this happens, it can only take us further …

Sometimes when the people where we come from see us as a leader and then going to the school or University course, they think "ja, he's going to forget us. This education will give them wings to fly away". Our booklet will show it is different and it will encourage them …

And this is part of the thinking about bringing the two universities together. Perhaps we can talk of achieving the 'Universal University' – invading the academic one in order for it to benefit the people. …

Written stuff is powerful. … It is an invitation to the world to "take your time and read it", you can learn from it, it is living – not in the distant past. It can generate and provoke debate and discussion, even critique, and even among academic intellectuals. If this happens, it can only take us further …

Others can learn from our learning, which is a Living Learning, and so they can learn our politics, which is a living politics. Through the booklet, it can be seen by the world. This is important in this time of globalisation …

We are always answering this question from outsiders: "you are always criticising NGOs, but there's one NGO that you work with?". We have to explain that we do not welcome those who exploit us and use our name – but when we work with this NGO (CLP) it creates us and makes us feel as human beings. Education can sometimes destroy our struggle – when education makes leaders think of the people that they came from as the 'uneducated' ones, those who 'do not understand', those that we move away from. Therefore we do not go to school or University for our own benefit as individuals. We would curse CLP if this was the 'education' that had happened because they will have destroyed our movement. …

How did I escape the oppression where so many people are still living in a kind of darkness? Because I really see the world differently. How to remove that membrane from others' eyes? So many people see things in this way that how the world is, is how God meant it to be, that we are meant to suffer. How can we enlighten all others – not to think *like* us, but to think, to see the world. "Wake up, gogo. God loves you" …

This publication will … enable people to know where they come from and to feel proud of themselves no matter where they come from, no matter if they are rich or poor.

The Living Learning Sessions

Session 1: 28th January

In the first session, we mostly talked about how we all understand the intentions of the process and agreed on the practical arrangements of how it would work over the year to come. That also meant developing a framework for how each session would be structured. In the notes from each session below we do not repeat the full description of the steps we went through each time because that basic process stayed pretty much the same for the whole year. What we wanted was a framework that would not in any way predetermine the agenda or topics for discussion. There could be no 'curriculum' set by anyone except the movement militants themselves. The steps we agreed on at the beginning seemed to work really well to achieve this, and we more-or-less followed them in each session: collectively developing an agenda of issues first, and then working through them in discussion. The first steps never took too much time – so we could always spend most of the time that was available to us in discussion and debate.

Here's the general framework we developed for the sessions[1]:

1. think for a minute about what you have found most relevant or interesting over the last month or so;

2. go round and each person mention one thing briefly (even if it's to agree with something that's already been mentioned): "One thing I have found most interesting or relevant is …";

3. use these things to get a list of issues on newsprint for people to talk about together (where possible, prioritising the things that come up most often and grouping things that are closely connected);

1 Readers will notice that for some sessions, slight modifications to this process seemed appropriate from time-to-time.

4. taking each issue, think and talk about why these are important, and especially how they could be useful and relevant to the life of the people of the movements and their struggles[2].

It was during this first session that the phrase, 'Living Learning', emerged. It became the best label for the work we did together. We wanted a 'living learning' that really connects what happens in the University course with the everyday work – 'the living politics' – of the movements.

Everyone stressed that our 'living learning' should help this movement work. According to this view, attending the CEPD course was not for individuals to be certificated and to graduate for themselves and their individual careers outside of the movements. We are accountable to the movements who have given us the mandate to go on this course. Out task is to plough what we can learn back into the struggles and structures of the movements – and vice versa: to plough the learnings from struggle into the University course processes.

What we wanted was a framework that would not in any way pre-determine the agenda or topics for discussion. There could be no 'curriculum' set by anyone except the movement militants themselves.

2 It was intended that part of step 4 (which was the main discussion) should not become just an 'application' of what has been learnt in class at UKZN, but rather a recognition that there are different sources of learning (within class discussion, within movements, from readings, etc.) and that the discussion enables interaction between these different sources of learning.

Session 2: 18th February

We started this session talking about how everyone was feeling so far about doing the University course:

I was scared to go to the University. But when I got there I was surprised, and it's been a good experience. There are many people from different NGOs and even government doing the course.

Often, we as Abahlali are in conflict with these organisations but doing the Course allows for us to talk with these people and discuss things, and even build friendships. So far so good.

For me it's been an eye-opener. For example, I used to think that peace was only relevant for a country or people who are at war. But how we are learning about these things makes it clear that actually it starts within the people and in the relations between people. There can be no real peace while there is rich and poor, while we still have struggle for the basic things – like our struggles in Abahlali for decent housing and respect.

I was scared to go there, I was literally shivering. But the people have been friendly and, on the whole, no-one thinks they are superior to others. I have been deliberately wearing my Abahlali T-shirt and I have found that people are very interested in our Movement. Even with those few who you can tell really do think they are superior to us from the jondolos, it has been good to have conversations with them about our feelings, and our views from within the Movement. After those discussions, they can't hold on to the view of us that they had before. Also, how the course is running is helpful in learning more about how to work as a group.

I was not so scared – I like challenges! Doing the course has been helpful in shaping and re-shaping my thinking and how I see myself in the context of the Movement. Of course I have my natural eye to see the world but I now can also add in some of the academic view which helps. But this academic skill is not going to privatise me but rather advance my naturality.

The course section [in the second year] on alternatives to violence has a focus on how to transform power and I have found some of this to be deep, reflective and analytical. All of these things make me to think that the bigger question for us here is how does this 'living learning' that we do here connect with the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, and the whole of the struggle of the movements? Can we look to extend these discussions? As socialists, we must be sharing everything.

I thank God for this opportunity to do this course. At first I was scared. I told myself; 'I am too old to go the University', and 'I can't do it!' But my family advised me and I took this chance. Definitely I am gaining from working with other people. Because I am from the oppressed community, I am going to use this chance.

There can be no real peace while there is rich and poor, while we still have struggle for the basic things – like our struggles in Abahlali for decent housing and respect.

In a way, I was scared – not scared of learning but of being expected to learn something I don't like to learn. Education is never neutral! It's good that so far, what we are learning about does accommodate my views and it is relevant.

The 'agenda' of things to discuss that was generated by everybody looked like this:

communication

- and communication within the movement

development

- that it can lead to conflict or peace
- that a 'bottom-up' development (like what Nyerere says in the quote we were given in the placement test) is closer to what Abahlali is fighting for

respect

- and working in/as a group

that '**life-long learning**' takes place everywhere and all the time – if we recognise this and what the people already have, then we can move forward and all these are **connected** for us.

Discussion

Really in our experience, all of these things cannot be divorced from each other, they are one thing. We can understand this by talking about how we think of these things, and how we see them as connected. If we were using this language of 'brainstorming' and 'mind-mapping', perhaps we would say these ideas share the same 'space' or universe.

Development is not just a thing to be done to someone, it is a process of moving forward together. Communication is one of the tools for development. But to develop the community does not mean that the community has no ideas and experiences of their own development. So when an outsider comes, with their own language and culture and agenda, they can miss all the ideas that the people actually have. So it is much better to work *with* the people – and this requires group work. Otherwise you can only produce the kind of 'top-down' development which is not at all what we want. Without communication, nothing progresses with the community. For example, for anything that can take our Movement forward, the first thing is always to ask the views of the members. Only then can we begin to strategise. And when we ask about the people's views, this is done with deep respect and to encourage sharing. So it is clear the the kind of development that Nyerere was talking about also meant a proper communication because a good, 'bottom-up' development cannot happen any other way.

We see very clearly that the so-called 'development' that we have in South Africa is not involving the people in a right way. Look at the examples of shack-dwellers being evicted again and again out of the places we choose to live and into these housing projects that are built for us in other places. Of course, what happens is that so many people who are relocated like this simply sell or leave these houses and return to the settlements they chose in the first place – so it doesn't work. They should rather talk to the

people and involve them in finding answers. As it is, there's no respect for me and our traditions and our thinking.

In this way then, communication should be the driving force, but when there is a division between rich and poor, the rich use the knowledge they have to oppress. This is opposite to a proper communication which comes from respecting each other.

In a way, our Movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, was born because of a lack of this proper communication between the people and the Municipality. And all over the country, when the oppressed people organise their protests, they are saying the same thing. This lack of communication we experienced in Durban really led to what I can call the Municipality 'torturing' the poor in the jondolos. The councillors develop the people in the way that they (the councillors) want and not the way the people like.

Communication should be the driving force, but when there is a division between rich and poor, the rich use the knowledge they have to oppress. This is opposite to a proper communication which comes from respecting each other.

Look at what has happened in the last week in Kennedy Road where they have come to cut off people's electricity – this is just going backwards! Why? It's just because we are the poor who are not known and who are not respected and so they can do whatever they want to us.

One of us had the experience (which many in the shacks have all the time) of being harassed and searched by a policeman for no reason (even though there were plenty of other people going for a run at the same time – coloureds, Indians, all sorts) – when I challenged him, the policeman said: "A black man is always a suspect".

For the government, 'communication' means making the people to be following orders, always. So we can talk here now but, as soon as the

government comes into it, they want you to follow orders. Also it is clear that our national political leaders refuse to learn from their mistakes because they are arrogant in their power.

It is clear by now that a proper communication means that listening is very important. When some of us are elected to be a leader in our movements, this listening is very important. For example, after the Municipality cut the electricity in Kennedy Road last week, I as the leader from there had to listen to all the views of the people about this thing. Only after that, we were able to make a statement to the public and begin the strategies and mobilise for the next steps.

Proper communication means that listening is very important. When some of us are elected to be a leader in our movements, this listening is very important.

This is true. But even if you do your best, and listen with respect – then there still comes your turn to be respected and listened to. This becomes a real challenge.

At the march we had last week at Nkwalini, some of us thought that we, as the abafundisi, would be leading the march. But the people told us 'No, this is not your turn'. It was wonderful and powerful, and the people sang traditional Zulu songs and hymns.

Session 3: 17th March

Many of the ideas that were mentioned in the first steps of this session were connected with the idea of 'lifelong learning'. So we decided to start with that issue and open it up for a discussion that would allow everyone to connect their particular insights, questions and interests.

Lifelong learning is quite a good concept. It recognises the richness of information and knowledge that you are already having from your life. It makes clear that learning is something that can happen everywhere, anyhow, and any time. But it is not just that we must take everything as it is, or as it is presented. What is important for real learning is to question and debate it – especially what is presented to you. This is a very different understanding from what we were taught in school where 'the teacher is always is right'! Now we question giving that authority away to a 'teacher' – we can argue and debate. Only in this way can learning provide the possibility of finding different ways of doing things. And even though it is necessary to remain questioning, we are nonetheless building up our knowledge in the process.

Lifelong learning is also connected with the idea of experiential learning, and our questioning and debating is always related to the real experiences of the people. And because it is clear that learning is continuous, there is no 'maximum amount' of knowledge and we never reach a point we can say we have finished learning!

We discussed how this idea can be connected to the thinking of the living politics of Abahlali baseMjondolo. It can stop us becoming arrogant as leaders of a movement because our experience in life and in the movement means that we must always remain open to debate, question, and new learning from and with the people.

This way of thinking about learning also makes us to look back with new questions about things we were taught before. For example, for some of us, our experience in the Boy Scouts movement was very important.

Although it gave us some good things, we can now look back and question what was the real point of something like the Scout Promise to be faithful and loyal (to our country etc.) – part of it was definitely part of a way of teaching meant to produce 'good boys', who are obedient and not troublemakers!

A couple of weeks ago, MEC Mabuyakhulu was in Durban. One of us from the movement spoke to one of his staff about the problems we are having in the shacks. She said I should phone her the next week. When I did that, they were trying to ask tricky questions and I said, no, it is not right that I discuss this like this – come to a meeting of Abahlali and we can properly discuss these things. On the phone, I also mentioned that I was studying at the Pietermaritzburg campus of University. I said I was studying the law! Then this person said, 'Oh OK, now I can come and learn from you.' But still I said, 'Sure – come and learn from where I learn from – the meeting of the movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo!'

[Lifelong] learning is something that can happen everywhere, anyhow, and any time. But it is not just that we must take everything as it is, or as it is presented. What is important for real learning is to question and debate it ...

Thinking about this thing of experiential learning, I believe and know – it's even in the Bible – that Christ is coming back, but we are still waiting attentively. And in the meantime, as we wait, we are actively learning about good and bad in the world.

From what we have seen, there are many at University who that think they are there to learn what to come and 'teach the poor' when they are finished studying. It is clear that they imagine they are our educators. They assume we are empty enough and stupid enough for others to learn what *they* decide, and that they will come and think for those of us who are poor and cannot think. But now we are having our *own* living learning – and so there is a confrontation brewing about who's teaching who.

We see that education is mostly used to control people and keep power for the powerful – but we can disrupt this. This requires us to analyse what kind of education is going on – is it there to make us 'good boys and girls' or is it helping to make us question things and make that part of our struggle to change the world? So for us, learning is not about salaries and CVs. We must always be very aware of the trap that the other students fall into to think that others who have not had this opportunity for University-learning are stupid. For example, at the Abahlali camp this last weekend a question we discussed was 'why have these camps?'. The discussion there made clear that we do it to generate knowledge together – and when we do that, we are also generating power together.

A lot of this living lifelong learning seems mostly about working and learning in groups and in communities. But I need to share from experience about working on my own. In the place where I live there is a Centre for the Disabled. I've seen many things happen there, and I have worked there for 2 years without being paid. In order to do this University Course in Participatory Community Development, I told the boss of the Centre that I could no longer work there. His reaction was bad and he criticised me strongly for making that choice. The supervisor at the Centre is not doing good things for the disabled people. Even though the Centre is supported by the government with money, he is making people pay for food and services there. Other people are scared to challenge him and the boss about these sort of things. And now I have been banned from talking to the people there about these things! I have tried to suggest that the people who are affected talk to others and get the right information to challenge these things, but it is a difficult situation now. When the group talked about this we explored whether maybe the learning we are doing at the University can help us think about how to go back to those people in this problem because it

Learning is not about salaries and CVs. We must always be very aware of the trap that the other students fall into to think that others who have not had this opportunity for University-learning are stupid.

is a kind of oppression that they need to liberate themselves from. Perhaps God has taken you away precisely so that you can be the one to help the people there?

One other aspect about working on our own, and how it can connect with lifelong learning, is through the study materials that we get at the Course. They allow us to study anywhere and anytime and this can help us to do a thorough work in the communities where we are from.

One course is the 'Alternatives to Violence Project' (AVP). At first I didn't know what it was really about but now I am personally learning a lot. For example, I think that maybe if our politicians had learned about AVP, especially on the importance of listening and being listened to, things would not be so bad as they are. They should have had some training in these skills because they don't understand how to listen to the people. In the Course as we are learning about these things, it's also that we don't just learn what's taught as it is, but we also question things. For example, there are some very western ways of focussing on the individual and this can be a selfish, I-centred, approach – but African ways of thinking about these things can be better.

Together we talked about why the politicians do not listen; what do they gain from this way of working? One thing that was raised was that, especially those politicians who were in exile, were trained to kill, and to be violent against those they disagreed with, and this continues now in how they act as rulers. They should have been counselled after this experience to try and change these patterns. After discussing this we thought that, in general, it also shows that it is important to look after and put into practice in a disciplined and continuous way within our movements and our struggles exactly the kind of 'politics' and values that we want to achieve in the future we fight for. It was also mentioned that there is a connection with the kind of communication that we discussed at the last 'living learning' session – because we are saying that a proper mutual understanding (communication) requires listening.

But it is remarkable to think about how our politicians have changed (since 1994). In Abahlali we have some discussions with someone working for Amnesty International. This person said that it is ironic to be supporting Abahlali against the kind of oppression they are experiencing from a leader like Mabuyakhulu who Amnesty supported years ago when he faced the same kind of harassment and rights violations from the previous rulers and politicians!

Now it seems that most of our politicians have degrees in free-market economics. They put the economic issues first and they don't care about the people because they are looking after their own pockets and focus on issues like economic growth, profits and so on. We realise that the politicians wanted to distribute the resources – but now they seem to govern the resources and not care for the people.

As leaders and members of people's movements, our lifelong learning is teaching us a different way. For example, just before our session this evening, I was watching a DVD about our recent march at Nkwalini. It is very clear how the religious leaders – who probably thought beforehand that they would be leaders of the march – are far apart from the marchers. This was because the people clearly decided to lead their own march. Even when we got to the boom gate where the authorities told us we could go no further, there was a strong debate about who would negotiate for the people – the *induna*, the committee chairperson, a priest? This kind of debate in our struggles is very important as we are learning how to be democratic.

And *this* kind of lifelong learning is a learning that helps us become questioning people – to the powerful, we become suspicious, we become trouble-makers and they do not want us to continue this kind of lifelong learning. This is quite funny because, on the other hand, everyone in government and in the media and so on is always emphasising education, education, saying that everyone must go to learn more, that we have a skills shortage etc. So this raises again the point that there are different kinds of learning out there – most of what is meant by education is about

learning to be 'good boys and girls' and take our place in the system that benefits the powerful without questioning it.

For us, this learning is very much about working together – in groups, teams, communities, and movements. But the politicians and the powerful are working on their own because they should be working together with us in the community – but they don't. They come up with their proposals in the boardrooms, and then sometimes they come to us for our opinions on these. But they do not expect or allow us to make any really big and substantial contribution that they will take seriously. If we oppose what they propose, we're in trouble and get arrested, beaten, locked up and harassed. Even though we remember the words from the Freedom Charter, that "the people shall govern", it is clear that we are not the governors – in fact, we are put behind bars if we disagree with what they want. I mean, even if you work with deaf people, there is a sign language that you can use to achieve communication! Maybe it is best to think about these elements as a chain because a good system can only work when all the different parts are connected. Even if someone has to do some work on their own – for example, to get some relevant information that can help the people – they must still come back and work with the community and listen to them and also communicate with them about the information they have got – it's a chain. We are learning the life!

Lifelong learning is a learning that helps us become questioning people – to the powerful, we become suspicious, we become troublemakers and they do not want us to continue this kind of lifelong learning.

Session 4: 14th April

Usually we think back over the last few weeks of the Course and the struggles of the movements, and then mention the things that have been most important or interesting. But this time, in a couple of weeks, there is Freedom Day – or Unfreedom Day, as Abahlali have made it known. So we agreed to see if there were some connections with this theme that would be useful to talk about together. Some of us remembered that in the 'placement test' that we had done before starting the Course, CAE had used a powerful quote from Julius Nyerere that linked the ideas of freedom and development.

So we first worked in small groups for a few minutes to generate some ideas. Then we heard from each group what ideas they thought the whole group could work on together, and recorded these on newsprint. In this first round of ideas, the following things came up:

We can think about freedom in the context of how we understand education. It is clear now that education is always biased; it has an ideology and a bias. So when we engage with it, our task is to fight to take it back and make it work for us. We do not just accept what is presented to us but we must question it. It is the same with 'Freedom Day': the people are told, 'celebrate, you are free' – but is it true? We must question this. Real freedom is not something that can be imposed on a person from outside, it can only be something learned from within.

There is much for the people to learn about what freedom really means. In South Africa there is unfreedom more than there is freedom. When we are interested in real freedom, part of our work becomes not just to understand the world that we are in but to change it, as a famous philosopher said.

When we have Unfreedom Day as well as a new law like the Slums Act being pushed at the people by the same politicians, and all in the name and language of 'freedom', we see the contradictions in our country. It is

true that we are told in SA that there is this freedom but there are also evictions – they say we are free but it cannot be true when evictions and hunger continue.

Definitely we are not free when our rights are denied – like when we are harassed and shot for marching and expressing ourselves as a movement – and when the people's lives are affected by so much crime, disease, homelessness and unemployment.

The people are told, 'celebrate, you are free' – but is it true? We must question this. Real freedom is not something that can be imposed on a person from outside, it can only be something learned from within.

The comrades from Church Land Programme had been reading an article by the radical journalist, John Pilger, about South Africa. Pilger says that in the neo-liberal South Africa there might be a lot of freedoms but that freedom from poverty seems a freedom too far. And so democracy is undermined and violence remains.

A researcher was discussing things with some of us from Abahlali. He asked a deep and tough question: 'If government delivers houses and services that the movement demands, is that freedom? Would that be the end of struggle?' We discussed these things with the researcher and made clear that there is no answer to the question about when the struggle is over except the answers that will come from within the life of the movement of the poor itself.

When we looked back over our list of ideas that had come up, we saw that it reflects a way of critical thinking about the life of the people, starting to uncover and name the contradictions this shows against what the powerful want us to believe about our situation. We also see that our ideas about freedom go much further and deeper than the way our struggles are presented when they are described as 'service delivery protest'. If the heart of our struggle was just for houses and services to be delivered, we would be just like beggars with our hands out, waiting for someone to

help us. No, what we are struggling for, a real freedom, goes much further than that! And so we started our discussion of these things together.

It is really important to discuss the bigger and bigger idea of freedom. It is not enough to taste a little of it ourselves in a discussion like this, but always to share with more people, more ears. In discussions in Abahlali baseMjondolo last weekend, it was discussed and agreed to go to each area to hear the people and to talk about this month of 'Freedom Day', to listen to their thinking about Freedom Day and the realities of shack fires, the Slum Act and so on. There is also a proposal to maybe have a focused workshop on these issues next weekend to bring together this process of listening, and to flesh out the ideas with the people, testing properly where the thinking of the people is. We need an open debate about notions of freedom, especially when so much of the people's lives is a contradiction to freedom. We need to make sure that as a Movement, we remain on the same page as the people's thinking and understanding. It might be a taste of freedom in itself to do this. So this space of discussing and listening is a small but important part of freedom – the freedom that comes from searching for the truth. Our country is caught in a politics that often prevents us to search for real truth. We don't say that we in the movements are perfect, but at least we are trying, we are opening these gates; at least we are on a right path to search for the truth. We have a deep responsibility to make sure that no-one can shut these gates.

If the heart of our struggle was just for houses and services to be delivered, we would be just like beggars with our hands out, waiting for someone to help us. No, what we are struggling for, a real freedom, goes much further than that!

Sutcliffe [eThekwini City Manager] said once that 'knowledge is dangerous'. We can see that the people who want to know more become a threat to those in power. The powerful see them as wanting to take their bread, and they would rather keep the masses of the people not knowing much.

As an example, there is someone in our class doing the university Course. He is someone you would describe as a capitalist – he is always careful to arrange on the desk his fancy set of car keys and cellphone, and he dresses and presents himself to show he is 'successful'. He works for an NGO and talks a lot about 'helping the people' – especially against HIV/AIDS. I asked him a question once. I said, 'If God sent you a questionnaire with the proposal to abolish AIDS, would you be able to say yes?'. He ran away after that and hasn't spoken directly to me since then! That is why Sutcliffe said knowledge is dangerous. It is only by denying and undermining the knowledge of the people that you can have, as you see on the official Freedom Day events, thousands of people filling stadiums and chanting "We are free, we are free" – what can they mean? It is not freedom that we have.

We talked about some of the ways that the powerful, including also some of the NGOs, are always denying and undermining the knowledge of the people. It has become necessary for them to do this and to insist that it is only they who have the real truth, the right analysis, the correct politics – in their minds, the poor must be given capacity building, education and training, political education which, of course, they will provide. All of this is to convince the people that they are not able to think and act for themselves. The kind of education and knowledge, the searching for truth, that we are doing is too dangerous for the powerful. It has no formal 'syllabus' except the life and priorities of the people themselves; there is no protocol to be observed except open debate between people as equals. This kind of education and knowledge recognises that, as comrade Mnikelo would say, 'It is better to be out of order', to be outside the prescribed curriculum! We see clearly that the prescribed curriculum has the intention of control built deeply into it and that there are strings attached.

I asked someone from my area [a deep rural area] what they really thought about this 'Freedom Day' thing. He said 'Well, since I don't go to work for a day on that day, we are free'. So it is clear that many of the people need to be brought to a proper learning about freedom and unfreedom.

Someone in the group told the story of a pig that had been kept in a cage. Then one day, the pig was released from the cage and tied to a tree instead. And the pig celebrated, saying, 'I am free now'. We all laughed about this story – and then our story-teller added: 'But you know, even if you cut that rope, the pig will still just circle around the tree and not move away.' We realised that this is what apartheid has done to us. The politicians abuse it as an excuse more and more to justify the mess we're in saying, 'Comrades, remember we have 400 hundred years of history on our shoulders.' Mandela once said in a speech that it can take a few minutes to destroy a tree but many years to grow it. But these are using part of the truth to tell a lie, to mislead the people and make excuses for the failures of the politicians. When we think of the thousands of people filling stadiums on Freedom Day chanting 'we are free', we think they are like that pig. And in any case, although they might be given a free T-shirt or some breyani for going to stadium, when they come home there is no food. So it just means 'free for now' – this is a really sad thing to understand.

People who talk about the story of South Africa often talk about 'land dispossession'. We can surely also talk about 'mind dispossession' as well. It is true: people from overseas came and confiscated our land and so on – but it is much more to see that they dispossessed our minds. And that is why we chant 'freedom' even though we are not free. The truth is that only certain individuals are free. So let us not allow our minds to be dispossessed! This is a very powerful and frightening analysis we are making. We are also saying that dispossession is not just some that happened in history – it continues into the present. How else can we understand that the politicians think they can get away with presenting something like the Slums Act in the name of freedom?

The Rastas have talked about this side of freedom for quite a long time. There is that song by Bob Marley called 'Freedom Songs' where he says 'emancipate yourselves from mental slavery'. And there is another rasta song that says no-one remembers Marcus Garvey. Hey, but those were written a long time ago but now they seem to be powerful and relevant to us in our situation. Perhaps we should have paid more attention to these

traditions about freedom that also talked about freeing our minds because we can see that the liberation we have had in South Africa was not at all complete. There was a tendency in the struggle to say we can postpone these questions till 'after the revolution' – this was a mistake.

A few of us were in a conversation about things in Zimbabwe recently. One of us said: 'Mugabe doesn't like Tsvangari because he will be a puppet of the western powers.' Certainly Mugabe is right to say Zimbabwe must never be a colony. But the comrade also replied: 'But so long as the people of Zimbabwe are really free'. And now we realise that all these leaders, in so many countries including ours in South Africa, they are all really puppets. So in the end, Mugabe or Tsvangari is not the issue at all but what is the will of the people?

Even when the State here talks about freedom, they want to limit it to voting and some little bits of service delivery here and there. But if we talk about it in the way we are doing today, then this undermines the state's logic of freedom. The naked truth is that actually there is no freedom. If we really were free, why are they always reminding us about it? It is in order to convince the people against what they actually know. The stadiums and the speeches, with the politicians in their very fancy suits, reminding us again and again – this all shows that someone is guilty of a very serious crime against the people. They do it to try and stop us, the people, from reminding them that we are not free!

When the State here talks about freedom, they want to limit it to voting and some little bits of service delivery here and there. ... The naked truth is that actually there is no freedom. If we really were free, why are they always reminding us about it? It is in order to convince the people against what they actually know.

When our discussions come to this point, we can say that we have really reached a 'living learning' because we are matching the theory with the reality of the life of the people. Freedom, real freedom, and the experience

of real freedom, has to be something that is outside what is prescribed to us; it will come from becoming masters of our own history; professors of our own poverty; and from making our own paths out of unfreedom.

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ANNEXURE:

Abahlali baseMjondolo to Mourn UnFreedom Day Once Again

Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Release: Monday 21 April 2008

On Sunday it will be Freedom Day again. Once again we will be asked to go into stadiums to be told that we are free. Once again we will not be going to the stadiums. We will, for the third time, be mourning UnFreedom Day. Since the last UnFreedom Day we have been beaten, shot at and arrested on false charges by the police; evicted by the land invasions unit; disconnected from electricity by Municipal Security; forcibly removed to rural human dumping grounds by the Municipalities; banned from marching by the eThekwini City Manager; slandered by all those who want followers not comrades; intimidated by all kinds of people who demand the silence of the poor; threatened by new anti-poor laws; burnt in the fires; sick in the dirt and raped in the dark nights looking for a safe place to go the toilet.

We have also opened an office with a library, launched many new branches, opened new crèches, successfully taken Ricky Govender and the eThekwini Municipality to court to stop evictions, taken the province to court to overturn the Slums Act, marched on Glen Nayager and Obed Mlaba, defended all of our members arrested for standing strong in the politics of the poor, organised in support of people struggling elsewhere, received powerful solidarity from other movements and some churches and thought and discussed how to make our own homemade politics, our living politics, into paths out of unfreedom.

It is clear that no one should tell someone else that they are free. Each person must decide for themselves if their life is free. Each community must decide on this matter for themselves. In each community women and men, the young and the old, the people born there and the people born in other places must decide on this matter for themselves.

In our movement we have often said that we are not free because we are forced to live without toilets, electricity, lighting, refuse removal, enough water or proper

policing and, therefore, with fires, sickness, violence and rape. We have often said that we are not free because our children are chased out of good schools and because we are being chased out of good areas and therefore away from education, work, clinics, sports fields and libraries. We have often said that we are not free because the politics of the poor is treated like a criminal offence by the Municipalities while real criminals are treated like business partners. We have often said that we are not free because the councillors are treated like the people's masters instead of their servants. We have often said that we are not free because even many of the people who say that they are for the struggles of the poor refuse to accept that we can think for ourselves.

We have often asked that our settlements be humanized, not destroyed. We have often asked that city planning be democratized. We have often asked for an end to wasting money on stadiums and themeparks and casinos while people don't have houses. We have often asked that democracy be a bottom up rather than a top down system. We have often asked the Municipalities and the police to obey the law. We have often asked for solidarity in action with our struggles. We have often offered and asked for solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe and Haiti and Turkey and in all the places where the poor are under attack.

But freedom is more than all of this. Freedom is a way of living not a list of demands to be met. Delivering houses will do away with the lack of houses but it won't make us free on its own. Freedom is a way of living where everyone is important and where everyone's experience and intelligence counts. Every Abahlali baseMjondolo branch and every settlement affiliated to Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban, Pinetown, Pietermartrizburg and Tongaat has had a meeting to discuss the ways in which they are not free and has written a letter to the whole movement explaining why they are not free. Many new and important issues have been raised. These letters are being collected into a pamphlet that will be distributed and discussed at UnFreedom Day. We invite everyone who wants to think about Freedom and UnFreedom in our country to attend our event.

We welcome the participation of Christian Aid from Wales who have come to learn about our struggle.

We welcome the participation of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, our comrades in struggle who are driving all the way from Cape Town to be with us.

We welcome the participation of Bishop Reuben Phillip and the other clergy who have bravely stood with us in difficult times.

At this time we express our solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe suffering terrible oppression in their own country and terrible xenophobia in South Africa. We also express our solidarity with the people battling eviction in Joe Slovo and Delft in Cape Town and the whole Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign as well as the Landless Peoples' Movement and all organisations, big and small, standing up for the right to the city, the humanisation of the rural areas and for justice for the poor across the country. We also express our solidarity with the 1 500 people left homeless in the Jadhu Place settlement on Sunday morning after another of the fires that terrorize our people. We condemn the attempts of the City & the Province to misuse this fire, as the flood in the Ash Road settlement in Pietermaritzburg was recently misused, to advance their shack 'elimination' agenda. We will resist this. We will resist all attempts to turn settled communities into transit camps.

We salute the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union and Bishop Reuben Philip for their active solidarity with the Zimbabwean people. We call on others to follow their example. We call on all clergy to stand with the poor. We call on the South African Municipal Workers' Union to refuse to carry out any instructions to evict the poor from the cities. We call on the Police and Prison's Civil Rights Union to refuse to carry out any orders to assault and arrest the poor for exercising their democratic rights to protest. Solidarity in action is our only hope.

No Land! No House! No Vote!

Land & Housing in the Cities!

Bottom Up Democracy not Top Down Rule by Councillors!

Session 5: 13th May

Before we began it was commented that it was a very good thing to see material from our last 'living learning' session being used by Abahlali baseMjondolo in the pamphlets that were prepared for the Unfreedom Day events.

From the first round of comments about what people had found most relevant or interesting over the last month or so, the following contributions were made:

- *The point that Paulo Freire made is important that 'education is never neutral'.*
- *I also wanted to talk about a quote that comes from Freire too – that 'we make the road as we walk'.*
- *What I think is important, also from Freire's thinking, is that the oppressors always want more and more – and they get more at the expense of the oppressed.*
- *To these two classes (of oppressors and oppressed) we should think about a third group – those who watch silently (didn't Steve Biko have something to say about this?)*
- *I am interested in how the work of Karl Marx had an influence on Freire's thinking.*
- *Behind some of these comments is the question I want to raise – about the real problems facing adult learners. This is connected to the silence of the oppressed.*

It was clear that many of the ideas that were mentioned were connected with the ideas of Paulo Freire so this was obviously going to be the focus of where our discussions would begin. We saw that the areas that we had raised were about two, related, parts of Freire's work – on the one hand, his approach to processes of learning, and then also on the importance of social and political analysis.

It seems to be true that no education is neutral but the question is why or how is this important for us in our movements here and now? Definitely it helps us make a clarification between education that is either domesticating or liberating. For the oppressed it becomes necessary that we get an education that allows the people to see what is happening in *their* area, their world. So it must be relevant to our own context of life, and it must expose the reality of their oppression – we must really see the oppressor. This kind of an education we can use to set ourselves free and, in doing that, we can also be freeing the oppressors.

But most of what is called education is domestication. It is like the taming of an animal to make it obey a master. In the school system as we have it still, we can see that teachers have something to teach and a way of teaching it – but both of these are there to serve the interests of the government.

Even within the schools there is not neutrality. Government says education is free but white schools are seen as better and this affects the future of our kids from township schools – when they are looking for jobs, one of the first questions they are asked is to find out what kind of school they went to.

Christian education has not been neutral either. When some of us support the movements' struggles in church, others are saying 'No, we don't get involved in politics' – but this is just supporting the status quo and it shows how we have been domesticated through our religion too.

Paulo Freire emphasised that it is up to the oppressed people to do their own thing to liberate themselves. So even if you are an 'animator' and you want to come and help, you must recognise that the people are the ones who know about their situation. Some people who know more things from academic learning oppress us by saying, more or less, 'You know nothing – so do as I tell you.' This is how education maintains the existing order.

Christian education has not been neutral either. When some of us support the movements' struggles in church, others are saying 'No, we don't get involved in politics' – but this is just supporting the status quo and it shows how we have been domesticated through our religion too. This kind of domestication teaches us to accept that how things are in the world is somehow natural, or how God planned it – so that the people feel they cannot act to change things.

As far as I know, Karl Marx – who was the father of communism – once went to a sort of workshop in France. Bonaparte had been telling the people about a Renaissance. Marx looked at the people and said: 'Poor fools – with mouths agape' because he saw that the people were just accepting to be spoon-fed by the leaders. It was also Marx who said that all of history is a long tale of a struggle between the haves and the have-nots. In our capitalist times, the haves are the bourgeoisie and the have-nots are the proletariat or working class.

Yes but what do these things from great intellectuals have to say about our today's struggles? Certainly it makes us aware of the dangers of those who want to do things *for* the oppressed people. The only one who can emancipate me is myself. True liberation from oppression will only come from the oppressed themselves.

Ja, education is not neutral. To make an example, you can look at how some 'teachers' and even some who think they are 'animators' are actually exploiting us: we have our own ideas, and values and cultures but these are always being undermined and instead, the ideas, values and cultures of those who oppress are pushed. This makes us, as the poor, to feel that we are not important, that we do not count or matter.

This kind of abuse is the one that really affects me deeply. Somehow, physical abuse – which is what others out there seem to focus on more when they talk about things like child abuse or women abuse or substance abuse – these are bad but somehow, they can be treated and healed just on the physical level. But the mental abuse you have talked about, this is much deeper, much more damaging and much harder to heal. As a leader

in the community, I feel this difference very strongly when the people come to me to talk about the problems they are facing from time-to-time. When they say things like 'But what can we do about it? – God made us to be as we are' or 'God made the world to be as it is', this is what I find really heartbreaking. Someone once said to me, 'It's as though we just belong to the third class and we cannot change it.'

I come from the shacks. My 14-year old daughter went to the City library on the weekend. When she was standing at the cashier desk, there was girl of a similar age but from a Model-C school standing there too. This other girl asked the librarian for some books or information about 'informal settlements'. The librarian didn't hear clearly and the girl thought she had not understood – so the young girl explained that she was talking about "ezakhiwe kabi" – the ugly-built cardboard homes. This is a serious offence; these things hurt deeply.

When they say things like 'But what can we do about it? – God made us to be as we are' or 'God made the world to be as it is', this is what I find really heartbreaking. Someone once said to me, 'It's as though we just belong to the third class and we cannot change it.'

So domestication goes deep and far, it is true. You can even be oppressed and domesticated by your own pastor. Surely this is what is happening when you can pay him money to receive a blessing from God? And when religious teaching and thinking says that God wants men to rule over women?

We can also see the difference between liberating and oppressing possibilities even in ideas like 'development' – in practice, because it usually is done without truly liberating and involving the people, development has actually become a war on the poor. Like all these other areas we have talked about, there are these two alternatives – and the possibilities for good are in the struggles and the thinking of the poor.

In our economic systems we can see this too. Recently there was this story about the manganese factory at Cato Ridge where the workers are being poisoned and damaged from the work they do there. It is clear that the owners don't care what happens to the workers – they care only for the profits they can make. This is oppression, too; they don't talk in a proper way with the workers as human beings. I was in Rustenberg in 2007 when there were accidents on the mines there that killed and injured the workers. It was shocking to see that, although people were dying, the bosses seemed to be more concerned about the state of their machines that might have been damaged and not the people working there.

We are analysing so many things here, and we can think to use the work of these big intellectuals and so on, but even Marx's quotes can be turned around and used by our exploiters and oppressors. It's like all the different things that get justified by different people all quoting from the same Bible. So this domestication can be seen also in how language and words are used and abused – even the ideas that came originally from genuine struggles. For example, at one time, the idea of 'sustainable development' seemed like quite a good idea that could accommodate some of the protests against bad development that different struggles had raised – but by now, even the World Bank can use the words 'sustainable development' for their own projects.

In a similar way, we can say that 'education is a tool for development'. But if it's controlled by the oppressors or those who have authority, it can be used to manipulate the poor. To resist this, it is necessary to fight so that education, development, even religion, come to be dominated by the poor.

We can see that all these systems are connected up into our oppression. Even the economic system is really part of the education system. You can understand this when we think about the fact that, for most of the people, the economic system has really collapsed – and so also, the general education system has failed us because we were taught (we are still being taught!) that capitalism, or the 'free market', was going to be good for everyone – but it has failed.

You know, if the whole country and the whole continent of Africa did a 'living learning', we could have the chance to be free. Africa is rich in its people and resources – but we are poor. We are poor because the bourgeois classes take the resources, chow the money, and oppress the people. We are left with nothing – just maybe begging for some loans from the IMF or the World Bank. And even if these are given, nothing comes down to the people on the ground. Those on top just keep on taking – through running the companies, taking bribes and, as if that's not enough, even through taking back our money through tax. We are really poor and oppressed by these things.

There is something to think about here as well: we in our struggles from the shacks in Durban sometimes blame someone like Mayor Mlaba for the problems with bad housing for the people in Durban. But maybe it's from higher up – from [national Finance Minister] Trevor Manuel and the whole system that he is part of.

While we are saying these things, isn't important to be able to come with the alternatives? What do you say when the same oppressed is silent about this capitalist system? How do you justify your blame? – especially when the oppressed are silent and others talk *for* you? Well of course there are all these things that are said by people to naturalise the injustices – like 'you mustn't bite the hand that feeds you', and 'beggars can't be choosers'! But it's a good question – who's going to fight these things? – especially if we say 'don't speak for us'.

Didn't Marx emphasise that once you notice you are oppressed as a proletariat, then your struggle must be to overthrow the current government and replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat? Yes, but we have seen here and too many times elsewhere that, once in power, the leaders turn to oppress again. Sure – we do not necessarily agree that answer is to take over the government in that way. Maybe the point from Marx is that those who are oppressed must shout and fight with all their breath and life.

Wouldn't it be an important contribution to this (especially when we see that as a country we have too few teachers) to let us as the social movements to learn and teach at the grassroots; creating forums of living learning that would be helping the people to learn that they are not free. If we really did something like this, then we could also be educating the government – for example about proper service delivery. So we need to create our own forums and spaces of learning and teaching that would be different and separate from those that are prescribed by and for this system that we are fighting against. Traditionally our 'books' were our old people who had wisdom and knowledge. Nowadays, when we are toyi-toyi'ing on the streets, it is not only that we are protesting against something that is wrong, we are trying to teach, to teach everyone – our struggle is an invitation to the world to come and learn from us and with us.

We need to create our own forums and spaces of learning and teaching that would be different and separate from those that are prescribed by and for this system that we are fighting against. Traditionally our 'books' were our old people who had wisdom and knowledge.

At this point we took a moment to go back and see the connections between some of the things we had just been talking about:

- that we see quite big systems (education, religion, economy, government, values, and so on) that are connected into overall project of oppression of the people to favour the rich oppressors;
- that these systems try to keep us silent;
- that the thinking together of the oppressed who struggle can unmask this and create learnings and alternatives for better world and for the the whole world, everyone;
- that the struggle cannot be simply to take over the systems of power and government because then oppression returns again;

- that to keep our struggle and movements from getting corrupted in this way, we must continuously try to open spaces for our own thinking and learning and teaching at the grassroots;
- that these are all part of our politics really – it is a different politics from party politics and the systems of government and power that oppress the people or exploit the workers.

What do we call this politics of ours? Even though we draw on the thinking of someone like Karl Marx, does that mean we are communists or members of the Communist Party? When some of us were in a workshop in Cape Town, there was this line that we are 'running away from party politics'. What did they mean? Partly you can identify the politics by looking at the ideas and ideologies of a movement so maybe our ideology helps to identify the kind of politics under our movement. But the party politics that we see cannot emancipate us and it is not our politics. Perhaps we are making something new – but what can we call it?

The facilitators were asked to share something about this question too. There was a discussion about the contributions of Michael Neocosmos, Alain Badiou, and Jaques Rancier. Perhaps the best word for our emerging politics is 'abahlalism'. We will carry on to learn it and think it, to speak and not be silenced, to produce something really new for everyone, and not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Session 6: 3rd June

At this session we had reached more-or-less the half-year point of learning and teaching at the university, in struggle, and in our 'living learning' sessions. So we did things a little bit differently this time. We started by opening up for reflections and comments from the group around these two questions:

a. *what comes to mind as the most important or significant from the year so far?; and*
b. *why is that thing so important for me?*

One of the main things to come from this discussion was seeing that freedom, peace and proper development are always together. It's like the chicken and the egg because you can't really say that the one comes before the other one, but they must all be there for the others to exist, too. Working with research and information, as well as the contributions of other philosophers and ideologies, has also been a really good experience.

One thing that stands out concerns our learning more about skills for working with others in groups. We have not just been taught this as something from a book. It has been put into practice in the very way that our facilitators of the course have done things. We can now say that we have learned a lot about working with others from our experience in the class; we have learned skills (for example listening skills) from actually using them in the process of our learning and teaching. The right way of working with others respects their local struggles and their sufferings, and in no way undermines the people. This has been exactly how the facilitator of the course has approached us and our movements, struggles, experiences and opinions.

In the second part of our session we were given a short amount of time to prepare to make a group presentation on 'living learning' as if we were reporting back to our movement who had mandated us to attend the university course.

Everyone from the course contributed to preparing a really powerful presentation. Making the actual presentation was delegated and shared among three comrades – these notes just catch some of the main ideas that came out from it:

We are here to address you, the communities that sent us student comrades to the University. Each of us will talk a bit about each of the topics that we have written [on newsprint] under the heading: "Living Learning". The headings were as follows:

Living Learning

- *Life Long Learning – We make the road by walking*
- *Peace and Development*
- *Conclusion*

I greet you all. Thanks for sending us to this course – even though some of us were scared about going there! We want to share with you how we see that this information can help us in our struggles – and that our learning is not to make us into petty capitalists!

We want to talk about a 'living learning'. When we are sharing information together with you as the community, then we can call it a 'living learning'. The idea of lifelong learning shows that, as people, we are learning all the time and in all parts of our lives – in schools and universities, in homes and communities, in marches and struggle.

We know very clearly now that you, the people, must lead if we are to reach a proper development – not the NGOs and other outsiders and experts. It is you who will tell us whether or not we should continue with our University course. My own lifelong learning includes so much of what I have learned from you, the community. What you have said and done, and what you continue to say and do in your struggles, is confirmed as correct by what I have learned at the University.

The right way to go forward is to start with the things that are the most important to the local community. And so we need to hear from you the people about the burning matters that affect you, whatever they are – like

maybe electricity load-shedding, or xenophobia or whatever it is.

I actually do hope that you will let me go back to learn more. Hopefully what I learn will be useful to you.

I want to give you encouragement in your struggle and say that what you are doing is not wrong. You are right to be struggling for development – and you are right that your struggle for development is more than just for houses or services. It is a struggle for everyone to have a whole life and a good livelihood where we are, without being forcibly removed from our homes and settlements. There are good reasons that we have for living where we are. We must stand united and fight together: until we have a good development, we cannot experience real peace and freedom.

Now it is important to say: I am not an 'expert'. It is **your** thinking and **your** views that I respect. What I have learned at the University confirms this to be true. So don't say that now, because I have been to the University, that I know everything – NO! We must not allow for the ordinary people to be made to feel discouraged. For us who have been at the Course, what is important is the relation with the ordinary people, to feel that we are part and parcel of what can be done together. We have not learned to use aggressive, bombastic, or fancy English words to make the people feel like they are less. Rather, we want to practice what we preach and to connect all the things we are learning with the real struggles and issues of the people here. We are ready to share with you any time. Thank you.

The idea of lifelong learning shows that, as people, we are learning all the time and in all parts of our lives – in schools and universities, in homes and communities, in marches and struggle.

We know very clearly now that you, the people, must lead if we are to reach a proper development – not the NGOs and other outsiders and experts.

Session 7: 22nd July

From the first round of comments, the following contributions were made:

- *in the month of June there is a focus on the youth. We 'celebrated' and remembered two young boys who died after being shot by a farmer in 2006. We also know that Abahlali baseMjondolo launched its Youth League. And there was a court victory concerning an assault on a girl by a farmer in the Rietveli area.*
- *I've been thinking about the question of education. After the fire at Kennedy Road, there was a story in the Daily News newspaper which quoted government spokesperson Lennox Mabaso saying: 'We would appreciate it if Zikode did something to educate his community on fire safety instead of talking the whole time' (Daily News, 17 July). So there is this kind of education that others always want to impose on us.*
- *Also on education, but a different kind: we need to think about the education in our communities that is needed about development.*
- *Capitalism against African countries.*
- *Fires at Nkwalini and at Kennedy Road show that it is not yet Uhuru.*
- *I have in mind the task to review and implement the learnings we have been making over the last year and more.*
- *Yes, we must think about how to apply the learnings to our communities and organisations.*

When we looked at all the contributions that had been made, we thought that we would proceed by looking at the following three main themes that seemed to be coming up – and which are probably connected with each other:

1. *education*
2. *applying and implementing learnings*
3. *actions and activism.*

Well it was not just Lennox Mabaso's comments that made me think about this 'education' thing. After the fires at Kennedy Road, different people came to us offering help. One was a local church, the Ethekweni Community Church. They asked, 'How can we help?', which seemed like a good start. But after we had discussed with them the different things that were actually needed, then they said: 'Don't you think these people need education?'! So there are always two sides to education. On the one hand there is the education that we want, the kind of learning that we do here and elsewhere and that is liberating. But there is also this other education that others want us to have which is something that suits them and that we are almost forced to have. The first kind, what we are getting here, must be very threatening so they always suggest another kind – a kind of education for suppressing us. So education is a dangerous game, it's biased and as dirty as politics. After the fire, people were basically telling us to teach people how to use a paraffin stove properly – how to use a paraffin stove is not something I need to teach to the people who have used them all their lives! Why is this the thing they think must be taught when we have said clearly the problem is that we are excluded from getting electricity?

Where I am from in the rural areas, it is clear that the people do need a kind of education about development. If development means moving forward from where you are to a better position, then the people need it. In the places where we live, there is a lack of development. We live the same life as before. For the people to change this, we must know how to look for the development we want. For example, at the University I learn about IDPs [Integrated Development

Where I am from in the rural areas, it is clear that the people do need a kind of education about development. If development means moving forward from where you are to a better position, then the people need it. In the places where we live, there is a lack of development. We live the same life as before. For the people to change this, we must know how to look for the development we want.

Plans], but the councillors in our place don't give us the people any chance to say what we want, they just take decisions for us.

But doesn't this also mean that there are others who need an education? I mean the politicians in government and parliament. What you have described shows they need education because they are not civilised.

So OK, the people need education of a certain kind but really: who must educate who? The people living in the shacks and in the rural areas know their life, and those on the top must come down to learn from the people. Education is sometimes one-sided because those in the upper levels want to 'educate' the people so that they feel inferior. So **their** education is to impose; it is not to ask and listen to the people's views. Now to ask and to listen, that would be a liberating education!

Who must educate who? The people living in the shacks and in the rural areas know their life, and those on the top must come down to learn from the people.

The examples from the fires show us clearly that the education that is imposed does not deal with the causes of the problems. If we were to learn something useful after the fires, we would be learning and teaching about the **causes** – but what they propose does not deal with this.

We **are** all educated. If I need to be educated about development, then the best educator is a real experience of development. So a good education for bringing development means we must know about our places; we must know what we want; we can show our education in these things by saying clearly what is wanted, when, where, and how. If they refuse to answer these questions, then it is they who are shown to be uneducated.

Part of the experience we have of development is working with lots of NGOs. Most of them want to educate us all the time. They have no money to help us with the practical things we need – like money for bail when comrades are arrested, phone bills for organising, banners and T-shirts

for protest actions. Instead they assume they know better what we need – and it's always some kind of 'education'! But we who have the experience, know that they are the ones who need an education.

We discussed for a bit whether this analysis of people's experiences shows that there are not simply two but maybe three kinds of education? Certainly there is 'education' that is imposed to keep the people suppressed and silent so that the status quo is not threatened. On the other side there is a liberating education that starts with the people's struggles to be fully human. But is there a special kind of 'education' in the middle – usually called 'capacity building' or 'political education' – that civil society organisations specialise in giving when the people who are meant to be suppressed start to struggle against their oppression? This kind of education is done in the name of the poor and oppressed and is aiming to teach the language and rules of how to change your struggle so that it can be 'in order', following the protocols, thinking and expectations of the civil society people who want to claim to represent the people's struggles and interests. These differences help us to see that it is important to think carefully about the kind of education that is best for learning within our communities because it must really be a process of formation that builds on people's real life and thinking and experience.

Sometimes these differences that we are analysing here can mean we 'talk past each other' in relation to the elites. How we talk in this room is different from what and how elites think. They think we know nothing and must be taught. They think the people don't understand and therefore need education. We start from the opposite assumption. When elites respond by insisting on 'education', it shows again and again that they are not listening. When they insist it is the people who need education, it shows they assume the people have no understanding.

And then we must think about the next two themes to discuss ['applying and implementing learnings' and 'actions and activism']: then the question becomes how to make a rolling wheel of what becomes activism? Definitely not an education that sidelines or confines your anger because there is some protocol to follow! It must be a process that highlights our

feelings, our rights and our demands for a development that we want – that's how we turn an understanding into a demand for action. We cannot remain silent any more. All the processes of learning that we celebrate and look after in our movement – the living learning sessions, the camps, the meetings, the protests – they are there to express the anger and understanding that is always being suppressed: our activism is the expression of this coming out.

The kind of education we want involves people listening to each other. The learning we talk about is always a learning that is put into practice. At the same moment of learning, we apply it. To share it and apply it is what makes it a living learning. This is not an education to make individuals better in their individual jobs and careers – it is with the people.

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At the last Abahlali camp, which was a sort of induction workshop for new leadership, we discussed what is good leadership[1]. On the following Friday, one of us attended a BEC [Branch Executive Committee] workshop of the ANC which was also an induction workshop. At the ANC one, it was clear they didn't know what to say really. So I pulled out my diary where I had my notes from the Abahlali camp discussions and I used these notes to talk about a good understanding of leadership. They ANC leaders were shocked and eventually they asked me stop talking. It was a major disaster for them. They say they will come and speak to me privately this week. 'A leader must listen and be listening' was what we had said at our camp. These people in power and in the political parties don't want people who are lower to say this. They only want the people to agree with what the leaders impose on us.

1 There is a good article by Neha Nimmagudda called "Resistance from the other South Africa" which talks about this camp, available on the Abahlali wesbite www.abahlali.org

Our role is not oppose them. So our living learning has really turned a page for me.

The expression of our learning in our activism is very important. In June we showed that our movements have already started. By launching the Youth League we show we need this education with and for our young people. Our message to the government and the world is clearly that we are not yet free. This was shown clearly by our remembering the young people who have died at the hands of the farmers for taking a teaspoon of sugar – sugar that is grown on our own land! Our new heroes are dying in this time called 'freedom'! And there were fires in Nkwalini valley and in Kennedy Road. We must search for the answers about why these elements of neoliberalism are causing our world to burn. Our world is burning and so we need another world.

We discussed the importance of this statement – that another world is necessary. We noticed that there is a difference when the poor say another world is **necessary** and when civil society says another world is **possible**. We conclude to say that it is the formations of the poor and the grassroots that are the agency to make this other world come – not civil society. And the work that we have to do happens in many spaces – we have work to do at the University too because it is clear that, without us who are from the movements being there, another agenda would be imposed. The work we must do through our struggles must always relate to practical things that we can see and touch. For example, we must fight for land before this 2010 soccer thing – they are building their big stadiums with concrete that should be for homes for the people on land that should be for the living of the people.

All of this discussion helps us to see how we must make our own meaning of the word 'development' based on our own knowledge and thinking. In my rural area, the government came and said 'We'll develop you here'. To achieve this development of theirs, they first removed all the people from their land. Then they made a game reserve on our land and built a 'multi-media centre'. Now, if you ask anyone in our area what a 'multimedia centre' is, they would not know!

Session 8: 12th August

From the first round of comments, the following contributions were made:

- *service learning*
- *education*
- *livelihood assets*
- *gender gap and the 'social compass' tool*
- *planning*
- *history*
- *power*

Things like 'service learning' and 'education' can have a simple definition, but what we must do is to work out together what it can mean for us. Some of us call ourselves leaders but we know at the same time that we need to learn. So while in leading, while in struggle, we learn – we must acknowledge this always. We said last time that experience is a good teacher. That's true but it is also true that 'service' is a good teacher: through our service to the communities we are also learning from them. Just because we are elected leaders of our movements does not mean we are perfect people. As Mashumi said at an Abahlali camp 'a good leader leads but is also led by those you lead'.

The issue of education is really big and it can even be intimidating because we must always test who's education should we endorse? During the week, some of us were discussing the question: how you can identify a 'well educated' person? Is it about good English? Good isiZulu? Not breaking the rules of grammar? Having lots of degrees and qualifications? The answer we came to was actually it's someone who, firstly, knows their surroundings, knows their environment, and secondly, someone that humbles themselves not to be bullying or arrogant but instead to show a big mind by being able to adjust to their environment in a way that is not intimidating or undermining for the people in that environment. So being well educated has nothing to do with good English or isiZulu, or

with using fancy words to show off with. Instead of becoming big, it's about becoming small because then you can be raised by the people who view you and you grow in stature.

For example, as a leader in a movement you might be elected to be the chairperson. It seems to be expected that when you are elected, you say 'thank you very much' to the people for being elected by them. But no, it should rather be the people who elect you who say thank you because you are being sent to do a job for them. It is sad when other people, including other poor people, think that if they are elected they must say 'thanks' – as if they've been given something for themselves. We must always reach all the stages where the people are so that all the people must and can know us, and feel comfortable with us – we should not act in a way that makes the people feel intimidated – 'Hey, I'm next to a boss or a leader now!'

Being well educated has nothing to do with good English or isiZulu, or with using fancy words to show off with. Instead of becoming big, it's about becoming small because then you can be raised by the people who view you and you grow in stature.

Education goes together with development – something we have talked about before. Marx emphasised that the people are oppressed by force, but Gramsci showed how important ideology, which includes education, was to continue to oppress the people.

With a court case recently, we were trying to tell the Investigating Officer that he had done something wrong in his case by not including the deaths of two boys in the case documents. He reacted saying 'You are trying to educate me! I know my work! I've been doing this for 26 years … ' This example just shows that the state and the people in it think they don't need an education from the masses but only the other way round. But we are educated because we really know the places we come from and we know what needs to be done.

But I have a worry – we may begin to fool ourselves saying 'we are educated'. Education is being so commercialised. When you get 'education' like that, you get an education to suppress and undermine others for your own benefit. So there is a danger when we say we are 'educated' – people then come with the question: 'Oh, so if you're educated, what are you doing in the shacks and on the farms? You should be living in the suburbs like Westville!' Can we say we are educated when we still suffer? But we can claim that we are 'rich in mind' and we can define ourselves now in our own understanding before someone else defines us according to *their* views.

I remember at my farewell ceremony from school in Grade 12, there was a Professor who was the guest speaker. He said there is a difference – there are some who are educated but have not learned, and there are some who have learned but are not educated.

Thinking about the things that worry us about education as it is, we must add to that it comes with classes. Some classes can be good – like your peers, your elders, your neighbours, and so on; perhaps we can call these our primary classes. But it is bad when the classes that come with education are what are used to make the elites; when those who get education have power over others. Then education and its classes start to categorise people. So a good education would be the one to destroy all classes and bring uniformity. That would be a universal education; an education for freedom; and for equality; a creative education.

[Leaders] should try to involve the people in whatever they are doing – but they don't want to know the people and their history. To know this you cannot get it from the big sky – you must go to them and then you can know by learning from them. So history is very important.

To add on to what was said about our worries about education: we all get encouraged so much to go to school, to get an education – why? It's only to get a well-paying job tomorrow – it's to earn big bucks and nothing

else. This has become a serious disease that most of us are suffering from. For the elite, their education did not value the person – only the money.

Perhaps there is something similar in a thing we discussed some time back about the political leaders who were in exile where they underwent military training for war and violence. This also does not value the person. But now what is needed is their humanity because you are going to deal with the people. Perhaps we see something of this in the song 'Mshini Wami' of some of these political leaders – and it shows the need for a divorce from this kind of education.

Regarding the idea of 'livelihood assets': for me, if we deal with this properly and treat ourselves as assets then we're on a right path. All spheres of our society are then valued properly, and if we consider our society from each element (like the family, the neighbourhood, the community), then livelihood is possible. That is why I am offended when all these bonds of cohesion and unity in our society are destroyed by forced removals. Those who are educated for money-making will not understand this.

They will also also not have a proper knowledge of our values and cultures. This knowledge is very important and it is why I wanted to talk about the question of history. People come from different cultures and pasts. Somebody from the top thinks they can solve the problems for everyone – but actually they only solve the problems of some people. For example on the question of 'service delivery', they want to think for the people and not to go and learn *from* the people what they actually need. If they came to the people to learn from them, they would also learn about the different groups and the different thinking among the people. So they should try to involve the people in whatever they are doing – but they don't want to know the people and their history. To know this you cannot get it from the big sky – you must go to them and then you can know by learning from them. So history is very important. If you can know about peoples' particular histories and also about the right external assets and where to get these from, then it can be possible to satisfy *all* the people.

It reminds that someone once said: 'A nation without a history is like a ship without an anchor.' Yes, and we have also talked before about Karl Marx' view about history as a long struggle between the have's and the have-nots.

There is an honest, energetic gentleman, who is very well-qualified from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and now newly employed in the Department of Housing. He arrived at the Abahlali office recently saying he had come to do things for the community and was going to talk to the jondolo people about this. We said clearly: 'No, not in Kennedy do you just arrive to do things for the people! First you discuss with the people's structures where we can work out how best to put something to an open meeting of the masses of the people.' But he thought that, to speak to the jondolo people, he didn't even need to prepare or to do any research. He was totally humiliated and embarrassed because it was obvious straight away that he did not know the people's history. He didn't understand at all their anger and frustrations. His education was rubbished because of this.

Our indigenous knowledge is powerful, too – and also our own good livelihoods assets that we have. We used to have good houses, livelihoods, assets before that ship arrived in 1652.

Our indigenous knowledge is powerful, too – and also our own good livelihoods assets that we have. We used to have good houses, livelihoods, assets before that ship arrived in 1652. We had our land, our cattle, good rivers and beautiful mountains. We knew the places that we regarded as our boundaries and borders that showed we belong *here*. The settlers didn't respect this knowledge; they talked about 'discovering' us, and they re-named all these things!

In a way it is true that saying that 'power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'! Even as leaders in our movements we can be tempted to disregard the masses. So we always remember our constitution of the movement in the voices of the masses; we always remember the organi-

sation and its meetings and rules – so that we can never start taking decisions *for* the people.

This is so different from those who say things (as talked about in the last session) like 'Educate *your* people'. To talk about a leader as if this leader somehow owns his people shows this wrong approach. I even disagree when people talk about those who are 'born to be a leader'. No, this is not right – you need to learn and be taught about how to be a good leader. In this right understanding, all of the things we are learning at the University course are also really important in this process of learning about good leadership.

Session 9: 25th August

[Note that an edited version of the notes from this session appears as the Introduction to this booklet.]

With the end of the year approaching and the idea of a publication to come from our living learning sessions, it was agreed that what was most important was to talk about why we might make a publication. What would it really be for if we did it? What would happen next?

For a living learning, the critical question was always how best to take back to our communities whatever we might gain? How best can our communities benefit from the few of us who are lucky to have access to the course? How will we utilise the academic skills we can gain? How do we take this information back? It has always been the task of a synthesis and a breaking down of the University theory so that we can work out properly what we can learn from it – and so we can understand for ourselves in what way it is that different from the daily learning of struggle and life emijondolo or eplasini. We must understand this if we are going to be a sort of bridge between for those who cannot access the University learning themselves.

And that is why the living learning is part of a living politics. It is not about heavy things to be learned by us 'fools' from 'smarter' people. Publishing a booklet out of our living learning could also be there for those 'smarter' people to learn from the 'fools'! By putting some of our thinking out there in a booklet, we need of course to be tolerant and accept criticism. Critique is fine – and at least we will be walking the talk by putting our stuff out there for the world.

Living learning is like a person watching TV – it is up to you to decide which TV is good for you and which is not for me. In a similar way, this living learning is a living testimony and a record of how we made reflections and distinctions about what we face in life and in our learning. By having this document published, we can always reflect back – without

even having to go back to the University. Surely, a booklet like this can open some of the closed doors.

I support the thinking about a publication because for me, living learning is about what's happening in and outside of the University classroom. So we are trying to combine the two universities – the one of experience and the one of academics. The publication will be a tool for carrying on our own education – and also for the education of the public, including the government. This work of connecting is difficult – it is difficult to take some of the ideas from the University class to the community; some terms are difficult like globalization and neoliberalism. So there is a need for a good translation and interpretation to make it really a living politics.

Maybe we should have pictures of ourselves in the booklet too showing that it is really us who have done the work. The point is that it is not *our* work – it is the people's work. They sent us and we need to report.

Eish, ja – knowledge is a dangerous thing! The publication will help the people where we come from because people compare these two universities – the University emijondolo and eplasini and the academic University of KwaZulu-Natal. There is this assumption, for example among some people in the shacks, that when you go the academic university you don't think about what you are learning daily in life but you are just theorising and talking *about* the people. But if this publication comes, it will show that it can be different; that the people and daily life are included by us in our living learning, and that the work continues. And sure, maybe there will be critique on our thinking. But you know, if a car is running, the dogs will be

This living learning is a living testimony and a record of how we made reflections and distinctions about what we face in life and in our learning. By having this document published, we can always reflect back – without even having to go back to the University. Surely, a booklet like this can open some of the closed doors.

running alongside and barking. Anyway, if the car stops, the dog just pees on the car.

I think the publication will also be encouraging for the youth and others. They can see how important it is to challenge the mindsets of those people who want to always undermine us, and they can be encouraged not to accept this undermining.

I was talking with some comrades from my area during the week about the University course learning, and I was stressing that we are also learning with the Abahlali and the people in our places where we struggle.

A publication will be helpful to us and our communities. Especially because we are coming from the farms and the shacks where so many do not know their rights, this will help all to learn. Sometimes when the people where we come from see us as a leader and then going to the school or University course, they think 'Ja, he's going to forget us. This education will give them wings to fly away.' Our booklet will show it is different and it will encourage them – perhaps some will also see that, whatever my age, I can also go to school, I can still be learning.

What we have begun here is also opening a greater opportunity that our movements, our communities, and even CLP, have given us and we can use it more.

What we have begun here is also opening a greater opportunity that our movements, our communities, and even CLP, have given us and we can use it more. So we need to think about the next year, too – some of us are in our final year of the course. If we say, yes it is a useful tool for building our movements, then we must start to discuss now about who should enrol next year. We should also think about how we can have an event to launch our publication so that it can encourage young people and others as we grow the work.

And this is part of the thinking about bringing the two universities together. Perhaps we can talk of achieving the 'Universal University' – invading the academic one in order for it to benefit the people. We are not doing this for better salaries and jobs – it is to grow.

This publication will enable people to take us seriously, to learn from us – and so perhaps it will help to change those wrong mindsets. Because of wrong mindsets, we often tend to want to trust the outsider too much, the one with the impressive suit and academic training. But it is your brother or your sister next to you who is to be respected.

Written stuff is powerful. Now imagine *this* publication – even with your own photograph in it. It is an invitation to the world to 'take your time and read it', you can learn from it, it is living – not in the distant past. It can generate and provoke debate and discussion, even critique, and even among academic intellectuals. If this happens, it can only take us further.

In the UKZN course at the moment, there is a lot of talk about doing a 'presentation'. When you are asked to stand in front of the people and talk, this is a difficult thing because to stand and talk to those who are sitting down is about being powerful, it is a political action. This way of doing a presentation can make you seem big – or, if you are a shy person, it can make you to feel very small! So it is a challenging space to occupy. And also with a publication – it is a space to occupy. How would ours be different from other printed things? Who is meant to read it? We need to think how to make it unique.

Another good thing will be to forge the partnership between our movements, Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network, because it will show how we have done something together.

Others can learn from our learning, which is a living learning, and so they can learn our politics, which is a living politics. Through the booklet, it can be seen by the world. This is important in this time of globalisation. People from our movements worked together at the recent 'Peoples

Summit' event and it is clear that we made more impact by thinking and working together.

We are always answering this question from outsiders: 'You are always criticising NGOs, but there's one NGO that you work with?' We have to explain that we do not welcome those who exploit us and use our name – but when we work with this NGO (CLP), it creates us and makes us feel as human beings.

Education can sometimes destroy our struggle – when education makes leaders think of the people that they came from as the 'uneducated' ones, those who 'do not understand', those that we 'move away from'. Therefore we do not go to school or University for our own benefit as individuals. We would curse CLP if this was the 'education' that had happened because they will have destroyed our movement. Two of us will graduate this year. I am thinking about the graduation ceremony (which I can only imagine because I have never been there before). How? How can we receive the certificate? Is it in the name of those who sent us? Or is it for me? If it is for me, then that is stealing from the people.

How did I escape the oppression where so many people are still living in a kind of darkness? Because I really see the world differently. How to remove that membrane from others' eyes? So many people see things in this way – that how the world is, is how God meant it to be, that we are meant to suffer. How can we enlighten all others – not to think *like* us, but to think, to see the world? 'Wake up, gogo. God loves you.'

This publication will show you can pick up from the different views from different people and generate our own thinking. This is good for us and the next generation. It will enable people to know where they come from and to feel proud of themselves no matter where they come from, no matter if they are rich or poor.

[After the session had finished, Thulani from CLP said: "You know, I think they have just written the Introduction for the publication!"]

Session 10: 14th October

We started this session with a quick report back on the publications issues. In discussion of the report back, the following points were emphasised:

- *for the guest piece that we have asked Anne Harley, Nigel Gibson and Richard Pithouse to write for us, we would like these comrades to read and react to the work that's been done in the sessions of living learning and write some pages highlighting what they see as especially important. We can't really tell them what this should cover.*
- *if our publication was a Shakespeare play, there would be scenes and settings, and characters coming in and out. We come to these sessions from different places and from within our movements and our meeting place is in these offices of an NGO. But what is important to say is that we have held on to our movement politics – this did not become an NGO space. This is important for people to see clearly. As Paulo Freire emphasised, we remain the agents of our own recuperation. We do not allow academics and professionals to be on top, but rather to be on tap. This should be emphasised in the Introduction to our publication. So many other NGOs have so much to learn and we want to encourage CLP in the way it works. Other NGOs grow up to the ceiling without coming down, but CLP works very differently. It is not using the organisations of the people but working* ***with*** *them.*

After the report and discussion, we carried on as we have done before in most of the other sessions.

From the first round of comments, the following contributions were made:

- *community development*
- *participatory research*
- *monitoring and evaluation (M&E)*
- *significance of participatory development*
- *achievements of our organisations*
- *a strong voice from social movements.*

We agreed to start talking about the group of issues around participation in research and development (and M&E), and then in the second part to talk about the achievements and strong voice of our organisations and social movements.

I have been thinking about what 'participatory development' can really mean. This is a very practical question of relating our learning and our practice in the movements. For example, we in Abahlali are in a process that involves talking with PPT (Project Preparation Trust) and the Municipality. In this process, an approach of participatory development has been very good because you can stop things from being imposed just because they are things that a developer thinks the people want. When there is a proper participation of all the people, then they can know clearly what is needed and what is suitable for a particular community. We had the example of the developer who wanted to put in communal kitchens in each settlement. We discussed this idea, talking about all the good and bad aspects about it, and concluded that it will not be possible for all the reasons that the people had discussed. So, as a result, this proposal has been stopped. It shows that it is important to involve the people from the beginning through to the end of any process that affects them; from planning through to implementation. Doing development this way also uses and helps to build real and relevant capacity among the people.

To add to that, I think that Freire said something that you will feel proud when you take a real part in building your home rather than someone building it for you. So real participatory development can achieve this pride. Without it, you just have the implementation of things that are actually not wanted; with it, you build and use people's relevant skills.

Thinking about the example of the communal kitchen idea, it shows that the developer was coming with ready-made things and expected that the people must just follow the line and gratefully take what others think they need. In this approach, they take the people as empty and not able to do anything for themselves. This is the approach that produces what you can call dependency. It is not creating space for the people to do their own

things. Rather than this approach, it is better to come from the bottom up.

On the question of the real meaning of participatory research, I thought about the Centre were I am working with disabled people and their different problems. Before, the people used to come to me to report all the problems they had there, asking me to talk to the manager to sort them out. But now I have discovered that's not good. It is better that they must take their own research and decisions about their issues – I don't have a right to do this on their behalf. So I've learned that the researcher mustn't come with their own solutions but instead must be unbiased and flexible and finding out how the community thinks and is planning to address their own issues. One of the benefits of participatory research and development is that it can emphasise that poor people are competent and can do much of their own investigation, analysis and planning.

It is important to involve the people from the beginning through to the end of any process that affects them; from planning through to implementation. Doing development this way also uses and helps to build real and relevant capacity among the people.

Other researchers don't even ask the people. And actually, some 'community leaders' are like this, too, always emphasising that 'I am working for the community' even when this is not in a participatory way at all. Even though I am elected as a leader in my own community, I cannot know everything about my place without asking all the people – so it's no good for a researcher to put the questions to me alone. The people must be part and parcel of the research.

A few weeks ago in class, I had a problem with a lecturer at University who is teaching a section on research. I was interrogating what he said. He said that a researcher must be neutral. But I said I will be trying to influence a situation, and that I will be on the side of the people in what they want to do about the problems they might have – I can't

be neutral. So this teacher talks about participatory research methods but actually sticks to the 'generally-accepted scientific' model of hypotheses, deduction and objectivity. But participatory methods are not like this because they involve the values and thinking of the people, they are more qualitative than quantitative – and you can't be neutral. You are there because there is something to be done, an issue or situation to be influenced by the thinking and actions of the people.

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We must always interrogate the information we are given! And when we work with the people too, we must do this thing so that the people are encouraged and allowed to interrogate everything too – there is no 'generally accepted' version.

But then, on research as a whole, where do you become 'neutral'? Surely you always have bias of some kind because you have a certain belief or a certain ideology. For research to have a direction, purpose or question, there must be some kind of bias or commitment. But on the other hand, you always need to check that it is working in practice, so you must be able to test or question even your own approach. So in the end, this is an important debate about neutrality and bias, but there isn't a contradiction between our views because our commitment to the people also means being able to listen properly to what they think, say or do.

Some writers on research separate the researcher from the material being researched – and this is part of that model that says that it is objective, 'neutral', scientific. We can see that the ideas behind this model have some similarities with the ideas behind a much bigger approach to thinking about, and acting in, the world. It is the idea that you work 'from the outside', and that things are 'done to'. As movements of the poor, we see

this in the way that many outsiders and elites treat us and our issues. It is also true that you can have a kind of 'participation' that fits into this model – but it is not at all the participation model we want. In a way, the struggles of our movements is an eruption against this model, an eruption that starts with declaring 'Enough is enough'. Only the space created by this eruption creates the possibility of a really new kind of participation, one where outsiders can be invited to participate in what is being made in and through that eruption – and so we make the paths by walking.

If we want to even *start* a project or research, all the people need to come together and develop a plan of how to address the problem. This must involve everyone – not outsiders, but all of us. We can be developing the questionnaire, thinking through the problem, budgeting together, monitoring progress together and so on. If a questionnaire is done by one outsider, then perhaps you need that 'neutrality'. The whole idea that 'thinkers do not do, and doers do not think' is wrong.

To move to the second area we wanted to talk about – that about our achievements as organisations. I was thinking especially about our achievements since the 'living learning' process was started. One thing that's been important is to combine our organisations (of Abahlali and the Rural Network) in a way. Even though we each have our own leadership and membership structures and identities, we find we have the same views. By working together, we have found more and more ways to tell the world about the truth of our situations in the shacks and on the farms.

To add to that – in the good relation that we are building between our organisations we have been taking government to court successfully, fighting jointly against evictions, and attracting good friends who are not exploiting us from here and abroad (sometimes under the good eye of CLP!). But if the social movements in South Africa as a whole can work out their differences and fight jointly against whatever is affecting them, this would be good and we would have a strong voice. But I notice that we are sub-divided into classes – proletariat and middle-classes; poor and rich; poor mom and poor dad; farm-dwellers and shack-dwellers. But really, the divisions are the private property of the world, and the wealthy

and the poor are going on in parallel and not meeting. So fighting to overcome this division will deal with these issues that divide us. Some poor people are struggling to survive day-by-day while other people are owning 15 expensive cars. What is parallel can never meet. But if we as poor people and social movements can fight jointly, trying to heal our differences, then we can make a better *assegai* to fight against anything that is against those movements.

My comrades have already covered some things that I wanted to mention in our achievements. So let me add to that the achievements of a living politics and a living learning; a good partnership between our movements, and good media coverage of our struggles. But there are still some challenges for us. Both movements have good leadership now, but we must pay attention to grooming the next leadership because some of us will retire soon! We must find ways to pass on the tradition and thinking of a living politics. We must find ways to make sure that words and ideas that we have learned as leadership that are useful must be understood by all too – like neo-liberalism, globalisation and so on. Another challenge is increasing our membership – and especially increasing the members who have an active involvement.

I've also realised there is sometimes a problem: people need to understand that when we say 'enough is enough', we are not saying something against God or people's religion. I was listening to a priest preaching on the radio the other day. I was impressed with what he was saying, but then he said that 'these toyi-toyi'ing people I see on TV have forgotten God'! The implication of this sort of teaching is that God made us to be poor and that we should not resist injustice but accept it. Whereas my interpretation of what is written in the Bible is very connected with our living

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politics. Some time back, I spoke in church. I thought some people were interested but then they told me later that 'we don't need you to come back to our church because you are preaching politics'. I said to them, 'No surely, God didn't create us to be stupid? Anyway, a while later, they called me again and asked me to come back. I asked them whether they meant that I must come without my politics and they said, 'no, come'. The bible is not about silencing people. If you take the Moses story, it was politics to set the people free from oppression. So we shouldn't stop people who are dissatisfied from voicing it out. I put this challenge to the priests.

Another achievement is that we have managed to educate so many others organisations, ecumenical structures, NGOs and so on about a living politics. We have also succeeded to get rid of those who have been trying to use us and exploit us.

In many organisations previously, there was a tendency where certain people, especially women, were being undermined. At least now it is good to see women in both our movements emerging as some of the strongest leaders. They are not threatened or intimidated by anyone – even women leaders in Rural Network are not threatened by an inkosi: if they know that what they must say is good and true, then they will say it. Also in Abahlali, I feel so very proud in my heart to see the strength of women comrades – they will challenge anyone! Even though some others are still shivering when they speak – what I like is that we know that we are all human beings, and no-one is better than another. There is this view out there that 'I can't listen to … ' – whether it's women, or a youth or whatever, that they do not have a voice that must be heard. We must fight this.

Out of Order: A living learning for a living politics

"We are poor, not stupid." – *Ashraf Casiem*[1]

Introduction

In late 2007 the Church Land Programme (CLP) offered Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network, two poor people's movements working in KwaZulu-Natal, a chance to each elect two members to attend the Certificate in Education (Participatory Development), a course at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. Abahlali baseMjondolo is a shack dweller's movement founded in Durban in 2005 and the Rural Network is an alliance of rural community organisations founded in 2006. The Certificate programme is offered by the Centre for Adult Education, and is an attempt to keep open a space within the academy for teaching and learning premised on liberatory assumptions.

"The oppressed have been... reduced...to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings."

- Paulo Freire[2]

1 This quote from Ashraf Casiem is taken from a letter emailed to an NGO by Ashraf in 2007. The letter was written in protest at attempts by some NGOs to control poor people's movements from above. Ashraf Casiem is the chairperson of the Anti-Eviction Campaign. Their website is at http://antieviction.org.za/

2 This quote is from a book by Paulo Freire called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paulo Freire was a Brazilian radical who took the view that everyone can think. For this he was jailed and then sent into exile where he wrote this book in 1970. It is available in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library in the Kennedy Road settlement and online at http://www.marxists.org/subject/education/freire/pedagogy/ch01.htm

Abahlali baseMjondolo organised some very large marches in 2005 and became quite well known soon after it was founded. The movement and its leaders were quickly offered money by various NGOs. In some cases secret offers of personal money were made to the movement's leaders by NGOs. This money was refused because it was clear that the NGOs wanted to buy control of the movement.[3] However it was decided to accept the offer from CLP because CLP had committed itself to support rather than to control poor people's movements[4] and because the movements had concluded that, in its praxis as well as its principle, "It is not using the organisations of the people but working with them"[5] … it "makes us feel as human beings."[6]

But there was a concern that very often "you get an education to suppress and undermine others for your own benefit."[7] In the light of this concern it was decided to create a space where the students from the movements could reflect on their experience at the state university and how this related to the popular university created by Abahlali baseMjondolo but shared by both movements. This space was called 'Living Learning' and it took the form of a monthly discussion held at the CLP offices in Pietermaritzburg. Mark Butler took notes and after each session they

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3 See *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2007) edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence for a collection of articles on the dangers that movements face when accepting donor funding. The editors decided to produce this book after the Ford Foundation decided to remove their funding because of their support for the struggle in Palestine. This led them to explore the issue of donor agendas and they discovered that many North American activists have forgotten how to struggle without funding but that in countries like Brazil and Egypt movements often reject donor funding as a form of co-option. Some people have argued that it is important to distinguish between good money (that which does not undermine a movement's autonomy or professionalise the movement in any way) and bad money (that which does undermine a movement's autonomy and professionalise it).

4 A CLP paper on NGO practice, *Learning to Walk – NGO Practice and the Possibility of Freedom* (2007) by Mark Butler, with Thulani Ndlazi,David Ntseng, Graham Philpott, and Nomusa Sokhela, is available online at http://www.churchland.co.za/upload/files/OccasionalPaperNo3.pdf For a deep reflection on the relation between NGOs and community struggles see *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism Through Seven Lives in India* (2006) by the Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar.

5 This quote comes from the notes of Session 10, 14th October, of this booklet.

6 Session 9, 25th August, of this booklet.

7 Session 8, 12th August, of this booklet.

were circulated to all participants to be checked for accuracy. Those notes are now being published in this booklet.

Living Learning is not an academic programme; it is not a university degree – it is a space for reflecting on what it means to be part of two realities that are separate and often opposed. It is the space for trying to ensure that it is possible for comrades to step into a formal university – which is mostly a machine for creating and sustaining inequality – without stepping out of a 'living politics'. At the end of the year the students from the movements were pleased that Living Learning had remained "a movement rather than an NGO space"[8] and wondered if, after the experiment in bringing the movement and state universities together, it would be worth talking of "achieving the 'Universal University' – invading the academic one in order for it to benefit the people."[9]

At the August 2008 Living Learning session it was decided that it would be useful to publish the notes of the Living Learning discussions. This would, in part, take the form of a report back to the movements that had elected the participants. But it was also noted that "written stuff is powerful" and that, therefore, publishing is "a space to occupy".[10] This refusal to 'know one's place', to accept the divisions of oppression that divide people into different types and then allocate them different spaces and roles, is very important. In the same month as the decision was made to publish the Living Learning notes, S'bu Zikode made the point about occupying spaces very clearly in the Economic Justice Lecture at the Diakonia Council of Churches:

> Our politics starts by recognizing the humanity of every human being. We decided that we will no longer be good boys and girls that quietly wait for our humanity to be finally recognized one day. Voting has not worked for us. We have already taken our place on the land in the cities and we have held that ground. We have also decided to take our place in all the discussions and to take it right now. We take our place humbly because we know that we don't

8 Session 10, 14th October, of this booklet.

9 Session 9, 25th August, of this booklet.

10 Session 9, 25th August, of this booklet.

> have all the answers, that no one has all the answers. Our politics is about carefully working things out together, moving forward together. But although we take our place humbly we take it firmly.[11]

When the decision was taken to publish these notes, a hope was expressed that this publication would show "that the people and daily life are included by us in our living learning"[12], that it might also be useful to "generate and provoke debate and discussion", and while criticism would be welcome, for "those 'smarter' people to learn from the 'fools.'"[13] It was decided to ask three academic intellectuals who had not been part of Living Learning but who had been working with the movements in various ways, to write a 'guest piece' that would include their responses to the work and stress that the movements "do not allow academics and professionals to be on top, but rather to be on tap."[14] It was also decided that this 'guest piece' would be checked by the participants before the booklet was published.

Everybody Counts, Everybody Thinks

Many forms of politics are founded on the view that only some people matter. A racist, nationalist or fascist politics takes the view that only people of a certain race, nationality, religion or culture count. In South Africa we know this kind of politics very well from apartheid, xenophobia and recent threats of a return to ethnic politics (what some people are still calling 'tribalism'). A sexist politics takes the view that only men count. We can recognise versions of this politics in all levels of our society. An aristocratic politics takes the view that only people born to certain families should have decision making power. We know this politics very well from the struggles against undemocratic 'traditional leaders'. A classist

11 The lecture, which was titled, The Burning Issue of Land and Housing, is available online at http://www.diakonia.org.za/index.php?Itemid=54&id=129&option=com_content&task=view. There is also a video of this speech, filmed by Fanuel Nsingo, at the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo Library.

12 Session 9, 25th August, of this booklet.

13 Session 9, 25th August, of this booklet.

14 Session 10, 14th October, of this booklet.

politics takes the view that only people with money count. This is a key moral foundation of capitalism. It measures a person's worth by their money and fails to recognise the history of exclusion and exploitation that has made some people rich and others poor. By measuring the worth of a person by how much money they have it concludes that the system is just because the rich deserve their wealth and the poor deserve their poverty.

A radical politics is always founded on the view that everyone counts, that everyone matters. The radical demand that everyone be recognised as important opposes radical politics against all forces that want to deny the humanity of everyone. Therefore the desire for unity, for universality, always leads to division and conflict. Frederick Douglass, who was born into slavery in America but taught himself to read and write before escaping to freedom, wrote that:

> Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."[15]

This is well recognised in Living Learning where movements are, in the concluding session, thought of as an *assegai* (spear). Opposing an image of false unity that masks real relations of domination (such as 'we are all South African', 'we are all ANC', 'we are all the left' etc.) creates an image of disunity that matches the reality of disunity. This is not always welcome. One participant reports hearing a priest on the radio claiming that the people protesting in the streets have strayed from God, another reports being chastised for bringing politics, an acknowledgement of the reality of division, into a church. It is noted that: "Even though we remember the words of the Freedom Charter, that 'the people shall gov-

15 This quote comes from a speech that Frederick Douglass gave in 1857. His story of his own life, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, is in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library. All of his writings are online at http://www.iupui.edu/~douglass/

ern', it is clear that we are not the governors – in fact we are put behind bars if we disagree with what they (politicians and the powerful) want."[16]

But there is also a divide in progressive politics between those forms of left wing politics that believe that everyone can think and should be listened to, and those forms of left wing politics that believe that the oppressed are not yet educated enough to think their own struggles. Karl Marx saw this division between 'mental' and 'manual' labour as a hallmark of capitalist society[17], but it is often repeated in progressive organizations. Sometimes white people have thought that only they can liberate black people from racism, men have thought that only they will liberate women from sexism and rich people have thought that only they will liberate the poor from classism. For a long time it used to be that people who thought that the poor could not think their own struggles thought that the leaders in a political party should do this work – this idea is called vanguardism. This still happens – but these days it is often NGOs that assume that they should think the struggles of the poor. This paternalism can degenerate into the active denial that there could be such as thing as a grassroots intellectual – "some of the NGOs are always denying and undermining the knowledge of the people."[18] This is often mixed up with racism, sexism and even imperialism. This also happens in other countries. Peter Hallward, a philosopher of the political empowerment of ordinary women and men, argues that in Haiti the left NGOs are the acceptable face of struggle to oppressors because, while they create the appearance of a democratic debate that seems to indicate that the system is fair as it allows for oppositional ideas, the NGOs are not able to actually threaten those oppressors:

> Rather than organize with and among the people, rather than work in the places and on the terms where the people themselves are strong … [they] … organize trivial made-for-media demonstrations against things like the

16 Session 3, 17th March, of this booklet.

17 Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*

18 Session 4, 14th April, of this booklet.

> uncontroversial evils of neo-liberalism or the high cost of living. Such protests are usually attended by tiny groups of 30 or 40 people – which is to say, by nobody outside the organizers' tiny circles.[19]

Most NGO politics is supported by governments and big business in order to persuade people to accept their oppression. But even when NGO politics is anti-capitalist it most often takes the form of a small group of professional people trying to persuade governments, big business and international organisations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations to be kinder to the poor. One problem with this kind of politics is that, despite how anti-capitalist it purports to be, it has no power to force its agenda. It can only ask nicely for favours. Another problem is that it often treats the people in whose name it claims to speak with the same disrespect, the same denial of their intelligence, as the oppressors it seeks to influence. Politics then becomes a debate between competing elites instead of a popular struggle against elites.

This kind of NGO politics is a professional politics and not a politics of ordinary people.[20] It has often happened that when ordinary people have organised themselves and created their own movements, these kinds of NGOs have responded with fear and anger, sometimes even going so far as to side with states and capital against the movements.[21] In South Africa Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign have been attacked by left NGOs using the exact language of the state. They have been declared 'out of order', 'criminal' and 'under the control

19 This quote comes from pages 181 and 182 of *Damming the Flood* (2007) his new book on the struggle of *Fanmi Lavalas* in Haiti. There is a copy in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library.

20 It is interesting that in South Africa the state often explicitly asks journalists to go to NGOs and not movements when they have to 'balance' their stories on the movement's struggles with comments from both the government and critics. NGOs are allowed to speak freely but a movement activist who debates the government on TV, especially if the debate is in isiZulu or isiXhosa, risks immediate and usually illegal intimidation from the state.

21 On this issue see *Damming the Flood*.

of a white man'[22]. It is unsurprising that the Living Learning delegates have developed a strong critique of NGOs:

> The powerful, including some of the NGOs, are always denying and undermining the knowledge of the people. It has become necessary for them to do this and to insist that it is only they who have the real truth, the right analysis, the correct politics – in their minds the poor must be given capacity building, education and training, political education which, of course, they will provide. All of this is to convince the people that they are not able to think and act for themselves. The kind of education and knowledge, the searching for truth that we are doing, is too generous for the powerful. It has no formal 'syllabus' except the life and priorities of the people themselves; there is no protocol to be observed except open debate between people as equals. This kind of education and knowledge recognises that, as comrade Mnikelo (Ndabankulu) would say "it is better to be out of order."[23]

Of course it doesn't have to be this way and there are some NGOs that try to offer democratic and respectful support to popular struggles rather then to claim to speak *for* the poor without speaking to the poor let alone *with* the poor. Of course when NGOs do decide to support rather than direct poor people's movements, it is up to movements to determine if the NGOs that choose this path are successful in their work. If the NGOs are not prepared to give this power to the movements then their political integrity must be questioned.[24]

The problem here is clear. The real issue is not whether or not NGOs can make critical statements. As Hallward puts it "the real question, the divi-

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22 This type of racism, which assumes that poor black people cannot act in the world on their own and that if they are acting in the world they must be doing so under white direction has a very long history in South Africa and in the world. In his book *Silencing the Past* the Haitian historian, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, writes that in 1790, just a few months before the slave revolution that shook the whole colonial world, white colonial officials were writing letters home to France saying things like: "There is no movement among our Negroes … They don't even think of it … A revolt among them is impossible … I live tranquilly among them without a single thought of their uprising unless that was fomented by the whites themselves" (pages 72-73).

23 Session 4, 14th April, of this booklet.

24 On this point see Playing With Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism Through Seven Lives in India

sive question, concerns the political empowerment of the people."[25] In his famous book on the Haitian revolution against slavery C.L.R. James, the great Caribbean Marxist who strongly believed in the political and intellectual capacities of ordinary people, wrote that "It is force that counts, and chiefly the organised force of the masses … *It is what they think that matters*".[26]

Material equality is not the only kind of equality. A person can be living in a shack and facing regular fires, mud, rats, long water queues and all kinds of intimidation from the police and have personal or collective dignity. A person can be living on a farm and face exploitation, racism and intimidation and have personal or collective dignity. A person can think in a shack or on a farm as much as they can think in a university. A person can change the world from a shack or a farm as much as they can from an NGO, perhaps even more.[27]

A left politics that starts from the view that everyone matters and that everyone thinks, moves from the assumption of the immediate equality of all people. It sees a world in which equal people live in unequal condi-

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25 *Damming the Flood*, page 9.

26 This quote comes from page 286 of *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1989). It, along with lots of other books by C.L.R. James, is in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library. David Ntseng is currently translating some of James work into isiZulu. There is also a collection of his writings online at http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/

27 Many people do not accept the politics of immediate equality and argue that only the enlightened elite can emancipate the poor. These people are not just prejudiced. They have also been miseducated about struggle history. Who made the struggles of the United Democratic Front (UDF) uprising in the 1980s? Who made the Soweto uprising in 1976? Who made the Durban strikes in 1973? Who made the Phondo revolt in 1960? Who made the Women's Riot in Cato Manor in 1956? Who made the Bhambatha Rebellion, in 1906? Who made the Haitian Revolution in 1803? All of these struggles were unthinkable to the oppressors and their experts when they happened. All of these struggles were thought and made by the oppressed and for the oppressed. In the university of the state it is possible to forget or ignore this history. In a movement like Abahlali baseMjondolo, where the members includes people who fought in, and whose ancestors fought in the UDF uprising, the Durban strikes, the Phondo revolt, the Women's Riot in Cato Manor and the Bambatha rebellion it is impossible to be ignorant of this history because it is the history of the people themselves. Of course being aware of this history and finding a way to reinvent it for a new generation are two different things but the fact that this is difficult does mean that it is impossible. And failure is not the end of the road but becomes part of the conversation of a living learning. The lessons learnt from the failures of one generation can be taken up anew by the next generation.

tions. A left politics that starts from the view that everyone matters but that not everyone is ready to think takes the view that equality is something that will be achieved after a long struggle. This politics is often able to see poor people as suffering bodies but it often fails to understand that there is a mind in each body. It fails to understand that everyone can think and that dignity requires full participation in one's own liberation. In Paulo Freire's way of talking this kind of politics takes poor people as objects who will later become human beings. In South Africa this politics is sometimes mixed up with the racist idea that thinking should be done by white people or the imperialist idea that thinking should be done by people in North America and Europe.[28]

A Living Politics

Quite early in the struggle of Abahlali baseMjondolo, S'bu Zikode developed the phrase 'a living politics' to describe the movement's politics. He has explained that the essential idea is that a 'living politics' is a popular politics, a politics of ordinary women and men. It is not an elite politics but a politics of those who do not count. It might seem obvious that any

28 In *Not Only the Masters Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice* (2006) the radical Jamaican scholar Lewis Gordon, who has been very influenced by Frantz Fanon, argues that it is often assumed that "Colored folks [i.e. black people in South African terms] offer experience that white folks interpret. In other words formulating theory is a white affair'" (page 31). In another book, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (2006) Gordon also makes the point that "The standard view is that things white represent universality and things black are locked in a web of particularity" (page:6). This is also important because the claim that only some people can offer an international perspective is often used to deny the value of the knowledge and experience of grassroots activists and to subordinate grassroots activists to professional activists. This is a well known phenomenon in South Africa and it is discussed with reference to Brazil in *The Revolution Will Not be Funded*. As well as being a moral problem this is also a political problem. In their well known study of poor people's movements in America, *Poor People's Movements: How They Succeed, How They Fail* (1979) Frances Fox Priven and Richard Cloward made the important point that "If there is a genius for organizing, it is in the capacity to sense what it is possible for people to do under given conditions, and to then help them to do it. In point of fact, however, most organizing ventures ask that people do what they cannot, and the result is failure … people cannot defy institutions to which they have no access, and to which they make no contribution" (pages 22 and 23). This may well explain why in South Africa poor people's movements, which are rooted in poor people's knowledge and experience, have, often with no or very little outside money and support, mobilised so successfully while the left NGOs, with all their money and international connections, consistently fail in their attempts to mobilise people.

politics in support of the poor should be a popular politics but this is not always the case.

The participants in the Living Learning discussions are clear that here in South Africa "the party politics that we see cannot emancipate us and it is not our politics."[29] Against this they pose 'Abahlalism', an attempt to defend a living struggle against the stultification[30], here called corruption, that so often follows the ascent to power. The strategy for resisting this corruption of a living struggle is "continuously trying to open spaces for our own thinking and learning and teaching at the grassroots."[31]

Abahlali baseMjondolo have argued that a living politics must be a politics that is carried out where people live, at the times when they are free and in the languages that they speak. It must come from the needs of the people and it must be owned, thought and shaped by the people. It must be of the people, by the people and for the people. S'bu Zikode has argued that when a politics of the poor is a living politics, and when it insists on the immediate equality of everyone and that everyone should have the same right to shape and to share the world, then that politics should be called 'a living communism'.[32]

Abahlali baseMjondolo have long realised that in order to develop their politics of the poor they would have to think their own politics of the poor. This was taken forward in all kinds of meetings where people can think, together, about their situation and their struggle. After a while the University of Kennedy Road was declared, then the University of Foreman Road and then the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo has its own structures – the camps, all night meetings, are one of these structures. A delegate to Living Learning

29 Session 5, 13th May, of this booklet.

30 To stultify a person or a group of people is to make them passive and stupid. In many revolutions the people bought to power by a mass struggle have immediately tried to stultify the people that brought them to power. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon describes this process as "sending the people back to their caves" (page 183).

31 Session 5, 13th May, of this booklet.

32 See To Resist all Degradations and Divisions: *an interview with S'bu Zikode* which is online at http://abahlali.org/node/5063 for more detail on this.

reported that the question arose as to why the camps were held and that "The discussion there made it clear that we do it to generate knowledge together – and when we do that, we are also generating power together."

Education

It is unsurprising that education is a central and consistent theme in this booklet. Formal education in contemporary society is considered to be a means to 'get ahead', a way to "privatise"[33] the self by acquiring the skills and techniques as well as the languages and way of speaking to market oneself in a neoliberal economy.[34] Living Learning begins the discussion of education from the other side, grounding it in the lived experiences and concrete realities of people who have been oppressed – excluded, burnt and beaten marginalized in post-apartheid South Africa. In contrast to the hierarchical system and logic of formal education, Living Learning begins from below and develops horizontally. It is learning that demands more than inclusion but requires praxis and the re-thinking of a real and living politics.

Most of the discussions start from the recognition that "Education is never neutral."[35] From Karl Marx, the Living Learning participants understand how education and capitalism are intimately connected. It is suggested that "most of what is meant by education is about learning to be 'good boys and girls' and taking our place in the system that benefits the powerful without questioning it."[36] The critique of formal education is also given a clear colonial perspective: "People who talk about the story of South African often talk about 'land dispossession'. We can surely also talk about 'mind dispossession'."[37] The Nigerian writer Ben Okri says

33 Session 2, 18th February, of this booklet.

34 Although, of course, there are some important challenges to this within the formal system. For instance Lewis Gordon has called for 'a living scholarship' that, although the two ideas emerged separately, has many clear links with the concept of 'living learning'. See his *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times*

35 Session 2, 18th February, of this booklet.

36 Session 3, 17th March, of this booklet.

37 Session 4, 14th April, of this booklet.

that ""To poison a nation, poison its stories."[38] A class, a gender, any oppressed group of people, can be intellectually poisoned in the same way.

In contrast to formal education, the Living Learning participants conceptualize a second kind of education, a "liberating education that starts with the people's struggles to be fully human."[39] Yet things are not so simple. There is also a third kind of education that appears progressive because it speaks the language of social justice rather than private profit. But instead of listening to the people, this education aims to discipline communities and even movements to try and teach them to become "stakeholders" in "service delivery." This approach is often predicated on the assumption that the poor are incapable of thought – "they assume we are empty enough and stupid enough for others to learn what they decide, and that they will come and think for those of us who are poor and cannot think."

Three key problems emerge from this attitude. Firstly it denies the thinking and experience in communities and movements – "when an outsider comes, with their own language and culture and agenda, they can miss all the ideas that the people actually have." This is a serious problem because "the people are the ones who know about their situation."[40] Secondly this attitude often blames the suffering of the poor on their ignorance rather than the system that oppresses them.[41] This emerges very clearly in the discussion about the response of a church to a spate of fires in the Kennedy Road settlement. The fires are due to a denial of electricity to shack settlements as part of the slum clearance project. But instead of facing up to this, the church wanted to teach people who have been using

38 *A Way of Being Free* (1997)

39 Session 7, 22nd July, of this booklet.

40 Session 5, 14th May, of this booklet.

41 Lewis Gordon has done important work on this issue. In *Not Only the Master's Tools* he argues that blaming the oppressed for their suffering produces "the notion of 'problem people', people who disrupt the system. Under this view, the system ultimately works, which means that the people who suffer within it ultimately don't" (page 40). Every time an NGO wants to train oppressed people to cope better with their oppression, without supporting them to resist their oppression, they are also teaching people that the oppressed deserve to be oppressed because there is something wrong with them.

paraffin stoves all their lives how to use the stoves. The third problem is that any assumption that people cannot think for themselves is a form of exploitation that can even become a form of mental abuse:

> we have our own ideas, and values and cultures but these are always being undermined and instead, the ideas, values and cultures of those who oppress us are pushed. The makes us, as the poor, to feel that we are not important, that we do not count or matter. This kind of abuse is one that really affects me deeply.[42]

Living Learning also rejects the social scientist researcher's claim that research is "value neutral" and that the researcher must separate themselves from the research. The goal of such "objective" research is fundamentally at odds with "Living Learning." For Living Learning research is undertaken not simply to "help" people but to "be on the side of the people"[43] which means, to work to support the process of involving everyone in making decisions about the way forward. Research must therefore be open to criticism by the movements at all stages. In other words, it is the human relationships that are borne of the research which become the property of the community not the alienated "data" for the individual researcher, that matter. Thus "development" must include the people who are its subjects otherwise it simply reinforces objectification and the hierarchies that make up 'mental slavery'. For example the great Africana philosopher, Frantz Fanon speaks about building a bridge in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He says that if building the bridge doesn't "enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built." He insists that "the bridge should not be 'parachuted down' from above [but] … should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens."[44]

Living Learning speaks a fundamentally different language from mainstream education and unless one changes one's standpoint and "comes

42 Session 5, 13th May, of this booklet.

43 Session 10, 14th October, of this booklet.

44 All of Frantz Fanon's books are available in the Abahlali baseMjondolo library. David Ntseng, of the Church Land Programme (CLP), is currently translating some of Fanon's work into isiZulu. There are also some excerpts of his work available online at: http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/fanon/index.htm

down" to the shack dweller and rural dweller meetings, one can't hear what is being said. The great threat remains of course that once one goes to the academic University, one no longer has the patience to hear. This is what usually happens. The Living Learning participants have gone to the public university with something else in mind. For them reporting back to the communities and listening to what is said there is central. Indeed they argue that the ability to listen to those who are frequently unheard is the sign of a "well-educated" person. And the profundity of the Living Learning sessions that are included here is based in that dialogue. Indeed the brilliance of the discussion is so bright because the participants stand on the shoulders of a mass movement; they stand on the Living Learning that goes on elsewhere, in the meetings, the camps, the protests, the jails. As the participants put it "being well educated has nothing to do with good English or isiZulu, or with using fancy words to show off with. Instead of becoming big, it's about becoming small because then you can be raised by the people who view you and you grow in stature."[45]

The participants are thus aware of the ways in which the academic university encourages alienation from the movements. Academic universities often encourage an alienating theorization of poor people rather than talking with them. In the context of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa Fanon spoke about "snatching" what militants and others dedicated to the struggle learnt at the colonial universities and putting these ideas and practices in the service of the people. The discussion of the Living Learning echoes this insisting on accountability and the need to bring back to the communities (literally and metaphorically) whatever has been discussed. But the sessions also develop this concept arguing that one can challenge the academic university to become beneficial to the poor. The participants from the shack dweller and rural communities are gesturing to a critique of the Manichean assumption that one cannot be part of the two universities, the University emijondolo and eplasini and the academic University of KwaZulu-Natal. The people have often seen that once a leader joins the university they no longer think about the grassroots, and so the mass of people are rightly cynical. But Living Learning offers a

45 Session 8, 12th August, of this booklet.

different conceptualization based as it is on the principle of opening new spaces for discussion of freedom. This publication is part of that thinking. It doesn't solve the problem of creating a 'universal university' but it is meant to generate debate among the movement intellectuals and the university intellectuals.

Each Living Learning session begins with a discussion of what the participants have found most interesting and relevant, connecting learnings and questions that arise in everyday life, in movement struggles, and in the academic course as well. Over the year one can see how this simply mechanism has developed into a rich discussion of connections. In the discussion of freedom and education (April 2008) they take a step back and connect some of the "big system" – education, religion, economy, government – that "try to keep us silent." Since these structures are powerful, and since struggles and movements often corrupt the living politics that made them, it is only by "continuous try[ing] to open spaces for our thinking and learning and teaching," namely continuously making connections – always connecting on a human level – that real alternatives can develop. Thus Living Learning is alive or it is nothing. In other words, if Living Learning simply became a slogan or rhetoric it could also be corrupted, turned around, and used against the movement.

They say:

> Now, because I have been to the University, that I know everything – NO! We must not allow for the ordinary people to be made to feel discouraged. For us who have been at the course, what is important is the relation with the ordinary people … We have not learned to use aggressive, bombastic, or fancy English words to make the people feel like they are less. Rather, we want to practice what we preach and to connect all the things we are learning with the real struggles and issues of the people here.[46]

46 Session 6, 3rd June, of this booklet.

Hegemony

A key theme that emerges from the Living Learning discussions is that of the intellectual work that must be done to oppose oppression.

The Italian revolutionary, Antonio Gramsci argued that as we learn to accept domination, we learn hegemony. Hegemony is the process by which "educative pressure [is] applied to single individuals so as to obtain their consent and their collaboration, turning necessity and coercion into 'freedom'."[47] This is why Steven Bantu Biko famously wrote that "The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor, is the mind of the oppressed."[48] Ben Okri was thinking along similar lines when he wrote that "reality is also a battle of contending dreams … we live inside the dreams of others. We might be imprisoned in them."[49] But although hegemony by definition is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. This is something that Gramsci emphasised – that hegemony has to be constantly remade; partly because it is constantly challenged. For Gramsci there are two types of struggle. One is when the oppressed do direct physical battle with the oppressors and try to seize control of the means of physical domination – the state and its police. The other is when both oppressors and liberators battle to have their ideas become dominant – to make their ideas the 'common sense'. He thought that because states don't have the resources or political legitimacy to always be violently intimidating everyone, progress can also be won by shifting the 'common sense' in wider society. This is the battle of ideas.

When movements are criminalised, and the police and local party structures prevent free political activity, the main struggle is often just to defend the right to exist. But once the state and local party structures have been forced to recognise the movement's right to exist it becomes possible to focus more fully on fighting the battle of ideas in wider society.

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47 *Selections from The Prison Notebooks* (1995, page 242. This book is available in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library and there is a collection of Gramsci's writings online at http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/

48 Steven Bantu Biko, *I Write What I Like* page (1978, page 68).

49 *A Way of Being Free*, page 53.

In the Living Learning discussions there is a critical understanding of the way civil society (NGOs, churches, education, and even spatial planning) – backed up by the potential force of the state – colludes to keep people oppressed. Here, too, is a cogent argument of how this can be contested; how hegemony can be 'unlearned', by acknowledgement of what people already know, because they have lived it – "We see that education is mostly used to control people and keep power for the powerful – but we can disrupt this."

The reflections on hegemony developed here are not limited to the state. The churches are also subject to critical scrutiny:

> Christian education has not been neutral either. When some of us support the movements' struggles in church, others are saying "No, we don't get involved in politics" – but this is just supporting the status quo and it shows how we have been domesticated through our religion too. This kind of domestication teaches us to accept that how things are in the world is somehow natural, or how God planned it – so that the people feel they cannot act to change things.[50]

But the comrades in the Living Learning space didn't only develop a critique of how oppression shapes our common sense about the world. They were also clear that the poor must fight to challenge this common sense and to reshape it in a way that recognises the humanity of everybody:

> it is necessary to fight so that education, development, even religion, come to be dominated by the poor … Wouldn't it be an important contribution to this … to let us as the social movements to learn and teach at the grassroots; creating forums of living learning that would be helping the people to learn that they are not free.[51]

There is a degree of optimism about progress made in the battle for hegemony: "Another achievement is that we have managed to educate so many other organisations, ecumenical structures, NGOs and so on about

50 Session 5, 13th May, of this booklet.

51 Session 5, 13th May, of this booklet.

a living politics. We have also succeeded to get rid of those who have been trying to use us and exploit us."[52]

Freedom (& UnFreedom)

Abahlali baseMjondolo, now working together with allied movements like the Rural Network, famously holds a heretical 'UnFreedom Day' event every year on the national public holiday Freedom Day – the anniversary of the first democratic election in South Africa. The 2008 press release for UnFreedom Day is included here. It is a remarkable document in many ways not least because, although it makes some clear demands like 'Land and Housing in the Cities!' and 'Bottom Up Democracy not Top Down Rule by Councillors!', it clearly commits the movement to a collective, bottom up and dialogical process of reflection on the question of freedom. This is radically opposed to the state's practice of bussing people into stadiums to be hectored and lectured by big men on platforms.

The idea of freedom is central to Living Learning. An idea of freedom becomes necessary because of the daily situation, the daily emergency, of millions of shack dwellers and rural dwellers in South Africa – the fires, the lack of toilets, the violent evictions, the harassment from farmers and the police and so on. The quest for freedom is the human response to this situation; it is a situation that demands freedom. This is uncomplicated. It is a question of straight forward logic – this world is unviable and therefore people must rebel: "Our world is burning and so we need another world."[53]

It is also noted that "there is a difference when the poor say another world is necessary and when civil society says that another world is possible. We conclude to say that it is the formations of the poor and the grassroots that are the agency to make this other world come – not civil

52 Session 10, 14th October, of this booklet.

53 Session 7, 22nd July, of this booklet.

society."[54] This fits well with Freire's argument that only the oppressed can humanise society .

But how to rebel, and what to rebel for are more complicated questions. The nature of freedom is also a complicated question. The answer developed here is that freedom is the self-organization of the shack dweller and rural dweller struggles, the insistence on their own agency and intelligence – as force and reason for the reconstruction of society – that gives content to freedom. Freedom "will come from becoming masters of our own history; professors of our own poverty; and from making our own paths out of unfreedom."[55] It is this vision of freedom as collective empowerment that transforms the struggle into one for a whole new society. There is a clear recognition that freedom is not merely a change in the relationship between a community and external forces like state, capital and civil society. Freedom is also an internal practice. For instance one participant observes that:

> In many organisations previously, there was a tendency where certain people, especially women, were being undermined. At least now it is good to see women in both our movements emerging as some of its strongest leaders. They are not threatened or intimidated by anyone – even women leaders in the Rural Network are not threatened by an *inkosi* (so called 'traditional leader'): if they know what they must say is good and true then they will say it. Also in Abahlali, I feel so proud in my heart to see the strength of women comrades – they will challenge anyone![56]

There is a complete absence of the dogma that continues to turn much of the left into a mirror image of what it seeks to oppose. This is a critical, democratic, open-ended and praxis-based vision: "We don't say that we in the movements are perfect, but at least we are opening these gates; at least we are on a right path to search for the truth. We have a deep responsibility to make sure that no-one can shut the gates." It stresses that collective reflection on the experience of oppression and resistance

54 Session 7, 22nd July, of this booklet.

55 Session 4, 14th April, of this booklet.

56 Session 10, 14th October, of this booklet.

is essential to that praxis: "Our experience in life and in the movement means that we must always remain open to debate, question and new learning from and with the people." The point is not to tell the people what to think but to create spaces that can enable people to discuss how and why they are not free. The notion is dialogic rather than hierarchical, and relies on the "damned of the earth" speaking for themselves.

This idea of freedom is posed against "the state's logic of freedom" which is limited to "voting and some bits of service delivery here and there."[57] However it also becomes clear that many NGOs and human rights organisations which, often against direct requests from the movements, reduce their struggles to 'service delivery protests' as if their struggles were only demanding greater technical efficiency from the current system. The participants are clear that: "our ideas about freedom go much further and deeper than the way our struggles are presented when they are described as 'service delivery protests'". They insist, against the stunted and anti-political language of the NGOs and human rights organisations, on the right to define their own struggle and to do so in explicitly political terms.

Conclusion

There are many important ideas in this booklet, such as the critical importance of language,[58] that we have not engaged with in this section. But we do hope that we have drawn some attention to a number of the key ideas. We thank the comrades from Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network who were part of the Living Learning project in 2008 for the honour of their invitation to write a piece for their booklet.

We would like to conclude our contribution by noting that towards the end of 2008, Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network joined with the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Landless People's

57 Session 4, 14th April, of this booklet.

58 On this question see the first chapter of Frantz Fanon's book B*lack Skin White Masks* (1967) and the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1967).They are both in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo Library along with Ngugi's wonderful new novel, *Wizard of the Crow* (2006).

Movement in Johannesburg to form an unfunded national alliance of poor people's movements – the Poor People's Alliance. The movements and their alliance face all kinds of challenges and the future is not, at all, certain. But Living Learning, along with various other records of the intellectual work done in the movements – press releases, films, essays, songs, speeches, interviews and files and files of meeting minutes, and so on – makes it is very clear that the movements have laid an excellent intellectual foundation for the next phase of struggle. If, as the radical French philosopher Alain Badiou argues, "a struggle prevails when its principles are clear"[59] then the movements are in with a fighting chance. We salute them. *Qina!*

Nigel C. Gibson
Anne Harley
Richard Pithouse

59 Badiou first wrote this in French a political pamphlet called *La Distance politique*. It has been cited, in English, in a 2002 paper by Peter Hallward called *Badiou's Politics: Equality and Justice* which is online at http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/271/256

Glossary

Abafundisi	isiZulu for Church Leaders (Priests or Pastors) and teachers
Abahlali	[literally: 'those who stay/live'] residents in a neighbourhood or members of Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement
ANC	African National Congress
assegai	a traditional spear
CAE	Centre for Adult Education
chow	colloquial expression broadly meaning 'to eat'
Emijondolo	in the shacks
Epulazini	on the farms
Freedom Day	official state holiday held annually on 27th April to commemorate inauguration of democratic government after apartheid
Induna	headman in the village appointed under an Inkosi in areas of traditional authorities
Inkosi	is traditional leader under Isilo (his Majesty the King)
Mabuyakhulu	Mike Mabuyakhulu, ANC Member of Executive Committee (MEC) of the Provincial Parliament responsible for housing matters.

the song 'Mshini Wami'	protest song dating back to the anti-apartheid struggle that celebrates the AK47, and currently adopted by ANC leader, Jacob Zuma as a sort of personal theme song
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
Slums Act	legislation aimed eradicating what the government calls 'slums' in KwaZulu-Natal
Ugogo	isiZulu for grandmother
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Umjondolo	a shack

Notes:

Church Land Programme (CLP)

is an organisation that works with people, churches and land.

It works to affirm, learn from and journey with those who are systematically excluded and impoverished in their struggles related to land and justice. CLP supports people's struggles for freedom and to regain their collective power.

In doing its work, CLP upholds: a commitment to social justice and democratic practice; a commitment to being present with and listening to people; respect for others; reflection and learning.

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