

17 July 2011

Revolutionary radicals recalcitrant in their reflective refusal to revere "freedom days" are dubbed as reactionaries by our "democratic state".

by Reverend Mavuso Mbhekeseni, Rural Network

The South African calendar is full of days on which we are asked to celebrate our freedom. There is Human Rights Day, Freedom Day, Worker's Day, Youth Day, Mandela Day, Women's Day and Heritage Day. These days are turned to months. Those of us who refuse to celebrate these days and months as if the struggle is over and who insist that the struggle goes on are called reactionaries.

Fifty years ago the revolutionary philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote that:

The leader pacifies the people. For years on end after independence has been won, we see him, incapable of urging on the people to a concrete task, unable really to open the future to them or of flinging them into the path of national reconstruction, that is to say, of their own reconstruction; we see him reassessing the history of independence and recalling the sacred unity of the struggle for liberation. The leader, because he refuses to break up the national bourgeoisie, asks the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk on the remembrance of the epoch which led up to independence. The leader, seen objectively, brings the people to a halt and persists in either expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it. During the struggle for liberation the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then.

We have had more than one leader since 1994. But the party has played this role of the leader. Fanon goes on to say that:

Now it must be said that the masses show themselves totally incapable of appreciating the long way they have come. The peasant who goes on scratching out a living from the soil, and the unemployed man who never finds employment do not manage, in spite of public holidays and flags, new and brightly-coloured though they may be, to convince themselves that anything has really changed in their lives. The bourgeoisie who are in power vainly increase the number of processions; the masses have no illusions. They are hungry; and the police officers, though now they are Africans, do not serve to reassure them particularly. The masses begin to sulk; they turn away from this nation in which they have been given no place and begin to lose interest in it.

For us Fanon is a prophet. Our lives confirm his vision of the future and the need for struggle to continue after independence.

Human Rights Day is on the 21st of March and March is Human Rights Month. We all know that you can't eat Human Rights or live in Human Rights. But Human Rights should protect you as you struggle for land and housing, for education, and for all that you need. Yet we have been repressed in Human Rights Month.

In March 2005 residents of the Kennedy Road settlement blockaded the road because they wanted to fight for their right to land in Kennedy Road. They knew that shelter, electricity, water and sanitation is their human rights. But they were beaten and fourteen people, the Kennedy Fourteen, were arrested. Even school children were taken to Westville prison. That is illegal but it was the protesters that were called criminals. The road blockade was how they mobilized, organized and emerged as a poor people's movement. The movement grew out the fact that the response to the road blockade was police brutality instead of negotiation. Should the Kennedy People really have been celebrating Human Rights Day while they were being beaten and jailed? Should they have been celebrating while the police occupied their settlement?

We have not only been beaten and jailed in Human Rights Month. We have also been evicted. In March 06, 2009, the Durban high court ordered Shepisi Dlamini and 49 others who were residing at the Siyanda settlement in Newlands East to relocate to the Transit camp situated in Richmond Farm to allow the MR 577 main road to be constructed. That application to evict Abahlali baseMjondolo was brought to court by the then MEC for Transport in KZN Mr Bheki Cele and the eThekweni Municipality. We went to court and the court promised that no one would stay in the transit camp for more than one year and that everyone would get water and electricity in the transit camp. The victims were promised houses within one year. But there was no water or electricity in the transit camp and more than two years later the victims are still sitting in the transit camp. The Municipality has just ignored the court order. It was on the 17th of March when the victims left their shacks, which were then destroyed by the eThekweni Municipality agents, and were then relocated to the very inhumane tins where they are still languishing. There is not enough space for families, no clean water, electricity, and sanitation. The place is not safe to live in. It was Human Rights month but they were not celebrating! Do you think they were being reactionary?

On the 21st of March 2009 Rural Network members had a protest march in Reitvlei near Greytown because the so called farmer Mr Collen de Gasparyz of Bright Water farm had brutally assaulted and was also evicting the Masikane family. The Rural Network, Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Landless People's Movement were all in that march to support the struggle of the Masikane's, who were victimized by Collen. The memorandum of grievances was received by the official Mr Zondi on behalf of the then MEC Bheki Cele of Safety and Security. In that memorandum they were also complaining about the Rietvlei station commissioner Capt. Jonck whom they accused of being biased because she was not arresting Collen de Gasparyz. Because of the strong evidence against Capt. Jonck given by Rural Network she resigned in May 2009. This protest was organized by Rural Network on Human Rights day. We were fighting for human rights that were violated by private sector and government departments. What were we supposed to do? To celebrate human rights day while we were being victimized?

On the 21st of March 2010 the Rural Network organized an event at Nkwalini between Melmoth and eShowe. Abahlali baseMjondolo also took part in that event. We were all reiterating that our human rights are being trampled over by farmers like Mr Mark Channels of New Venture farm and the municipalities who were trying to evict Nkwalini people, farm dwellers and shack dwellers. Mr. Channel destroyed about 30 homes because he wanted to build a game reserve. That farmer had applied for a court interdict to forbid the Inkosi, traditional leaders and the members of our organizations to move and have meetings on their own land, which is under the Ingonyama Trust. This farmer Mr. Channels also hijacked and confiscated the public school Khethimfundo Primary School and incorporated it to his farm as if it is a private school. He fired and hired teachers as if it was his school so we were talking about these sufferings and social ills in our event. Does it make sense to celebrate Human Rights Day when a white man can use a game reserve to become a dictator? Don't Human Rights mean that human beings come first - before animals and before private profit?

On March 22, 2010 Abahlali baseMjondolo invited Rural Network to their protest to demand their human rights and services from government and municipality. The march started from Botha Park and was supposed to proceed to King Dinizulu city hall but we were barred by police personnel to reach the City Hall. We were nearly shot by the police force and we had to change our route so we went to Albert Park we were handed over the memorandum to Cyril Xaba who is an MPP and also an advisor to KZN premier Dr. Zweli Mkhize. He received the memorandum on behalf of President Jacob Zuma. It was a big march. We were thousands. Do we all deserve to be called reactionaries? It was towards the 2010 soccer World Cup tournament and evictions were rife! Should we be celebrating Human Rights when we are being evicted and denied the right to march through our own city?

This year on the 5th of March 2011, Mr. Nayetsheni Lymon Ndlozi, 62 years, residing in Uitkom farm in Utrecht was physically assaulted by the notorious farmer Johan Landman and his son of Vaalbarn farm after the farmer had impounded Ndlozi's cattle. Ndlozi is a labour tenant who claimed Uitkom farm from Landman's father.

This year on the 28th of March 2011, Abahlali baseMjondolo in the Dududu settlement on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal had a protest march to demand services from their district and the local municipality. They demanded houses that were promised and water, electricity, sanitation, health facilities and agricultural projects. All these projects are in their IDP and they had all been approved 4 years ago but had not yet implemented. So Abahlali and Dududu community members marched to Vulamehlo local municipality and submitted the memorandum to the now ex-Mayor Miss Bongiwe Duma.

This march followed that of Abahlali baseMjondolo and other progressive organizations like the Rural Network, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), the Fisher Folk, and others from Durban Social Forum (DSF) that was on the 21st March 2011. They were all demanding social services that they are entitled to and which are their constitutional rights. They were demanding transparency, corruption to be investigated, a simplified and open tendering system that could make corruption more difficult, a fair billing system and clear employment procedures from eThekweni municipality. These were protests about human rights that are violated. These were not celebration events. Are we all crazy or unpatriotic?

In April those who are free celebrate Freedom Day. But in 2006 Abahlali initiated unFreedom Day where we dream and plan in reflection as to how we can realize our own freedom, freedom for always and not freedom by event, freedom every where and not only in the stadiums, freedom for everyone and not freedom only for the elite, politicians, officials and government representatives. When we talk about freedom we mean freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of speech and freedom of movement. Therefore when we reflect on freedom we are lamenting and not celebrating because we do not enjoy these freedoms. Is it reactionary to refuse to celebrate freedoms that you do not have?

In May our country celebrates what is called May Day which is Worker's Day. COSATU and its alliance partners use to have workers' events for the whole month. But as social movements we do not relax when worker's right are celebrated. Many of our members have no jobs and when they do have jobs they are working casual, temporary, for labour brokers, as domestic workers and security guards and without rights. And even those few of us that do work with worker's rights are not free from evictions and other plagues perpetrated by the state machinery.

On 14 May 2009 Abahlali baseMjondolo took the notorious Slums Act to the Constitutional Court to challenge this attack on the poor.

In May 2010 Rural Network were preoccupied by the Masangweni trial at the eShowe regional court (case number 279/06/06) which is about two school boys who were killed by farm guards for eating sugar cane.

In May 2011 Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network were at the Durban court to support the Kennedy 12 who are charged with public violence and murder. They were accused after being attacked and having their houses destroyed by the ANC. Some of the accused were not even in Kennedy during the attack but they are being prosecuted. So in May we were defending ourselves from state repression and not celebrating the rights of workers. We were in court for three consecutive days. During that month of May politicians were busy electioneering for local government elections which were on 16-18 May 2011. We did not vote. At this time the trial had some transpirations that were reaching a climax in terms of evidence.

We were privileged to conclude the May month by participating in the discussion that was organized by the Church Land Program [C.L.P] and the Paulo Freire project at UKZN to deliberate and reflect about our struggle while marking 50 years after the death of Frantz Fanon. We deliberated whether what Frantz Fanon struggled for, and his beliefs and convictions, are still relevant in our struggle under the new dispensation. We were motivated and given courage by fascinating warnings that when colonialism sees that it will lose it tries to make a deal with leaders of the anti-colonial movement. That deal is for the system of oppression to remain in place but for new people, people who are leaders of the anti-colonial struggle, to take over its management. We ended that May month on a high note and in a high spirit with the words of Fanon when he says that after independence is achieved the party becomes a means to control the people, it always reminds people of the struggle days to try to keep their loyalty but in fact it is a new oppressor reminding them of freedom days like 2 February 1990 and others while repressing their new struggles to complete liberation.

June is Youth Month in honour of the courage of the youth killed on 16 June 1976. But our children are still killed today. On 17 June 2006, the day after a 16 June event, two boys were shot for sugar cane eating. Thembinkosi Mpanza was 17 and Vukani Shange was 16 years old. This thing of sugar cane has a long history. Frantz Fanon's ancestors were taken from Africa and India to grow sugar cane in the Caribbean. Millions of people have suffered and died for sugar cane. The sugar cane that was bought here by colonialism is worked by our brothers and sisters, by our mothers. They still don't get a living wage. Many people have got rich from sugar cane. Many more people have been made poor by sugar cane. Millions of people were even made into slaves by sugar cane. When these poor boys wanted to take a teaspoon of sugar they were killed. Is it reactionary to refuse to celebrate Youth Day in a way that says that the struggle of the youth is over now when our children are still being killed?

On 16 June 2009 the Rural Network, together with Abahlali baseMjondolo, attended an event hosted by the Gauteng Landless People's Movement.

On 24 June 2009 the Rural Network, together with Abahlali baseMjondolo, held a commemoration for Mpanza and Shange.

On 16 June 2010 we held an event at Masangweni to mobilise the community for the case on the scene where the two boys were shot. A young boy called Oupa Xulu offered up a very moving prayer. He said "Oh God make that sugar cane to taste bitter. Make the oranges to taste bitter. Make it bitter so that we don't want to take it because we are being killed for a tiny bit of sweetness."

On 16 June this year we joined the AbM Youth Day event at Motala Heights where the community has been fighting a battle against the notorious landlord Ricky Govender for many years.

On the 18th of June this year the Rural Network held an event to celebrate that we won the case of the two boys murdered for a mouthful of sweetness. Their killers were sentenced to twenty years. We remembered the youth of 1976 on that day. We remembered how Phila Mdletshe has to run with the body of his dead comrade just like Mbuyisa Makhubo had to run with the body of Hector Peterson.

On the 22nd of June the notorious farmer, Louis John Nel, began evicting families in eNkwalini. Did the Youth of 1976 ever imagine that the white farmers would still be evicting people in a democratic South Africa? Are we reactionaries for finding this unacceptable?

Mandela Day is celebrated on 18 July and July is Mandela Month. We have not been safe in July either.

On 24 July last year Mr. Patrick Mpanza was shot dead by the Farm Watch on Mr. Channel's farm near eMpangeni. The case was thrown out of court due to

'insufficient evidence'.

In July this year the eThekweni Municipality declared war on the people of Kennedy Road for the crime of connecting themselves to electricity. It is very sad to see that the Sunday Times is in full support of this war.

There have also been evictions at Richmond Farm and a notice of motion has been served for evictions in eMmaus.

What was very good in July this year is that S'bu Zikode, David Ntseng and Richard Pithouse met with Ayanda Kota, Nigel Gibson and other comrades from around South Africa as well as the Congo, Jamaica and Ghana in iRhini to discuss the living legacy of Frantz Fanon. This was very powerful.

Tomorrow, on the 18th of July, on Mandela Day, Abahlali baseMjondolo will be in court for the Kennedy 12 case. We as the Rural Network will be in court in Utrecht for the case of Mr. Mdlalose who was assaulted by a farmer. In Motala Heights Shamita Naidoo is organising an event for all the children.

On Mandela Day we will still be struggling. We are saying to people that, yes, it is good to give 67 minutes on Mandela Day. But we should give that 67 minutes in struggle. This South Africa is not the country that Tata Mandela and his comrades fought for. The only real way to honour Tata Mandela is to work to complete the struggle of Mandela. This means that the struggle continues. It also means that those who tell us that the struggle is over dishonour the spirit of Mandela.

We are looking forward to the 26th to the 29th of July when Dear Mandela, a powerful film about the struggle of Abahlali baseMjondolo, will be released in Durban. This film is clearly saying that Mandela's struggle is not completed.

Heritage Day is on the 24th of September. We have twice been attacked in Heritage Month. On 28 September 2007 we were attacked by the police in Sydenham during a peaceful march. The Abahlali Fourteen were arrested. On the 26th September 2009 we playing soccer and dancing iMfene and then we were attacked by the ANC in Kennedy Road. The Kennedy Thirteen were arrested. Two days before, on Heritage Day itself, we had launched the Living Learning book in eMmaus and planted trees there too.

In September 2010 Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network had a long mediation, reflection and recuperation about the attack and the way forward. The attack damaged our movement but it did not defeat it.

The struggle continues for the Rural Network and Abahlali baseMjondolo during the so-called revered days. The boys who died for a mouthful of sweetness are our Jesus. Isicathimiya and iMfene are our heritage. Living Learning is our philosophy. Struggle will open the road to our future.

The real reactionaries are those who insist that we are free while we remain oppressed.

Aluta continua.

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