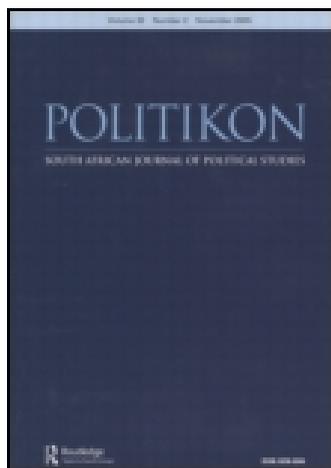


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Occupying Umlazi: Hesitant Steps Towards Political Ideology in a Durban Township

CHINA NGUBANE*

ABSTRACT *Umlazi is considered the second most populated African township in South Africa, after Soweto. Located in southwestern Durban, Umlazi has long been a site of community movements, especially during apartheid. Umlazi's Ward 88 was a site of political revival in 2012, a time when ideas unified people and motivated them to pursue a common goal. The name of those ideas was 'Occupy', following a film screening of the 2011 Occupy movement. There are a variety of lessons from assessing several weeks of protest marred by state violence, followed by a Ward Committee election won by the Occupy movement, followed by uneven access to development resources. The ebb and flow of ideology is one such lesson: it is a necessary part of moving from local to global, to address both deep problems and the politicians who sustain them.*

Introduction

For my part, the more I know political cultures and circles, the more the certainty is imposed on me that the greatest danger to threaten Africa is the lack of ideology. (Fanon (2006), *For the African revolution*)

The ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, within the national liberation movements – which is basically due to ignorance of the historical reality which these movements claim to transform – constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses of our struggle against imperialism, if not the greatest weakness of all. (Cabral (1966), 'The weapon of theory')

Different people do not view or value the term 'ideology' in the same way. Political ideologies may originate from theory or philosophy, but many ordinary community activists simply do not believe in ideology. In this article we discuss the development of political ideas at micro-level in one specific area, Umlazi, and consider their relation to macro-political ideology. We will discuss the meaning, nature and function of political ideology from an activist standpoint with reference to lessons learned during Umlazi's 'Occupy' experience, from May through August 2012. Although the term 'political ideology' has no perpetual

meaning, we will use it to denote local and global political ideas whose functions influenced and mobilised people to support a common goal in Umlazi. These include beliefs about the desired nature of society and actions employed for the attainment of the desirable society. The township political ideology can be seen in the community programme of action for achieving collective demands, which included the delivery of social services and government accountability. To some extent, these relate to the world Occupy movement which began nine months earlier in New York City, in taking space and demanding accountability and socio-economic justice. The use of the name Occupy Umlazi reflects both style and content (Ngubane 2012).

The protests witnessed in Umlazi in June–August 2012 were not in isolation, for ‘service delivery protests’ have numbered in the thousands since the 1990s. The police labelled 1882 of South Africa’s protests in 2012–2013 as ‘violent’ (Mthethwa 2013). But as the Umlazi experience confirms, violence sometimes comes from one direction: above. Although there are many differences between them, such protests are characterised by common assumptions on how people ought to act and what must be done, usually with a highly local orientation: to improve municipal capacity, competence, anti-corruption and political power. The attention to local causes in most protests influenced the way in which people thought and acted, even if these causes and protests have been witnessed across an entire country.

Individual ideas eventually connect and influence collective ideas. In a previous era, 40 years ago in the same area, the political ideology which gave rise to community actions was inspired by Black Consciousness (Steve Biko lived in Umlazi in a house with Barney Pityana, as a University of Natal medical student), although ‘syndicalist’ (proto-socialist) trade unionism also arose at the same place and time, amongst workers who commuted a short distance to Durban’s harbour. Later, 30 years ago, the United Democratic Front and then African National Congress (ANC) won political-ideological power for the non-racial liberation movement, fighting off the Inkatha Freedom Party’s Zulu nationalism. Fifteen years ago, there was an attempt near Umlazi, in Chatsworth, to create a politics known as ‘We are the poors!’, which included water activism in the township as disconnections became common, though even one of its founders, Desai (2006), admits this was overblown rhetoric. A few years later, shackdwellers and their academic allies claimed what has been called a ‘living politics’ and even a ‘living communism’, although there are questions about its authenticity. These are some of the ideas from below that excited people to mobilise.

On the other hand, the Umlazi community has had to confront the extreme political-ideological ideals of political authority, which combine revolutionary rhetoric with neo-liberal policy and authoritarian practices. There have also been regular turf battles, such as between Inkatha and its breakaway National Freedom Party, which have led to extreme violence and assassinations. But the ANC easily wins elections as large parts of Umlazi citizenry have adopted an increasingly collectivist ideology, including faith in newly re-elected president Jacob Zuma to rescue people from poverty. However, local political ideals have

also created a community expectation around majority consent, public autonomy and community participation in state resource distribution. Within a few years, the practices of municipal government came into contradiction with these community expectations and local understandings of entitlements. As a result, a large number of Umlazi residents started to recognise a justifiable obligation not to obey authority if the authority was unjust. While residents have differed in their judgements about whether municipal authority is legitimate, some submitted their allegiance out of self-interest and pragmatism, while others obeyed authority due to fear of punishment (e.g. arrests or violence). Others, though, rebelled, and the sporadic protests in the township finally became more decisive in mid-2012.

Ward 88's Community Crisis Committee included members from the ruling ANC, as well as from the main opposition political parties such as the DA, IFP and NFP. Those not politically affiliated included local activists from faith-based traditions, Community-based Organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations. Whatever their pre-existing party or civil society affiliations, they agreed to actively participate in this process to resist authority, even to the extent of using civil disobedience, in the face of the state's willingness to use violence. Ideological development occurred during the period, as some ANC members threatened to withdraw their membership and the majority withdrew their allegiance to authority. The turn to an electoral tactic did not diffuse a broader ideology demanding government accountability that did not tie community interests into either patronage systems (although this did eventually split Umlazi Occupy later in 2012) or a mainstream political party. Whether these conditions will pertain in the 2016 municipal elections, in the event a Workers' Party is established by Numsa and the Economic Freedom Fighters contest the area, remains to be seen.

Umlazi's rebellion

According to eThekweni Municipality reports, Ward 88 has a population of 31,000, in 7900 dwellings. Of the population, 46% are young people between the ages of 15 and 34 years, 40% are unemployed and 33% are not economically active. About 60% of the population live in informal settlements, of which Zakheleleni is most prominent. Shortly after her 2006 election, activists in Umlazi Ward 88 began to demand that the eThekweni Municipality dismiss local ANC Councillor Nomzamo Mkhize for failing to do her job. The activists felt that their Councillor deliberately and disrespectfully ignored the public call to engage, and that Mkhize never called for a public meeting to discuss community problems during her six years in office. Mkhize was blamed for promoting nepotism, tribalism and division. Ward 88 activists demanded housing, electricity, education, land, water, sanitation, roads and sidewalks, a clear programme of development, a database of the unemployed, landless, skilled and the blind people, the abolition of transit camps, creation of employment and most importantly that Mkhize be replaced. In mid-2012, the National Unemployed People's Movement leader Ayanda Kota commented, 'I was here nine months ago for a protest on similar

issues. Today is another protest on the same issues and there has never been progress and no government response, while people continue to suffer' (Interview, 8 June 2012). The township became famous for badly built housing by the Mpisane family that is notorious for tenderpreneurship corruption (Mbuyazi 2012; Medley and Nene 2012). Protests became so intense that S'bu Mpisane had to change his employment policies in September 2012, and one councillor involved allegedly hired a hitman (SA Press Association 2012).

Umlazi Ward 88 protests intensified in May 2012. Leaders included Bheki Buthelezi and Sizwe Shiba of the Zakheleni shack settlement, known as Section S. Buthelezi was known as a strong critic of government, including its Secrecy Bill (Mhlana 2012). He helped organise more ward sections with continuous activist mobilisations. Government's immediate response was, activists argued, denialist, divisive, insincere and vicious. The months of May–July witnessed police brutality, intimidation, random shootings, activist arrests, unfair detention and a biased judiciary. Although activist arrests hampered continuity by instilling fear, this tended to make people more vigilant and also angered the larger community sufficiently to encourage that they join the cause. Through periodic road occupations and tireless door-to-door publicity the Ward 88 activists increased their support base. Cell phones and social media were other means of communication and dissemination of information. Before long, this compelled the government into negotiations, but because power had not adjusted, this turned out to be a waste of time. The first negotiations were part of what activists came to term 'All protocol observed', but it was evident that more disruptive activism would be needed.

As June began and protests regularly blocked Umlazi's main road, the Mangosuthu Buthelezi Highway, movements and organisations, such as the Democratic Left Front, Abahlali base Mjondolo, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, Right to Know Campaign, Clairwood Community, Umbilo Community, Durban Social Forum, University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society and Black Conscious Movement, students and researchers began to support the struggle. At first the Umlazi struggle could be said to have a narrow ideological scope as it focused mainly on Zakheleni shack settlement and then Ward 88. As people continued to mobilise and raise awareness, the ideological scope became wider; it not only embraced more Umlazi activists but also attracted outside communities.

June was the critical month, featuring near-constant community protest actions demanding the 'promised' basic services, as well as the transfer of the large tract of land at the old Durban international airport to people for housing. Other broader demands were heard: respect for human rights and the end of discrimination, xenophobia, racism, political fundamentalism and capitalism. Although some argue that after apartheid many community protests were often 'popcorn' in character because they pop up and fall quickly back without having lasting impact, Umlazi activists soon began to make genuine ideological statements and did so without any presence of middle-class academics. Supporting organisations played a strategic role in providing solidarity and logistical assistance, mobilising

for support, issuing of supportive statements, workshops and site visits. Regular meetings were held at specific venues and times and protest marches were pivotal in attracting community support. Public support swelled up soon after the June protest. Communities neighbouring Zakheleni (*Spring Section*) shack settlement (e.g. Emhlabeni, AX2, Enkonkoni, Emathupeni, Zwelethu and Enduduzweni) began to come forth together with members from other wards (e.g. Ward 85 and Uganda). In the same token Ward 88 enjoyed growing solidarity from individuals, social and faith-based movements and schools around Durban.

The June 8 protest was a turning point; it set the tone, gave courage and provided the ideas from which the Occupy movement emerged. About 500 people marched 4 kilometres from Mangosuthu University to the municipal offices at Mega City. The ward councillor did not arrive to receive the memorandum of demands. The use of such memos was instrumental; they were used as a record to hold government accountable and to be able to pose more questions.

Our last memorandum has gone for nine months without response and there has been no progress. We hope that this time they will take us seriously. What we are adding today is that Mkhize must go because she failed to confirm to people's needs, insisted Buthelezi. (Interview, 8 June 2012)

But arrests of 19 activists including Buthelezi followed on 23 June. On 25 June, there was a victory in the courts when charges were withdrawn (Abahlali base Mjondolo and Unemployed People's Movement 2012). According to Buthelezi,

I was later released on R500 bail and told to appear in the magistrate's court, but there was no magistrate there. I was told my case had been struck off the roll because there was no evidence against me and that the bail would be refunded. (Asmal-Motala 2012)

An ideological dispute arose. Councillor Mkhize told the *Mail & Guardian*:

I talk to every person in my ward. Some of these protesters are interested in issues of tenders, others are politically motivated. There is service delivery in this area, but there are nominees who did not become councillors, so this is politically motivated.

Buthelezi replied,

We are doing this as residents, not political parties. There are four political parties in the ward—the ANC, Black Consciousness Party, National Freedom Party and Inkatha Freedom Party—and we have all come together to raise issues of unemployment, housing, the landless and informal settlements. (Asmal-Motala 2012)

Witnessing the scene, a *Daily Maverick* reporter (DeWaal 2012) remarked about the ANC leadership, 'If they don't do something soon they may have an insurrection on their hands.'

The occupy strategy

After weeks of ongoing protests and fruitless attempts to draw government's attention in Umlazi, new political ideas emerged to justify resistance against authority

and to fulfil justice, freedom and equality. For the first time Ward 88 Community gathered at the Councillor's office on 26 June to design a programme of action and to commission committees that manage the process in a peaceful way. Police ordered the community to move away from the councillor's office, stating that there was no formal appointment made with the Councillor, or a permit authorising the gathering at her office. People dispersed and then gathered at Emhlabeni grounds as an alternative venue. A collective action plan was proposed. At this meeting it was revealed that there were threats by a hit squad alleged to be linked to the Councillor and some police officials. The credible rumour was that not only would they shoot protesters but also burn the councillor's office so as to discredit community efforts. In other parts of Umlazi (such as at the Glebelands Hostel in 2013), burning down the councillor's office was one way to express anger at inadequate service delivery (SA Press Association 2013). To avoid this scenario, the Ward 88 activists decided to occupy the councillor's office for the whole night so as to offer it protection.

As a result, the largest march yet, with over 2000 people, peacefully made their way from Emhlabeni grounds to the Councillor's office. As protesters drew closer to the office, police opened fire with live bullets. Two people were injured on the spot including Mkanyi Simelani, who was rushed to Emshiyeni hospital by community members, and four others were arrested. The march dispersed. By midnight the hit squad was moving around the community hunting activists, threatening to kill them and imposing a curfew. Among others, Bongani Zungu, a former Ward 88 aspiring Councillor candidate, was threatened with murder. At midnight on 26 June Zungu's tenant, Noxolo Makhaye, was shot on both her legs while lying in her bed during that night's rampage.

On the evening of 30 June, Joel Ndlovu (40 years old) was shot four times in his stomach and hospitalised. The perpetrators were known and bullet cartridges were discovered and kept as evidence. Despite evidence of hospitalised activists and cartridges, regional police commissioner Lt-Col Vincent Mdunge denied the shootings and hospitalisation of protesters. Perpetrators continued to move freely in the contested Ward 88. As Zungu testified,

I was threatened by a telephone call from the Councillor to stop community activism. They (*hit-squad*) were hunting for me at my house and they finally gunned down my tenant. Umlazi shall be ungovernable, we can't bear this, we are abandoned. (Interview, 30 June 2012)

A township movement prepares to 'Occupy' Umlazi's unrest won't be solved by intimidation

By China Ngubane, 2 July 2012, *The Mercury*

It is a time when local police brutality is a national scandal, with more than 50 extra-judicial executions (including many innocent bystanders) traced to a hit squad operating from the Cato Manor station. It is also a time when service delivery protests forced South African President Jacob Zuma to proclaim the need for 'radical' changes at last week's African National Congress policy conference so as

to redress blatant economic injustice—though this appears to be merely a career-lengthening rhetoric.

So it is time for a South Durban community in the huge Umlazi township to stand up bravely in spite of extreme intimidation by the cops and ruling party.

Facing down police harassment and threats from people they claim are ruling-party political thugs, residents of Umlazi's Ward 88 continue to demand that the eThekweni Municipal leadership dismiss Councillor Nomzamo Mkhize. She has long failed to respond to constituent demands, including that she hold a public meeting to discuss community problems.

Located in the vicinity of the Mangosuthu University of Technology, Ward 88 is like hundreds of other township settlements where poor people suffer. Members of the local Crisis Committee claim that Mkhize works selectively with her friends, causing division and failing to deliver basic services. She ignores popular calls for return of land to the people, including the old airport nearby which is slated for development as a new shipping port at an exorbitant cost of more than R100 billion.

The Ward 88 community further demands respect for women's rights in a township notorious for patriarchy and rape, and an end to discrimination, xenophobia, tribalism, racism, internecine political warfare and economic injustice.

When asking nicely does not work, the activists hit the streets. For almost two weeks, they have periodically occupied the Mangosuthu Highway, occasionally burning tyres, the symbol of resistance that dates back decades. Last week, in response to a sit in occupation at Mkhize's office across the highway from the municipal court and police station, the cops evicted Ward 88 activists and arrested 19.

The police initially used tear gas against 3000 protesters, but later, at midnight, people believed to be the ruling party's thugs went searching for leaders with guns and live ammunition. Two people, Mkanyani Simelani and Noxolo Mkwazi, were shot and hospitalised.

I have spent many hours in Umlazi investigating these problems, and it is hard to dispute community arguments that violence by the police and politicians is a crude attempt to intimidate people from further non-violent protest.

The arrests were meant to lock up leaders and foil the community's plans to occupy Mkhize's office tomorrow. According to the Crisis Committee, 'Ward 88 community activists have been threatened by a group known to be the Councillor's hit squad. But we have had enough of the struggle of the poor being politicised. It is high time we unite for justice.'

The group statement continues, 'We have lived years in poverty, silenced by law; we will use our power outside court for our voices to be heard. It's time the government takes the people seriously.'

Just as Zuma finally comprehended popular anger and called for a 'second transition' to deliver economic freedom, the KwaZulu-Natal provincial ruling party leadership belatedly noticed Umlazi's anger, agreeing to have a meeting in Ward 88 last Saturday. But Zakheleni residents arrived to find only the ANC Branch Executive Committee, not even the Mayor and other officials who have received memoranda at various protests.

Because of Umlazi's notorious housing corruption, residents demand that lead municipal housing manager Nigel Gumede explain the housing situation. Willies Mchunu was requested to come, to discuss violence by the police and the local political mafia. This meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday afternoon.

If they still cannot get inside, make their voices heard and achieve a dramatic change in their circumstances, the Ward 88 community has another strategy. They have been preparing ground near the Councillor's office for the kind of Occupation we have seen spring up in cities across the world.

In downtown New York last September, the 'Occupy Wall Street' idea sparked a movement of idealistic youth fed up with corrupt politicians, banks and corporations. In January, an 'Occupy Nigeria' movement linking poor, working and middle-class people succeeded in reversing a petrol price hike that the International Monetary Fund and its local allies had imposed.

The same rising fury and creative protest capacity appear to make Zakheleni residents and their allies like the Abahlali baseMjondolo shackdwellers' movement and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance fearless against even Durban's fascistic cops and a ruling party that in Umlazi believes it must act like some kind of paramilitary.

But after last week's attacks, a peaceful 'Occupy Umlazi' is an event many hope can return power to the people.

Occupy Umlazi

Buthelezi clarified the next move, on July 2:

We've occupied next to her office because we reckoned that Mkhize have no desire to listen to the people. We are not fighting Mkhize but the system, capitalism, in which our government operates. We are staggered that government urgently attacks us; the law protects politicians and not the people. (Interview, 30 June 2013)

People unanimously agreed that Mkhize failed to serve her constituents. Community members brought tools (spades, bush, grass cutters, etc.) from home to clear the thick bush next to the councillor's office in preparation to 'occupy'. The place became known as the *People's Office*. Buthelezi explained,

We are here because we are all suffering, We have come closer to the councillor to save her time and costs going to the community, and that she can respond to the people's demands. People will share information and ideas in the build up to the occupy movement. We will mobilise support and call for solidarity to mass resistance against tribalism, nepotism, patriarchy, partisanry, incompetency, disrespectfulness and unaccountability by civil servants. (Interview, 2 July 2012)

By 15 July, the Umlazi protests had consolidated and transformed from temporary taking of space during protest marches in which road blockades featured, into an occupy movement with a continual presence of scores of activists next to the Councillor's office. Community ranks swelled, for the struggle was not only for Zakheleni shackdwellers, but were increasingly prosecuted by people living in

proper houses who expressed disgruntlement over long-awaited maintenance of houses. They were angry about the poor supply of water and electricity and the high cost of living. From the government's perspective, protesters were labelled as 'trouble makers', hooligans or agents of opposition parties.

By 23 July, Mkhize, her son and two men were seen assaulting people for being involved in these protests, including Thabile Ngcobo who was wearing a Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu) tee shirt. With community support, Thabile instantly reported the case to the police station, and testified:

I was smacked several times in the face by Mkhize's son who under the instruction of Mkhize took a blade and ripped-off my Fawu teeshirt from the front neck to bottom. Mkhize ordered her gang to take me photos and promised to deal with me. Mkhize was pulling and pushing me and calling me names. They took my teeshirt and I was cautioned never to attend such meetings. (Interview, 23 July 2012)

This raised the stakes, and the occupiers decided to shut down the councillor's office and replace it with a People's Office in the form of a tent. As the two Al Jazeera documentary films about the Occupy movement were screened through a makeshift sheet and imported data projector and small computer speakers, along with the *Dear Mandela* film about AbM's housing struggles, there was increasing interest in relating the Umlazi Occupy to the rest of Durban and to the world's cities where Occupiers had taken space and then been brutally displaced.

As the dramatic events of June–July unfolded, every week there was growing support from social movements around Durban and abroad. This provided a degree of protection for the big tent and its residents, and increased pressure on the municipal government to respond to people's demands. Some of the norms adopted included that as members gather at Umlazi Occupy, they leave behind political party affiliations in the interests of community's unity. As Sizwe Shiba put it, 'We are not the ANC, Inkatha Freedom Party nor the Democratic Alliance—but the community, the society, the electorate and the people' (Interview, 22 June 2012).

On 12 July, Buthelezi welcomed about 300 occupiers next to the Councillor's Office, marking the second week of the Occupy Umlazi movement. People demanded that Mkhize must go and that the Councillor's Office be locked. They insisted that in future, ANC membership cards should not be a prerequisite to receive services from the Councillor. A demand was raised for immediate by-elections. A case against Mkhize was reported to the police station for her role in earlier vigilante shootings. On 18 July, Mandela day, occupiers picketed outside Umlazi GG Police station, calling for '*67 minutes of Mkhize's detention*', pressurising police to begin to do justice. As Elvis Ngubane explained, 'It is nerve-racking that public members are arrested promptly while government officials only get arrested after we nit-pick' (Interview, 17 July 2012). Finally, Mkhize appeared in court two days later, and she accepted all assertions against her and apologised to the public. After a negotiated settlement, Thabile was compensated for the damage.

Celebrating this victory, Buthelezi applauded consistent support from allies as well as the courage and strength of community members and friends: 'Our leaders do not want unity among people and they are happy to see us divided. We must now leave party politics and work as a community' (Interview, 22 July 2012). A mobilising team was established to carry out the task of distributing flyers to newly identified areas, for example, wards 79, 85, 89 and 76. A media team and other community functionaries were appointed. Community members asked themselves how to address a councillor who would send snipers to murder her own people. According to Buthelezi, 'We have lost hope that government will do justice and recall Mkhize; she propagates tribalism, sews seeds of discord and division. Mkhize made it clear that she will never help the AmaMpondos (*the Xhosa speaking people*) in the ward' (Interview, 22 July 2012).

Buthelezi and 19 others were arrested on 23 July. Threats, arrests and detention were made more difficult by the difficulty in getting legal representation and funds to bail out members. Nevertheless, constant media coverage and tireless vigilance meant the provincial ruling party and government took notice, finally calling for a meeting to engage the community. The day 23 July was an important day since community representatives were going to meet the regional government to discuss ward issues. In spite of Buthelezi's jailing, 10 members were appointed to represent the Occupy movement and to engage government. Said Shiba, 'If they don't listen we will mobilise to occupy Durban City Hall, we all come from different political affiliations and here we are one community fighting a common cause' (Interview, 22 July 2012).

Eventually a meeting was facilitated and chaired by the municipal Housing Portfolio Committee chair, Nigel Gumede. It included Mayor James Nxumalo, the Ward 88 Crisis Committee, the ANC Branch Executive Committee (BEC) and Municipal officials at the Durban City Hall. Although Gumede acknowledged that there were numerous calls, memos and protests by Ward 88 activists to address community issues, he denied he had been informed by his Ward Councillor, who again was absent at this meeting. Gumede conceded that if the Councillor should be dismissed, it would follow a political process within the ANC. Gumede admitted that memos were not comprehensively responded to. Still, he argued that Ward 88 activists should not associate themselves with organising transit camps and demanding access to the Old Airport space, for neither fall under Ward 88. As Gumede put it,

If there are too many people against the ANC councillor, there are possibilities of a by-elections and the winner can be someone not ANC. We look at what will happen when we change forces and the only people to ask from are the ANC Branch Executive Committee (BEC). And even those who are protesting we question their sympathy with the ANC and this is what we firstly weigh before we attempt to go for by-elections. We do not want to take a risk that is not calculated. The BEC needs to confirm to enable a political decision on whether to replace her. (Gumede recorded at the meeting of 23 July 2012)

This bad news meant the community would be stuck with its problems until the ANC made a decision to find a new Councillor. Promises were made for new

priorities: income generation, job creation, a clean environment, sports and recreation and skills development. In this meeting mayor Nxumalo discouraged toyi-toyi protests and encouraged engaging with government. He added

Protests are becoming fashionable, it's unfortunate that in South Africa we are transparent, marches are shown on TVs, which is one of the things that never happened in eThekweni region, that we can burn tires and block roads, but because of what we see happening in other areas some communities start to think they are left behind. To march is your right but what we haven't done as communities is to look for information before we march. In other areas these marches are becoming destructive, they destroy halls, schools, and clinics yet we don't have money; it will take time to build another budgets to recover those facilities. (Nxumalo recorded at the meeting of 23 July 2012)

However, concessions were made by the municipality. Information was critical, and the community demanded—and won—ward profiles, maps and documents with the most up-to-date data. Other officials in the meeting also committed to fast-track finance to Ward 88, including R12 million for ablution facilities and water dispensing devices. The shack settlements of Zakheleni and Emshiyeni were targeted for new housing. The meeting was a breakthrough, as a working relationship was established between the Occupiers and their political representatives. The Crisis Committee demanded a holistic report with clear answers addressing all Ward 88 grievances. The community continued to demand that Councillor Mzhize 'must go'. A municipal team joined the 'five-aside' community representatives and continued to meet, though disputes arose over the meeting venue, which the ANC politicians wanted to draw into a primary school in an area where they enjoyed control. Most importantly, the community demanded and won a concession for an election for a new Ward 88 Committee, which is a small group from wards which is usually used for tokenistic consultation purposes. This was agreed, and an election was set for 19 August.

During this period, the Umlazi Occupy space was strategic for the community. People received regular feedback, updates and testimonies, which also helped in building strength and maintaining momentum. People could engage and develop strategies. Information and knowledge were shared through workshops, films and sharing experiences. Different progressive social groups, alliances, churches and individuals shared the platform with solidarity messages. It was also a space for collective planning and building networks. Every Sunday was the occasion of a mass meeting. At the third 'Big Sunday', (Bandile Mdlalose recorded at a meeting on the 15th of July 2012) AbM Secretary General Bandile Mdlalose reminded about the atrocities experienced since the protests had begun. She restated community concerns, including poverty, unemployment, housing, evictions, water, land, electricity, injustice, police brutality and disservice by government. Despite death threats and attacks by the hit squad, the community continued to express their demands including that Mkhize must go.

The fourth 'big Sunday' marked a month of continuous vigilance at the Occupy site. For the entire month, the councillor had avoided her office. Addressing over 500 Occupiers, Zungu of the Umlazi Crisis Committee worked to generate an idea

of 'one voice', in order to destroy the loyalistic party political boundary mentality. According to community activist Bheki Mkhize,

People will never be co-opted into party politics, the BEC has no capacity to deliver and pressure should be directed to government to respond people's demands. BEC is irrelevant and not legitimate to the people. Their failure to come to the people tells that they are not accountable to the people but a political party. (Interview, 28 July 2012)

People agreed to work to replace the Ward 88 committee and to start occupying other areas in Umlazi. But it was at this stage of maximum social unity and common purpose that various dilemmas arose, including unavailability of resources to maintain momentum, for instance food, publicity material and communication tools (e.g. smart phones).

The ward committee election opportunity

The day 19 August was a defining moment for Umlazi Occupy, as the Ward 88 Committee election became the activists' focus. Only people who had voted before in Ward 88 were allowed to vote. People without IDs were not allowed to vote, even if they stayed in the community for the past 20 years. The Independent Electoral Commission did not advertise the elections widely. Buses were provided but only to ANC strongholds like the Enkonkoni. People living in the shacks had to find their own way to the polling station. There was no voter education and the message sent by the ANC Branch Executive was that this was an ANC event. This resulted in non-ANC members not participating; only a few realised later that these were Ward Committee elections. Conscious of these ANC tactics, the community carried parallel mobilisations. The elections took place at the Enkonkoni School grounds, an ANC stronghold. Even though they had limited resources, the Umlazi Occupy activists defeated the ANC's candidates, by 60% to 40%. Shocked, the ANC local leader pleaded with the community to compromise so that they will have a 50-50 representation, a request that was turned down.

On 26 August, 600 Umlazi occupiers gathered within the Councillor's Office yard to celebrate the election victory and to mark the final day of Occupy at the People's Office. The people's office would be handed over to the new Ward Committee. The committee, representing all sections in the ward, would work together with the Councillor to address community demands. But the Councillor remained a target of anger; the Occupiers had rehearsed a community play, 'Trial of the corrupt politician'. It depicted the plight of the community and challenges leading to protests and finally the Umlazi Occupy. The councillor, Police Commissioner and President of the country are brought before the Constitutional Court where the community outlines disservice, nepotism, corruption, tribalism and unaccountability by government officials. The election victory was a 'return of power to the people'.

The Ward Committee role would be to serve people without being swayed into party politics. It was an advisory committee, with no final say in anything. Its decisions were passed by popular consensus. The community made periodic

demands to the Ward Committee, which in turn would be forwarded to the municipality and even the mayor (Interview with Buthelezi, 26 August 2012). The election victory gave powers to the people to have a certain degree of control over community affairs. No municipal projects would take place in the ward without the knowledge of the Ward Committee and the community.

However, there were a few who failed to resist temptation. Less than a month after this victory, a Ward Committee representative signed for a position (paying R6000 per month) as a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) of Ward 88 without informing the Committee and community. He received a toilet building contract without the knowledge of the community, and employed only members from his section of Umlazi. This led to tensions with 15 people employed under this contract, for other activists felt betrayed, since the project was to be owned by the community, and since the CLO and the people who work in the project were supposed to be selected by the community as a whole.

Five months later, Councillor Mkhize for the first time agreed to meet with the community leadership. The Ward Committee wanted clarity about projects undertaken without consultation and public consent. Although Mkhize did not resolve the toilet construction problem, she announced other projects and she ensured that every section of Ward 88 would benefit.

Zakheleni continued to be well organised, and began advocating for more rapid transfer of development resources. The Zakheleni community elected their own CLO who liaises with the community and the Ward Committee. New shack settlements mushroomed near Emhlabeni grounds, as a result of Occupy Umlazi giving confidence of the citizenry's ability to disrupt official business. On 20 January 2013, people gathered at Zanempilo Crèche in Zakheleni. The Crisis Committee informed that municipality surveyors were in the area to look at the proposed toilet sites. Twelve double-blocked flush toilets were planned for Zakheleni; however, this was not adequate for the 802 households demanding faster implementation of development projects. As a result, 200 Zakheleni protesters went back to the streets, barricading Mangosuthu highway just as the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations (Afcon) began, reminding local government about unfulfilled promises. As Sizwe Shiba put it,

This is the way we celebrate the Afcon. We do not have electricity since last year and we were promised electricity by end of December 2012. As the rich are watching games through their televisions people have no electricity to switch to their televisions in Zakheleni and other parts of the ward", more action will be taken to ensure that government officials act faster to provide electricity this year. (Interview, 23 January 2013)

A youth known as Lwazi explained:

We are frustrated because of betrayal and false promises by government officials. For how many years shall we live in the shacks, in the darkness like chickens? Government does not care about the people, government is quick to act when we burn tires. We will not be silenced by police and we will not stop protests until government officials get our message clear and provide services. It's over 24 years living in Zakheleni shack settlements and no service delivery was ever realised. We have no money to buy paraffin for cooking; no lights for

our children to study, our fridges and TVs have become ornaments, let alone the risk of using candles and paraffin. (Interview, 23 January 2013)

In February 2013 the electricity and sewerage projects commenced in Zakheleni and this was followed by a housing project. A year after the protests began in earnest, in May 2013, the completion of electricity and toilet projects was celebrated in Zakheleni. These were positive victories of the protests; Mayor Nxumalo encouraged a continued partnership with the community. Although there were difficulties in relocating some families to allow for development in the settlement, along with banning of building of new shacks and ongoing illegal electricity connections, as well as the selling of shacks, development picked up pace.

New ideas emerged, to find land for cooperative use, for example, projects that will benefit the community as whole, including building more crèches to prevent children from walking long distances and avoiding traffic risk, and give alternatives to the already existing Zanempilo crèche built by the community, hence empowering mostly women and opening job opportunities to community members. There was an attempt to incorporate the blind/disabled and youth in these projects. The Ward 88 youth embarked on some cleaning campaigns, cultural performance groups and supporting and promoting rights of people at one of the city's main disability shelters in Umlazi, Enduduzweni Centre for the Blind, where activists have lobbied strongly for better conditions (News 24 2013).

Conclusion

Popular uprisings have repeatedly shaken numerous municipalities in South Africa, not only demonstrating ongoing anger, but also showing that localised and individual groups have little or no ability to capture power. The case of Umlazi is an important example of a partially successful local struggle. Although there are some considerable victories, social movements have not yet been capable of building programmes that unify the diverse social groups locally, nationally, regionally or globally. Instead, they have remained too fragmented to effectively implement a common cause. The differing nature and scope of commonality and the local scale together prevent the emergence of revolutionary political ideology and decisive actions to overcome the existing political power relations. One of the reasons for this is that some movements maintain single-issue struggles and are not willing to share responsibility with other social forces, to develop a United Front. This is especially true in the community movements of Durban, which have localistic interests.

However, popular ideas do keep emerging in ways that often target the broader neo-liberal capitalist system. In Durban, that larger ideology has been found when social movements criticised multinational corporations and states, mobilising nationally and globally, for example, at the United Nations Conference of the Parties climate summit (COP 17) in 2011, and in 2013 when 'Brics from Below' was initiated by local social fronts in collaboration with global movements in the fight against the recolonisation of Africa, extractivism, environmental degradation, etc. Such larger political ideas were also obvious during the FIFA

World Cup tournament in South Africa in 2010, just as was repeated in Brazil in 2014. A few decades ago, the scholar activist Denis Brutus applied similar political ideas to stop white South Africa from participating in the world Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968. When Gaza was bombed by Israel in 2009 and again in 2014, activists made many local to global linkages. In 2008, just after Robert Mugabe had lost a major election for the first time, the Zimbabwean army tried to import Chinese weapons through Durban harbour, but the arms and three million bullets were blocked there and across the region by labour, community and faith activists. In the years ahead, if Umlazi Occupy intends to conduct a land invasion at the Old Airport, that too will put it into direct confrontation with global forces, especially a world shipping industry and National Development Plan that have R250 billion earmarked for a different kind of development.

Over centuries, since Vasco de Gama sailed by South Durban in 1497 identifying a 'Natal' (Christmas) bay for future white settlement, as Afrikaners and British engaged in settler-colonialism, and as Portuguese slavery, British colonialism, indentured labour, Apartheid, Zulu ultra-nationalism and then neo-liberalism worsened this area's social divisions, ideologies went through many changes. Social struggles achieved victory in 1994 and again when battling for free AIDS medicines a decade later. It is true that Umlazi had many popcorn-style protests, but it was later, when resorting to 'Occupy' geographical space and a non-party political place, that the community achieved unity, vigilance and broader networking. Although not all demands were fulfilled, the people have a voice on issues that involve them. Their victories come with some bruises and even bullet holes. But these forced them to do something no one else had done: Occupy Umlazi and prepare for the next stage of their struggle.

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Notes

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Recorded speeches and interviews:

1. Bheki Mkhize (28 July 2012)
2. Ayanda Kota (08 June 2012)
3. Bheki Buthelezi (2 July 2012)
4. Bongani Zungu (30 June 2012)
5. Lwazi (23 January 2013)
6. Thabile Ngcobo (23 July 2012)
7. Bandile Mdlalose (15 July 2012)
8. Sizwe Shiba (22 June 2012)
9. Elvis Ngubane (17 July 2012)
10. Nigel Gumede (23 July 2012)
11. James Nxumalo (23 July 2012)