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Social organizations central in the resistance against South Africa's *apartheid* regime, such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), effectively mobilized their constituencies through use of alternative media such as t-shirts, murals, music, pamphlets and posters. However, their tactics, use of alternative media and strategies of resistance lived on in the new social movements that emerged in South Africa in the early 2000s.

Post-apartheid social movements

These emerged in response to the neoliberal economic policies adopted in the mid-1990s. In 1994, the new ANC government sought to address the huge structural economic inequalities it inherited from its *apartheid* predecessor through adoption of a social-democratic programme named the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP).

But in 1996, policy switched to the neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. While this offered opportunities to a growing urban black middle class as part of the government's Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme, the trade liberalization inherent in GEAR closed a range of uncompetitive industries. Resulting unemployment spikes coincided with local governments' decision to introduce fees for basic services such as water and electricity.

A number of social movements emerged seeking to address government's failure to provide adequate access to basic services for all. These included the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF) in Johannesburg, the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) in Cape Town (both established in 2000), and *Abahlali baseMjondolo* [Shackdwellers in isiZulu, AbM] in Durban (2005) and Cape Town (2008). They challenged local government attempts to evict residents, opposed electricity and water cut-offs, and resisted the enforcement of cost-recovery mechanisms such as the installation of pre-paid water and electricity meters. These movements also highlighted the top-down nature of government housing policy, the lack of consultation in policy formulation and the state's frequent intimidation of social movements.

Social movements and mainstream media

While the 'new' social movements of the early 2000s opposed the policies introduced after 1994 by the 'old' social movements such as the ANC and COSATU (now in government), their media and mobilization strategies bear a strong resemblance to their predecessors'. Like the 'old' social movements, the APF, AEC and AbM had little access to the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and influential national newspapers such as *The Star*, *The Sunday Times*, *Mail and Guardian* and *Business Day*. Mainstream broadcasting and print media often

delegitimized the new social movements and framed their actions in terms of ‘conflict’, ‘troublemakers’, or the ‘ultra-left’.

Although some movements managed to build up good relations with individual broadcast and print journalists, locally and even nationally, they perceived the SABC as primarily amplifying the ruling party’s voice. They felt the national broadcaster particularly highlighted government achievements in improving the plight of some poor South Africans, but failed to expose the negative impact of its policies on the poor at large, and rarely accorded airtime to the views of social movements. While ANC representatives were allocated significant airtime on SABC, representatives from social movements merely featured for a fraction of a second.

As a young AbM activist pointed out in the run-up to the April 2009 national elections: “We have come to understand that the media is not our friend and the media will never be our friend. They will only show the President of Abahlali for one minute and they will show the President of the ANC for two hours...so frustrating.”

Because of their limited access to formal media at national level, social movements used a range of alternative media in order to highlight their campaign issues and to draw more activists into their struggles.

Old media: the march, the T-shirt, songs and dance

The protest march still constitutes an important medium through which the APF, AEC and AbM communicate their grievances to government officials and the wider public. Social movements frequently organize demonstrations during which community members deliver memoranda to local and national officials. Marches are announced through posters and pamphlets handed out to the general public and distributed to social movement members, or through door-to-door visits.

T-shirts, songs and South Africa’s distinctive *toyi-toyi* dance - a hallmark of anti-government demonstrations under *apartheid* - play a key role during social movement marches. In demonstrations, activists from the APF, AEC and AbM are easily identifiable by their red t-shirts with slogans about major campaign issues. Under *apartheid*, political T-shirts were banned as early as 1953. In post-*apartheid* South Africa, the political T-shirt continued to play an important role.

One AbM activist argued: “It gives you the pride of what is written on it. When it says ‘No land!, No house!, No vote!’ [the slogan of AbM’s election boycott campaign], and you go to a shopping complex or to a hospital or to anywhere else, someone who has not yet gotten the fruits of democracy, can see yes, I have been doubting who to vote for. But after seeing the T-shirt, someone gets persuaded to vote for the ‘No land!, No house!, No vote!’ campaign.”

In South Africa, the red t-shirt has become a symbol of resistance which has enabled social movements to obtain visibility, to gain respect, or to elicit fear from government officials. T-shirts have become the embodied adverts of social movements, continuously communicating the lack of service delivery and the unfulfilled promises of government in the streets of South Africa.

Apart from T-shirts, songs and dance mark most marches organized by the APF, AbM and the AEC. Activists perform the *toyi-toyi*, and sing powerful songs to highlight the issues. New songs are performed as well as old ones. Social movements have also given liberation songs new meaning to suit the changed political context of the 2000s. In 2007, the APF recorded a number of songs used during marches on a CD entitled ‘Songs of the working class’. The liberation song *We Nyamazane Yiyo Ehlala Ehlathini* [A Buck Lives in the Forest, in isiZulu] tells the story of liberation fighters who often spent long stretches of time in the forest. The song

has been adapted to call on the post-*apartheid* government to remain serious about improving the living conditions of the poor.

In another song entitled *Amanzi Ngawethu* [Water is Ours], APF activist-cum-singer Patra Sindane calls on the ANC government, local authorities and private water companies to accept that access to water is a basic human right and that its provision should not be privatized. APF uses the CD both as a fundraiser as well as a means to mobilize communities and raise more awareness about the various struggles that the movement is involved in.

Similarly for AbM, songs have been central in order to mobilize and spread the word. In addition to their own songs, the award-winning Dlamini King Brothers, a 12-member *a capella* choir based in one of AbM's shack settlements in Durban, has advertised AbM's work through their songs. On their album *Hlis'uMoya* [Bringing Salvation] the group laments the conditions faced by poor communities and the failure of government to safeguard their rights. The album also pays tribute to AbM with a song entitled *Ablahali*. The song praises the organization for its campaign work on behalf of Durban's poor communities. In the song, the group calls on the government to listen to the needs of impoverished communities, echoing AbM's call to government officials to "talk with us, not for us".

Unlike AbM's own songs which have not yet been recorded, the song *Abahlali* was playlisted in 2009 on Ukhozi FM, the largest radio station in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The increasing popularity of the Dlamini King Brothers contributed to publicize AbM's work to new constituencies. Music then has the power to bring in new activists into local struggles and to fight the stigma attached to squatters and shack dwellers.

New media: internet, video and cellphones

These were also crucial in advancing the struggles of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa. APF, AbM and AEC all had their own websites which collated press statements, articles written about the movements, and photos, videos and statements of solidarity with other movements. Although few social movement members have direct access to the internet, websites increased the national and international visibility of all three organizations. Email distribution lists enabled movements to circulate press statements on marches, arrests of activists and ongoing court cases to journalists, local and international activists and friends of the movement. Videos produced by activists about the birth of movements such as AbM were also used in order to organise new communities and bring their struggles into the movement.

The cellphone was pivotal. While in 2007, only 8 out of 100 South Africans used the internet, 87 percent owned a cellphone. Fixed telephone lines in South Africa are only accessible to 10 percent of the population. Nearly all social movement activists had cellphones, which enabled them to effectively mobilize constituencies. As one AbM activist argued, "Without the cellphone, there is no organization. You cannot organize without the cellphone". Another noted "while I can say the media is not our friend, I can say the cellphone is our friend - not the radio or the TV". Mobile chat technology such as Mixit drastically reduced costs.

Cellphones were used as tools of protest in their own right. For example, after AbM sent a list of grievances to the government, a large number of activists phoned up government offices to request an answer to the communication. The movement managed to block the landline phone connection at the government offices. As a movement representative narrated: "[a]ll comrades were phoning, phoning, phoning, comrade after comrade. When they picked up the phone, they hear it's AbM. Everything was blocked in the government office because of AbM. That was another *toyi-toying*, we were protesting using the cellphones".

While post-*apartheid* social movements thus often adopted similar media strategies to their predecessors, the Internet and cellphones publicized their struggles to broader, international audiences and enabled the movements to communicate more frequently with their members and constituencies.

Cross-references

Anti-*apartheid* movement media [South Africa]; community radio in Nairobi [Kenya]; online diaspora [Zambia]; San Eland Ceremony [southern Africa]; small media against Big Oil [Nigeria]; social movement media [South Africa].

Further reading

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