

The pedagogy of road blockades

Anne Harley

Abstract

Road blockades have long since been a tool of struggle, and in recent months have featured in protests in South Africa, Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Palestine, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, India, Canada, Turkey, and probably in most other countries in the world. Whilst some road blockades might be considered spontaneous eruptions of anger, with little reflective thought involved, others are clearly part of conscious praxis, a tactic reflecting Gramsci's 'war of manoeuvre'. However, I argue, road blockades are also used as a counter-hegemonic pedagogical tool in a 'war of position', as one of the associated pedagogies within the "multi-faceted praxis and political strategy" of Subaltern Social Movements (Kapoor, 2011). The article uses two such movements, Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa, and the piqueteros in Argentina, to explore this claim.

Keywords: road blockades; barricades; 'war of manoeuvre'; 'war of position'; social movement pedagogy; piqueteros; Abahlali baseMjondolo

Introduction

Last night, and again this morning, hundreds of us blocked roads around the Kennedy Road shack settlement with burning tyres...we blockaded the road again to demand that the Mayor keeps his promise to meet with us to discuss our demands.

We will continue to educate the politicians in their duty to obey the people. (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2013).

Road blockades have long been a tool of protest. They were famously used, *inter alia*, in the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, as well the 1968 moment of rupture, becoming a worldwide phenomenon by the end of the 19th Century (Traugott 2010, Appendix A). Recently, road blockades have featured in protests in South Africa, Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Palestine, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, India, Canada, Turkey - and very probably in most other countries in the world, since, as Gibson reminds us, "from Damascus to La Plaz and London the reality is constant and daily revolts" (2011).

Many blockades may be 'spontaneous' expressions of anger or frustration rather than carefully thought through strategies. However, in some cases, and particularly in relation to social movements, blockades appear to be more consciously and strategically used, as part of a 'war of manoeuvre' à la Gramsci

(1971); and as the quotation above suggests, certain social movements see the road blockade as more than simply one more tool in an arsenal of potential tactics - they see it as a pedagogical device, as part of a 'war of position'.

This article considers the road blockade as a conscious tactic ('war of manoeuvre'), and as a pedagogical device ('war of position'), in the light of the thinking of two social movements - Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa, and the piqueteros of Argentina. The discussion draws on current work on thinking and learning within social movements, arguing that the conscious involvement of movements in the 'war of position' has been relatively under-studied.

Road blockades as 'war of manoeuvre'

Gramsci (1971) used the concepts of 'war of manoeuvre' and 'war of position' to explain how he thought the proletariat might successfully overthrow Western capitalist regimes. By 'war of manoeuvre', Gramsci meant direct confrontation with the state; 'war of position', by contrast, was about engaging in the contested terrain of hegemony. Writing in the early decades of the 20th century, Gramsci argued that a 'war of position' would be more tactical against Western capitalist governments than a 'war of manoeuvre'; nevertheless, many road blockades act as direct confrontation with the state both in the 'West' and elsewhere.

In his vast study of barricades in Europe between the start of 16th century and the end of the 19th century, Traugott (2010) attempts to classify barricades in a "database of European barricade events" (Appendix A). He specifically confines his study to Europe, and ends it at this point in time, because it simply becomes far too difficult to systematically track barricades once they became a global phenomenon (Appendix A). I have thus made no such attempt (neither has anyone else) - but even a brief internet search identifies dozens of recent road blockades, across the globe.

For example, in recent months, roads have been blockaded to protest against shale gas exploration in New Brunswick, Canada, a hike in bus fares in Maputo, Mozambique, the marginalisation of people with disabilities in Owerri, Nigeria, and crooked elections in Conakry, Guinea; to demand the nationalization of Kyrgyzstan's largest gold mine; to prevent Israeli forces invading the village of Nabi Saleh in Occupied Palestine; and for a wide variety of other reasons in other countries around the world (Agence France Presse, 2013; CBC News, 2013; Gordon, 2013; International Solidarity Movement, 2013; Lopes & Mapote, 2012; Ndidi, 2013; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2013; Reuters, 2012). The blockaders have included indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, the poor, the politically marginalised or disaffected; and involved between 40 and 'thousands' of protestors.

In looking at blockades instituted by people who are protesting (i.e. not barricades set up by the police or other state institutions) over the last several months of 2013, common themes of recent road blockades would seem to be:

1. Roads are blockaded for a range of reasons, but almost all relate to a sense of frustration at not being heard/consulted/counted.
2. Roads are thus typically blockaded by people who are not counted/do not count, “surplus humanity” (Gibson 2011). As Alain Badiou argues:

Today the great majority of people do not have a name: the only name available is ‘excluded’, which is the name of those who do not have a name. Today the great majority of humanity counts for nothing. (Badiou, in Neocosmos, 2009a:265)
3. Road blockades are often seen by the protestors as the ‘last resort’, other tactics having already been tried. As one Canadian protestor said, “We’ve tried to speak to politicians, we’ve petitioned, we’ve marched to the legislature, we’ve done everything that we should be doing” (CBC News, 2013).
4. They are often characterised by the state and the mainstream media as criminal, illegitimate, and violent. Of course, in this respect, road blockades are treated no differently from many other tactics used by those who ‘do not count’, a point Nigel Gibson (2011) made with regard to the London riots of late 2011, citing Quadrelli’s discussion of the Paris revolt of 2005:

Like the Paris Banlieues revolt of 2005, the London revolt has been dismissed as reactionary—destructive and criminal. Much of the destruction in London occurred in poor neighbourhoods and the descriptions of the French revolt could easily be applied to London: “desperate,” “senseless,” and “criminal” acts by “victims of social exclusion,” “indistinct and indiscriminate, a destructive luddite force that sometimes recalled the disturbing, incoherent and irrational action of the open crowd”. (Quadrelli 2-4)
5. They are often responded to with violence and/or arrests, precisely on the grounds of being criminal, illegitimate, and violent, even when they are patently not: “The RCMP is coming in here with their tear gas - they even had dogs on us. They were acting like we’re standing there with weapons, while we are standing there, as women, with drums and eagle feathers” (former chief of Elsipogtog aboriginal reserve, quoted by Gordon, 2013).

Many of the road blockades have been short-lived and apparently fairly ‘spontaneous’ expressions of frustration and anger. This is hardly surprising. Fifteen years ago, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, cited in Martin, 2003) spoke about ‘legitimate rage’ in response to the way things were, and Ian Martin has argued for “the importance of staying angry” (2003, 574). He argues that agency “may be expressed as anger because, in a sense, it can be expressed in no other way” (Ibid.). John Holloway (2010) suggests that ‘the scream’ is the only appropriate way to begin in a society mutilated by capital. Agency thus starts simply with a No, a refusal, an insubordination (Ibid.).

So many roadblocks are simply a ‘No’ a refusal. In my country, South Africa, there have been thousands of municipal revolts since 2004; and the most

commonly used tactics are road blockades and vote strikes (Pithouse, 2013: 339). So visible has the tactic of the road blockade become, a very recent article (Sacks, 2014) focuses specifically on road blockades used by shack dwellers in Cape Town). Frequently, road blockades in this country are referred to as spontaneous (Manzi, 2013). Spontaneity (and its efficacy) has concerned political theorists for some time, and was a particular interest of Frantz Fanon:

At certain times the anger erupts and is directed toward what is called “the system”. Seemingly unorganized, the intensity of these revolts is their strength. They win local battles but, Fanon argues, this becomes a strategic weakness. Often built on the basis of resentment and feelings of deprivation, which let it be said are entirely objective, the revolt becomes a release of pent up frustration – a moment of collective catharsis. It is often reactive and without any clear political goals...For Fanon the weakness of spontaneity is its immediacy, its reactive action, a reaction against brutality that leads to a counter-brutality and also a brutality of thought. And though there is no immediacy without mediation and no spontaneity without prior thought, the weakness of spontaneity is when it fetishizes immediacy. Reduced to Manichean reaction it invariably becomes expressed in a politics of hate when what is needed is a nuanced analysis (Fanon in Gibson, 2011).

So for Fanon, some element of self-reflexivity is necessary, some thinking through; and indeed a number of writers have queried the very notion of spontaneity. Gibson (2011), for example, suggests that “there is no such thing as pure spontaneity—there is always thinking before and during an event”; and Zibechi (2010) argues that labelling the activity of the oppressed ‘spontaneous’ is precisely about rejecting the notion that such actions are conscious and political. There is certainly evidence that some social movements consciously use road blockades as a tactic in ‘war of manoeuvre’. Raul Zibechi (2012), for example, argues that blockades have become an important technique of social movements in Latin America, and is now “perhaps the most widespread form of action among [these] movements” (84):

The roadblock is a technique with multiple uses. It ranges from interruption of the flow of merchandise and the protection of regions or cities to, in its “aggressive” version, a gradual fencing off with the threat of isolating the municipality or state bodies (84-85).

There is plenty of evidence of the conscious use of this technique in South Africa, too. For example, former residents of backyard shacks in Delft, near Cape Town, evicted from a flagship government housing project they had occupied on the invitation of their local councillor, took up residence next to the road directly outside the project. They permanently blocked the road for almost two years – one of the longest protest actions in South Africa’s history (Symphony Way

Pavement Dwellers, 2011). Sacks' (2014) discussion of road blockades by the Sweet Home shack dwellers also shows the deliberate use of this tactic.

Below I discuss in detail this conscious use of roadblocks by two social movements, one South African, Abahlali baseMjondolo, and one Argentinian, the piqueteros - the piqueteros perhaps more so than Abahlali. Their thinking and experience raises remarkably similar themes to those identified above.

Abahlali baseMjondolo

Abahlali baseMjondolo is a social movement of shack dwellers. Abahlali grew organically out of grassroots struggle. On Saturday morning, 21st March 2005, 700 people from the Kennedy Road shack settlement in the middle-class suburb of Clare Estate in Durban, South Africa, blockaded a major thoroughfare for four hours when they discovered that land nearby, which had been promised to them by the local African National Congress (ANC) councillor, had been leased to a brick manufacturing company. The blockade came after attempts by the community to meet with the councillor and the owner of the company (who failed to arrive at the scheduled meeting) (Bryant, 2006). The protest was ended by police with dogs and teargas, and 14 people were arrested (Ibid.). By September, the Kennedy Road shack dwellers had been joined by other shack settlements to form Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). The organization claims to have around 10,000 members in 64 different shack settlements in South Africa.

The movement has been subjected to considerable State and police harassment over the years. On 29 September 2009, the Kennedy Road settlement was brutally attacked over a period of several hours by an armed mob, leaving many shacks destroyed, hundreds of people displaced, and two people dead (Chance, 2010). The police refused to come to the help of the community. Two weeks before the attack, the ANC Chair for Durban publicly stated that Abahlali was a threat to the ANC, and the day after the attack the ANC Provincial MEC for Safety and Security said that a decision had been taken to disband the movement, and described the attack as a 'liberation' of the settlement (AbM, 26/9/2010).

Bizarrely, in the wake of the attack on Kennedy Road, twelve Abahlali members were arrested and tried for charges ranging from public violence to murder. All twelve were acquitted of all charges on 18th July 2011, some two years after the attack, when the magistrate found the state witnesses to be unreliable and dishonest. There is little doubt that the Kennedy Road attack profoundly affected the movement; many of the leadership were traumatized, and forced into hiding, so "for some months we had to organise underground" (AbM, 26/9/2010); and the movement was unable to run large and open meetings as had been the norm prior to the attacks. However, as the movement says, "It damaged our movement in some ways but it has not destroyed our movement" (Ibid.).

Road blockades have thus been an important feature of the movement from the start; and in recent months the movement has repeatedly used this tactic as a

conscious strategy. In late September 2013, thousands of Abahlali members marched to the city hall in Durban to deliver a memorandum to the mayor. They made it clear that they expected a response within seven days - this was not forthcoming, and the movement thus decided to blockade roads around the city “to demand answers to all our unanswered memoranda” (AbM, 26/9/2013). “As always instead of James Nxumalo (mayor) coming to scene to talk to us he sent his police force. The shoot to kill crew” (Ibid.). Three people were arrested, and charged with public violence, “our normal crime”. The movement expressed some frustration at having to resort to road blockades: “What is the point of having the so called legal march if it doesn’t deliver fruitful result to our demands? What is the point of going to court when court orders are ignored?... If showing our power with a legal march of thousands gets no response then we will engage in disruption with road blockades” (AbM, 26/9/2013).

Some days later, a 17 year old school girl was shot dead by police at a road blockade at Cato Crest shack settlement. A second girl was wounded. Both were shot in the back. The blockade had been organised by about 500 members of the settlement. The police claimed they had shot in self-defence (although they have offered no evidence of the protestors being armed), something which the movement rejected. “We note that some media are reporting the police statement on this matter [i.e. that they shot to save their lives] as if it is the truth. We would like to remind the media that the police in Durban have a long history of lying”. Abahlali stated they intended to expose this in court, as they had done many times before (AbM, 30/9/2013).

The following month, the blockades continued, this time in other communities, including Clare Estate, iSiyanda and Umlazi. Again, these were attacked by the police, this time with tear gas and rubber bullets (AbM, 4/10/2013). The iSiyanda community issued its own press statement, reiterating that the blockade came only after a series of telephone calls, emails, letter writing, protest marches, and promised meetings: “This is the result of the frustration when the majority of the poor people, the marginalised, the forgotten, only count when it comes to voting time...After all the peaceful attempts to meet the responsible officials, by the poor people, these are only met by the arrogance of government officials, police brutality, constant arrest of the protestors and even murdering the leadership of the movement”. The blockades were thus an attempt “to show to the world their [iSiyanda shack dwellers’] anger and frustration” (AbM, 4/10/2013).

Tellingly, Abahlali now linked their use of the road blockade tactic to the anti-Apartheid struggle, during which the road blockade had played an important role in many townships across the country: “Utata [Father] Mandela said that if the ANC does to us what apartheid did to us then we must do to the ANC what we did to apartheid...Therefore we are back to the streets. In these actions we are honouring Madiba” (AbM, 4/10/2013).

A week later, in response to further police attacks on road blockades, Abahlali again raised its concern about the ways in which their actions were cast as violent not only by the state, but the mainstream media:

As usual the media reported the very violent and near fatal police attack on us as 'a violent protest'. It is becoming very clear that some of the media will always consider any protest during which people are violently attacked by the police (or the Land Invasions Unit or private security firms) to be 'a violent protest' even when the only violence comes from the police. They take our suffering as normal and they take state violence as normal. At the same time they take our demand that our dignity must be recognised as violent and criminal. We are supposed to remain in silence in our dark corners (AbM, 11/10/2013).

The piqueteros

Although, like Abahlali, the piquetero movement arose out of road blockades, this tactic has been a far more conscious and fundamental part of their praxis. The piquetero movement consists of a variety of local groups of the 'socially excluded', who organised themselves as a result of unemployment, poverty and repression arising from neoliberal structural reforms (Dinerstein, 2010). Under the then president Menem, unemployment in Argentina rose dramatically: "People went from being on the margins to being completely 'outside' the system" (Khorasane, 2007: 766). In June 1996, workers laid off by the state-owned oil company YPF blocked National Route 22 (Young, Guagnini & Amato, 2002). Originally confined to small towns in remote provinces, this form of protest spread rapidly (Sitrin, 2003). By the following year, there were 77 roadblocks in the country (Ibid.), by 2002, there were 2 336, with so-called piqueteros (from 'piquete', 'picket') demanding jobs, public works projects and relief funds. As a piquetero commented in 2003, "the piquetero movement grew by using that method of roadblocks" (Sitrin, 2003: 473). Initially, the road blocks were massive blockades, of up to 10 000 people (Zibechi, 2007):

On main national roads or on important highways, which sometimes last for days. The *Piqueteros* set up barricades made of burning tyres, nails and broken bottles, thousands of men and women sit on the road, preventing the traffic from passing and only allowing emergency vehicles through. They cook, eat and take turns to sleep (Colmegna, 2002: 5).

These road blockades often involved whole families, and some 60% of blockaders were women (Sitrin, 2003: 472).

The blockade method was a fairly deliberately chosen strategy. Piqueteros themselves say that the tactic of road blockades was an old one used by the workers, at factory gates - they were now moved to highways where oil was transported, or merchandise from companies was transported, because although factories were employing fewer and fewer workers, there was still a need to transport goods made in factories (Sitrin, 2003: 472, 473): "traffic piles up, trucks can't move, factories can't get supplies. These are the functional equivalents of factory workers downing their tools...Instead of directly stopping

production, they stop input and outputs from production” (International Socialist Review, 2002). So road blocks were often carefully planned:

For example, we would decide that the negotiations with the government [for the subsidy] hadn't advanced in the meetings or petitions. So in the neighbourhoods we would take 15 days to quietly plan an action, without anyone knowing what highway we would block when. And then we would go organized, we would get there before the police and then we would have to stand firm despite the police pressure. This meant burning tyres, making some sort of barricade, and keeping our families safe in the middle of the *piquete* and protected by the *compañeros* that would stand in front in case of police repression (Sitrin, 2003: 473).

Momentum built as the economic situation in the country worsened. Initially,

there was a huge debate within the movement, because the so-called progressive trade union leadership thought it could win over the middle class by blocking main streets but allowing alternative streets to function. This was opposed by the more militant unemployed movements, which said you either close the streets, or you don't (Ibid.)

The tactic worked. By December 2001, the piqueteros had been joined by thousands of Argentineans, with every city and town in the country paralysed by mass demonstrations (International Socialist Review, 2002). Within a week, four presidents had been deposed (Bassi & Fuentes, 2004). In February 2002, 7 000 piqueteros met in the Plaza de Mayo for the first National Assembly of the Employed and Unemployed Workers, with delegations attending from all over the country (Fuentes, 2002).

The considerable leverage of the movement meant that it “played a major role in securing subsistence programs from the government and public works for at least a sector of the unemployed” (Ibid.). However, as momentum built, so too did the state response. By early 2002, ‘5 or 6’ people had been killed in police confrontations (Ibid.), and in June two young piqueteros were shot dead when police fired into a demonstration of about 1 000 piqueteros at a road block in Buenos Aires (Chretien, 2002), and a further 90 were injured by lead or rubber bullets or tear gas inhalation. 160 people were arrested (ArgentinaNow, 2002). Police claimed that ‘the piqueteros shot each other’ although evidence clearly showed otherwise (Ibid.). The deaths merely increased public support for the piqueteros, with some 20 000 people demonstrating in the Plaza de Mayo some days later, many of them chanting “tonight we are all piqueteros” (Chretien, 2002).

Gradually, the movement became more organised, and protests expanded from road-blocking to blockading other areas, such as supermarkets (with people taking food to feed their families) or government buildings; and into alternative forms such as co-operatives and factory occupations. The subsidy now paid by

the state allowed those receiving it to pay a small contribution to their local piquetero wing, which in turn allowed the creation of community kitchens, libraries, literacy projects, and workshops (Birss, 2005; Colmegna, 2002; Epstein, 2003), a “network of subsistence” (Colmegna, 2002: 9). At the same time, different tendencies emerged within the movement, with different organisational forms being favoured by different branches in different places (Birss, 2005; Colmegna, 2002). It would thus be inaccurate to call the piqueteros a single, organised movement - rather, there are multiple, often fairly autonomous groups.

However, it is possible to discern certain common features across the piqueteros movement/s. The piqueteros emphasise human dignity, with many piquetero organisations claiming that dignity, rather than employment, is the driving force behind them. The MTD, a group of a number of autonomous piquetero blocs, use the motto “Work, dignity and social change” (Birss, 2005). The piqueteros provide a fundamental critique of capitalist work and its social relations (Dinerstein, 2010). Khorasaneh also argues that fundamental to the piquetero politics is “the reclaiming of direct democracy and the rejection of capitalist norms” (2007, 766).

So both of these movements have consciously used road blockades as a tactic to confront the state; but to what extent is this tactic also intended as pedagogical?

Road blockades as ‘war of position’

Writing in the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci sought to explain why it was that the Russian revolution had not led to more widespread revolution within the Western European states. From his analysis, Gramsci argued that no regime (and particularly no Western parliamentary regime) could sustain itself primarily through force. He thus identified two distinct forms of political control - domination, by which he meant direct physical coercion by the police and armed forces; and hegemony, by which he meant ideological control and consent:

The “spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci, 1971:12).

Gramsci referred to this process of manufacturing consent as hegemony. However, if this process failed, the State would resort to force: “The apparatus of State power ... ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively” (Ibid.). Gramsci argued that Western regimes maintained power through a combination of force and hegemony, although

hegemony was often used to make the use of force appear appropriate, 'common sense':

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary régime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force dominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion - newspapers and associations - which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied (Gramsci, 1971: 80).

Gramsci's conception of hegemony goes beyond simply ideas, as Cooper explains: "While ideology is the way in which power struggles are fought out at the level of signification, hegemony operates at the multiple levels of ideology, culture, politics and the economy" (Cooper, 2005: 13). Gramsci argued that civil society is deeply implicated in state hegemony. However, because "the will and initiative of men (sic) themselves cannot be left out of the account" (Gramsci, 1971: 244), hegemony is constantly open to negotiation and re-negotiation; constantly being renewed and recreated. There are also moments when the whole process undergoes a crisis (Mayo, 1999: 38).

Owing to the tendency for ruling class interests (as opposed to working class interests) to be revealed in times of crisis, Gramsci argued that the 'war of position' could most usefully happen at times of crisis within the system. A 'war of position' was about a war of ideas and of practice, creating a 'hegemony of the proletariat' that allows for the elaborating and propagating of a new conception of society (Bobbio, 1979), which can then lead to the creation of such a society. According to Gramsci's analysis, the working class could not confront the state head-on if it wanted to transform it - rather, it must engage in a 'war of position', a process of wide-ranging social organisation and cultural influence (Mayo, 1999: 38). However, according to Gramsci, in the creation of any kind of counter-hegemony, "a politics of truth is necessary" (Thomas, 2011).

Gramsci saw education as playing a pivotal role in hegemony. Firstly, because we learn hegemony, so "[e]very relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship" (Gramsci, 1971: 350). Secondly, because educational institutions, controlled by the bourgeois state, deliberately create bourgeois hegemony, along with the church, the media, and the family (Ibid.). However, education could play the opposite role, could help turn the 'commonsense' of hegemony into 'good sense' (Gramsci argued this was the important role of 'the party' (Cooper, 2005)). Gramsci himself was involved in exactly this kind of education (Mayo, 1999), and retained a lifelong interest in exactly how such an education might work.

Since Gramsci's time, the role of education in making and unmaking hegemony has been picked up by a number of writers, particularly those writing 'from

below', within a field now often termed 'critical pedagogy'. Such writers see education as serving particular interests:

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and brings about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Thompson, 1980: 26, quoted in Mayo, 1999: 5).

One of the most famous writers of this school is the Brazilian educationist, Paulo Freire. Much of Freire's work focuses on the pedagogy of this process - i.e. how to bring about conscientization through critical reflection (and thus, many of his seminal works included 'pedagogy' in the title). Freire argued that it is not sufficient to change only the content of education - we need to change the pedagogy as well (Kane, 2001: 39). In other words, "pedagogy is never innocent" (Bruner, 1996: 63). Thus it is not surprising that pedagogy is a somewhat contested term. Much contemporary work on pedagogy, particularly in the global North, tends to treat it as something approaching didactics (Smith, 2012); but there is a strong tradition of an alternative conceptualisation of pedagogy, largely born out of the work of Paulo Freire and relatively better developed in the global South (although a number of the leading exponents of 'critical pedagogy' are increasingly Northern intellectuals). This understanding of pedagogy is associated with the radical tradition of adult education and of popular education, although it is increasingly also associated with postmodernism. For example, the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* features work largely within a postmodernist paradigm (and also, incidentally, largely within formal education, in particular schooling).

The alternative view of pedagogy is thus more than the content, and more than the method, although "In our experience of doing popular education we have found that the method used often communicates a more powerful message than the content discussed" (GATT-Fly, n.d: 19). Critical pedagogue, Ira Shor defines critical pedagogy as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (Shor 1992: 129).

Until recently, critical pedagogy contained little theory of social movements despite arguing that power and knowledge are intimately linked, largely because

social movements were not seen in terms of cognitive praxis (Holford, 1995). Recently, however, there has been growing interest in this field.

Social movement learning and pedagogy

There is a growing body of literature about the politics and processes of knowledge and theory production from within social movements (Choudry, 2009), with several special editions of key journals appearing in the last five years (McGill Journal of Education 44(1) (Winter 2009); Studies in the Education of Adults 43, No.2 (Autumn 2011); and, of course, the very first edition of *Interface* (January 2009)). This interest in social movements as sites of cognitive practice emerged in the early 1990s when Eyermann and Jamison (1991) argued that social movements should be seen as such. Seminal works by inter alia Foley (1999) appeared shortly after, making a particularly important contribution to the field (Choudry, 2009). From the beginning, social movement learning was seen as both informal learning of people involved in social movements, and learning in the broader community as a result of social movements and their actions (Hall & Turay, 2006, cited in Gouin, 2009); although learning within social movements has tended to dominate.

However, “...even in many supposedly alternative milieus, voices, ideas - and indeed, theories - produced by those actually engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts” (Choudry, 2009: 5). Thus some recent work, mostly notably by Choudry and Kapoor, has focused on actor-generated knowledge and learning; and Kapoor (2011) has argued for looking particularly at what he terms Subaltern Social Movements (SSMs), as distinct from so-called New Social Movements or Old Social Movements. Zibechi also suggests that movements in Latin America, whilst sharing some traits with New Social Movements, mark a departure from these (2012).

Drawing on the work of Partha Chatterjee, Kapoor suggests shifting focus to movements operating within ‘un-civil’/political society - the politics of the ‘lower’ orders and their political consciousness:

Following Chatterjee, it would seem that anti-colonial SSMs are agents of and simultaneously constitute *political society* since: a) they face unequal treatment under the law or are victims of the law, b) are expendable or burnable through multiple and racial/ethnically targeted dispossessions and subjected to other forms of violence if need be (since they are not lawfully constituted civil society), and c) are compelled to resort to extra-legal collective activism through land occupations by stealth or *uncivil* activism and transgressions of laws that are there to keep them out (Kapoor, 2011: 135).

Some recent work has looked at learning and SSMs. The editors of the first edition of *Interface* argue that attempts to look at how movements produce

knowledge have raised, inter alia, the issue of subaltern knowledge as against official knowledge, and suggest that “the relationship between knowledge from below and action from below is... a central one” (Cox & Fominaya, 2009:5). Zibechi (2007) has also considered the issue of learning and SSMs. However, learning and SSMs has again tended to focus on learning within such movement; when pedagogy is talked about, it’s about teaching others within the movement. Gregorčič for example, gives a fascinating account of the pedagogical practices used by the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the Civil Council of Peoples and Indigenous Organizations in Honduras. She argues that there is “a heritage of radical, autonomous, non-institutionalised, and especially indigenous pedagogy that has been, to date, inadequately documented” (2009: 358). She comments that many innovative pedagogical practices are not in fact new, but on the contrary are old practices, passed down through practice.

Whilst there is some work about the ways in which movements ‘get their message across’ (eg. Mattoni 2012, cited in Bergfield) looks at the media practices of the precarious workers movement in Italy), there has been relatively little consideration of the ‘war of position’ aspect of social movement knowledge production, despite that fact that Slater (1985), writing before the advent of leftist governments in Latin America, argued that social movements might play exactly this role:

In countries like Brazil and Argentina with relatively densely-structured civil societies a war of position is indispensable and the radical democratic struggles of the new social movements provide a crucial contribution to just such a ‘war’...in the palpable absence of more immediate prospects of radical transformation of state power, new social movements generate new sources of political hope. And optimism of the will can invariably attenuate pessimism of the intellect. (Slater, 1985: 18-19)

A recent exception is the work of Meek (2011) on the MST in Brazil. Meek considers how the movement’s journal is a pedagogical device in a ‘war of position’ - but his discussion focuses on its role within the movement, raising the consciousness of grassroots members and ensuring their continued participation in movement politics even after they have gained their immediate goal of land.

I would argue that both Abahlali and the piquetero movement could be classified as Subaltern Social Movements, and that this helps us understand their praxis; including their use of road blocks as ‘war of position’. I am not asserting here that road blocks have been primarily pedagogical in intent; as Epstein points out in relation to the piqueteros’ blockades of strategic roads, “the most immediate purpose of such an occupation of public space is to induce government officials to pay attention to the economic needs of the participants” (2003: 12), something which the piqueteros themselves have acknowledged. However, I am suggesting that in some cases road blocks have included a conscious pedagogical element.

Road blockades as pedagogy

As argued above, “hegemony operates at the multiple levels of ideology, culture, politics and the economy” (Cooper, 2005: 13); and is a contested space wherein the *meanings* of these are fought out. For the ‘excluded’, “the great majority of humanity [who] counts for nothing” (Badiou, quoted in Neocosmos 2009a : 265), the task is to disrupt the existing meanings, and to create alternative meanings. Kapoor (2011) reminds us that SSMS necessarily operate outside existing spaces:

Anti-colonial SSMS constitute and take root in political society as movements that are primarily located outside and against the state-market-civil society nexus and the laws and institutions constructed and strategically deployed by this nexus (134).

Or, as the Zapatistas say, “we are perfectly ordinary people, therefore rebels” (quoted in Holloway, 2007, interview by Marina Sitrin, response 11).

So, for movements such as Abahlali and the piqueteros, the use of extra-legal methods is not only understandable, but essential. But why block roads?

The meaning of roads

It is clear that for both the piqueteros and Abahlali, the road blockade is a deliberately chosen tactic (although for Abahlali, like many other ‘spontaneous’ protests, it is often chosen as the last resort, rather than the first). Zibechi (2007; 2012) argues that the growing use of road blockades by newer forms of struggle is partly because traditional forms of protest – such as the strike – are no longer appropriate. However, it is clear that it is also to do with the symbolic and spatial dimension of blocking roads, something which has always been part of this tactic, as Traugott recounts about his study of barricades:

I needed an explicit and carefully constructed definition of the insurgent barricade as something more than a physical object, requiring both a certain shared understanding of the concept and a clearly articulated relationship to the insurrectional setting. (Traugott, 2011)

Roads carry meanings with them, something which has been explored by writers continuing the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991), who argued that space is more than a neutral container of activity. Space is actively produced, not just physically but in terms of social meaning (Hammond, 2013: 500). Harvey (2008) suggests that urbanization is a class phenomenon - cities arose through geographical and social concentrations of surplus. Urban areas are increasingly divided along class lines and conflict-prone, with privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance, and the masses “dispossessed...of any right to the

city whatsoever” (2008:37). But it’s about more than access. According to Lefebvre, “dominant ideas are...consolidated through the built environment of the city” (Loftus & Lumsden, 2006: 103). “Elites try to manipulate hegemony, not simply by changing the physical environment...but by reshaping the way in which people relate to that environment through their concrete, everyday activities” (Kipfer, 2002, quoted in Loftus & Lumsden, 2006: 103). Thus hegemony is physical and not simply ideological - and so the city is also a contested terrain, a site of struggle, a terrain for challenging dominant ideas. “As rulers attempt to turn space into abstract space, devoid of particular properties and amenable to social control, subordinates construct counter-spaces in which they strive to maintain their attachment to particular localities and assert their right to determine the activities that go on in particular spaces” (Hammond, 2013:500). The recent occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul is but one example of this - an occupation to demand an end to the ‘privatization’ of public spaces that became the creation of an entirely alternative commons (Jourdan & Maeckelbergh, 2013).

The same is evidently true for roads. “Walls and roads obviously privilege certain kinds of activities and inhibit others, support the projects of one type of actor and deter the goals of others” (Boano, Lomarca & Hunter 2013: 313). In Apartheid South Africa, roads were used to divide people on the basis of their ‘race’, as so-called ‘buffer-strips’ between residential areas for different ‘groups’ in terms of the Group Areas Act. Now, roads are used to demarcate poor areas from rich ones, and to allow easy access into the city for the wealthy who increasingly live outside of the city. Thus although roads are ‘public’, they frequently belong more to some of the public than others; and are increasingly ‘privatised’ - blocked by booms and guards to keep poor people out of rich gated communities. And sometimes, roads are used to move shack dwellers, their land expropriated for the ‘public’ good. None of this is unique to South Africa, as Harvey (2008) argues, being a feature particularly of the so-called developing world. In Angola, some 25 000 people in the city of Lubango were recently moved to make way for re-opening a railway line, the beautification of city, and a new road (Smith & Jenkins, 2013: 152).

So when people block a road, they are making a statement about meaning: “People fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes” (Smith & Jenkins, 2013:314). Zibechi (2007; 2012) has argued that the occupation of space is a critical part of Latin American movement tactics, and Hammond (2013) has recently argued in this journal that “control over space, and struggles for the possession of space, are an important factor in the course of social movements” (Hammond, 2013: 515). Hammond considers in particular the case of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Occupations are obviously quite specifically about space; and change space, create counter-space. They are a growing phenomenon, used in the last three years in Libya, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Turkey, and all over the USA. Hammond draws on Tilly’s notion of ‘symbolic geography’ (2000: 137, cited in Hammond, 2013: 501) - that choice of location symbolizes something about the movement, because location is not normally chosen at random: “locations have meanings, and those meanings can

telegraph the message that the movement wants to convey” (501). Hence OWS’s choice of Wall Street, a space that had symbolic significance, because of its association with the corporate financial control that OWS was targeting. However, Wall Street was very well guarded, and so OWS occupied Zuccotti Park instead, “a privately owned public space”. OWS sought to expand the meaning of ‘public’ in ‘public spaces’; this is a common thread in occupations:

The occupation is also likely to claim legitimacy on the basis of a concept of public space; occupiers are claiming their right to determine the use of space formally designated as available to the public (501).

Confrontation with the authorities is thus inherent; and comes with its own advantages and disadvantages:

Participants in gatherings that are forbidden or subject to repression realize that they *can* transgress normal rules and act on their beliefs. The act of transgression, especially when it is repressed, ratifies the belief in their rights, the conviction that those rights are being trampled on, and the determination to assert them (Hammond, 2013: 512).

However, Hammond argues, occupations are structurally limited - because when movements lose the space they have occupied, the movement is weakened. Hammond raises the concern that occupations fetishize space. The occupation, the space, becomes the central concern, rather than reason for it.

There is much in Hammond’s discussion that has relevance for road blockades, and for movements who use road blockades as a tactic in a ‘war of manoeuvre’. Clearly, particular roads can carry particular symbolism, which is why main access roads are so often chosen; and as public space becomes increasingly privatised or subject to surveillance, roads remain a key public space. The point about being public is fairly self-evident - road blockades, like occupations, are a way of being seen, particularly when “We are supposed to remain in silence in our dark corners” (AbM, 11/10/2013). A number of studies have shown that movements “consciously choose different mediums, technologies and tools of communication to achieve the greatest possible degree of visibility” (Bergfield 2013: 546). Mattoni (in Bergfield, 2013: 156), in her examination of the precarious workers movement in Italy, looks at how they have used different methods to raise awareness: “in doing so, they rendered themselves visible as political subjects instead of mere victims”, and in her consideration of the piqueteros, Colmegna (2002: 7) has argued that “the very act of mobilisation renders them visible to society”. Conflict with authorities is thus inherent in the road blockade, as it is in an occupation of public space. However, a key difference between road blockades and occupations is that the space itself, and holding onto it, is not the point - so the problem of fetishisation is less likely. Of

course, there is also less opportunity to create an alternative space, but as the piqueteros have shown, this is not impossible:

The biggest change was the relationship with other people in the neighbourhood, the development of friendship and the possibility of sharing...When you're on a roadblock and you have nothing to eat, the people next to you share their food. Now I feel I'm living in a large family, my neighbours are my family (Sitrin, 2003: 476).

Kapoor argues that SSM pedagogies are “a multi-faceted praxis and political strategy” through strategic and political necessity (2011:138). But if road blockades really are sometimes intended as pedagogy, then what is it that movements are trying to teach through the method of road blockades?

The message of road blockades

In the quote that started this article, Abahlali say: “We will continue to educate the politicians in their duty to obey the people”. I would argue that this statement is underpinned by a set of fundamental assertions, consistent with the knowledge-creation and theorising of both Abahlali and the piqueteros, and precisely at odds with current hegemony:

1. That people count. Their experiences count. Their feelings count.
2. That people think.
3. That people count and think equally.
4. That, contrary to what others might argue, people are not ‘voiceless’. The issue is about listening and hearing, rather than speaking.
5. That change is both necessary and possible.

People count

Both Abahlali and the piqueteros have asserted that people count in the face of a situation and its accompanying hegemony that excludes them. Thus for both movements, the issue of dignity is a critical one. The then president of Abahlali, S’bu Zikode, made this clear in the early days of the movement: “For us the most important struggle is to be recognised as human beings” (Zikode, 2006a), but in the meantime, they assume this: “Our politics starts by recognizing the humanity of every human being” (Zikode, 2008).

In a speech to the Economic Justice Forum of the Council of Churches in Durban in 2008, Zikode said:

We take our place as people who count the same as everyone else. Sometimes we take that place in the streets with teargas and the rubber bullets. Sometimes we take that place in the courts. Sometimes we take it on the radio. Tonight we take it here. Our politics 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. We organize it in our own languages and in our own communities. 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)

Fairly early on, the piqueteros began to form an identity “that has primarily to do with dignity”, not just during a roadblock, but beyond (Sitrin, 2003: 475), and hence organise under the slogan “Work, Dignity and Social Change” (Sitrin, 2003: 474). “We think that dignity as well as social change has to be built by us. It’s not something we demand from the government. We think that we have to build that up and they have to allow us to do so” (Piquetero quoted in Sitrin, 2003: 474):

We are regaining dignity from having organized ourselves, from fighting capitalism...we want to...put together a new society, to build a more fair society where there would be neither oppressors nor oppressed, a society where there wouldn’t be exploiters and exploited (Ibid: 474).

Horizontal, rather than vertical, organisation is seen as an essential part of the movement, the antithesis of trades unions and political parties. As already discussed, unlike Abahlali, the piqueteros were able to use the road block as a means of creating alternative spaces, possibly because their road blockades tend to last longer.

Part of the road blockade as pedagogy is thus an affirmation that people are there, that they do count, despite the system that organises them out of it; and that new spaces can be created that treat people as if they count. Freire (1972, 48, quoted in Crowther, 2009: 79) asserted that

the oppressed are not marginals...living ‘outside’ society. They have always been inside - inside the structure which made them ‘beings for others’. The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structures of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’.

I would argue, however, that what Abahlali and the piqueteros are showing in the roadblock is that they are *already* ‘beings for themselves’; that they are, as Zikode insists, taking their place, or as a Kondh ADEA leader puts it, “demanding a place for ourselves” (quoted in Kapoor 2011: 142). This is why the visibility of the roadblock is so important, why the method becomes as powerful as the message.

People think

One of the most fundamental tenets of ubuhlalim (the name used by Abahlali baseMjondolo to refer to its ideology and praxis) is that everyone thinks. This has been an absolutely consistent theme from the movement since its inception. In a documentary made about the Kennedy Road blockade shortly after it happened, an Abahlali member, Nonhlanhla Mzobe says, “We think. People must understand that we think” (quoted in Pithouse, 2006: 37). Connected to this is the plain fact that thinking results in understanding, in (new) knowledge. Very early on, one of the banners carried by Kennedy Road residents read “University of Kennedy Road”; and by the march of 14 November 2005, “University of Abahlali baseMjondolo”.

Ordinary member of Abahlali are insistent about their capacity and right to think, and their subsequent knowledge and understanding. Interviewed in 2007, one said:

I’m not that educated, but I always say...that you may take Mlaba [the mayor], you may take him, and let him sit with me. And then you sit with us and listen, and you may find that I know more of politics than him. But he is in politics! He is practising it day and night. But you might find that I know more than him. (Mdu Hlongwa, quoted in Ngiam, 2007)

Abahlali have long recognised that it is precisely this assertion that they think, and that they have a right to speak and be listened to, that is most threatening to hegemony; as Zikode wryly remarked in mid-2006, “The state comes for us when we try to say what we think” (Zikode, 2006b); “it is taken as a crime when people want to think and speak for themselves” (AbM, 9/3/2011). This is because “We are the people that are not meant to think” (Zikode, 2008).

The piqueteros argue along exactly the same lines. “Here everyone has a voice and a vote, everyone can express their opinion. It’s not like no-one knows anything but that we all know something.” (Sitrin, 2003: 477). For the piqueteros, building community kitchens, organic gardens, bakeries, popular libraries is a threat to the state, because it is about “other ways of thinking”, gaining consciousness. “I believe that is what they are afraid of, of people with a conscience, of people that think...The state is very afraid” (Sitrin, 2003: 480). This is precisely why the state responds with violence and why “they portray us in the media as violent” (Ibid.). Some of the autonomous piquetero groups have specifically set aside time for reflection: “For example, Friday, the day that we focus specifically on reflection, is the time we most work on this. How can we continue to learn with this group of compañeros that I have at my side?” (MTD Allen & Khorasane, 2004). “We are able to do many things through our work, our thoughts, and our ideas. This is also a revolution” (Ibid.).

Gramsci believed that engaging in a war of position was possible precisely because everyone could think, “everyone’ is a philosopher” (Gramsci, 1971: 330);

something which has been reiterated by a number of ‘counter-hegemonic’ (Gramsci never used this word) writers since then, including Fanon:

One of Fanon’s contributions to revolutionary theory, a contribution that remains controversial today, is his belief that the “damned of the earth”—the poor, landless, unemployed, the marginalized and less than human—are not only thinking and rational beings but can organize themselves as forces that can change the world and make it a more human place. In other words, those people who are considered outside of society, the cast-offs and dregs, the worthless and stupid, the lazy and uncivilized, the irrational and ill-tempered, are the very people on which Fanon’s hopes for a “new humanism” are based (Gibson, 2011).

It is not surprising, then, that hegemony precisely rejects this claim; and reacts with such violence when the claim is made. It is also not surprising that any ‘war of position’ needs to assert it so powerfully; and because they are so visible, and so obviously ‘out-of-order’ (as Abahlali call it), road blocks are a pretty convincing way to do this.

People count and think equally

Like many movements, and particularly subaltern movements, Abahlali claims a universalising humanism, in which all people are essentially the same, and all people are essentially equal:

There is only one human race.

Our struggle and every real struggle is to put the human being at the centre of society, starting with the worst off. (AbM, 21/5/2008)

This idea, of everyone being essentially the same, was also picked up in the mass response to the shooting of 2 young piqueteros in June 2002, when thousands of Argentinians took to the streets under the slogan “We are all piqueteros”.

It is in this respect that the movements perhaps show the most radical praxis. As Rancière argues, the current idea is that people are not equal, but we could get there if we worked hard enough. Rather, we need to start from an ‘axiom of equality’ (Rancière, interviewed by Lawrence Liang, 2009):

What if equality, instead, were to provide the point of departure? What would it mean to make equality a *presupposition* rather than a goal, a *practice* rather than a reward situated firmly in some distant future so as to all the better explain its present infeasibility? (Ross, 1991: xix).

In fact, Rancière asserts, we are all already equal because we all already think; and we think equally well, because we are equally intelligent. Learning requires two faculties - intelligence and will. Will is what accounts for differences in what is learned (Rancière, 1991). For Rancière, then, hegemony is not about persuading us that the way things are is normal and natural, or that we cannot do anything about it, it is about persuading us that others do not think. If we simply accept that they/we do as the ultimate truth, then it is axiomatic that we can act in the world to put precisely the fact of our equality into practice. So emancipation is “that every common person might conceive his (sic) human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it” (18).

This impacts on our pedagogy:

The normal pedagogic logic says that people are ignorant, they don't know how to get out of ignorance to learn, so we have to make some kind of itinerary to move from ignorance to knowledge, starting from the difference between the one who knows and the one who does not know (Rancière, interviewed by Lawrence Liang, 2009).

Even Freire ultimately argues this. Rancière, by contrast, sees the process of learning “not as a process from ignorance to knowledge but as a process of going from what is already known or what is already possessed, to further knowledge or new possessions...the idea is that the ignorant always know something, always ask something and always has the capacity, and the problem is how to make the best of this capacity and start from equality”. Thus there is no specific pedagogy of the oppressed - no specific education for poor people, oppressed people (Rancière, interviewed by Lawrence Liang, 2009). What there is is ‘symbolic rupture’: “symbolic rupture [is] when people start talking about things that were not supposed to be their business” (Ibid.).

Both Abahlali and the piqueteros have started talking about things that are not supposed to be their business; but more than that, both assume the capacity of themselves, and of everyone else (including the state) to understand what they are saying.

People are not ‘voiceless’

People who can think (i.e. everyone) have something to say; and are perfectly able to do this for themselves. Thus one of the things that Abahlali and the piqueteros have been most insistent on is their right to speak for themselves; and they have been highly critical of those who attempt to speak on their behalf.

From fairly early on, Abahlali began using the phrase “Talk to us, not for us” (Zikode, 2006c: 7): “Words from everyone have to be heard. They [the ANC] mustn't listen to just the words of the rich, or the big people, they must listen to the words from everyone....We're trying to make something because we're

talking. They must listen to us, we mustn't listen to them" (Linda Motha, 2007, interviewed by Kate Gunby). One of their consistent criticisms of government and of civil society has been that they attempt to speak for them; or that, when the poor do speak, they are not listened to: "because we have always been considered as people who do not count in our society our claims are always dismissed with contempt" (AbM, 9/3/2011).

In his *The Third Force* article in December 2005, Zikode (2006a) responded to claims that there was a "Third Force" behind the movement. Zikode conceded that there was one:

The Third Force is all the pain and the suffering that the poor are subjected to every second in our lives....It is time for us to speak out and to say this is who we are, this is where we are and this is how we live. (2006a: 1)

Later in the article, he said, "This is the struggle of the poor. The time has come for the poor to show themselves that we can be poor in life but not in mind" (4). Indeed, the so-called leaders had been of no help. "It is the thinking of the masses of the people that matters" (4).

The piqueteros have been rather more ambivalent about their ability to speak, arguing that it was difficult to speak after such a long period of being silenced (MTD Allen & Khorasanee, 2004; Sitrin, 2003). In many ways, this is precisely the function of hegemony.

The claim to speak on behalf of others rests precisely on an assumption that they are unable to speak for themselves. Often, ultimately, this is because they are assumed to be unable to think for themselves, as discussed above; but often it is because they are seen as having been so mentally mutilated by oppression that they have no voice. I would argue that Freire himself has a lot to answer for in this respect; and it continues to be a key reason given by those who speak 'on behalf of others, such as Wangari Maathai, speaking on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize:

When people are poor and when they are reduced to beggars, they feel weak, humiliated, disrespected and undignified. They hide alone in corners and dare not raise their voices. They are therefore, neither heard nor seen. They do not organize but often suffer in isolation and in desperation. Yet all human beings deserve respect and dignity (Maathai, 2005)

A South African NGO who has attempted to break this practice in their own work has recently written:

In civil society organisations, the overwhelming tendency is to speak - and the unerring consequence is to reinforce the silencing of the people. In fact much

civil society practice and thinking proceeds really on the assumption that speech is not a capacity of the people...A central idea that emerged [in our exploration of an alternative path] was that 'our voice is our praxis' - or indeed, 'our praxis is our voice' - and that the discipline of that principled praxis requires of the organisation much more listening than speaking (Church Land Programme, 2013).

If you have a voice, and yet no-one will listen, how do you make yourself heard? You enter the public domain, through for example, the media, including social media (and recent studies have looked precisely at how movements do this - see, for example, Hall, 2011; Malone, 2011; Mattoni 2012, cited in Bergfield, 2013); or you shout very loudly in a public space. As Hammond (2013) argued in his discussion of occupations, because occupation is about recasting the public space - who can do what in it - "Occupation is therefore an exercise in freedom of speech and public communication" (501).

Change is both necessary and possible

The praxis of both Abahlali and the piqueteros rests on an assumption that it is possible to change things; and yet both movements admit that their actions in fact helped to prove this to themselves. Some piqueteros, for example, have said that they did not believe that it was possible to fight the politicians until they had blocked the roads: "So many years of politics with state control over the people...generated a lack of self-esteem in us... The piquete kind of broke that passivity and people are able to recover their self-esteem" (Sitrin, 2003: 474). The similarity between this and Fanon's concept of living organization, of "action that creates a new reality and thus changes consciousness" (Gibson, 2011) is inescapable: "By exploding the former colonial reality the struggle uncovers unknown facets, brings to light new meanings and underlines contradictions which were camouflaged by this reality" (Fanon, 1968:147, quoted in Gibson, 2011); potentially not only for those engaged in the struggle, but for those they are struggling against. As a piquetero commented about the State, "if they don't gain consciousness and keep doing it, they are always going to find resistance everywhere" (Sitrin, 2003: 480).

A number of writers have talked about the importance of social movement precisely as places that keep the hope of something different alive within a hegemonic insistence that there is no alternative. Crowther (2009) says that "utopian thinking has undeservedly fallen into disrepute", because it is defined as unrealisable. He thus argues for a "critical pedagogy of real utopias" (86), something fundamentally different from other types of educational activity. Dinerstein and Deneulin (2012) argue that what they call 'hope movements' have recently sprung up. These are movements that are "creating alternative economic arrangements conducive to the pursuit of a dignified life" (585). They argue that the term 'social movement' does not really adequately capture what these movements are. These movements "are engaged in an autonomous *search*

for a new way of life which is more conducive to creating an environment where human beings can live in dignity” (589).

I am not convinced that these are something entirely outside of current understandings of social movements (one of their examples is the Zapatistas), but I think the point they are making about the potential, the hope, for something allowing a life of dignity is an important one (and, of course, one that Freire made over and over). There are, as we know, many intellectuals who remain hopeful; and I would argue that these are to be found particularly amongst those who are actually actively engaged with real struggles of real people (as was Gramsci). Holloway (2007, interview by Marina Sitrin), for example, says “These are not miserable times. Perhaps that is the most important point” (response 1). The times may be awful, and frightening, but they are full of struggle, and therefore full of hope.

Conclusion

So what does this mean for the road blockade within the praxis of movements of those ‘without’ (Zibechi, 2012)? According to Gramsci, “Not all practices are equal to each other, or rather, not all practices have the same capacity to mobilise and valorise other social and political practices” (Thomas, 2011), so choosing which practise to use is critical. As we have seen, Zibechi (2007) argues that road blockades are an essential tactic of such social movements because they rely on the occupation of space and territory, and macro-economic shifts have meant that it is necessary to move from occupying the factory floor to occupying more public space; but also because they are simultaneously both defensive and offensive: “a roadblock is a way of establishing a border, a break marking the territory controlled by the state and that controlled by the movements”.

However, road blockades also need to be consciously employed as part of a ‘war of position’, i.e. as a critical pedagogical tool, both because of the symbolism of the road and because of the ways in which road blockades can make visible a counter-hegemonic ‘truth’, as discussed above. Thomas (2009) reminds us in his seminal analysis of Gramsci’s thought that Gramsci argued we cannot always choose the form of war we want, especially if we start from a subordinate position; and as we have seen road blockades are often a last resort. However, when roads are blockaded, even as a last resort, it is possible for “the war of manoeuvre [to] increasingly [become] the war of position” (Gramsci, 1971: 243). In this, we need to remember that for Gramsci, a ‘war of position’ is not a programmatic strategy, but a realistic political strategy of the proletariat within the constraints imposed on them (Thomas, 2009).

Thus road blockades potentially allow for a rethinking and retheorising of social movement pedagogy not only as learning within such movements, but as a conscious 'teaching' of an alternative truth.

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About the author

Anne Harley is a lecturer in the Centre for Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. She teaches in the field of adult education and participatory development at both postgraduate and undergraduate level. Since 2006, two social movements, Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural Network, have sent members on the programme which she co-ordinates. Anne is interested in issues relating to 'development' and, in particular, the relationship between 'development' and the poor; in gender issues; in environmental issues; and in the possibilities for change through genuinely grassroots subaltern social movements. Email: HarleyA AT ukzn.ac.za