

**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN/FOR ACTION: A CASE STUDY OF ABAHLALI
BASEMJONDOLO MOVEMENT**

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education, in the Graduate Programme in Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, David Ntseng, declare that

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'DAVID NTSENG', written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

Social movement struggles have generated an interest amongst theorists who want to contribute to the growing literature about organisations that organise and mobilise in recent years. Amongst these theorists are those who argue that most crucial in researching social movements is looking at learning and theorising within social movements. There is a debate about whether there is in fact any theorising within social movements, or rather external theorists present their own ideas about social movements.

This study locates itself at the forefront of this debate with the intention to argue that social movements' struggles are useful for understanding learning and theorising within social movements themselves. It uses existing theories of learning, in particular Communities of Practice theory, to argue that social movements theorise. The study uses Abahlali baseMjondolo, a social movement in Durban, South Africa, to engage with the question of learning in social movements. I conducted eight interviews with current and former members of Abahlali, looked at documents generated by the movement itself, and drew on my eight years' experience of working closely with the movement.

The study is located within a critical paradigm and is written within the Marxist theory of social movements, hence it sees Abahlali's struggle as being about confronting systems of power. It is a struggle that rests on issues of equality, justice and social transformation where the rights of being human and rights to place and to a decent life take priority. Critically important is that this struggle is a school through which its members derive new meanings and power to engage their reality. The study shows that this struggle is not elite driven or externally manipulated but that organising and mobilising take place from the ground up. What is striking in this study is that Abahlali's struggle is part of their practice of theorising. In their struggle, Abahlali have produced a phenomenon based on their lived experience and theoretical framing called Ubuhlalism. However, using the Community of Practice theory, the study presents significant shifts in Abahlali's practice and theory-making processes over time.

Key Words: learning, participation, social movements, learning theories, Ubuhlalism

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|--|
| ABM | Abahlali baseMjondolo |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| CLP | Church Land Programme |
| CPT | Pastoral Commission of the Land |
| GEAR | Growth, Employment and Redistribution |
| IFP | Inkatha Freedom Party |
| KRDC | Kennedy Road Development Committee |
| MST | Movimento Trabalhadores Sem Terra |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NSM | New Social Movement |
| PAIA | Promotion of Access to Information Act |
| PPT | Project Preparation Trust |

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Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

The main focus of this research is knowledge production within social movements, particularly knowledge that emerges out of action, and then is fed back to strengthen action. I am looking at Abahlali baseMjondolo (“residents of shack settlements”), a shackdweller movement that is based in Durban, South Africa. What motivated me to undertake this research is a desire to understand the nature of the knowledge that is produced and its contribution to struggles waged by Abahlali. Part of this is rooted in my own understanding of the role of the poor in struggles for change. I see the poor as the subjects of their own history. My core interaction with social movements is based on an approach that sees the poor as agents of their own liberation (Arthur, 1970; Freire, 1996; Mentinis, 2006). In struggling for liberation, the poor are not passive recipients of services but actively involved in thinking in action (Birkinshaw, 2007; Bryant, 2006; Mondini, 2008; Neocosmos, 2009; Nimmagudda, 2008; Pithouse, 2006a).

I have chosen to focus on Abahlali because, through my work, I have been in contact with Abahlali since 2006, and thus know the movement fairly well. In my understanding, from early on Abahlali have insisted on autonomous political action which enables them to develop their own understanding of politics, of their context and of their struggle. Abahlali root their politics and knowledge of engaging the world in what they call Ubuhlalism. Ubuhlalism as understood within the movement consolidates principles and ideas that the movement has developed and is still developing in order to express its politics and its view of the world order – i.e. Ubuhlalism theorises their struggle. Ubuhlalism is also referred to by members of Abahlali as living politics as it emerges from the daily experiences of the poverty and the critical thinking and actions to counter poverty (Zikode, 2007). Abahlali has consciously asserted that it creates knowledge by speaking of the “University of Abahlali”. The movement has thus been engaged in action over a long period of time; but also engaged in thinking and knowledge generation. Thus looking at this movement can help understand knowledge production in/for action.

This thesis tries to understand how knowledge is produced within Abahlali, and the relationship between action, the knowledge produced, and the theory of Ubuhlalism.

1.2 Rationale

In the last two decades there has been an increasing interest by scholars in social movement learning. In the context of South African scholarship there is relatively little that has been produced. It is only in the last decade that scholars began to look at learning in South African social movements. For example Cooper (2005) looked at learning in the South African trade union SAMWU, and Endresen (2010) looked at learning in the Western Cape, focusing on the Alternative Information and Development Centre, Treatment Action Campaign and Congress of South African Trade Unions. In the case of Durban, Abahlali has been a key focus of scholarship, and there is a growing body of literature focusing on their struggle and how it impacts on the post-1994 socio-political context. However, relatively little has been written on learning in the struggle of Abahlali (eg. Patel, 2006; Pithouse, 2006a; Harley, 2012a). This thesis is an attempt to close this gap by adding to this body of literature.

At the time I began this thesis, in early 2009, there were already shifts that were taking place in Abahlali, particularly relating to practice and ideological positioning. Nonetheless, it was still important to undertake this research for there was something intriguing about how the Abahlali struggle embodied learning and knowledge production. My interest in this research was to argue that there is learning that takes place in Abahlali. Since Abahlali's struggle involved everyone, I argue that this learning is collective. This learning that happens as a result of the struggle of Abahlali is useful to look at because it adds to the field of learning in social movements. I argue that on the basis of learning from and in the struggle, there is theorising that takes place building on Abahlali's experience of learning. I argue that the learning and theorising that Abahlali do is fed back into their struggle which is thus useful for supporting movement struggles elsewhere. I argue that what Abahlali are doing should be seen as part of important theoretical work that seeks to unearth, analyse and understand knowledge production within social movements.

My own orientation towards a critical paradigm has made me view militants in social movements as producers of their own knowledge. In the case of Abahlali, through my

experience of working with them, I have come to see the use of the concept of Ubuhlalism as a theory that evolves from, in and around their struggle. Therefore in this thesis I argue three points which are: (a) Abahlali learn, and this is consistent with a critical view of people as producers and not just consumers of knowledge; (b) Abahlali theorise; and (c) this research is necessary to study how learning in Abahlali occurs and what accounts for it.

During my time with Abahlali I became aware of the growing interest in learning whilst struggling and struggling whilst learning. In Abahlali everyone contributes and everyone's ideas matter (Bryant, 2006; Patel, 2006; Pithouse, 2006a). My interest in this thesis is to argue that Abahlali's struggle is important to look at for researching learning in social movements. I argue that learning is organised by Abahlali themselves and theoretical work that occurs from within the movement is not elite driven or externally manipulated. Organising and mobilising takes place from the ground up.

1.3 Background

After the first national democratic elections in 1994, the majority of South Africans had high expectations with regards to the improvement of their material conditions and quality of life. Amidst these expectations, in 1996 the South African government introduced the Growth, Economy and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic strategy which was seen by many people as a clear adoption of the neoliberal agenda by the South African government. For many poor South Africans and left-leaning activists particularly in the Trade Unions, this was a slap in the face as it clearly showed the South African government's collusion with the neoliberal economic agenda by developing what some regard as a home-grown structural adjustment programme (Bond, 2000).

This introduction of GEAR was justified as a necessary step to bring robust transformation in what was already a fragile economic context. The emphasis was on building investor confidence and creating an environment to build the economy so that the government could address social inequalities and improve the quality of lives of people. This economic roadmap involved, among other things, liberalisation of trade tariffs and encouraged cross-border trade, continentally and internationally (Bond, 2000).

However, five years into democracy, South Africa had an alarming gap between the rich and the poor, shocking job losses, deteriorating education standards, declining quality of the health care service, and increasing housing demands resulting in the increase of informal settlements (Vavi, 2004). It can be said that the much anticipated economic growth became a far-fetched trajectory that saw many poor South Africans experiencing the country's worst poverty in history (Anthony, 2013). The situation led to protest marches, mass demonstrations and stay-aways from all sectors, and workers in the steel and motor industry, public service (such as teachers) and mining sector, and more importantly, communities, began to show their disillusionment with the promise of a better life and improved material conditions (Zikode, 2006).

Admittedly, the 1994 transition brought a possibility of a new South Africa. Most important to note is what it meant for people who lived under harsh conditions of poverty especially in rural areas and in urban shack settlements. In the case of Durban for instance, communities from shack settlements expected a change from living in shacks to humane settlements with decent and dignified services like other neighbourhoods (Zikode, 2006). Such dreams and hopes were shattered when a decade passed and there was nothing to show except spates of evictions and cut-offs of water and electricity (Mzobe, quoted in Giles & Khan, 2006).

1.3.1 The current state of shack settlements in Durban

The state of shack settlements in Durban after 1994 did not change, partly because the city of Durban, like its national counterparts, adopted a neoliberal policy which focused on meeting investor demands (Anthony, 2013). Part of this drive meant paying more attention to big projects that had the potential of bringing in profits as opposed to public spending or social services. The promise of creating jobs and addressing living conditions was replaced with more job losses and the migration of people nearer to industrial areas. Consequently, the demand for housing grew rapidly and the city admitted its incapacity to deal with the backlog (Kockott, 2007). In areas like Clare Estate residents from informal settlements felt betrayed by their ward councillors as they were subjected to the most appalling living conditions.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of Kennedy Road shack settlement (Google Earth, 2014)

Clare Estate has the largest number of informal settlements, one being Kennedy Road, and others being Foreman Road and Palmiet Road, all of which have minimal services such as water, electricity and sanitation (Pithouse, 2006a; Zikode, 2006). It seems abundantly clear that the same can be said about other shack settlements, not just in Durban, but other South African cities (Pithouse, 2006a). A clear depiction of how difficult it is to live in shack settlements is summarised in Zikode's (2006) article "I am the Third Force". Zikode is a founder of the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement and a former resident of Kennedy Road settlement. In the article, he presents the appalling conditions that shack residents have to contend with in the shacks and dispels the notion that people's revolts are influenced by foreign nationals from the West.



Figure 2: Photograph of Kennedy Road shack settlement (Ntseng, 2008)

Over the years shack residents have had to brace themselves for shack fires which occur in winter and summer. With no access to running water it is often difficult to extinguish these fires. The city's fire department does not always manage these fires, and as a result they destroy many homes and belongings (Birkinshaw, 2007).

Figure 3: Photograph taken after fire swept through Kennedy Road settlement (CLP, 2008)



1.3.2 Abahlali baseMjondolo

In 2005, residents in shack settlements began to organise themselves and mobilised to deal with their situation of neglect and betrayal by the government. In March 2005, at Kennedy Road, the first of the many protests organised by shack residents took place. Things came to a head when residents saw tractors clearing land nearby. They thought it was the beginning of the housing project they had been demanding. Upon enquiry they realised the land had been sold to a private developer. This sparked a mass protest which led to the blockading of the road and head-on confrontation with the police. In the same Ward another shack settlement, Foreman Road, had another protest shortly afterwards that demanded basic services such as clean water, proper sanitation facilities, electricity and houses (Patel, 2006). Throughout 2005 different settlements took turns organising and leading revolts.

Not receiving any attention from the Ward councillors and the Ethekewini (Durban) municipality, they mobilised other settlements to form a mass movement of shackdwellers to pressurise the city, and in November 2005 the Abahlali movement was launched at a big march at which the movement declared autonomy from party politics and announced the boycott of the 2006 municipal elections (Zikode, 2006). The 'No Land, No House, No Vote' campaign made headlines across South Africa (Abahlali, 2013).

Having realised that shackdwellers had been betrayed by the political system (which in their analysis considered them only useful as a vote bank), Abahlali's first act was to symbolically bury the Ward councillor, declaring that he did not represent the shackdwellers. Secondly, Abahlali refused to be associated with any ethnic politics. Membership is based on living in the settlements without reference to background, ethnicity, language or citizenship. The organisation's strength lies, in other words, in creating an inclusive and clear politics that built solidarity and opposed anything that would divide the settlements. In the early years ABM insisted on fully democratic annual elections in each settlement as a condition for affiliation (Abahlali, 2013).

Abahlali's key demands were and still are land, housing and dignity. Abahlali thus collectively fought against forced removals and for access to education and the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, health care and refuse removal as well as bottom up popular

democracy (Zikode, 2007). In some settlements the movement has also successfully set up projects like crèches, gardens, sewing collectives, support groups for people living with and orphaned by HIV and Aids and so on.

The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo

Figure 4: Photograph of the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali)



To account for Abahlali's claim to be a university we need to look at the first wave of intellectual work that was deployed in the early years of their formation. The notion of the university was manifested through general members' meetings, night camps, preparatory meetings for marches, press statements and articles written by members of the movement. The practice of hosting night camps became one of the key resources for learning in Abahlali. These night camps were quarterly meetings that lasted the whole night where members of Abahlali, leaders and everyone else, engaged, theorised, planned and strengthened their solidarity to one another. These night camps became a place where serious intellectual work happened. It seems that their intellectual work always used as its point of departure their collective experience of difficult life in shack settlements, collective understanding and commitment to action.

A few years later in collaboration with their solidarity partners they initiated what was later known as Living Learning sessions where they engaged with a range of issues and themes that seemed relevant and had implications for their struggles.

This intellectual work attracted scholars who were interested in social movements' struggles. This is highlighted in Pithouse's (2006a) article, *Our struggle is thought, on the ground, running*. Another account is captured in Patel's (2006) article *A short course in politics at the University of Abahlali*. Clearly the understanding of Abahlali politics and their intellectual project has been one fundamental component of their struggle from the beginning. In 2005 when preparing for a march against the local councillor, one banner had a slogan - the 'University of Kennedy Road'. Later that year, a 'University of Abahlali baseMjondolo' was declared during the protest march on Mayor Obed Mlaba (Abahlali, 2013).

Claiming the idea that shackdwellers have their own university was seen with some suspicion (Böhmke, 2010; Sinwell, 2010). Cautions were raised about how academics closely linked to Abahlali made claims about the autonomy of Abahlali in doing their own intellectual work. This debate - about the intellectual autonomy of social movements, and Abahlali in particular, and the extent to which they produce their own knowledge as they theorise about their struggle - will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Two.

Their university is the hub of what Abahlali call, 'living politics' (Abahlali, 2013). Abahlali strongly feel and argue for the right to be in charge of their own intellectual work. Part of what gives them a right to this claim seems to come from their early relentless culture of making time and taking time to discuss their situation and develop an analysis based on their experiences. Ordinary members took turns in collectively making sense of their situation and developing strategies to counter their demise.

This is manifested through Abahlali's demand to speak for themselves and refuse to be represented or spoken about. Their slogans, 'speak to us, not about us' and 'nothing about us, without us', are testimony to this. From the beginning, it appears that Abahlali insisted on direct interaction with the city officials who are responsible for development plans and basic services. Representations and promises by local politicians made Abahlali robust in developing their own politics and intellectual work (Zikode, 2009). For Abahlali, at this university everyone is a teacher and everyone is a student. The source of theoretical work for this university is the daily life experience of the members. It is that experience that is the core of Abahlali politics and of their thinking.

Abahlali political interventions

Abahlali have carefully identified which critical battles to fight. Most of their battles involve resisting evictions and the demolition of people's homes within shack settlements, illegal detentions and arrests. From April 2006 Abahlali were concerned with the rhetoric of freedom and the celebrations that were staged every 27th April, the anniversary of the first democratic national elections of 1994, called Freedom Day. They realised that the way to allow for real politics is to unmask these celebrations and therefore introduced what they called Unfreedom Day. Since April 2006, until 2013, Abahlali hosted Unfreedom Day every 27th April of every year at which they deliberated on their experience of repression by the state police and municipal security personnel, unlawful demolitions and evictions, etc. (Abahlali, 2013).

In 2006, Abahlali, with the support of Open Democracy, a legal NGO based in Cape Town that specialises in litigation using the Promotion of Access to Information Act, lodged a request to the Ethekewini municipality for information about the city's development plans for shack settlements. Since 2005 Abahlali had tried to engage the city but had not received any response. They resorted to protest marches and submitted memoranda but the city still did not respond. Abahlali decided to use the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA), and Section 32 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to information. Obligated to respond, the city provided information that showed its intention to clear shack settlements by providing people with so-called RDP houses far from the city. This gave Abahlali more reasons to mobilise and fight for in situ upgrades and the rights to the city (Abahlali, 2013).

Figure 5: Photograph taken during demolitions in Siyanda B shack settlement (CLP, 2009)



In 2008 in what was seen as willingness to enter into dialogue, Ethekewini municipality employed the services of Project Preparation Trust (PPT) to mediate discussions that led to Abahlali leaders from Kennedy Road settlement engaging Ethekewini municipality regarding development and housing plans. Several meetings were held to brainstorm and give shape to what Kennedy Road settlement would look like. A number of options were put forward including the type of housing development that was possible and the number of people that could be accommodated. This process resulted in the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was signed by the city and Abahlali from Kennedy Road (Own experience).

One of the critical achievements of this process was the drafting and finalisation of the Interim Settlement Upgrade by PPT (Andreason & Crawford, 2013). It was submitted to the city to endorse and finance. PPT made numerous calls on the city to follow up on the agreement but there was no response. As a result PPT decided to step down from the project. Abahlali continued to make calls on the city to meet its end of the bargain, but this never happened (Own experience).

Things looked rather grim at the level of Provincial government. In the previous year, 2007, the KwaZulu-Natal legislature had passed a law called *The Eradication of Slums Act*. This law as understood by Abahlali prohibited the emergence of new shack settlements and forced landlords to protect their land by fencing it off and preventing illegal occupation of vacant land. Abahlali were concerned with the way in which the Ethekewini municipality dealt with shack settlements. In fact, in the two years before this period the municipality had relentlessly demolished shacks and evicted people. This law now gave the Provincial Minister of Housing more powers to execute the same demolitions and evictions which were now going to affect not only shackdwellers in Ethekewini but in the whole of KwaZulu-Natal (Andreason & Crawford, 2013).

Although there were discussions between Kennedy Road and Ethekewini municipality, this did not prevent Abahlali from mobilising against the Slums Act. At the beginning of 2009 Abahlali took the Provincial Legislature to the Constitutional Court. They mobilised other grassroots movements in urban and rural areas, even in other provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape, to join the battle against what they saw as another Group Areas Act. In October 2009 a judgement was passed in favour of Abahlali, and the law was scrapped as

Section 16 of the Act was found to be unconstitutional and would allow further violations of people's constitutional rights. This was one of the biggest achievements for the movement but also for all shackdwellers in the country, since the law was being piloted in KwaZulu-Natal with the aim of duplicating it in other provinces.

The victory seems to have had an impact on ongoing discussions between Ethekewini and Kennedy Road because the process unexpectedly stopped and PPT could not continue mediating. Hostilities between the parties concerned were on the rise again. It is not, however, entirely clear what led to the discontinuation of the talks between Kennedy Road leaders and Ethekewini municipality.

The attacks

On the night of 26th September 2009, violent attacks by an armed group left two men dead and an estimated thousand fled Kennedy Road shack settlement, the headquarters of Abahlali at this time. The armed group, self-identified as a local branch of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) supporters and disgruntled community members, chanted anti-amaPondo slogans and stormed the offices of Abahlali demanding to see Zikode, the President of Abahlali. During the night, the Abahlali offices were literally and physically dismantled, then ransacked. The next morning two people were found dead and others were rushed to hospital. Abahlali leaders and their families, including their children, fled their homes in fear of their safety and went into hiding. Their homes were destroyed and their furniture stolen (Chance, 2010).

Days after this attack, police arrested 12 Abahlali members accusing them of the violence and the murders that had occurred. Seven of the 12 were released on bail while the other five remained behind bars until July 2010. Abahlali issued a press statement in which they alleged that the attacks were carried out by a 'local ANC militia' and were backed by police and 'high level' officials. These attacks on Abahlali sparked a worldwide outcry that the attacks constituted vigilantism intended to silence the voice of the poor. A number of solidarity actions were organised in various cities around the world. Solidarity movements' protesters gathered at local universities and at South African embassies from London to New York to Moscow under Abahlali banners. Church leaders and academics from the Archbishop of Cape Town to Noam Chomsky condemned the attacks, as did Amnesty International, and other social movements and civic groups (Abahlali, 05/10/2013).

In the days and weeks that followed the attack, state officials – local, municipal, and provincial – circulated public statements which told another story, one claiming that the violence at Kennedy Road was an intensely localised criminal matter, perpetrated by a ‘vigilante group’ with links to Abahlali which held Kennedy Road residents under a curfew, barring them, under threat of force, from watching television, cooking or walking outdoors after 7pm (Chance, 2010). In July 2011, all 12 men were cleared of all charges and were set free. Due to instabilities in Kennedy Road the 12 men could not go back to their homes but instead sought refuge in neighbouring settlements where they reside until today.

The impact of the attacks

The short-term impact of the attacks was the discontinuing of dialogue and discussions with the Ethekewini officials. My suspicion is that this was due to the considerable level of hostility and lack of trust between the two parties.

It appeared as though elements of mistrust also developed between Abahlali leaders who were now suspicious of one another. They monitored each other’s moves hoping to discover the truth about who could have been part of master-minding the attacks. Organising and hosting night camps was seen as risky and unsafe. Mindful of the contribution of night camps in Abahlali, shifting away from having these night camps meant dismantling one of the key foundations of Abahlali practice and learning space.

As someone who was working very close with Abahlali, I noticed that there was little time spent discussing and engaging on issues and theorising about the struggle. It also meant that learning that usually happened in these all-night meetings was no longer happening. The logical consequence was the encroachment of tendencies that were destructive to the movement. These were in the form of over-protection of resources, limited travel to shack settlements, adopting routines that are similar to those of NGOs or political parties which are normally rooted in over-emphasis on hierarchy and structures.

In recent years the struggle of Abahlali has taken a lot of strain. My suspicion is that perhaps this is due to living in the immediacy of the situations and security concerns, Abahlali began to learn more about discipline, safety, being in order and sticking to their constitution. During this period there were serious cracks in the way learning occurred in Abahlali, for a number of reasons. Firstly, many new members joined from 2010, who saw Abahlali as a home for

the poor where they could access resources easily, particularly legal assistance. Secondly, there was not enough time given to learning as used to happen in the early years, except for induction workshops when new members joined. There has been a widening gap between leaders and members in shack settlements which has led to many pioneer shack settlements losing interest in participating in Abahlali activities.

As stated above, this research began in 2009. The data was collected in late 2013/early 2014. The research thus focuses on the period from the beginning of Abahlali's struggle in 2005 until early 2014. In May 2014, significant developments occurred within the movement, but these are outside the scope of this research and will thus not be discussed here.

1.4 Research questions

I have located this thesis within the critical paradigm because Abahlali's struggle appears to be about confronting systems of power. I am particularly interested in how they make meaning during the struggle, thus producing knowledge. As it is a struggle that concerns itself with concepts of learning, equality, justice and social transformation where the rights of being human and rights to place and to a decent life take priority, I wanted to understand how these become Abahlali's daily learning. Therefore the research seeks to answer the following key questions:

- ▲ How is knowledge produced within Abahlali?
- ▲ How does individual experience and knowledge relate to the collective experience of Abahlali?
- ▲ How does this collective experience contribute to the theory of Ubuhlalism?
- ▲ How useful are existing theories about learning in social movements in relation to Abahlali's theory?

To deal with these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight current or former members of Abahlali. I read articles and papers that have been published about learning in social movements and theories of learning in social movements. I looked at the literature of what has been written about Abahlali. Since I worked with them for over eight

years, my own experience is crucial in understanding how Abahlali learn in their struggle, and I have thus drawn on this as an additional source.

In the context of current social movements, particularly Abahlali, the real issue is to understand the form of learning and theory-making that happens in their struggle, and to understand the connection of that learning with the growing interest of studying social movements. I am hoping that this research will be able to highlight critical issues of understanding theories of learning within social movements.

1.5 Thesis outline

The thesis is arranged as follows. Following the introductory chapter (chapter one), Chapter Two looks at the literature review. In this chapter, I look at the body of literature that discusses learning in social movements, how it is accounted for and viewed by different scholars. I also look specifically at the literature on what has been written about Abahlali and different aspects represented in the literature.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework used in this study. I begin by considering possible relevant theories before discussing that which I believe to be most appropriate, viz. Community of Practice theory, in detail. In Chapter Four I provide an outline of my research design and methodology. Here I show why this research is framed within a critical paradigm and discuss the methods that I used to collect data. This chapter also discusses issues of validity, trustworthiness and ethics relating to this research. Chapter Five presents the data/findings, whilst Chapter Six analyses and discusses these findings in detail, using thematic analysis. Chapter Seven presents my conclusion.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

I have argued in Chapter One that the core interest of this thesis is in understanding how learning takes place in social movements with particular reference to Abahlali. I argue that there is learning that takes place in Abahlali that becomes useful in the struggle of Abahlali and also useful in the field of studying social movements' learning in general. A lot has been written about social movements' struggles and why they exist but only relatively recently has the focus shifted to look at learning that occurs within social movements (Cooper, 2005; Endresen, 2010; Foley, 2001; Harley, 2012; Thapliyal, 2006). Seemingly, scholars of social movements point to one very important feature of social movements - the collective learning and collective theorising which influences and is influenced by collective action to promote social change or resist disenfranchisement.

In this chapter I will look at literature on social movement theories that largely influence how scholars see learning in social movements. These theories include the Marxist theory of social movements, New Social Movement theory and Resource Mobilization theory (Ballard, Habib, Valodia & Zuern, 2006). I will then look at MST and the Zapatistas, both radical international social movements, to draw similarities with Abahlali. I then look at the literature on Abahlali and what is written about them. Finally I look at what has been written about learning in social movements in general in recent years.

2.2 Social movement theories informing literature

It seems appropriate to start with a definition of social movements put forward by Morrow and Torres (2003) extracted from their article titled, *The State, social movements and educational reform*. They define a social movement as:

...a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests, and for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors

such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilization, or the threat of mobilization as their primary source of social sanction, and hence power. They are further distinguished from other collectivities, such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned with defending or changing society, or the relative position of the group in society. (Morrow & Torres, 2003, p.100)

It seems that Morrow and Torres (2003) were trying to develop a definition that accommodates all aspect of social movement theories and varying dynamics of social movement existence. This definition raises useful concepts, such as identity, common interest, power and social change that enable subsequent discussion on different understandings of social movements.

2.2.1 Marxist theory

Marxist theorists emphasise the notion of equality, power and social change. Theorists in this field argue that from early on the theory of Marxism emerged as a distillation of the experiences, debates, theories and conflicts faced by the popular movements of the nineteenth century that sought in turn to contribute to those movements' further development (Barker, Cox, Krinsky & Nilsen, 2013; Morrow & Torres, 2003).

Marxist theory begins with a proposition that the core problem facing popular movements in the present epoch is the capitalist system. Barker et al. (2013) highlight the following:

- ⤴ Marxists see capitalism as subordinating everything to the predominant drive to competitive accumulation, itself fuelled by exploitation.
- ⤴ Marxism's emphasis falls on agency, on people 'making their own history'.
- ⤴ Movement repertoires include the construction of new institutions 'from below', both as means of conducting their struggles and as ways of replacing existing power set ups with alternatives (p. 74).

From within this theory social movements include trade unions, anarchist movements, anti-segregation movements and anti-oppression movements.

2.2.2 New Social Movement theory

Authors within this theory move away from the conventional social movement paradigm held by Marxists. They argue that the rise of the post-industrial economy created conditions for the rise of new social movements (NSMs), which focus not on issues of materialistic qualities such as economic wellbeing, but on issues related to human rights (Diani, 2011).

Within this theory what takes centre stage are social and cultural concerns, rather than economic or political considerations (Diani, 2011). Basically,

- ⤴ NSMs consist of informal, loosely organised social networks of supporters rather than members and tend to be locally-based.
- ⤴ NSMs act as a platform for collective action in civil society or in the cultural domain, rather than as an instrumental tool for the state. As such, new movements are often considered to be anti-authoritarian.
- ⤴ NSMs are normally centred on a single issue, or a limited range of issues which are related to a broader theme, such as the environment.
- ⤴ They are mostly middle-class with regards to their content and origins.

From within NSM theory, movements in their view include peace movements, environmental movements, lesbian and gay rights movements, animal rights movements and indigenous rights movements.

2.2.3 Resource Mobilization theory

Resource Mobilization theory focuses on how groups organise to pursue their ends by mobilising and managing resources. Theorists assert that social movements form when people who share grievances are able to mobilise resources and take action. This theory places resources at the centre of both the emergence and success of social movements. In this case, resources include knowledge, money, media, labour, solidarity, legitimacy, and internal and external support from a powerful elite (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

Resource Mobilization theory emphasises organisational control over resources and clearly demarcated outcomes that can be evaluated in terms of tangible gains (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In short Resource Mobilization theory highlights the following:

- ⤴ It emphasises the significance of outside contributions and the co-optation of institutional resources by contemporary social movements.
- ⤴ Movement supporters, like all socialised actors, act in terms of internalised values and sentiments as well as calculations of self-interest.
- ⤴ The primary task is to generate solidarity and moral commitment to the broad collectivities in whose name movements act.

Theorists regard social movements such as women's society clubs, savings federations, housing rights movements and associations, and human rights movements as examples of NSMs.

The discussion above shows that social movements are explained differently depending on the theoretic perspective. Clearly from the point of what they are meant to do and how they are formed and what they are concerned about, each theory puts forward a somewhat different emphasis from other theories. As I have mentioned in Chapter One, in this thesis I have used the Marxist theory as a lens for my research, in keeping with the critical paradigm I have adopted.

2.3 Literature on specific social movements with similarities to Abahlali

I now turn to two social movements to make the point about looking at social movements from a Marxist theoretical position. These are the Movimento Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST) of Brazil, and the Zapatistas of Chiapas in Mexico. I chose to look at these two movements because their struggles have drawn the attention of theorists who looked at learning and theorising in social movements. I argue that these two movements emerge as radical movements struggling for real change in society and they fit with my research in that I can draw similarities with the Abahlali movement.

2.3.1 *Movimento Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST)*

MST is a Brazilian mass social movement, formed by rural workers and by all those who want to fight for land reform and against injustice and social inequality in rural areas. MST was officially founded in January 1984 in Rio Grande Do Sul, Brazil, at the First National Meeting of Landless Workers. This followed a long struggle of organising and mobilising rural workers and peasants to fight for agrarian reform and social justice. Growing out of Liberation theology, Leninism, and Marxism, among other sources, the MST has organised 1.5 million landless workers in 23 of Brazil's 27 states (Starr, Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2011).

From its origins Meek (2014) suggests the MST has prioritised education for ideological and practical reasons. Being disillusioned by the quality of education that the state was providing to rural poor and the absence of schools near MST camps, MST resorted to starting their own schools (Thapliyal, 2006). The curriculum embodies the movement's struggle for larger agrarian reform and is provided to its members, including children. This is born out of the fact that for the MST knowledge is power. Its ideology is clear - this is a movement to change the system (Starr, Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2011).

Furthermore, as argued in Thapliyal (2006), the struggle of the movement is not just for land redistribution and agrarian reform; but also involves a radical vision of an equal, democratic and sustainable society through fundamental change in social institutions and relations. It is said that this ideology is strengthened and reinforced through the creation and practice of rituals that help build peasant-worker identity and unity (Starr et al., 2011).

The MST employs a range of strategies to put pressure on the government to redistribute land and promote a fair and just model of agrarian reform. These strategies include land occupations, marches, demonstrations, public petitions, hunger strikes, camping outside government buildings, cultural activities, research, and publications (Thapliyal, 2006). What seems to strengthen MST's struggle is its ability to organise rural workers at the grassroots; to encourage the participation of the rural workers in unions and political parties; to develop leaders and to build a political leadership of workers; and to connect with urban workers and other rural workers across Latin America (Starr et al., 2014; Thapliyal, 2006).

For the MST, participation is central to the work of creating a just and equitable society. Participation is a fundamental right for people who have been persistently excluded from society. It allows for people to have a genuine influence on decision-making and develop their own personal capacities in the process (Starr et al., 2014; Thapliyal, 2006).

The point that is made in the discussion above is that clearly MST's struggle provides space for understanding learning that takes place in social movements. It seems the struggle itself is a school as it is not easy to separate learning from activities. There are authors who have written about MST and have looked at how education and learning is carried out in the MST and some did that from a Marxist position (Kane, 2001; Starr, Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2011; Thapliyal, 2006).

2.3.2 The Zapatistas

I now turn to the Zapatistas of Chiapas in Mexico. Here I argue that, like the MST, the Zapatistas' struggle is useful to understand learning in social movements. I am also using Marxist theory in order to see the connection between the radical struggle and radical theory of change emerging from the Zapatistas.

The Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN), popularly known as the Zapatistas, is a guerrilla army of indigenous peoples from Chiapas, the poorest state in Mexico, as well as non-guerrilla supporters amongst the indigenous communities of Chiapas. The name Zapatista was taken from Emiliano Zapata, the agrarian reformer and commander of the Liberation Army of the South during the Mexican Revolution and the movement sees itself as his ideological heir. With reference to inspirational figures, nearly all EZLN villages contain murals of images of Zapata, Che Guevara and Subcomandante Marcos (Holloway, 2010). Their ideology combines libertarian socialism, libertarian municipalism, and indigenous Mayan political thought. They align themselves with the wider anti-globalisation, anti-neoliberal movement and seek indigenous control over their local resources, especially land.

In 1994, on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into being, the Zapatistas captured the town of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and presented a series of demands to the Mexican government for the granting of land, local autonomy, and services for indigenous communities summed up in a popular document known as the Sixth

Declaration. The negotiations have proceeded very slowly but the Zapatistas are now in control of 32 autonomous municipalities (Holloway, 2010; Kane, 2001; Mentinis, 2006; Starr et al., 2011; Thapliyal, 2006).

The Zapatistas' struggle is about the recognition of the indigenous people. As argued in Holloway (2010), the struggle is not just about gaining material improvements, better housing, schools, hospitals and so on. It is about creating a world in which people can live with dignity, 'a mutually recognitive world in which people can relate to each other without hiding behind masks' (p. 3). The issue of inclusion and acknowledgement of the indigenous people as humans was and still is a priority focus for the Zapatistas. It is a struggle that started in the sixteen century when the first Catholic Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas, devoted his life to defending vigorously (before the Church and the Spanish monarchy) the rights of the Indians to equal treatment (Wallerstein, 2008).

The Zapatistas developed a six dimension approach to enable them to work effectively within indigenous communities and beyond. They set up, as Starr et al. (2011) illustrate:

- ⤴ Political and military leadership that functions as the ultimate authority in Zapatista communities to ensure that all decisions that are made are approved in community assemblies.
- ⤴ Good government councils to make sure that everyone eventually serves so that people will no longer be mystified by the process of government. Nobody is paid for service on a junta or in any other position of authority or service.
- ⤴ Local economy and autonomy as an effort to reconstruct a vibrant local rural economy after the devastating effects of free trade and neoliberalism in recent decades.
- ⤴ The Other Campaign is a project with Mexican civil society in which the Zapatistas and their sympathisers are constructing a different form of politics.
- ⤴ International meetings where the Zapatistas periodically invite allies from the rest of the world to meet. However, a firm principle remains that if you want to work with them, you have to be able to listen.

There is a strong connection between the Zapatistas' daily struggles and learning, as recorded in an article by Rico (2014) by a Zapatista education promoter:

Our education is about having a dignified struggle and one heart, so that we can walk together in the same direction. We believe that education is not only about teaching literacy and numeracy, but also about solving problems between our peoples, how to defend ourselves, about our history and how to keep on fighting. (Themes and Challenges)

It seems that Zapatista education crosses wide areas of alternative knowledge and being, and offers a space where collective knowledge is aimed at social transformation. Realising that state schools were inappropriate for them and their children, the Zapatistas set up their own schools to build up the autonomous education of the Zapatistas; a form of education based on their own needs and supported by the community through popular assemblies and collective work (Rico, 2014).

It is clear that the Zapatistas' struggle, like that of the MST, is useful to understand learning in social movements and particularly useful for this research as it provides insights into literature that wrestles with the question of knowledge production in and for the struggle.

2.4 Literature on Abahlali baseMjondolo

As I have argued in Chapter One, Abahlali emerged as a movement of shackdwellers that struggled for the rights of shackdwellers in the city against unlawful evictions, injustice and indignity that was experienced by its members. In this section I show that since its inception, the Abahlali movement has drawn the attention of many scholars from a wide range of disciplines; but very little of this work has focused on learning.

2.4.1 Early academic work and reactions to these

As a post-1994 grassroots movement, Abahlali created a space for visiting concepts such as autonomous politics, self-assertion and bottom-up political formation. The account by Lyons (2005) in her article *Amandla Awethu: Direct action by civil society in eThekweni* recalls the first wave of uprisings that was led by shackdwellers around this time. In her article, Lyons (2005) writes about Abahlali's tactics of protest and marches, and illegal connections to services such as electricity and water as part of what she argues are direct actions. Quoting Zikode, Lyons (2005) writes:

We are prepared to talk, but if that doesn't work we are prepared to use our strength. We will do whatever it costs us to get what we need to live safely. (Zikode cited in Lyons, 2005, p. 1)

In her summary discussion, Lyons (2005) asserts that the different actions that were taken by Abahlali ranged from direct democracy organisation, marches, mock funerals, road blockading with burning tyres and mattresses, land occupations, illegal connections and reconnections, and actively resisting cut-offs. All of these were a rational response to a perceived failure of government to care for its people.

Another early work that emerged is a report by Bryant (2006) when he sought to provide what he called a 'geography' of the movement. In his understanding, Abahlali, in addition to the demands they make or the tactics they employ, represent a thrust for 'bottom-up democracy' (p. 50). Equally important is his description of Kennedy Road settlement which carries a resemblance to other shack settlements in eThekweni. He writes:

People do not have real houses, but cardboard and mud shacks built onto a hillside next to a dump that smells, they said, and when it rains the floors of the shacks are wet and muddy. (p. 53)

The response to these living conditions has been promises that ranged from cleaning up the settlement through refuse collection to building formal houses. Bryant (2006) records that people's responses to these promises and their views of the government are laced with words like 'broken promises' and with feelings of betrayal, and thus the motivation for their protests (p. 54). Reflecting on people's views on the road blockade in March 2005 by Kennedy Road shack residents, Bryant (2006) asserts that it gave people a new 'feeling of power', thus what began as an isolated protest from one settlement grew to a series of protests and negotiations in partnership with other settlements (p. 64). It is all this organising and mobilising in various shack settlements that gave rise to a movement, Abahlali BaseMjondolo. Bryant quotes Zikode describing the objectives of the movement as being a political endeavour to "[provide] a real platform of togetherness and contribute whatever we can to change living conditions in shack settlements" (p. 72).

I now turn to Beresford (2006) who did a comparison between the Abahlali movement and the Durban faction of the trade union federation, COSATU, with the view to explore the likelihood of co-operation between the two. Since this research is on Abahlali, I am interested in what he says about the Abahlali movement as he makes the comparison. However, it is important to acknowledge what Beresford (2006) is saying about COSATU although it actually goes beyond the scope of this research. A key point that he makes is that because COSATU is an affiliate of the tripartite alliance with the ANC, which is the ruling party and 'locked into a neoliberal paradigm', it has not managed to forge changes in policy and practice of the corporate sector (p. 22). In his article Beresford (2006) describes his view about Abahlali's struggle. He asserts:

Abahlali's struggle does not simply come from impatience at the lack of housing or service delivery. Rather, it comes from the lack of respect and outright contempt with which they feel they have been treated by their local government. (p. 26)

Here Beresford (2006) views Abahlali's struggle as one that comes out of a sense of alienation from the local government. This point forms part of the ongoing debate about whether Abahlali's struggle is materialistic or not, and whether or not it is about changing the system of power in the city. Notably, for Beresford (2006) Abahlali's struggle is a continuation of a struggle to reclaim dignity and to exercise their right to be heard.

I now turn to Pithouse (2006a). From early on Pithouse viewed Abahlali's struggle as a rebellion. Starting from Kennedy Road in 2005 to shack settlements across eThekweni, Abahlali broke out of obedience (thus a road blockade) and continued to demonstrate earnest and thorough work of organising on the ground. In his early article, Pithouse (2006a) argued that Abahlali's struggle was a school and through the struggle Abahlali had accomplished the creation of a 'community of struggle' among its members. This was born out of a practice that every important decision was made through a collective decision-making process of mass meetings. Opportunities for travel and interactions with external organisations were rotated amongst members. For Pithouse the underlying and most critical feature in Abahlali practice was the consistency of their collective reflection on their experience, thus giving new meaning to concepts of participation and leadership. Pithouse concluded his article by arguing that all the events that happened in shack settlements from March to November 2005 were actually a demonstration that a 'new movement has given birth to itself' (p. 5).

From its inception the Abahlali movement was understood to have been built on the foundations of openness to truth and collective critical reflection, thus creating a legitimate political project. Seemingly what gave strength to Abahlali was the rigorous and consistent rhythm of holding mass meetings where everyone was allowed to speak, thus creating a democratic practice. More accounts of this early formation and emerging politics and theorising in Abahlali is summed up in the article by Pithouse (2006a), *Our struggle is thought, on the ground, running: The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo*.

I was drawn to Patel's (2006) similar view of Abahlali's struggle as argued in his article, *A short course of politics in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo*. In this article Patel uses Badiou (2005) to argue that Abahlali's struggle provided necessary space to understand the connection between place, event, fidelity to the event and real political discourse. The series of protests, marches and theoretical work that resulted in the birth of Abahlali in 2005 amounted to a break with the false politics that had kept shackdwellers waiting for decades without seeing any real fruits of the 1994 transition to democracy.

According to Patel (2006), Abahlali meetings were an important space to reinforce fidelity to the event - the rupture with dominant politics. This explains why Patel (2006) yearns for consistency saying:

...once the political value of the intellectual work done in the meeting is accepted then the next question that will have to be confronted is how far the principles that sustain the meeting can move into other sites and modes of thinking and action in the social realm that sustain the meeting. (p. 98)

No wonder his concluding remarks state:

We need, in other words, to understand the meeting and its politics not only by connecting it backwards and forwards in time with Events, but also by connecting it in space with the 'ordinary' material and lived experience of People. (p. 98)

On the whole, it seems that Abahlali's struggle, at least at the beginning, raised interest in looking at shackdwellers' lived experience in relation to their agency to change their reality.

However, as the discussion about Abahlali expanded, so did the interest of intellectuals who were sceptical about legitimacy of the claim of autonomous movement. One of the key points of difference is the presentation of Abahlali's struggle as a unique and radical political opportunity that has grown from within Abahlali itself. As Böhmke (2010) states, "a key element in Abahlali's portrayal is how different it is to the old, authoritarian, vanguard Left who were 'in control' of the social movements that just preceded it" (p. 2).

In Böhmke's (2010) caution about the portrayal of Abahlali's struggle is a suggestion that Abahlali are just a breeding ground for academic work. Böhmke accuses scholars of using Abahlali as a research subject proving the viability of their own breathless political fantasies (ibid), with members of Abahlali "portrayed as subjects who are resolutely militant and possessed of unusual clarity and courage" (p. 4).

Böhmke (2010) refutes Abahlali's own self-presentation as a movement of radical and direct democratic practice. He does not see any connection between Abahlali as they actually are, and their claims that they are an independent, vibrantly democratic and autonomous unit:

They are, in their being and constitution, as prone to economism, reformism and chauvinism as any trade union and no amount of dressing up of their politics as a quest for "recognition", "voice", "dignity" and "humanity" can hide that. (p. 11)

I now turn to Walsh (2008) who agrees that Abahlali have been the source of a great deal of academic and activist writings from the beginning, and has similar concerns to those of Böhmke. In her article, *Uncomfortable collaborations*, Walsh deals with the friction between the reality of Abahlali's activism and thought, and how they are portrayed by left-leaning academics and middle class activists. She also critiques Abahlali's spread to other parts of South Africa. For Walsh (2008) there are clearly contradictions in the way Abahlali themselves account for their struggle. She notes that the insistence on 'speaking for themselves' actually clashes with their claim and aspiration of becoming a national movement as this means they 'speak for others' (p. 81).

This critical scrutiny of the account of Abahlali's struggle is also picked up on by Sinwell (2010) in his article, *Social movement defensive battles: The need to engage with politics*. He

argues that the left's depiction of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa has "tended to be superficial, labelling the poor's voice as a virtuous one that needs no outside political strategy – as is the case with Abahlali" (p. 1). In his article, Sinwell warns of romanticisation of social movements and the uncritical view that the poor are embodiments of the truth as pure subjects. In the case of Abahlali he says:

Merely amplifying the voices of the poor and assuming that those participating from below embody the truth, does not enable us to understand the potential and limitations of movements to challenge neoliberalism. Nor is there any possibility in this line of thinking to chart a way forward for liberation or to contest capitalism. (p. 2)

In his conclusion Sinwell (2010) calls for rethinking the roles of academics and other activist intellectuals together with grassroots activists to ensure development of political and strategic direction in order to bring about fundamental changes in society.

Clearly what seems to be important from the above discussions is that from early on the Abahlali struggle revived the interest of studying and writing about grassroots struggles and confronting the question of autonomy, participation, democracy and politics. I now move to recent academic work to argue that the interest in writing about knowledge production and learning has increased slowly but still appears to be a critical area of work that needs attention.

2.4.2 Current academic work

It is interesting to note that even though there were growing critiques of Abahlali's struggle and how it was portrayed, the body of literature about the movement continued to grow. One would have thought that the 2009 attacks and the subsequent criticisms from traditional theorists would have led to a loss of interest in continuing the debate about Abahlali's struggle.

One of the interesting developments in the literature is that more attention is now given to the politics of Abahlali as a move beyond looking at their origins and authenticity in respect of their identity. This is found in Selmeczi's (2012) dissertation on Abahlali, "*We are the people*

who do not count”: *Thinking the disruption of the biopolitics of abandonment*. Selmeczi (2012) argues that the politics of proximity is what gives value to understanding Abahlali’s politics. She argues:

...their politics is 1) a space of speaking and listening, 2) a form of knowledge that maintains the shack-dweller as the subject and the knower of politics, and 3) a legal struggle to claim their place in the city. (p. iii)

Perhaps scepticism about, and hostility towards, the intellectual work that has emerged as a result of Abahlali’s struggle can be addressed by reviewing the issue of proximity. Selmeczi (2012), having spent time with Abahlali, argues that what makes Abahlali’s struggle strong largely depends on their “formulation of ‘living politics’ as an emphatically vocal politics of proximity, that is, a political practice, the utmost principle of which is to stay close to the sufferings entailed by the living conditions in shantytowns” (p. 131).

Probably, the principle of staying close to the suffering and being in Abahlali spaces is what makes theorising about Abahlali’s struggle an important task. Many writers fall into the trap of ignoring the crucial role of being close and staying connected to the reality of their subjects. Abahlali seem to be clear that their politics is born out of their conditions of a life in shack settlements. Keeping a distance from the reality of Abahlali makes it difficult to understand how they theorise and thus renders outsider theorising flawed. Böhmke (2010) argues that much of the academic work on Abahlali is:

...overblown and homogenising and thus undermines the sort of sober assessment Sinwell calls for. What is really known about the diverse attitudes, motives, aims and direction of social movement members who fight for change? What sort of change do they seek? The answers to these questions are unknown. (p. 8)

It is indeed correct that the answers to these questions are unknown because even the growing literature on Abahlali cannot provide answers if generated at a distance from the reality of Abahlali. It feels correct to concur with Selmeczi’s (2012) contention of proximity.

2.5 Learning in social movements

I now look at what theorists say about learning in social movements. It is important to acknowledge that there is a growing interest in looking at learning in social movements (Choudry, 2009; Cooper, 2005; Hall, 2006; Harley, 2012a; Kane, 2001; Kapoor, 2011; Langdon, 2009). I begin by drawing on the definition of learning in social movements offered by Hall (2006) in his article, *Social Movement Learning: Theorizing a Canadian Tradition*. In groundbreaking work, Hall states that social movement learning is:

a) learning by persons who are part of any social movement; and b) learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of the actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements. (p. 3)

This broad definition suggests that learning in social movements occurs for both members of the social movement as well as those who are not in the movement. What is important about Hall's view is that social movement learning is linked to actions undertaken by the social movement.

Perhaps one should start from the beginning. It must be acknowledged that learning in social movements became the issue for adult education theorists (Foley, 1999). As an adult educator, Foley (1999) asserted that learning should begin by honest investigation of what people are actually learning where they are, in their workplace, neighbourhood, school, and in social movements. In the case of social movements, learning is incidental and informal and yet remains connected to everyday life struggles. Foley writes:

Satisfactory accounts of learning in struggle make connection between learning and education on the one hand, and analysis of political economy, micro-politics, ideology and discourse (or discursive practices) on the other. (Foley 1999, p.9)

Seen in this way, Foley argues that theorising about learning includes:

...the extent to which everyday experiential learning is implicit and embedded in other activities, and the extent to which it is, or can be, deliberately fostered ... the

extent to which everyday experiential learning reproduces relations of exploitation and oppression, and to the extent to which it does, or can, resist or help transcend such relations. (p. 85)

Notably what is emphasised here is that learning deepens as a result of social movement actions and reflections. Indeed to Foley (1999), informal learning needs to be understood from within its context. He writes:

We learn as we act, and our learning is both tacit and explicit. This is indeed a complex tapestry, difficult to unpick. But just to know that it is complex and needs to be unpicked is important for those of us concerned with understanding and facilitating critical and emancipatory learning. (p. 86)

Learning in social movements is not only informal, it is collective (Kilgore, 1999). Since this learning is concerned with the community's dominant shared meanings and identities that are closely related to collective social action, it is therefore collective learning. It is perhaps based on the logic that as a collective people develop solutions to their societal problems. In fact, they collectively develop shared understandings of their context and develop a shared analysis of their situation.

This learning is collective because it involves individual learning and the group's learning as it begins from the interaction of the experiences of both the individual and the group. It is the collective nature of this learning that raises interest in seeing social movements' learning as having direct impact in the field of understanding learning outside formal institutions. Be that as it may, Kilgore (1999) throws a challenge to theorists that in order to be relevant they should "be involved with learning communities dealing with social change" (p. 200).

I now look at Cooper (2005) who asks the question, "How can we theorise pedagogy within social action contexts?" In her thesis she navigates through a range of learning theories to make sense of learning that occurs in social movements. The focus of her research is the trade union SAMWU in Cape Town, South Africa. From the beginning, Cooper views trades unions as organised and having a long history of embracing learning programmes for their members. She writes:

...through their experiences of organizing, meeting, taking collective decisions and engaging in collective action - knowledge is shared and new understandings are sought and produced. (p. 1)

Clearly in the context of trades unions, much of the learning that occurs is shared between new and old shop stewards, whereby new shop stewards learn new meanings, new roles and values and new forms of participation. In what Cooper (2005) calls trade union pedagogy, she argues that learning comes from a range of sites, and is thus hybrid learning resulting in hybrid knowledge. These sites are 'union meetings, education workshops, and during the strike, workers at various times grappled with concepts related to labour law, political economy, social theory, and history' (p. 14). According to Cooper learning in trades unions is also marked by contradictions and contestations which reflect the broad context.

Kapoor (2011) contributes to the growing literature on social movement learning. Writing from the experience with the Adivasi movement of India, Kapoor views social movement learning as embedded in what he calls a 'pedagogy of place' (p. 140). The pedagogy of place that is found in the Adivasi movement connects the experience of members of fighting against domination by elite classes, of caring and living in harmony with the earth, and of their traditional rituals and practices. Kapoor's view of learning in Adivasi movements is largely influenced by his view of Adivasi and the space they occupy in the society. For Kapoor the Adivasi emerge as a subaltern social movement, a definition that goes beyond the limits and historical baggage of old and new social movements. Providing the situation in India and the repression that poor people, mostly Dalits, are facing, Kapoor makes it clear that the struggle of the Adivasi movement is extraordinary. He writes:

This sense of place is evident in a pedagogy that relies on the spiritual-intellectual resources of Adivasi/Dalit living and ancestral communities. Such appeals are marked by an emphasis on an apparent physical-metaphysics of Gods and ecology-humananimal relations, and a pragmatic sense of colonial politics concerning outsiders, that has been sharpened by a long history of direct experience with multiple colonial invasions and material dislocations. (p. 140)

Notably learning in the Adivasi movement weaves all these factors together so that the process of theorising helps strengthen their struggle. This way of seeing a movement like

Adivasi is important in the field of theorising about learning in social movements. The contribution by Kapoor (2011) disrupts the much written about tension between old and new social movements by showing that both do not account for all experiences of social movements. Bringing forward the discussion about subaltern social movements and the dynamics of the Adivasi movement's processes of learning provides an invaluable contribution to the field of learning in social movements.

I now turn to Harley (2012a) who undertook research on how social movements wrestle with learning in the struggle. In her doctoral thesis, Harley (2012a) wrote about movements' ways of unlearning hegemony using Alain Badiou's theory of the event. Understanding and recognising hegemony is a key area of knowledge development for activists. According to Harley (2012a), knowledge in Abahlali is generated through the 'collective process of thinking struggle' (p. 11). Her observation highlights the point that in Abahlali no one can teach or learn if they are not engaged in the collective thinking of struggle (ibid). Since learning in Abahlali is based on 'out of order' politics (Harley, 2012b) argues that their learning too is 'out of order' education, because it is self-made and self-propelled, emerging from within the struggle of Abahlali. In other words, there is a strong view that as an organisation ABM builds members' self-confidence by providing tangible skills (e.g. IT classes), by struggling together and by developing group narratives (Cooper-Knock, 2009).

It seems that Abahlali's assertion that they think and that they have a right to speak and be listened to, is the reason they draw the attention of so many writers and unfortunately also that of hegemony (Harley, 2012b). In fact the language they use helps build learning and theorising about the struggle as it is a language that is common among shackdwellers and is understood by all shackdwellers, that is, it is based on their reality of living in shack settlements. Central to the struggle of Abahlali it seems is learning to think with, and listen to, each other as a practice that generates a unique politics that is based on the principle that everybody matters.

I move to Meek (2014) who looked at the Brazilian context and the role of education in the struggle of the Landless Workers Movement (MST). Meek (2014) uses as his point of departure foundations laid by Gramsci (1978) where a view about the role of the poor is firstly about dismantling hegemonic ideas which keep them dependent on the ruling class for interpreting their reality. Meek (2014) writes:

Central to Gramsci's thought is the belief that subaltern subjects have the capacity to both understand and change the world. To do so, there needs to be an 'intellectual and moral reform' involving the critiquing of hegemonic ideas, and the advancement of popular ideologies. Popular 'common sense' can only gain the ability to become hegemonic through a long-term process of movement building that Gramsci termed the 'war of position'. (p. 222)

This is a profoundly useful view of people's movements because what it implies is that as subjects, social movements are in charge of their own learning and theorising. Meek (2014) adds that in a Gramscian view "every social group, coming into existence...creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals" (p. 222). He eloquently states:

I believe organic intellectuals are characterized by technical training they've received through the movement, and their active involvement in the everyday politics of the community as knowledge producer, disseminator, and mediator. (p. 226)

It is clear that many of the theorists discussed above agree that learning in social movements is best led by members of social movements themselves. Struggles that social movements wage are a central part of learning as they provide a nexus for theorising. Notably most theorists who were discussed above are within the radical tradition of adult learning which is useful for this research as it is about learning in social movements, thus knowledge production from and for action.

I agree with Bevington and Dixon (2009) when they argue that the richness of discussions among activists of social movements does more than just critique - it offers new ways of strengthening and building vibrant radical movements. I present a substantive quote whereby they raise important questions that cannot be ignored. They write:

Ultimately, a key test of movement-relevant research is whether it is read by activists and incorporated into movement strategizing. If one's goal is to produce useful information for movements, but the movements are not using this research, it is incumbent on the researcher to ask why. Is the research exploring questions that really

matter to movements? Are important issues being overlooked in the research process?
(p. 199)

For me this begins to deal with issues of relevance and accuracy of theory in its attempts to account for learning that takes place within social movements.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, a lot has been written about social movements in general, but it is only relatively recently that learning within social movements has generated such interest among scholars (Choudry, 2009; Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Cooper, 2005; Foley, 2001; Harley, 2012; Holst, 2002; Kane, 2001; Kilgore, 1999; Patel, 2006; Pithouse, 2006a; Selmeczi's, 2012). Likewise, whilst much has been written about ABM, this study is among the few that pays attention to how learning occurs in ABM, particularly how the struggle becomes a conduit for knowledge production.

This research is therefore focused on adults' learning that emerges through their collective struggle and collective action. In this chapter I will look at Experiential Learning theory and Transformative Learning theory, both of which appear to hold some relevance for this research and are used in other studies on learning in social movements. For example, Govender (2012) uses Experiential Learning theory to study learning that happens within the Clairwood Residents Association and Harley (2012) discussed Experiential Learning theory, Transformative Learning theory and Freirean Emancipatory Learning theory in her study about Abahlali BaseMjondolo. However, I argue that the learning of Abahlali might be best explained and understood through Community of Practice theory (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

Firstly, I will discuss Experiential Learning theory (Jarvis, 1995; Kolb, 1984; Le Cornu, 2005) showing its relevance to social movement learning. I will also consider its limitations in explaining what has happened in Abahlali. Secondly, I will discuss Transformative Learning theory (Mezirow, 1997), again showing its relevance in social movement learning and how it fails to completely explain learning that takes place in Abahlali. I will then discuss Situated Learning theory and Communities of Practice theory in some detail (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) as a theory that is most useful and relevant to explain and appreciate knowledge emerging within Abahlali.

3.2 Experiential Learning theory

Kolb (1984) argued that experiential learning is built on the premise that learning occurs based on a cycle which begins with concrete experiences. It defines the cognitive processes of learning and thus asserts the importance of critical reflection in learning based on actual experience. However, experiences alone do not assure learning. Instead, there needs to be reflection upon these experiences, followed by abstract conceptualisation and finally active experimentation. First Kolb (1984) showed that learning styles could be seen on a continuum running from:

- ⤴ concrete experience: being involved in a new experience
- ⤴ reflective observation: being able to reflect on the experience
- ⤴ abstract conceptualisation: being able to create theories to explain the experience
- ⤴ active experimentation: using theories to solve problems, make decisions.

In this theory learning occurs as a result of direct participation in the events of life, so learning is not led by a formal institution but by people themselves. There is indeed an emphasis of the primary experience as a key step towards learning. Kolb (1984) argues that this is in fact a spiral process of learning as circumstances change.

Jarvis (1995) offers a critique of Kolb's (1984) model, arguing that it is limited as it assumes sequential steps that are not necessarily reflective of reality. Instead of a cycle Jarvis (1995) developed a complex matrix of learning that occurs as part of human learning.

In Jarvis' (1995) understanding, learning is a combination of processes whereby the person constructs meaning based on experiences in varying situations thus transforming them into knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values and emotions. In the end, reflection on these experiences enables gradual transformation of knowledge into knowing. For Jarvis experience is the initiating or provoking aspect of learning. Cooper (2005) tends to agree with this view by adding that underlying experiential learning is the assumption that the role of people's experience in learning and knowledge production should be celebrated and legitimated.

Le Cornu (2005) builds on Jarvis by highlighting the web of complexities involved in this kind of learning. Her modification on Jarvis was the re-adjusting of the continuum of learning from a horizontal to vertical disposition. She adds that reflection upon the experience is critical as it offers possibilities of transformation of experiences into learning outcomes. The result then becomes a more experienced and changed individual.

3.2.1 Relevance for social movement learning

It is not surprising that Experiential Learning theory has been used by scholars in studies of Social Movement learning (eg. Govender, 2012). Looking at the Clairwood Residents Association, Govender (2012) used Jarvis' model to understand how individuals in the community changed overtime. She discussed each category in the model as it relates to participants in the study to show that there is indeed merit in using this theory to study learning in the community. In Govender's (2012) study an argument is made that using Jarvis (1995), participants in the study have reflected upon their experiences and have gone through a transformation process making them more experienced and more knowledgeable about their reality.

Another important study was done by Cooper (2005) looking at SAMWU, a municipal workers trade union in South Africa. In her thesis she discusses the value of Experiential Learning theory as it views individuals as actively constructing their own knowledge. Cooper's (2005) argument is that Experiential Learning theory has a deep influence on non-formal learning. She argues that one of the important achievements of the theory is the erosion of boundaries of learning whereby people themselves are now subjects of their own learning and knowledge production. Also she argues that Experiential Learning theories have been an important resource for those writing about learning in informal educational contexts, particularly those promoting social transformation. I think this latter point is evident when looking at Govender's (2012) study in Clairwood.

3.2.2 Why it is not useful enough for this research

Despite its relevance, I find this theory to be too limited in its focus and orientation. Much as I agree with the emphasis on experience as the departure point, I am concerned with the emphasis on the individual's experience. Although scholars like Cooper (2005) argue that the theory accounts for studies relating to social transformation, I worry about the extent to

which it is silent on shifting power relations and confrontation of systemic forms of domination and exclusion.

Cooper (2005) draws on various theorists (Usher and Edwards, 1995; Usher and Solomon, 1999) to state that Experiential Learning theories have been criticised for their failure to acknowledge the power relations at the centre of pedagogy. She goes on to highlight the issue of validity of or the perceptions on experience. Furthermore, she is concerned with a view that sees experience as static and never evolving. Using Michelson (1996), Cooper (2005) writes:

experience is never innocent, it is always located historically, socially and materially where it both reflects and reproduces social relations and social practices. Neither is our experience entirely transparent: it is affected by our positioning within hierarchies of power, and ‘... enters our consciousness already organised by ideologies, languages and material histories....’ (p. 43)

What I notice in the development of experiential learning theory is the progression from an individual’s experience to other members’ experiences. I agree that collective reflection on experience is an important feature of this theory since it moves from the individual learning experience to the groups’ learning experience. Some of what happens in social movements is based on what people go through and sometimes it forces them to form a social political force. It is important though to pay attention to the critics of this theory as they raise vital points. I have pointed out that experience alone is not enough to explain learning that occurs in Abahlali, particularly because there are multiple issues influencing learning among members that are derived from gender, class, position in the movement, etc. For these reasons I will not use it.

3.3 Transformative Learning theory

Transformative Learning theory was first developed by Mezirow (1991) and has been extensively used by adult education scholars to explain concepts of informal learning among adults. As Mezirow (1991) argues, transformative learning “involves an enhanced level of

awareness of the contexts of one's beliefs and feelings" and a "more critical understanding of how one's social relationships and culture have shaped one's beliefs and feelings" (p. 161).

Essentially, Transformative Learning involves a fundamental shift in one's meaning perspective – the way one generally makes sense of the world. Mezirow (1991) asserts that there are three types of meaning perspectives. These are, epistemic (in respect of knowledge and how a person uses knowledge), sociolinguistic (related to language and how it is used in social settings), and psychological (related to the way people view themselves). Perspective transformation is possible, Mezirow (1991) argues, when a person is:

...able to reflect critically on presuppositions and their consequences, [has] equal opportunity to participate (including the chance to challenge, question, refute, and reflect, and to hear others do the same), and [is] able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity.

For Mezirow (1991), transformative learning results from a disorienting dilemma which is triggered by a life crisis or a major life transition. It is concerned with the expansion of consciousness through transformation of basic world views. It involves experiencing a deep structural shift in the basic premise of thought, feelings and actions, leading to a perspective transformation, a fundamental shift in our 'habits of mind' that shape, among other things, our psychological self-image, cultural expectations, and epistemic frameworks about what counts as important knowledge (English & Peters, 2012). Transformative learning is about self-understanding and self-location in relation to other people and the interlocking structures of race, class, gender and the agenda for social justice.

Kitchenham (2008) in his article on the evolution of Mezirow's theory gives a detailed chronology of Mezirow's development of Transformative Learning theory. He shows that Mezirow added an 11th phase to the original 10 phases of transformative learning:

- ✧ Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
- ✧ Undergoing self-examination
- ✧ Conducting a critical assessment of internalised role assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations

- ⤴ Relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues - recognising that one's problem is shared and not exclusively a private matter
- ⤴ Exploring options for new ways of acting
- ⤴ Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- ⤴ Planning a course of action
- ⤴ Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- ⤴ Making provisional efforts to try new roles and to assess feedback
- ⤴ Reintegrating into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective
- ⤴ Altering present relationships and forging new relationships.

Cunningham (1998) reiterated Mezirow's (1991) argument that transformative learning is about social transformation in the sense that it seeks to change social constructions by triggering a personal transformation. However, Cunningham (1998) states that knowledge that is produced by what he calls the underclass is certainly different from that produced by elites as it (the former) is geared to achieving social transformation. His point is that Transformative Learning theory provides a lens to understand learning and its relation to the production of knowledge.

Imel (1998) agrees with the view that Transformative Learning theory assumes that learning is analytical, rational and cognitive with an inherent logic. Supporting this view also is Cranton (1994), who argues that the ideal conditions for learning are those that allow full participation in reflective discourse. In other words, when a person is interpreting the meaning of a new experience and examining the validity of prior learning, discussion with others provides a vehicle for learning. Taylor (2007) asserts that epistemological change is central to transformative learning in that during the process people change the way they make meaning.

3.3.1 Relevance for social movement learning

Unlike Experiential learning, Transformative learning provides a space to assess the relationship between power and knowledge production. It deals with learning that is influenced by the existing perspectives with the intention to transform them into new perspectives. The theory provokes conscientisation - people are able to question or critique

their reality. Individuals are able to engage as a group to create awareness among others and, as a result, dominant knowledge systems are challenged and new knowledge emerges. Some scholars who write within a Marxist tradition have used Transformative Learning theory in studies related to life stories. For example, Harley (2012a) looks at life histories of activists associated with the Abahlali movement.

3.3.2 Why it is not useful enough for this research

There is an ongoing debate about the phases of Transformative learning. John (2009) warns that there is a growing concern over the linear presentation of these phases as reality does not always present itself in that way. Although the theory explains how adults learn, I am concerned that it still relies on the individual's learning and does not clearly explain the group's learning, given power dynamics that are often found in large groups. In the context of grassroots organisations, learning is facilitated by a range of circumstances, and transformative learning theory does not give enough explanation of how an individual's learning experience influences the group's learning. As stated in the earlier chapters, this study focuses on collective or group learning. As explained above, the theory is much more useful when tracking transformation of learning of individuals and is, therefore, not quite appropriate in this study.

3.4 Communities of Practice

In the discussion below I discuss communities of practice learning theory to demonstrate its relevance to this study. I draw on recent studies using this theory, such as Graven (2004), Kimble (2006), and Nicholson (2009) to name a few, who have developed their work based on the work of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning theory and Wenger's (1998; 2002) Communities of Practice theory.

I begin with Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, which is the foundation and bedrock on which Communities of Practice theory was developed. This theory focuses on the relationship between the experience of learning and the social situations in which learning takes place. Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge that people regularly become members of groups of people involved in a common practice. In

this way newcomers start from the periphery and move closer to the centre of the group through the observation, practice, and mastery of knowledge and skills.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning should not be viewed as simply the transmission of abstract and decontextualised knowledge from one individual to another, but a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed. As indicated above, they suggest that such learning is situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment, and arises through autonomous and informal support and learning groups, which they called communities of practice.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that legitimate peripheral participation is at the heart of defining, or understanding the nexus of relations through which situated learning occurs. The construction of identity is a collective enterprise. As participation increases, situations arise that allow the participant to assess how well they are contributing through their efforts, thus legitimate peripheral participation provides a means for self-evaluation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This view underlines the situatedness of learning for the very group that is actively engaging with its context. Clearly learning and making meaning is not only the issue of individuals, but rather of the entire group. Learning to be part of group activities clearly develops as people spend more time participating in the activities. The graduation from the periphery to the centre explains how much is learnt and contributed as members (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In a summary provided by John (2009), key tenets of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory are presented as follows:

- ⤴ People learn through activity, the engagement with others in a shared practice developed over time
- ⤴ Social practice (participation) is the fundamental process by which we learn and thus become who we are (identity)
- ⤴ Meaning is socially constructed within context
- ⤴ Identity is created (and recreated) in the process of learning within practice
- ⤴ Practice is a source of coherence of a community
- ⤴ Communities of practice are everywhere and people can belong to several communities of practice simultaneously, and usually do (p. 59)

To examine learning, we need to treat the community of practice, rather than individuals or institutions, as the primary unit of analysis.

I now turn to Wenger's later (1998) work, wherein he looks at communities of practice. Wenger (1998) begins by simply stating that all of us belong to communities of practice. These are family, social structures, business organisations and/or educational institutions. He says that these communities develop their own practices, routines, rituals, artefacts, symbols, conventions, stories, and histories. Still using situated learning theory as a bedrock, Wenger (1998) identifies more features of learning found in communities of practice. Due to the situatedness of learning in communities of practice, Wenger (1998), usefully summarised in Cooper (2005), contends that learning is:

- ⤴ a collective process
- ⤴ embedded in rules of practice
- ⤴ intimately bound up with identity construction
- ⤴ a two-way process
- ⤴ always historically located (p. 47).

Given the above characteristics of learning, Wenger (1998) identifies three dimensions that further describe the character of learning in communities of practice. These are:

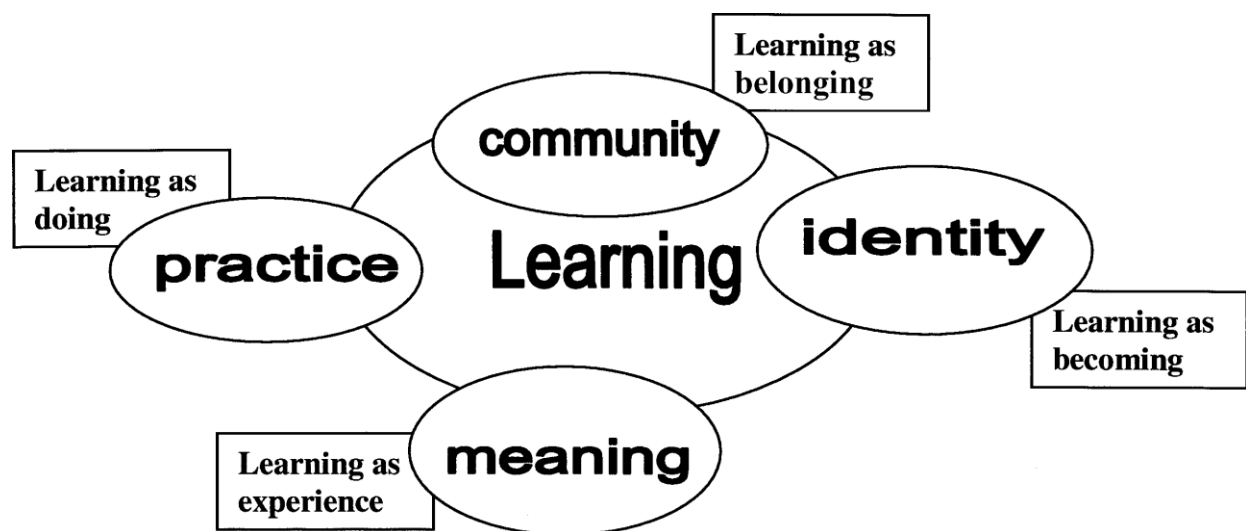
- ⤴ mutual engagement, whereby through participation in the community, members establish norms and build collaborative relationships by doing things together;
- ⤴ joint enterprise, whereby through their interactions they create a shared understanding of what binds them together through negotiations and mutual accountability; and
- ⤴ shared repertoires, whereby the community produces a set of communal resources characterized by stories, styles, artefacts, tools, discourses, concepts and historic events. (p. 2)

In developing this point further, Wenger (1998) asserts that communities of practice develop around things that matter to people. As a result, their practices reflect the members' own understanding of what is important.

There is much to appreciate from what Wenger (1998) raises. Firstly, he still roots learning in the context where actual experience is located. Secondly, he still emphasises collective purpose and action as key elements of communities of practice. Reflection on experience and action and, therefore, learning that takes place is a group's undertaking and not just an individual's. To explain how this happens, Wenger (1998) says that people learn through their participation in specific communities made up of people with whom they interact on a regular basis. These 'communities of practice' are mostly informal (p. 1).

I now turn to the diagram below to present Wenger's (1998) theory of learning in communities of practice.

Figure 6: The four components of learning (Wenger, 1998, p. 5)



Each of the four components - community, identity, meaning and practice – illustrates how Wenger (1998) understands learning in the communities of practice. In this diagram what really seems to be striking is the connectedness of all four components. Wenger (1998) gives the following explanation of the components:

- ⤴ Meaning: as individual and as a collective, a way of talking about our changing ability to experience our life and the world as meaningful
- ⤴ Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action
- ⤴ Community: a way of talking about the social perceptions in which our actions are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable as competence

- ⤴ Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

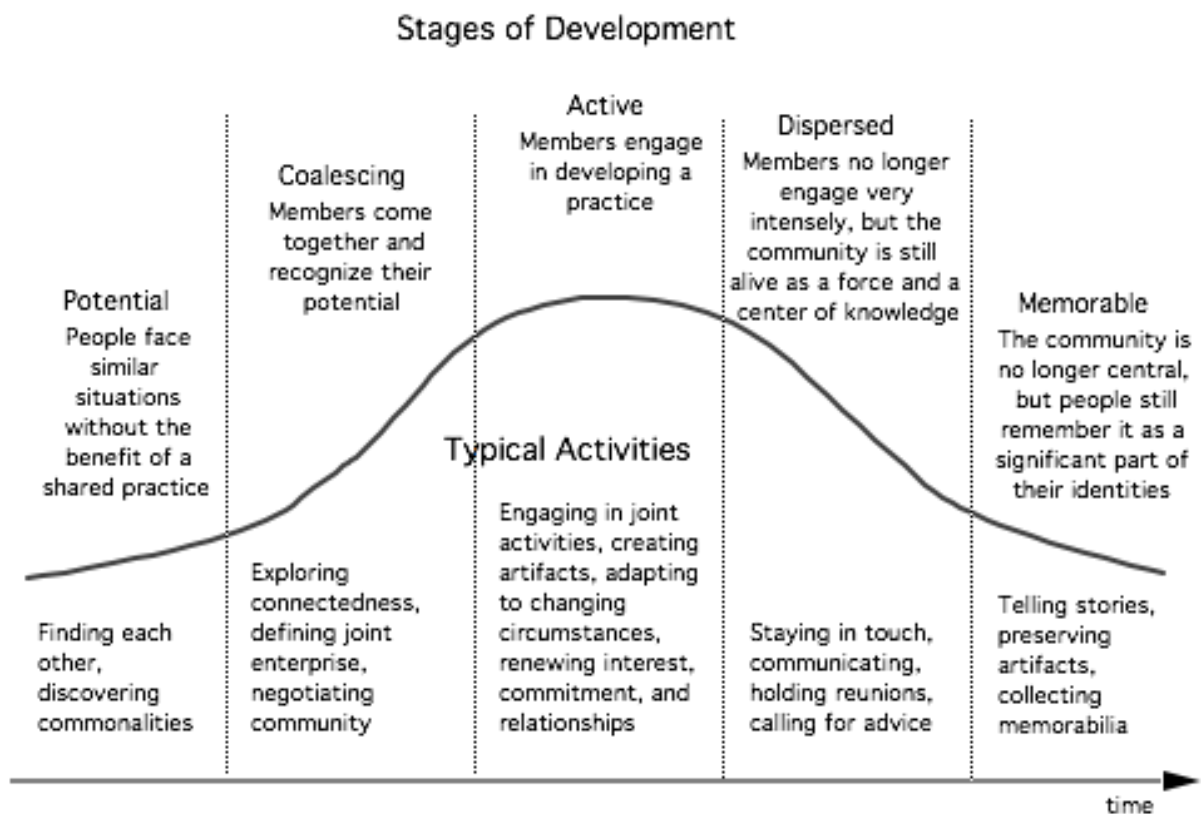
Embedded in these components is the interaction between newcomers and old timers, thus legitimate peripheral participation becomes key to understanding the extent to which learning occurs and its impact on changing the way people think. In this case learning is not only affecting the newcomers but also the old timers as they refine practice and develop new meanings. Clearly for Wenger (1998) connections made between community, identity, meaning and practice are key to explaining learning in communities of practice.

In an attempt to summarise, one can maintain that a community of practice defines itself in the doing, as members develop among themselves their own understanding of what their practice is about. It seems that the shared learning and interest of its members are what keep it together. It is defined by knowledge rather than by task, and exists because participation has value to its members. A community of practice's life cycle is determined by the value it provides to its members, not by an institutional schedule. A community of practice exists because it produces a shared practice as members engage in a collective process of learning. What is most important is that communities of practice are 'self-organizing and self-sustaining' (Wenger, 1998, p. 8).

Wenger (1998, p.3) looks at what he calls stages of development that are common to communities of practice. He lists five critical stages namely:

- ⤴ **potential**, where people facing similar situations come together and discover commonalities;
- ⤴ **coalescing**, where people together recognise their potential and explore connectedness and start defining their common ground or common interest;
- ⤴ **active**, where people engage and develop a practice and create artefacts and repertoires that demonstrate their common interest and their relationships;
- ⤴ **dispersed**, where people are no longer intensely engaged although the community is still alive as a force and a centre of knowledge. They continue staying in touch, hold reunions and call for advice;
- ⤴ **memorable**, where the community is no longer central but still remembers its people's identities by collecting memoirs, telling stories and preserving artefacts

Figure 7: Stages of development in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998)



In his later work, Wenger, in a joint book with McDermott and Snyder (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), continued to expand on the theory of learning in communities of practice, although this time the emphasis is about encouraging organisations to cultivate communities of practice and motivate why they should consider doing this. In the book, Wenger et al (2002) define communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4).

Learning is seen as social participation where an individual is seen as an active participant in the practices of social communities, and in the construction of his/her identity through these communities (Wenger et al., 2002). In this context, the structural characteristics of communities of practice are again defined as a domain of knowledge, a notion of community and a practice (p. 2). Wenger et al. (2002) explain these aspects as follows:

- ✧ Domain: A domain of knowledge creates common ground, inspires members to participate, guides their learning and gives meaning to their actions.

- ⤴ Community: The notion of a community creates the social fabric for that learning. A strong community fosters interactions and encourages a willingness to share ideas.
- ⤴ Practice: While the domain provides the general area of interest for the community, the practice is the specific focus around which the community develops, shares and maintains its core of knowledge.

In addition, Wenger et al. (2002) identify four types of communities that can be created as a result of cultivating communities of practice within organisations. These are helping communities, best practice communities, knowledge stewarding communities and innovation communities (p. 76).

3.4.1 Further developments in Communities of Practice theory

I now turn to others who have engaged with Communities of Practice theory in their scholarly work. I begin by looking at Graven (2004). Using a mathematics teacher training programme as his case study, Graven employs Communities of Practice theory to raise the point that confidence plays a critical role in members' learning. Like Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) he says that learning is located in the process of co-participation and the increased access of learners to participation in the group (p. 182). He highlights the importance of access as a key step to making newcomers become like the old timers through practice and therefore learning. Graven (2004) writes:

...learning is maximised if one maximises learners' access to participation in, and the resources of, a community of practice in which the development of identities in relation to that community are supported. (p. 182)

In his study, Graven (2004) discovers that Communities of Practice theory made provision for confidence as both a product and a process of learning whereby teachers can show their confidence as mathematics teachers, and have confidence to admit to what they do not know and still need to learn. As teachers interact in the community of practice, Graven concludes that confidence is key to shifting participation from the periphery towards the centre.

Another important contribution is the work of Macpherson, Antonacopoulou and Wilson (2010). In this work they used Communities of Practice theory to support the view that the

theory is useful to explain learning in the work environment. They did research on an IT company highlighting the situatedness of learning. Using Lave and Wenger (1991), they argue that the communities of practice concept was intended to help explain learning as “an integral and inseparable part of social practice” (in Macpherson et al., 2010, p.3). They assert that:

...this notion of participation is important, since it suggests a commitment, however temporary, to an activity system where there is at least some shared understanding and concern for achieving goals, however defined. (Macpherson et al, 2010, p. 5)

They further make the point that participation does not necessarily imply being involved in the same geographic proximity, but rather in an activity system. In this case “participation suggests a commitment to goals, relationships and meanings, and this can occur within, as well as across, formal organizational boundaries’ (ibid). It seems that learning in communities of practice would most likely occur if attention is given to the following three key areas:

(1) the objectives that the communities intend to achieve; (2) the tools and processes that are intended to support these goals; and (3) the perceptions of identity, participation and leadership that define the coherence and legitimate participation within the any (sic) potential community. (Macpherson et al., 2010, p. 7)

In their concluding remarks, Macpherson et al. argue that for learning within communities of practice there are “three essential values within the communities: *leadership and governance, participation and engagement and identity,*” (p. 13). These values are key in ensuring members’ learning through mutual engagement and interaction, thus creating new meanings and identities.

Crafter and Maunder (2012) concur with this view saying that members develop a sense of competence, identity and belonging through interacting with existing community members as they learn shared practices and beliefs. Using Wenger (1998) they assert, “participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (quoted in Crafter & Maunder, 2012, p. 14). Crafter and Maunder’s paper focuses on the transition within communities of practice. They argue:

...in Communities of Practice, transition not only happens to the individual through acquiring new skills, knowledge, meanings and identities, but also in the community itself by the inclusion of new members, refinement of practices and continuum of expertise. (Crafter & Maunder, 2012, p.14)

Like Graven (2004) and Macpherson et al. (2010), Crafter and Maunder (2012) are concerned with Wenger's (1998) simplistic assumption that this theory is applicable in all situations. Whilst it is true that communities of practice are everywhere, complexities that they represent cannot be undermined. Nonetheless, the theory itself remains relevant to understand the transition from periphery to the centre. Again for Crafter and Maunder, participation plays a key role as it involves social interaction between members.

Nicholson (2009) considers the usefulness of the theory for MacMaster University to unpack underlying implications of communities of practice. Using simple language she explains how learning occurs in communities of practice. Since this work is among recent studies to be undertaken, Nicholson uses Wenger's et al. (2002) work on communities of practice. Indeed there are traces of refined understanding on how learning occurs even for Wenger et al. (2002). For instance the understanding of communities of practice suggests that:

A community of practice has an identity defined by *a shared domain of interest*. The domain is a 'common ground' which provides a common sense of identity and purpose. [It] inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions. Knowing the boundaries and the leading edge of the domain enables members to decide exactly what is worth sharing, how to present their ideas, and which activities to pursue. (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, quoted in Nicholson, 2009, p. 1)

Nicholson motivates for communities of practice theory to be used as the foundation for teaching at McMaster University. Relying on Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger (2006), Nicholson (2009) shows the advantages of communities of practice both short-term and long-term. However, like other theorists, Nicholson (2009) too highlights short comings of Communities of Practice theory. The first one is the size of the community. When it is small it is intimate and interactions are usually very easy. However, when it is big what often happens is that sub-groups are formed on the basis of sub-interests (p. 10).

The second shortcoming is the period of the community - the older it is the more likely it is for the community to be conservative. The notion of new members bringing changes to the community practice implies changes in the interests of the community and even the very essence of the community. The biggest challenge is to be able to sustain and nurture learning in the community of practice without losing the very reason why it was formed from the beginning.

I now turn to Kimble (2006) who gives a startling view of communities of practice in his work titled, *Communities of Practice: Never knowingly undersold*. In this paper, Kimble (2006) follows the evolution of the understanding of Communities of Practice theory from when it was first introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), further developed by Wenger (1998), to its most recent discussion in Wenger, MacDermott and Snyder (2002). His argument is that there has been a significant change of how communities of practice themselves are understood and utilised, originally having been about exploring learning and theory to recently being fully integrated into the business environment to boost companies' productivity. Kimble's point is that we need to be aware of these changes and know how the notion of communities of practice has been overturned to mean something that it was not originally meant for.

What is critical about the point raised by Kimble (2006) is not so much about the shift of the notion or use of meaning, but the actual shift a community of practice itself might go through from its original purpose and learning practice. Underlying this shift is a power dynamic that sits with old members or contested by new comers which is not adequately represented in Communities of Practice theory. Like other theorists, Kimble starts with defining communities of practice saying that they are seen as a mechanism for the reproduction of existing knowledge through active engagement with others in some form of 'practice' (p. 221). He goes on to say "such communities are described as 'enacted', that is that members can be thought of as performing or improvising their roles in the community as they go about their everyday activities" (ibid).

Looking at the early stages of the development of the theory of communities of practice, Kimble (2006) asserts that the process of learning is understood to be ongoing, over time and

the process of making meanings is contested, negotiated and re-negotiated through participation, both in the community and in the practice.

To argue his point, Kimble (2006) presents a timeline consisting of early period, middle period and late period to show the shift in how communities of practice are understood to be, what they do and how learning is understood. Although I will not go into detail with regards to Kimble's model, I think it is imperative to highlight some key features. For instance, in the early period, communities of practice exist independently of the formalised world of organisations and are driven by their own internal needs. Learning that takes place is based on a particular activity performed in a particular community; consequently, what is learnt in that community might only be seen as being valid within that community (p. 224).

In the middle period Kimble (2006) states that communities of practice are viewed as a means of problem-solving and sense-making within an organisation. There is a shift from the previous view of autonomous and untamed communities of practice toward something that can be 'nurtured' and guided. Learning is still informal but it is now emerging from within organisational formalities and settings (p. 227). To describe the late period Kimble (2006) writes,

Communities of practice steward the knowledge assets of organizations and society. They operate as "social learning systems" where practitioners connect to solve problems, share ideas, set standards, build tools, and develop relationships with peers and stakeholders. (Snyder & Briggs in Kimble, 2006, p. 229)

It appears that learning in a community of practice shifts with changing contexts within which the community exists. Kimble (2006) is useful to show this as he traces how Wenger's views changed over time (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

3.4.2 Critiques of Communities of Practice theory

One of the main concerns is that the theory does not sufficiently appreciate power dynamics that exist within communities of practice. As mentioned in Trowler (2005), Wenger (1998) assumes harmony and willingness to share knowledge. Although Wenger (1998) is aware of difficulties that may arise as members participate in group activities, he pays little attention to

learning as a result of conflicts. The assumption that the old timers like and want to see newcomers moving towards the centre needs further scrutiny as it may not always be the case. For, instance, among old timers there is a tendency of wanting to hold on to power and set the direction.

Another related issue is Wenger's (1998) silence on gender representation in communities of practice. It is not clear how the theory accounts for the role of women whether as potential old timers or as significant contributors to knowledge production and learning within the communities of practice.

It is also concerning that the theory is not necessarily a politically radical theory as it does not go into depth in discussing how communities of practice may embark on actions to change structure or power relations. Yet the theory has found its way into adult education corridors and particularly radical traditions within adult education (Cooper, 2005; John, 2009; Trowler, 2005). Learning outside formal structures and networking outside formal structures is useful as it enables peer learning and confidence, but it is not clear what happens when the whole organisational form and structure has to change.

3.4.3 Relevance of the theory to this study

Communities of Practice theory is concerned with learning in a group and how individuals' participation shifts from the periphery as newcomers towards the centre as they grasp the culture, the identity and the meaning of being part of the group. This theory suits this study well as I am looking at how members within Abahlali learn and generate knowledge from their struggles. I view the shifts in the explanations of how communities of practice are viewed and what they do and how learning occurs very relevant as Abahlali as a movement also evolves within the context in which they operate.

Although the theory was developed in and for the workplace environment which tends to serve and reinforce relations of hierarchy i.e. master and apprentice, I found it very useful as it underlines the usefulness of participation as an important pillar of collective learning that occurs in a group. Whilst critiques raise the concern about the theory's silence on the role of power, in this study the theory was useful even in helping to understand how power influences the process of learning. As will be discussed below, Communities of Practice

theory applied to the democratic Abahlali movement provides the opportunity to understand mutual learning and increasing sense of belonging as members of the group participate.

As a social movement, Abahlali are a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests, and for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity (Thapliyal, 2006). Indeed Abahlali appears to be a community of practice in Cooper's (2005) definition that a community of practice is:

...not necessarily a well-defined, identifiable group, with socially visible boundaries. It is an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (Cooper, 2005, p. 45)

I was particularly interested in seeing how learning to be part of group activities for Abahlali clearly develops as people spend more time participating in the activities, in particular, graduating from the periphery to the centre. What I find useful about this theory is the situatedness of learning as people continue to actively engage in their struggle. As argued earlier by Crafter and Maunder (2012) in communities of practice, "transition not only happens to the individual through acquiring new skills, knowledge, meanings and identities, but also in the community itself by the inclusion of new members, refinement of practices and continuum of expertise". (p. 14)

The theory deals with concepts such as participation, relationships, practice, identity and context to explain the social and situated character of learning. I see value in using Lave and Wenger's (1991) list of some of the key tenets of this theory, discussed above, as a way of ensuring an in-depth understanding of Abahlali's ways of learning and knowledge production.

From their list it is clear that the theory is useful to understand informal learning, everyday practice and the production of knowledge. Clearly the efforts put in place by scholars, particularly in adult education, to use the theory to explain socio-cultural dynamics makes it possible to continue asking questions about learning, identity and practice.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed theoretical framework by looking at existing theories of learning in relation to learning in social movements. It discussed Experiential Learning theory by looking at its origins and paying attention to how the theory explains learning among adults outside formal institutions. The chapter has also shown why this theory is not necessarily useful in this study and gave reasons based on some of the critiques of the theory. The other theory that was discussed in the chapter is Transformative Learning theory. Here too the chapter presented the origins of the theory and discussed what it says about learning and making meaning. The chapter presented some of the critiques of the theory and gave reasons why it is not used in this study.

Subsequently, a detailed presentation of Communities of Practice theory was given to validate the use of this theory in this study. The chapter looked at the evolution of the theory as it has been applied in different contexts and times to highlight some of the problems and the strengths of the theory in explaining learning within communities. For instance, the chapter discussed Graven's (2004) emphasis on access and confidence as key elements for learning in communities of practice. The chapter presented Macpherson's et al. (2010) discussion on the need for participation as a prerequisite for commitment and vice-versa. Nicholson's (2009) focus on the shift within communities of practice as they become more conservative and learning being controlled and inaccessible, and her comments on the importance of the size of the community of practice, were also included, as was Kimble's (2006) discussion on how communities of practice change over time.

It is the position of this chapter that all the theories presented provide useful insights to explain how adults learn and yet they all have limitations. However, Communities of Practice theory appears the most relevant for this study, and will thus be used in the analysis of my data in Chapter Six. I now turn to the next chapter which is about research design and methodology.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As indicated in Chapter One, I have located this study within a critical framework, because the questions I intended to answer deal with radical militancy, knowledge production and learning for social change, and the study rests on an assumption that Abahlali's struggle is a platform that enables them to be creators and owners of their own knowledge. In this chapter I present my research design, consistent with this position.

4.2 Research paradigm

Scholars generally hold the view that paradigms are concerned with how we view the world, how we understand and give meaning to what is happening around us. Guba and Lincoln quoted in Voce (2004) write:

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of *basic beliefs* ... that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines for its holder, the nature of the "world", the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts. (Guba & Lincoln in Voce, 2004, p. 1)

Voce (2004) says that paradigms are basically concerned with three sets of questions, namely; 1. *ontological* questions i.e. what is the nature of reality, 2. *epistemological* questions i.e. what is the basic belief about knowledge and 3. *methodological* questions i.e. how can the researcher go about finding out whatever s/he believes can be known. We all carry with us, as Harley (2012a) points out, 'a conceptual framework that enables us to make sense of our world, which we carry into our research' (p. 14). Scholars seem to agree that there are at least four main paradigms that have shaped research, and are used to interrogate or explain reality. These are, positivist, interpretive, critical and postmodern (Lather, 1991). I will use Harley (2012a) and Voce (2004) to discuss differences between these paradigms and their implications for research. Below I present a table that draws on both these scholars' work.

Figure 8: Characterisation of research paradigms (Harley, 2012a; Voce, 2004)

| Paradigms Conceptions | Positivism (predictive) | Interpretivism (understanding) | Critical Theory (emancipatory) | Postmodern Theory (deconstructive) |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Nature of reality | An objective, true reality exists which is governed by unchangeable natural cause-effect laws. Consists of stable pre-existing patterns or order that can be discovered. Reality is not time-nor context-bound. Reality can be generalised. | The world is complex and dynamic and is constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with wider social systems. Reality is subjective. People experience reality in different ways. Subjective reality is important i.e. what people think, feel, see. | Governed by conflicting, underlying structures – social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender. | There is no objective reality, and reality itself is ultimately unknowable. |
| Nature of human beings | Rational. Shaped by external factors (same cause has the same effect on everyone) i.e. mechanical model/behaviourist approach. Under certain conditions people will probably engage in a specified behaviour. | Social beings who create meaning and who constantly make sense of their worlds. People possess an internally experienced sense of reality. | People can design/reconstruct their own world through action and critical reflection. | There is no unitary and coherent self; the individual is better understood as multiple and continually under construction. |
| Nature of knowledge | Knowledge can be described in a systematic way. Knowledge consists of verified hypotheses that can be regarded as facts or laws. Probabilistic – i.e. holds true for large groups of people or occurs in many situations. Knowledge is accurate and certain. | Knowledge is based not only on observable phenomena, but also on subjective beliefs, values, reasons, and understandings. Knowledge is constructed. Knowledge is about the way in which people make meaning in their lives, not just <i>that</i> they make meaning, and <i>what</i> meaning they make. | Knowledge is dispersed and distributed. Knowledge is a source of power. Knowledge is constituted by the lived experience and the social relations that structure these experiences. Events are understood with social and economic contexts. | There is no universally valid knowledge; knowledge claims are relative. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Concept of truth | There is a truth. | There are many truths – truth is constructed by humans within a historical moment and social context. | A critical analysis of society using the lens of power is a better truth than one which does not recognise power relations. There is a difference between scientific truth and ideology. | There is no such thing as truth; rather truths are socially constructed. Any claims to truth involve the enforcement of a single view point. |
| Implications for research | It is possible to undertake objective research to find the truth. This requires quantification and controlled-experiments. | The focus is on the individual and his/her interaction with the world, how he/she makes sense of it. Knowledge is constructed by the researcher and participants. Methods are generally qualitative. | The focus is on underlying power relations. This can be uncovered through researcher/participant dialogue. The intention is to act on this for a more just world. | Because there is no universally valid knowledge of truth, this approach calls into question the possibility of asking or answering big questions. |

The table makes explicitly obvious that there are fundamental differences between these paradigms. What Harley (2012a) and Voce (2004) present shows a significant shift from the early traditions of the positivist paradigm, with the postmodern paradigm clearly presenting an openness and pluralistic approach to reality, knowledge, truth and research and arguing that all views matter. Cooper (2005), however, argues against the postmodern paradigm saying it is idealistic in that it, “(reduc[es] everything to language, and therefore to the world of ideas) and relativist (maintaining that there are many truths and all descriptions of reality are mere constructions which are all equally valid)” (p. 71).

Cooper (2005) also argues that:

...although our knowledge of this reality will always be provisional and contingent, we need to retain the notion that some theories of reality are more convincing than others, and it is possible to have some standards for valid argumentation. (p. 71)

As I have indicated in Chapters One and Two, this study deals with knowledge production emerging from the context and experiences of contestations of power and resistance against domination. For me it is clear that the critical paradigm fits this study best. In keeping with the critical paradigm, this study is, “openly subjective and politically strategic” in purpose (Thapliyal, 2006, p. 82). It is fundamentally concerned with questions about knowledge,

relations of power and issues of justice, the subjective experiences of women and other historically oppressed groups, and practices of personal and collective activism. For Thapliyal, the study of construction of meaning and legitimacy is therefore central to research design located within the critical paradigm. She argues that particular social and political cultures employ particular systems of meaning based on the forms of knowledge produced in their cultural domains (ibid).

In line with this view, Lather (1986) contends that this paradigm is the most advanced in terms of developing empirical approaches for the building of emancipatory social theory. She argues that those committed to the development of research approaches that challenge the status quo and contribute to a more egalitarian social order have made an 'epistemological break' from the positivist insistence upon researcher neutrality and objectivity (ibid, p. 64).

For me it is crucial to locate this research within a critical paradigm because, as Thapliyal (2006) asserts, it articulates the possibilities for "agency and collective action that occur through the foregrounding of subjugated knowledge and a situated critique of dominant, postpositivist, patriarchal, neoliberal discourses of knowledge and development that regulate and maintain social hierarchies and institutions controlled by a privileged few" (Thapliyal, 2006, p. 82).

In Chapter Two, literature that was used mostly draws on theorists who conducted their studies within a critical framework. Adult education literature that I read and used comes from radical traditions largely located within a critical framework. Within this framework the understanding of social movements' learning and knowledge production is basically an epistemological break from dominant pedagogies (Allman & Mayo, 1997; Foley, 2001; Freire, 1996; Holford, 1994; Holst, 2002; Kane, 2001; Kilgore, 1999).

4.3 Research approach

According to Mouton, cited in Endresen (2010), there are two types of research approaches - quantitative research and qualitative research. Quantitative research is usually employed to ascertain a large quantity of data about individuals, groups or communities by use of surveys. Also cited in Endresen (2010) and echoing the same point, Creswell describes quantitative

research as interested in variables, whilst Berg (1998) goes on to add that quantitative research is largely focuses on measurements and numbers, whilst qualitative research focuses on “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and description of things” (p. 3).

Qualitative research, by contrast, helps provide an in-depth description of the situation using a small number of people focusing on the contextual imperatives that impact on the research subjects (Mouton cited in Endresen, 2010). Endresen (2010) says that qualitative research is “multimethod in focus, allowing studying of things in their natural settings, making sense of phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 80). In this case the qualitative researcher is interested in the ways in which people make sense of their lives and describe those meanings.

Since choosing a research approach needs to be in line with the research paradigm, this study fits well with the qualitative research approach as it gave me tools to get an in-depth understanding of Abahlali and the complexities underlying processes of learning and knowledge production.

4.4 Qualitative research design

In keeping with the critical paradigm, the research design for this study is qualitative. Babbie and Mouton (2001) assert that qualitative research takes the insiders’ perspective as its departure point. They submit the following features, namely, “(a) the natural setting of social actors, (b) the focus on the process, (c) the emphasis on the actors’ perspective, (d) in-depth description and understanding of actions and events, (e) the interest of the context of social actors and (f) ensuring that that the process is inductive in its approach” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 270).

Lather (1986) adds that a qualitative research design assumes the methodological task of bringing to the fore the participants’ views of reality, where these views come from, and the social consequences of such views, all situated within a context of theory-building. Hall and Heron, both cited in Lather (1986), assert that qualitative research design allows fusion of

research, learning, and action by providing conditions under which participants' self-determination is enhanced in the struggle towards social justice.

Cooper (2005) says that this kind of research enables researchers to “achieve an in-depth understanding of particular phenomena (processes of learning and forms of pedagogy and knowledge) within a particular context” (p. 72). This is useful because within qualitative research, as Cresswell and Patton, both cited in Thapliyal (2006) put it, the research is contextual, exploratory, emergent, and inductive. On this basis, it is possible that the view and the understanding of reality, knowledge production and agency will be seen from the perspective of Abahlali.

Choosing a qualitative research design allowed me to encapsulate the few years of participating in processes of theory-making and the struggle led by Abahlali. Having had a long-standing relationship with Abahlali - at a night camp where there was many members of Abahlali - I respectfully requested to conduct this study. I then developed open-ended questions. I went on to identify participants and conducted semi-structured interviews. I continued to attend meetings, events, protests marches and workshops. I read newspaper articles, website and books to get an in-depth understanding of Abahlali. In the next section I discuss research methodology, how I collected data and what tools I used to analyse data.

4.5 Research style

Since this study is framed within a critical paradigm and is conducted using the qualitative approach, it was appropriate that I choose a research style appropriate to this. Since I am looking at a particular case – that of Abahlali baseMjondolo – it made sense to choose a case study style. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) submit that a case study (a) “ensures that a vivid description of relevant events is drawn, (b) provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case, (c) develops an analysis based on the description of the events, (d) seeks to understand the perspectives of the individual actor or groups of actors as events unfold” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253).

According to Rule and John (2011) there are different types of case studies. Using Bogden and Biklen, Rule and John (2011) list four types of case studies namely, historical

organisational, observational, life history and community (p. 8). Stenhouse (cited in Rule and John, 2011), however, presents an extensive list, which appealed to me:

- ⤴ ethnographic, which examines a single case in-depth through participatory observation and interviews,
- ⤴ evaluative, which provides information to decision makers to make informed decisions,
- ⤴ educational, which is concerned with understanding educational action rather than evaluating it,
- ⤴ action research, which contributes by giving information that can guide revision and refinement of the actions (Rule & John, 2011, pp. 8-9).

A number of other scholars looking at social movement learning have used a case study style. Looking at Endresen's (2010) dissertation on non-formal citizenship education in Cape Town, there is a lot of coherence with what is described above. She used the case study method to get a vivid, in-depth description of three organisations that were part of her study. The three organisations were also working within the context of resistance and counter-hegemony. Endresen (2010), through using the case study method, was able to understand in-depth "what it is like to be in a particular situation, to catch the insider's reality and thick description participants of lived experiences of, thoughts about, feelings for, a situation" (p. 81). Thapliyal (2006) used an ethnographic case study to do research on MST (described in Chapter Two) to get an in-depth understanding of education programmes offered by MST in their schools.

As argued by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (cited in Rule & John, 2011), the purpose of a case study method is to portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of individuals and the situations, catch the complexities and situatedness of the behaviour, contribute to action and intervention, present and represent reality – to give a sense of being there (quoted in Rule & John, 2011, p. 9).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue that such observation "probe deeply and analyse intensively the multifaceted phenomena" (p. 253). In an attempt to understand the context, researchers try to explain why things happen as they do, and to generalise or predict from a

single example requires an in-depth investigation of the interdependencies of parts and the patterns that emerge (Rule & John, 2011).

Since I am examining a single case in-depth through participatory observation and interviews, in this study I conducted an ethnographic case study. This style allowed me to be involved in processes that form part of Abahlali's life of struggle, of learning and of production of knowledge. In keeping with the critical paradigm and qualitative research approach, the case study style provided me with a lens to see reality, and understand knowledge production from the insider's perspective.

I am aware of the limitations of the case study style, such as that there is often a danger of distortion resulting from inadequate information, lack of cross-checking data or biased influence of gathering or consulting sources of information. However, in this study I tried to maintain my objectivity to avoid these dangers. I will expand on this under the section on limitations.

4.6 Data collection methods

In keeping with a case study approach of conducting research, I kept a very close proximity to Abahlali's everyday life and experience. In order to ensure qualitative data, I relied primarily on interviews with key participants, textual resources such as Abahlali's press statements and articles, observations during meetings and workshops, their website, and dissertations and books that have been written on Abahlali.

This in line with what Merriam (2009) argues about qualitative data collection:

Qualitative data consist of "direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" obtained through interviews; "detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions" recorded in observations; and "excerpts, quotations, or entire passages" extracted from various types of documents (Patton, 2002, p.4). (Merriam, 2009, p. 85)

Seeing that this study has a particular bias towards knowledge production and learning outside formal or mainstream education, I came to terms with the fact that the study is about researching from the margins, as Kirby and McKenna (1989) express it. Therefore data collection and interviews were more about seeking to “understand perceptions of participants and their understanding of their social reality” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 122). In the sections below I discuss how each of the methods used was useful in this study.

4.6.1 Document review

In line with conducting a case study on Abahlali, I read extensively about Abahlali, and considered both literature about Abahlali (as covered in Chapter Two) and documents produced by the movement itself. According to Mertens (cited in Thapliyal, 2006), documents and records are an important part of an organisation and society’s history and current status.

I considered a range of documents including press statements, position papers, the movement’s constitution, and so on. A particularly useful document was *Living Learning* (Figlan et al, 2009), a booklet that is a record of discussions among six militants who were students doing the Certificate in Education Participatory Development course (CEPD) at the Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. *Living Learning* was a monthly reflection discussion that the militants used to make connections between their experience at university and their experience in the movement. Participants were from the Rural Network, a movement that works mainly with rural communities who are resisting farm evictions, and fighting for security of tenure in KwaZulu-Natal, and from Abahlali.

The process and publication were referred to as ‘living learning’ because they are rooted in the ongoing real life experience of resisting oppression and ongoing struggle for social change, at the same time making use of the CEPD course to draw on useful theories that can enhance inbuilt intellect that militants continued to demonstrate. Since *Living Learning* was a clear and deliberate act to own pedagogy in such a way that allowed militants to produce their own knowledge, I found this document incredibly useful because it allowed me to consider their process of learning, as they reflected on it themselves.

4.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

As stated by Terreblanche and Durrheim (1999), interviews give us an opportunity to “know people better and allow us to understand how they think and feel” (p. 132). They suggest that single person interviews provide an in-depth insight of the situation, but at the same time rely on trust built between the interviewer and the interviewee. Explaining how interviews work, Terreblanche and Durrheim (1999) argue that single open-ended interviews work best as they are not structured, too closed and leading (p. 132). Babbie (2013) argues that “the design in qualitative interviews is iterative”, and that “the nature of qualitative interviewing means that the questioning is redesigned throughout the project” (p. 346). What this suggests is the skill of learning to listen. As Kirby and McKenna (1989) put it, “listening means not to be afraid of silence” (p. 122). Harley (2012a) adds to this, saying that the most important thing is “learning how to ask” (p. 32).

I conducted eight interviews with key members of Abahlali. The interviews cut across gender, age and members’ period of participation in Abahlali, and I ensured that participants were drawn from different informal settlements in the Durban area. In doing interviews I was mindful of the danger that Kirby and McKenna (1989) warn against. They say that participants are neither passive nor subordinate. In fact the research participants have relevance and significance to the study. They write:

...you are researching how participants view their experience and the experience of others...what is important is their perception of their experience. (p. 115)

Therefore, I used purposive sampling (Dattalo, 2010) in selecting eight participants on the basis that they are diverse in terms of the period of involvement and learning experience in Abahlali. Furthermore, their gender and age also enabled this study to get a balanced and an in-depth reflection on what they think contributes to knowledge that is produced within Abahlali. I used open-ended questions with very little structure. I designed interviews to be conversational to allow members to talk freely and give critique of the movement where necessary.

4.6.3 Participant observation

According to Mouton (cited in Endreson, 2010) participant observation fits within a qualitative research approach since it aims at providing an in-depth description of a group or community. I chose participant observation because it allowed me to be involved in the life of Abahlali and participate in collective discussions. As indicated in Endresen (2010), the major aim of participant observation is to “enter the subjective worlds of those studied and to see these worlds from their point of view” (p. 87).

My own experience provides basis for data as I personally worked with Abahlali for eight years and there is enough basis for trust from both sides. I am able to move across settlements and talk to members of the movement. As mentioned above, over the years I participated in most Abahlali activities such as bi-weekly meetings, committee meetings, night camps and festivals - all potential spaces for critical reflection.

For the purpose of this research I visited eight settlements around Clare Estate, Pinetown, KwaMashu, Howick, Lamontville and Reservoir Hills. I participated in meetings and other events which included protest marches, picketing, seminars, etc. I visited some people in their homes and participated in rituals, ceremonies and funerals. I also visited the office of Abahlali when there were formal and informal meetings. All these moments were useful for this study as they gave adequate insights about the world of Abahlali - that which informs their politics and their theory of change. However, I am mindful of the caution that is raised by Marshall cited in Endresen (2010, p.87), that there is a methodological challenge of balancing adequate subjectivity and adequate objectivity. I deal with this issue further below.

4.7 Data analysis

Babbie (2013) argues that the aim of data analysis is to “discover patterns among the data, patterns that point to the theoretical understanding of social life” (p. 396). This point is emphasised by Stainback and Stainback cited in Thapliyal (2006), who say that the analytical process should consist of dividing the data into small, meaningful units which are then connected into meaningful themes with guidance from the research questions. Babbie (2013) goes on to say that the key process in the analysis of qualitative research is data is coding (p.

396). As this study is a qualitative research study that is framed within a critical paradigm, I turned to thematic analysis as an appropriate analytical method which allowed for coding of data.

This is in line with LeCompte and Schensul (1999) who describe data analysis as the process of reducing large amounts of collected data to make sense of it. They say that data is organised, summarised, and patterns and themes are identified. Supporting this view is Patton (1987) who suggests an approach using six phases for thematic analysis. These phases involve familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. In this chapter I followed these steps which enabled me to do the analysis.

I chose thematic analysis because it involves coding data into smaller units and variables that are useful to test my assumptions. Babbie (2013) says there are at least three types of coding, namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is the initial stage of breaking data into small parts that will help identify key concepts within data. Axial coding is about identifying core concepts, usually using concepts from open coding to regroup data or to get more analytical concepts. Selective coding identifies the central code in the study that all other codes relate to (pp. 397-398). For this research, I used both open and axial coding.

I then did an inductive and deductive analysis so that I could draw from themes that emerged from interview data and those that came from outside. As argued in Bertram and Christiansen (2014), inductive data analysis identifies patterns and regularities which then enable a researcher to explore and develop general conclusions. I started detecting patterns from participants' interview data and then developed themes that I used for analysis. I read data a number of times before I came to developing themes. I followed Thomas' (2006) five steps of doing an inductive analysis:

- ⤴ Preparation of raw data files ('data cleaning')
- ⤴ Close reading of text
- ⤴ Creation of categories
- ⤴ Overlapping coding and uncoded text
- ⤴ Continuing revision and refinement of category system.

Useful themes that emerged from my inductive analysis included becoming a member, participation, leadership, learning, Ubuhlalism and the aftermaths of the 2009 attacks.

It was obviously important for me to also do deductive analysis. As stated in Bertram and Christiansen (2014), this allows the researcher to use the theory to organise and classify data to draw patterns. Therefore, I used the key concepts of Communities of Practice theory to further analyse data, in particular Wenger's (1998) four components in communities of practice and stages of development, as well as legitimate peripheral participation.

I relied on the theme of knowledge production as the guiding and central theme for the analysis. I was obviously mindful of my research questions, as well as the questions I used during the interviews (derived from the research questions) as I undertook my analysis.

4.8 Trustworthiness

I am mindful of the danger of bringing my own bias into the research due to close proximity with research participants and the context within which they operate. In fact Lather (1986) warns of the researcher's position with regard to trustworthiness of research. Throughout the study I have not claimed to bring interest-free or neutral research; on the contrary I have a stated position, which is why I ensured that the integrity of this study was protected by meeting the requirements of triangulation, reflexivity and member-check. These requirements fit well with the critical paradigm as it confronts issues of power in knowledge production.

As Lather (1986) states:

At minimum, I argue that we must build the following into our research designs:

- ⤴ triangulation of methods, data sources, and theories
- ⤴ reflexive subjectivity (some documentation of how the researcher's assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data)
- ⤴ face validity (established by recycling categories, emerging analysis, and conclusions back through at least a subsample of respondents)
- ⤴ catalytic validity (some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents). (p. 78)

Below I discuss how I have dealt with these requirements.

4.8.1 Triangulation

Lather (1986) asserts that triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes to ensure trustworthiness of data (p. 67). Babbie and Mouton (2001) agree with this point adding that triangulation as a method minimises a researcher's biases and uses multiple methods to verify data. Interestingly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe triangulation as a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research.

Generally, this way of ensuring data trustworthiness has been used in the field of qualitative social research largely framed within a critical paradigm (Cooper, 2005; Endresen, 2010; Harley, 2012a; Thapliyal, 2006). What is common in all these studies is their open-ideological nature whilst retaining scholarly trustworthiness and validity.

4.8.2 Researcher-reflexivity

As I have mentioned in Chapter One, I worked with Abahlali for eight years. This was the opportunity for me to learn, understand and appreciate their ceaseless attempts to produce knowledge that is primarily useful for their struggle. As a participant observer my own assumptions have been challenged and shifted many times during this process. Etherington, quoted in Harley (2012a, p. 46), asserts that researcher reflexivity is “the capacity to acknowledge how their own experiences and context inform the process and outcomes of the inquiry”.

Lather (1986) argues that “agreed-upon procedures are needed to make empirical decision-making public and, hence, subject to criticism. Most importantly, if we fail to develop these procedures, we will fail to protect our work from our own passions, and our theory-building will suffer” (p. 78). This actually corresponds with Thapliyal's (2006) argument that one of the most important aspects of valid and trustworthy critical methodology is “reflexivity or the exploration of researcher subjectivities” (p. 94). She says that this includes reflection on: a) “the relationship between theory and data, b) the effects of the researcher's presence in data collection, c) the researcher's biases, and d) the dialectical relationship between structural/historical forces and human agency” (ibid).

I ensured that my position as a researcher and my assumptions did not hinder me from hearing and seeing reality from the perspective of research participants, by using researcher-reflexivity, but also face validity.

4.8.3 Face validity

As a researcher working within a critical paradigm, it was important for me to treat participants as adults and as people who think. It was crucial that they get feedback and get the transcripts of data. Most important was to involve them throughout the study to ensure that their input is well represented, and that I had not misrepresented what they said. Drawing from Lather (1986), I thus used face validity. Lather (1986) describes face validity as a process whereby “analytical categories and emerging conclusions are continually recycled back through the respondents” (p. 67).

Like Thapliyal (2006, p. 93), I have attempted to deal with issues of validity by:

- ⤴ engaging substantially with my research over a prolonged period of time,
- ⤴ keeping accurate records during fieldwork to capture words and events that I observed,
- ⤴ sharing my interpretations with participants to see if my analysis recognized the validity of their accounts,
- ⤴ consciously including primary data in my final account so that readers get an idea of what the data was like and also have access to the data themselves.

4.9 Ethics

All research carries risks and raises ethical questions. Govender (2012) cites Merriam's (1998) observation that in qualitative research, “interviewing carries risks and benefits to participants” (p. 56). As Thapliyal (2006) asserts, “ethics of qualitative research requires that the researcher protect subjects from harm and ensure that the risks do not exceed the benefits of participation” (p. 93). To avoid these risks, as discussed above, issues of face validity, member-check and triangulation are useful to minimise undesired outcomes. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest the researcher needs to guarantee the confidentiality of participants and explain everything that will happen during the interview (participants' rights, how the interview will be conducted, the fact that the interviews are recorded so that

participants can give consent or not). Another warning is shared by Harley (2012) who argues that there is always “the potential of exploitation” (p. 52). Therefore participants need to have a guarantee that the research will not be harmful to them and their struggle.

As a person who has been with Abahlali for such a long time and who carries a social responsibility of defending the dignity of people, I dealt with these issues by observing all the factors and concerns raised above by giving detailed information about the research process. I was sensitive to the needs of the participants which influenced negotiations with regards to time, venues and length of the interviews. I had explained the need for participants to sign a consent letter which served as bidding for me to abide by the stipulation of protecting participants and, at the same time, was proof that participants voluntarily got involved in the research.

I was aware of the sensitivity of the issues that the research might raise, especially since Abahlali are constantly being attacked and face real life threats. Thus I knew that people might find it difficult to easily open up. I considered the use of pseudonyms to protect people’s identities. It is for that reason that informed consent was obtained.

4.10 Limitations

One of the limitations relates to the fact that this is a case study. As John (2009) argues:

...typical of case study research, is that the findings are not generalisable to other community-based educational projects. Some level of theoretical generalization, is however possible. (p. 120)

In this study the focus is on knowledge production and learning within Abahlali, an area of study that has not been written about much, thus making resources very limited. Also this meant that other interests which may well be important to look at were intentionally avoided to allow the focus of the research to be guided by the research questions. The final limitation is that whilst I was writing up the research I had to be very careful about how much I put in, given the fact that there were developments in Abahlali that followed after I completed collecting my data.

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the research design which I used in this study. The study uses a critical paradigm and I argued for locating this research in this paradigm. The study uses a qualitative approach and I argued that it was impossible to employ any other approach because the critical paradigm requires in-depth description and engagement with issues from the perspective of the researched. The research takes the form of a case study, and I have used a wide range of methods such as document review, open-ended, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and my own experience.

I have presented how I went about data analysis appropriate to the critical paradigm. I dealt with issues of trustworthiness by using triangulation, researcher-reflexivity, and face validity to ensure the credibility of the research. I dealt with issues of ethics and limitations.

Throughout this chapter I ensured that the key issue remains knowledge production for social action. The next chapter will present the data arising from this study which will allow for more insights of how a movement like Abahlali uses its struggle as a space for knowledge production.

Chapter Five: Interview Data

5.1 Introduction

As indicated in the earlier chapters, by the time I conducted the interviews there were significant tensions in Abahlali that had serious bearings on their politics and their practice. Months after I had done the interviews there were serious leadership fall-outs. As 2014 was a year of National and Provincial elections in South Africa, Abahlali made a decision to participate in the country's elections for the first time since their inception in 2005, and chose a political party that they were going to support. Subsequently, there were two break away social movements that were formed by former leaders of Abahlali. The data in this chapter was collected before these developments.

As discussed in Chapter Four, I conducted eight interviews with current or previous members of Abahlali as my data source for this research. The people I interviewed reside in shack settlements across Ethekwini and are both males and females and of varying ages. They also joined the movement at different periods in the life history of the movement. In other words, they represent both the older generation and newer generation in the struggle of Abahlali. Most of the people were active members and leaders of Abahlali movement at the time of the interviews. This chapter presents the interview data, already filtered to some degree to reduce the volume of data, and provide useful insights for the next chapter which is discussions of findings and analysis.

Figure 9: List of participants

| Name | Sex | Settlement | Period of membership | Status of membership | Age |
|---------------------|--------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Sbusiso Zikode | Male | Kennedy Road | Founder | Current | 39 years |
| Mnikelo Ndabankulu | Male | Foreman Road | Founder | Current | 30 years |
| Mduduzi Hlongwa | Male | Lacey Road | Founder | Former member | Mid 30s |
| Lindela Figlan | Male | Foreman Road | Early joiner | Current | 42 years |
| Mama Kikine | Female | Jo Slovo | Early joiner | Current | Late 50s |
| Zodwa Nsibande | Female | Kennedy Road | Relative new comer | Current | 30 years |
| Thinabantu Khanyile | Male | Kennedy Road | Relative new comer | Current | Mid 30s |
| Nokukhanya Dlamuka | Female | Emmause | New comer | Current | Mid 30s |

In line with research ethics, I offered all of the participants the right to use a pseudonym. All of them, however, insisted on their own names being used. I conducted the interviews according to my interview schedule (see Annexure 1) but still allowed people to talk freely, and asked follow up questions to ensure my understanding of what they said. I interviewed people in isiZulu, and then translated and transcribed the interviews. I have edited the interviews slightly for grammar and clarity, but have also excluded things that were said in the interviews that have no bearing on the subject under discussion. Because of the growing tensions within the movement, many of the participants discussed issues of strategy and tactics which were simply irrelevant to the topic.

In this chapter, after looking at how the participants came to be connected with the movement (i.e. became Umhlali), the data is divided into three categories – learning (from experience, and in/from Abahlali); Ubuhlalism; and developments since the post-2009 attack.

5.2 Becoming an Umhlali

Zodwa Nsibande:

I came to Durban in 2002 after finishing my matric in 2001. I came to Durban to further my studies. I stayed with my mum who was staying in Kennedy Road but not in the informal settlement but in the suburbs on the other side of the road. During that period she was retrenched at work, she was working as a machinist at a factory in Congella. We had to move from that house and she got a shack in Kennedy Road settlement and we then went to stay in the shack. She then got involved in the settlement working as a home-based carer which gave her the opportunity to interact with the Kennedy Road Development Committee (KRDC). So she used to attend their meetings because some of the people who were in the KRDC were also involved in the Clare Estate Drop-in Centre where she was a volunteer in the home-based care programme. So if I was not busy at school I used to go with her to work.

If there were community meetings I used to attend. This allowed me to get to know people. At Kennedy Road settlement every year there were meetings to elect a committee, and because I was seen as an outsider I was asked to count the hands of people who were voting. I think I did that for three years and after that I was asked to be an additional member of the committee. I worked with KRDC very closely and that is how I got to know members.

During that process Abahlali baseMjondolo was formed and I came to be involved with Abahlali since then.

Maybe I need to go back a little by saying most of the discussion within KRDC meetings and the Kennedy Road community generally were about development in the area. KRDC used to have a series of meetings with Ethekwini officials to explore options for developing Kennedy Road and the provision of infrastructure whilst waiting for this development. There used to be a lot of meetings between KRDC and the local ward councillor, Mr. Yakoob Baig, about development of Kennedy Road. Despite all these meetings the process did not bear any fruit. I remember one day people were happy when they saw a bulldozer clearing the land across the settlement which KRDC had earmarked for development.

KRDC members went to ask the driver of the bulldozer what was going on and what the clearing of the land was about. The feedback that was given to the community was that the land had been bought by a private business person who was going to build a brick and blocks hardware shop. A meeting was held at around 6 in the evening for KRDC to give feedback to the community. People who were working on that land had already put in poles to fence off the land. At the meeting the decision was taken that we should go and remove those poles. And everyone went across to remove the poles and we hid them. During that time there were police everywhere and some shooting.

The action was at around 8 or 9 after the meeting. The removal of poles was an immediate action to show the business person that he or she was not welcome in the area. After that action there was another call for a protest. So a couple of days later the community blockaded the N2. The blockade started at around 4 in the morning. One of the reasons for this early start is that as the community you are not on the same side. Also the nature of work does not allow people to just not go to work. So there were people who were tasked to close all exit points that people use to go to work.

So they closed all the exit points, even the local taxi operators were told not to collect people that day. We then assembled at the community hall and then we all went down to block the N2 on both sides. During that time the police came, being led by the station commander. He came and asked who the leader was, and then told us to disperse in 5 minutes. Everyone was booing him. People started singing struggle songs. That day 14 people were arrested.

Amongst them were students doing matric who were in the middle of their Term 1 exams as the protest was around March. Whilst Kennedy Road was having these blockades, other communities who are within the ward, like Foreman Road, Jadu Place, Sydenham place, etc., were also inspired. This spread across the ward leading to informal settlements in ward 23 and 25 coming together to form Abahlali baseMjondolo.

During these protests people wore red t-shirts which I think maybe were donated by the Centre for Civil Society (CCS), with their grievances and demands written on them. The media was misrepresenting what was really happening and actually ill-defining these protests. The media was not presenting what people were showing. So this led to a meeting of all the leaders of settlements who had led or been involved in protest actions to discuss the issues of how these communities want to define themselves before they are defined by outsiders. So the question was raised concerning how we define ourselves. Various names were proposed but the one that got everyone's favour was Abahlali baseMjondolo ['people of the shacks'] because it includes everyone. What was important also about the name is that it described the nature of the living conditions that people were in. So that's how the name Abahlali baseMjondolo came about.

During this process Sbu Zikode was still the chairperson of the KRDC, so he asked others in the committee to go and mobilise other communities' leaders. He would then chair these meetings as a host because most were held at Kennedy Road community hall.

One of the reasons behind the name was that it defines who you are and also it inspires a person who is living in that area to aspire to something different. You need change. One of the reasons to establish Abahlali was to create a partnership between shackdwellers and the State so that everyone can play a role in bringing about social transformation and changing living conditions.

Thinabantu Khanyile:

I will start by talking about my background. I was born in KwaDumisa where I grew up and schooled up until I finished high school. Due to the scarcity of resources and opportunities there, I went to Durban looking for a job and found accommodation in a shack settlement in Clare Estate at Kennedy Road. When I was there people who were leaders in the community were always calling for community meetings even before the Abahlali movement was

formed. I attended those meetings and I ended up knowing the leaders in the settlement. In 2005 when the Abahlali movement was formed I was there but not very active, I was like all other general members in the community. In 2007 I had a terrible incident where I got mugged and stabbed during my daily jogging training. When I returned from hospital I was told that the Kennedy Road committee had found and detained one of the people who had mugged me, and I was asked to come and identify and confirm that it was indeed that person. I went there and confirmed that it was that person.

I then called the police who came and detained him. We don't know what the police did with the suspect but later we heard that he had died. What followed next was that I and other members of the committee got arrested for the death of the suspect. I grew closer to the committee members as we were all in Westville Prison together. I got to know about Abahlali as my co-inmates were endlessly discussing Abahlali. What really made me want to be actively involved is that Abahlali supported me without looking at whether or not I was a member. For instance, Abahlali organised bail money and lawyers for representation in court. When I got out of Westville Prison I wanted to get closer to the committee and find ways in which I could serve the community. The committee allowed me to work with them and that is where I learnt a lot about being an activist in the Abahlali movement.

I had no understanding of the function of the committee and why it was necessary to have the committee in the first place. When we were at Westville Prison, I began to hear more about ways of improving one's living condition in the community and things that can be done to improve living conditions in the community and developing youth in various skills. We explored ways of connecting with Durban Solid Waste authorities who are responsible for the landfill site that is adjacent to Kennedy Road to secure job opportunities for residents from Kennedy Road settlement.

I asked during one of the discussions when they were talking about Abahlali and the need to strengthen the struggle, how it was that they spoke of Kennedy Road as different from Abahlali. They tried to explain it to me saying that Abahlali is a movement that amalgamates all settlements within Ethekwini municipality. The reason for this was so that all these settlements can have a one strong voice when meeting Ethekwini municipality about development. So the Kennedy Road settlement committee is different from the leadership of Abahlali. Among other things that were discussed was the issue of succession and change of

leadership in Abahlali. It was raised that when the time comes for a change of leadership those who are leaving office need to form or participate in what was to be called oversight committee to ensure that new leaders do not divert from the objectives of the movement. Something like what other political parties do, recruiting previous leaders into committees and councils to retain their knowledge.

Nokukhanya Dlamuka:

When we arrived here we first rented a backroom. In 2009 we joined Abahlali. One of the Abahlali members recruited us and gave us membership cards whilst we were still renting. When we arrived some people who were tenants were already Abahlali members and then we thought maybe we also need to join. Sometimes it is useful to participate in communal initiatives because you don't know what will happen tomorrow. As of now I can say that joining Abahlali was a smart thing to do. As time went by in 2009 we then moved on to adjacent vacant land to occupy and build our homes. Basically there was a community meeting at the community hall between landlords and tenants. One of the resolutions of the meeting was that people must occupy vacant land so that the Ethekwini municipality can see that people need land. When we moved onto the land it was only tenants and not the landlords, whereas at the meeting it was proposed that it should be everyone.

In my case specifically, I had one child who was seven years old at the time. I then got twins and then when they were just one month old, the landlord gave us a notice of eviction. That was painful especially to my mother. The landlord began complaining about our use of electricity and water saying we are wasteful because we are a big family. She tried to look for an alternative place to rent. We stayed in a new place for about a year and then we also joined families that occupied this land. My mother always says that it was good that the landlord was horrible to us because if it wasn't for him we will still be living in backyards.

Life as a tenant is not pleasant at all. You cannot do what you want when you want. Even if you want to till the soil or work in the garden, there is that reminder that this is not your home. In addition you still need to pay rent no matter what. My mother is the only one working so she had to buy groceries and clothes plus pay the rent. Now we are free, we live happily although the land doesn't belong to us. We stay here for free, we collect water nearby, we have extra-legally connected electricity after three years of begging the municipality to supply us with electricity. The municipality's response has always been that we live on

private property so they cannot connect electricity for us. So we realise that if we wait for the municipality we will never have electricity.

Mduduzi Hlongwa:

I finished my matric back in the rural areas at home and then came to town. My mum was staying at Lacey Road which is an informal settlement in Sydenham. So I came there and stayed with her. One day I met Sbu Zikode and another Umhlali. When we met we discussed issues affecting our communities such as the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Most people were not even aware that they have the virus. We came up with the idea of having some training and some campaigns to encourage voluntary counselling and testing. We also believed there were orphans that had lost parents to HIV and AIDS within our area. These orphans did not have support or anyone to care for them. So we discovered organisations that could train us on HIV and AIDS-related programmes. We consulted the Department of Health who then funded the programme and we named ourselves as the Clare Estate Drop-In Centre.

We broadened our scope, looking at other issues beside HIV and AIDS, because we saw that people are suffering in informal settlements. It was not a pleasant and good experience to stay in a shack. The government had to do something for the people because it is the people who voted the government into power, so it had to give something back. Then we started consulting other informal settlements within our ward and out of discussions with them we came up with the name Abahlali baseMjondolo.

Mnikelo Ndabankulu:

I have seen the need to be part of this struggle because there are some questions that someone has to ask. Things are not done according to the Constitution or according to how God will expect them in our land. So if it's not me who asks these questions, then who? Now you find no option but to act. If you have a conscience or are conscious and you love yourself and your country then you can't run away from this struggle. If I remember well I think I am one of the co-founders of Abahlali, actually when the name Abahlali was born it was in a protest march that I was the convenor of in November 2005. Prior to that we used to have themes such as 'Kennedy Road year of action', 'Quarry Road says no to evictions'.

My branch [Foreman Road] asked to host a protest march and we had thorough discussions about how we could have a common name that would unite us all to ensure that other

settlements did not feel sidelined. We had a long discussion about this and we all settled on the words Abahlali baseMjondolo. It was the first time we had two messages for our protest march. We said “Abahlali say no to evictions” and another one said “Foreman Road say no to forced evictions”. By doing this we were trying to minimise settlement-oriented messages and rather develop something that accommodates every settlement. Every settlement must feel part of the protest, not feel like they are only there to support a particular settlement.

Mama Kikine:

I first heard about Abahlali in 2005. It was when one of our neighbours was being ill-treated by our ward councillor, Shezi. The councillor told her that she wouldn’t get a house because she is from the Eastern Cape, and she is a Pondo. She took this up with relevant municipal authorities but she was not getting any help. So then she went to the media and her story appeared in the newspapers. One day we were visited by Mnikelo, Sbu Zikode and another Umhlali who were enquiring about this woman. They even went to the local police station to see if police knew anything about her and how to find her. They eventually found her and us. I can say it is through her that we actually got to know Abahlali and became members.

They talked to us about the need to unite as shackdwellers because we are all struggling and fighting for a common purpose. They told us about the movement and said it will be much more powerful when most shackdwellers take part. And we were already participating in discussions that led to choosing the name Abahlali baseMjondolo. We said because we all reside in shacks we should call ourselves shackdwellers. We really spent a lot of time talking about how we want to be known and how we will call ourselves...we were at the night camp when we did this where we took the whole night discussing.

Lindela Figlan:

It was 2005 when I joined. I remember that for the first meeting of Abahlali I was at home in the Eastern Cape because we had a funeral. Mnikelo called me to say they have started an organisation called Abahlali baseMjondolo....he asked if I was going to attend the next meeting. I told him yes I would. When I arrived at Kennedy Road hall many people did not know me. I was big then and so they thought maybe I was one of the politicians or a municipal agent. I explained that I was a shackdweller myself and I am interested in being part of the movement. I was welcomed and since then I became a member of Abahlali.

When I first got involved the name Abahlali baseMjondolo did not exist, I attended the second meeting where comrades were still forming this movement by sharing ideas of what it means to start our own movement. When the name was suggested I was already participating. I remember other people who were there and said we should not be ashamed that we are from the shacks. The shacks are our home. This name we chose because there are shacks, it will only disappear when there are no shacks. In all these discussions everyone participated and we all wanted to give input. Nobody felt inferior because we were all equals and we did things together.

5.3 Learning from experience, learning from/in Abahlali

Sbu Zikode:

Let me start off by saying that the Abahlali movement is now in its eighth year this year. It has been a long journey to get where the movement is today. This journey was and still is a learning and educational journey. If we as Abahlali reflect on our journey we realise that we have drawn a map that is part of history about learning in the struggle, which in turn brought us to where we are. I can say without any doubt that there is a lot that we have learnt along the journey. One of the things we learnt is to actually see that communities have so much power to bring social transformation, to bring equality, justice, dignity and the respect that ordinary people deserve. I was fortunate to be part of this experience of learning from the poor who are looked down upon, seen as uneducated, who know nothing...these people taught me a lot. I have no regrets about being part of this movement, as there are many people today who praise Abahlali for having stood by them to defend and keep their homes. It is a lesson for everyone who joins the movement that change will only come if there is a clear programme of intent and a culture that will allow everyone to learn and achieve their objectives and vision.

What I have learnt is that if we talk about respect, you need to first respect others if you want them to respect you, first listen to other people if you want to be listened to, be serious and disciplined if you want people to take you seriously. Now in order for me to expect anything like respect and being listened to, I must first treat Abahlali with respect and really listen to what they say. So in that case, I can say without doubt that what I bring to the movement is taken very seriously and that is why we are where we are today. I can say that even

personally I feel that my vision from my upbringing when I was still a boy scout is still on track.

In that experience as a scout I learnt a lot about outdoor code and outdoor activism as I was being trained about citizenship and about manhood. I took an oath that I will do whatever it takes to listen to God and respect the leadership of our country. Now I see Abahlali's struggle as the continuation of that oath. I have learnt to deal with the question that says, what does it mean to respect governors of our country who do not respect you? It is a critical question that led me to take another oath that I will leave this world as a better place than I found it...I am quoting Lord Baden-Powell, who was the founder of the boy-scout movement, who said a scout must leave this place a better place than they found it...so me too I want to do the same.

I can also see that even Abahlali are continuing with that vision. In fact we discourage the tendency of joining Abahlali only to get a house and then when people get houses they discontinue their membership. We have a duty to others as well. In Abahlali we teach this and emphasise that our humanity is incomplete in isolation to others. Our ubuntu is described in relation to others. That is why collectivism is important. In fact we do not encourage people to join as individuals but as a collective because their defence is in their collectivism. The Abahlali office cannot protect you from evictions and demolitions but other families around you can. It is your family, it is your neighbours, that are your shield. That is why as Abahlali we believe we need to build strong family values and a neighbourhood movement. So we promote launching of branches where there is at least a minimum of 50 members. Clearly for us the strongest weapon is your neighbours and your family.

I am convinced that this kind of learning has rubbed off onto other members as well....in fact this has influenced not only leaders of the movement but general membership as well. I have seen this when I am out of the country that Abahlali continue to mobilise and organise and keep the struggle going. They are able to hold on tight to Abahlali's principles and ways of organising that demonstrate the distinct nature and form of the Abahlali movement. So we have been able to spread to and share knowledge with others. Everyone is responsible for sharing learning with everyone. I have learnt a lot from other members, likewise they learn a lot from me. It is not just me but other members as well who came with different experiences.

So it's a two way learning, leaders learn from members and members learn from leaders especially to jointly come up with strategies to confront poverty, inequality, injustice and gender discrimination. These strategies should be collective and be like our uniform, even when it is Abahlali in other provinces where there are cultural differences. This is what learning as a collective is about, to make efforts to push together for what you believe, knowing that you are not alone. Abahlali have demonstrated bravery in recent times where it's a matter of do or die, they stand together against brutal force to make sure that their principles and their beliefs are not broken and can be shared with others as well. There is a lot of sacrifice that comes with this and I know that Abahlali are strong; even when I am gone they will continue because they have started this journey on their own, that is what also makes them different from other movements. I can say that it is learning that has sustained this movement until today, we make the road as we walk. We are a learning movement, our road is only possible because we walk and experience it.

Zodwa Nsibande:

From the beginning I was not a person who was inspired by politics and political parties. However, as a person who grew up in an ANC-dominated area with the IFP as second on the list, I was only exposed to these two parties growing up and finishing high school. I remember the fights between the two parties and I never aspired to be involved in politics. Over time politicians made efforts to portray the ANC as a good party and as such when Abahlali were being formed I was in the process of getting membership of the ANC Youth League. So I think being involved in the KRDC was a gradual process that took time to come full circle. I used to spend a lot of time on my own digesting and reflecting on what I heard in meetings without actually attempting to share with others because politics was not my thing, whereas in Kennedy Road I would participate in the discussions and in other activities.

One thing that I can say I have learnt is to understand politics in a different way. Before we were taught party politics and how good political parties are, whereas in Abahlali meetings I was made to understand and see different forms of politics and their impact on people. Even here in Abahlali I can now differentiate between good politics and bad politics. I do question what I see as bad politics. It doesn't mean that because I am with Abahlali therefore everything is good. There are things that I question. Being with Abahlali made me an independent person who will understand politics the way she wants to. Understanding politics may vary for different people even in the movement, how you understand it is different from

how I understand it. I have grown to understand that we may not all believe in the same ideology.

It was a big shift for me coming from Greytown where I was living in a formal structure in a suburb where everyone minds his or her business, coming to Kennedy Road where you feel the sense of community as you greet one another, you love one another....we used to play cards as groups of 10 people, sharing jokes. This is something that you don't find in the suburbs and that is a good part of living in informal settlements. The worst part is that because of the lack of infrastructure as well as how close the shacks are to each other, it makes it easy for these fires to spread even if it could have been avoided. You know if a person comes home drunk and lights a candle, then forgets to put it out when he sleeps, you will have fires that will spread across the settlement. I don't want to blame the people only, the government too is responsible.

This April South Africa will be celebrating 20 years of democratic government that is led by the ANC who are supposed to be the custodians of the Freedom Charter as well as the Constitution. But nothing shows any progress. Not that things should happen overnight, but they could have done something to ensure that people live in humane conditions. The reason we have shack fires is because shacks are close to each other, so the fire starts from one shack and then spreads quickly. Here in Kennedy Road there are only five water standpipes that are along the road. When there is a fire at the bottom it is difficult to get water there, worst of all there are no fire hydrants where you can connect hosepipes. When we call firefighters they can only get to Kennedy in 20 minutes. One of the things that I have seen is that every time there is fire there is suddenly a wind which then makes the fire spread quickly. Once the wind starts it will quickly blow the fire to other shacks.

You see when you still growing up you are sometimes naïve. I remember in 1991 when Mandela was released there was a song that the comrades in the area used to sing...uMandela ukuleziya zintaba Maqabane gijimani (Mandela is on those hills, comrades run). Opposite my home across the valley there was a big forest. So when comrades were singing going down the road and the commander pointed at the forest, in my mind I thought Mandela will come out of that forest. And people who were singing were actually running towards the forest. It only occurred to me later that it was just a song.

On the other hand there was this old man who owned a bus that was commuting people between town and the location. He was an IFP member and he was known to be talkative. So during the day there would be conversations about the war between the IFP and the ANC. People from the location would be free to talk about it irrespective of their political affiliations. My granny would actually ask this man who was the leader of the IFP in the area, why are we fighting? This guy responded by saying, we are fighting for independence. And the ANC is blocking us from getting that independence. So for me looking at all that, I think it was a war about getting power.

People were fighting for independence from the ANC so that they can gain power and the ANC was fighting for independence from the IFP so that it can gain power. Abahlali's struggle on the other hand is not about gaining power. It is about changing the lives of the people. Whoever is in power is obliged to make sure that the lives of the people he or she is leading are changed. So that is how I understood the struggle of Abahlali to be different from the struggle of political parties. At least this is how things were from 2005 up until 2009 because from 2009 things have changed and practices have changed. But from 2005 to 2009 the focus was only about changing the lives of the people and their living conditions. It is in those years that there was an Abahlali slogan that said 'enough is enough'.

Thinabantu Khanyile:

What I can say is that every day is a school day in human life. There is a lot that I have learnt from Kennedy Road leadership and other Abahlali leaders including the ones who joined later. I always want to compare the ideas I have about contributing to the movement's growth with other people's ideas. In that way I learn new things. One of the things is how to conduct yourself in the movement and how things are done in the movement. Although I am not a politician, the movement equips us with critical thinking to analyse our political landscape. In fact the struggle we are in compels us to be politically aware, not as partisan politicians but living political activists.

From what I see, party politics is about fighting for positions and power, mainly who should take what position for what gains. Whereas in living politics we are talking about what do people need to enjoy and live a decent life, irrespective of being poor or rich. How do we live? What are the conditions under which we live? How do we transform our living conditions? We do not talk about who should vacate which position and who should take

what position. We are collectively talking about what we need to do in order to change our situation.

The movement has structures to perform certain tasks, but we believe in a bottom-up system, so we allow members to discuss issues in their branches first and then bring them to an open general meeting to avoid decisions being made by the executive only. Differences of opinions are inevitable in any organisation. What we normally do as the committee is to combine people's ideas to see what works best and how we can move forward. There are moments where we have to choose certain ideas over others but all these ideas come from members.

As a person who grew up in a rural village where there was no exposure to community organisations or platforms where these issues are discussed, it's true I only heard about these ideas when I became part of Abahlali. But also from reading I realise that there are other people who have similar ideas but cannot implement them because they are dependent on the State which compromises their power and will. The country's Constitution describes in detail how our rights are to be respected and fulfilled but none of what is written there is realised. Some of what Abahlali are calling for is not just abstractions from the air, but demands for rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. For instance, participation and the right to be part of your own development is enshrined in the Constitution. There are also stipulations in the Constitution that regulate evictions so that no one is left homeless. With regards to housing Abahlali take it from the Constitution that everyone has a right to a decent home. Abahlali calls for the implementation of these things and a democratic government of the country, not government by party politics.

Nokukhanya Dlamuka:

What I can say is that Abahlali have helped us a lot, because they taught us about our rights as humans who are shackdwellers. Even though we are not living in formal houses and legal plots we have rights. They taught us that no one can demolish your home without a court order. And also there was a fence that was put up by the owner of the land, Mahogany. Abahlali stopped the fencing of the land as the intention of the landowner was to make it a live electric fence. We have small children here, so that would have been fatal had it continued. Through Abahlali we got a lawyer who stopped the electric fence. Overall I can say Abahlali have helped us a great deal.

I can say that I learnt a lot from being Umhlali. When I first came in I could not even speak but now I can address people and express my feelings. I now work with other members from other settlements who are facing the same problems that we are facing here in our area. Through that collective I learn that what we are fighting against is also what other people are fighting against. We share strategies and learn from their tactics for confronting local authorities to get what they want. So doing it this way gives us hope that we too will get what we want. Although there are challenges, when you are among Abahlali you feel that you are at home. Abahlali are a home for all of us who are poor.

A while back we used to have workshops using a conference venue at Diakonia, we learnt a lot. These workshops in particular helped us insist that police and other authorities followed the law when dealing with us. Some respect us because of realising that we know how the law works. Learning this way is very important because we help each other grow in the struggle. Those who have won their battles always share their experiences with others so that they too can develop their own strategies. For example here in Emmaus, I always tell comrades that municipal authorities do not guess that there is a new settlement that has been established, someone alerts the authorities and then they come.

I learnt that through attending Abahlali meetings whereby as a collective we share experiences, people like me learn from what others are sharing. Other comrades told us that when the ward councillor was actively demolishing their homes, they confronted him demanding to know where they are supposed to go if they leave their settlement. They said that that was the last time the councillor bothered them. Since we moved onto this land we have tried many times to get electricity connected but the municipality refused. Now we use extra-legal connections but we know that some people will rush to report us to authorities. We have one option which is to confront them and ask what are we supposed to do.

When you are in Abahlali you learn, it does not have to be like in school where someone stands in front of you. In Abahlali you learn through other people's experiences. Every time we are in meetings we encourage each other that we should not give up and we need to continue thinking of new strategies. If you are not serious you will not learn anything. I know that I am where I am because of committing myself to wanting to learn and then I making sure I attend meetings and activities of the movement. By taking part in all these meetings I slowly learnt to express my ideas. For instance, the other day someone encouraged me when

he told me that when he came he was like me, he could not express himself, and now he is one of the key figures in the movement. So in Abahlali you learn.

Mduduzi Hlongwa:

[After we were formed] we talked to other social movements from other areas and talked to some civil society groups. We acquired knowledge that we needed to approach government at various levels - municipal, provincial and national.

At the very beginning we tried to talk to the government, the housing department in Ethekwini municipality especially. There were a lot of promises and they really promised that they would build us houses. But nothing was built and we went back to the communities to give feedback about what we were seeing and asked the communities what we should do. What concerned us was that this was not only in our ward, but it was everywhere. We realised that for government to listen to you, you must protest and that's why there were many protests.

As a general secretary you are expected to know a lot about the organisation, the whereabouts of the president, the meetings and so on. Even the president used to come to me for some direction on certain matters. The committee and general membership would come to me for some information. We used to have settlements' meetings and then people would ask information from me. We also expanded to other provinces and had branches there. When government departments, particularly the housing department, contacted me to arrange meetings, I would convey messages to committee members for their input and approval.

However every time we went through the doors of municipal offices, officials thought we were joking or wasting their time. Perhaps it is because we looked young, I don't know. By the time one talks to them they would see that I meant business and I was serious. On the PAIA issue I got quite a lot of experience there. Just applying for the information taught me that whatever you want from the government you can get it. It is you who must stand up. If we had sat down and did nothing I am sure we would not have received those documents. We had tried before to talk and ask nicely but we were denied the information. When we forced them we got what we wanted.

I learnt a lot, for instance even when applying for a protest march. I didn't know anything about organising marches and the application process before. It's only when I was in Abahlali that I got that knowledge. I learnt which are the relevant offices to go to when applying for the march and how to secure insurance for the march, etc. That's an experience. Also travelling to other countries, I even went to Kenya to attend the World Social Forum. It is quite an experience to leave your country behind and go to meet people from other countries....in this case social movements from all over the globe were there. I was networking, making friends and the knowledge I got from there is in me, no one can take it.

Even now most of the members of Abahlali who were there at the beginning still contact me and say they need me back in the organisation. That's an indication that they got something from me. And I also benefitted a lot from them.

Mnikelo Ndabankulu:

If you look at the minutes of the earlier meetings you will see that I proposed that Abahlali should not be a political party and not be aligned to any political party, but instead be a social movement. As the first spokesperson of the movement I was always on the field talking to different people and getting all kinds of questions about the formation of Abahlali. People would tell me that they don't like their councillors but they love the ANC, therefore they cannot join another political party. All the time I had to clarify that our movement is not a political party. So I saw the need to propose that we need to make sure we clarify our position towards political parties.

I have learnt that if people speak with one voice where everybody counts, you find that things are done for the benefit of everyone. Let me tell you this, when we started this movement we were running it from our own pockets and using SMSes to communicate. It was very expensive back then to communicate unlike today where there is Facebook and WhatsApp. Back then when a comrade was arrested and you spread the news about the arrest other comrades would not ask if there is taxi fare, they would ask where the comrade was, and they would bus themselves to the scene.

We used to have executive meetings, general meetings, and night camps where we discussed thoroughly. We used to have leaders who were not biased, who stood by the truth. If it is clear that the matter is complicated, we would go to a vote for a decision.

Mama Kikine:

What I saw when we met Abahlali is that everyone came with their stories of struggle and of suffering just like us. Kennedy Road shackdwellers had their own issues, Jadhu Place had problems regarding their councillor, Annet Drive had similar issues, Motata Heights, Emmause, Mpola, Reservoir, Foreman Road and us in Joe Slovo. I realised that we had the same cry and we suffer the same injustice. There are only slight differences, for instance here in Joe Slovo we were denied rights to RDP houses but our shacks had electricity and water metres on our plots. We even had a refuse removal service. For all these services we were not paying a cent. Other settlements that were in the movement had no services at all. No water, no electricity, no refuse collection service, no land and no houses. If they tried to connect these services themselves the municipality came with full force to disconnect. Stories we heard were actually shocking. People who had lived in a settlement for so many years were then suddenly told that the land on which they live is owned by a private owner. How is that possible?

For a long time people are told the parcels of land they live on belong to the municipality but when people start demanding houses they are then told that the land belongs to a private owner. And then the municipality justifies forced removals and demolitions of people's homes. How can people be removed from the land in the country of their birth? Whoever claims to have bought the land, under which terms was that allowed? Africa is not for sale. That is when we started intensifying our struggle, blockading roads, toyi toying, demanding our rights. We learnt that the municipality does not take you seriously until you take your grievances to the street. Even today the municipality only knows one language - protests.

Firstly, I learnt that when we are united we are very strong. The municipality cannot touch us because we know our rights and we are able to defend these rights even if it means going to court. We use our Constitution as our weapon. The municipality always violates the Constitution and that is why we resort to forcing the municipality to comply by insisting that our rights be protected and realised under the law. Therefore, I also have rights in South Africa. Even when the municipality is oppressing me, I have rights to be where I am and live here. I have dignity and my dignity is protected. And because we were members of the movement of Abahlali they could not touch us. They can't touch us because we are a strong movement. Until today we are still here and no one can touch us.

Lindela Figlan:

My observation was that first we are in KwaZulu-Natal, a province where women are understood to be occupying a back seat in public life. Some have internalised and accepted it. We did have women but there were not too many and even older women were few. I think some adult women were a bit shy to be part of the movement because they thought it's a youth movement given that most members were youth. Whenever we had activities older women will ululate from a distance but not come close to where we were. Some were afraid to be seen to be betraying the existing dominant political party. So to be seen as loyal to the party they kept a distance with Abahlali.

I won't lie to you. Most people who formed Abahlali were members of the ANC. I can also add by saying most of them were still loyal to the ANC. Most of those comrades believed they will talk to the ANC and influence the party to understand the logic of Abahlali. Unfortunately ANC members who were there did not listen to their own members. Leaders of the party continued to think that they know the poor and they can best represent them. There are Abahlali who believed that the ANC will change the situation in the shacks. Some of us who were lacking faith in the ANC and were vocal about that, did pay the price. As we learnt to do things ourselves I received a letter of expulsion from the ANC. I was barred from attending ANC meetings or any other ANC events. I compared that with Abahlali who were so welcoming and always ready to listen to you no matter who you are and what you have or don't have.

The key thing in Abahlali was respect for everyone. Not just for those who are prominent leaders or members...it was respect for everyone. Another important thing was that Abahlali emphasised the need for self-emancipation. They insisted on the fact that liberation and freedom for shackdwellers will only come through the struggles waged by shackdwellers. No one will bring us freedom, we will have to fight for it ourselves. That to me was a great difference between the party and the movement. And I think that lesson I will carry with me forever, I am encouraged to use it even here in Abahlali when I see them changing behaviour. I notice a few changes now that always trigger me to say to members that what is happening now is not what we started the movement for. I know that when people reach certain points in their lives...forget where they come from. I know it is human nature to change when you have more power and not let people criticise you or your behaviour. It's like government,

when people criticise how they run the country they protect themselves by claiming that those who criticise them do not know what they are complaining about.

What I have learnt is to be independent and firm, to stand up to party political influences that only benefit a few and not the poor masses. I am now able to discern that politicians lie about the plight of the poor whilst they only care about themselves. Another thing is that I have learnt to do my own research to verify the political claims before I put my name down. If the claims are truthful I will seek ways to contribute and get active, but if it's a lie I seek ways to expose the lies that are beneath those claims. Basically it is the truth we want and often those who speak the truth are persecuted and marginalised. The truth should be told to free the masses.

It is about trust in yourself and a belief that when you are united you can uplift the standard of living of the poor. It is also about sharing the idea that the poor can emancipate themselves from experiences of poverty. That's what brought me to Abahlali. Even when I am with my blood brothers who are all ANC, we sometimes quarrel because they say my politics is out of order. It is funny that I feel more at home when I engage politics of Abahlali amongst Abahlali. The reason this is happening is because Abahlali is a space of equals where there is no student and mentor. We all find our own ways of discovering the truth about our struggle. Everyone has something to say that is already in their minds because everyone is learning in this struggle.

If I look at past experience I can safely say that my experience was taken seriously. We used to share our views collectively and formulate whatever position or strategy that we were working on. When you are talking people give you their undivided attention and find ways to work with what you are sharing. When people raise questions about what you said it wasn't a sign of undermining your contribution but to really get to the core of what you are saying. But today things are not the same. If you share advice people don't listen to you because what you are saying is not expected to be coming from you, no matter how useful that advice. When someone else who is more favoured shares the same advice it will be taken seriously. For example, I proposed that leaders of Abahlali should not exit positions and then come back to them again. At least they must be part of an advisory group that will support current leaders at that time. Nobody took note of what I said until it was said by someone else and

people pretended they heard it for the first time. There is nothing we can do about that, people are not the same.

In the very beginning our discussions were largely focusing on land and housing. We talked about land in the city and the need for staying near workplaces. We talked about improving living conditions in the areas where we were staying. The ANC too promised that we will see better living conditions and get houses near the cities where our employment is largely located. Everyone understood that we can't stay far from the cities because the money we earn will just pay transport and not support our families. We all come from that experience of believing that indeed the government will do its best to change our lives for the better. But we all soon realised that the government was not prepared to listen to us.

We are used as voters like bank facilities, our task is to vote people in. As Abahlali we thought hard about these experiences and realised that before the eyes of politicians we have no dignity, they do not respect us. Which is why over the years our campaign came to include the issue of dignity. We then started talking about land, housing and dignity. Even if we don't mention land and housing but demand dignity alone that means we really take our lives and situation very seriously because dignity is the centre of humanity.

5.4 Ubuhlalism

Sbu Zikode:

What I can say we really want to see as Abahlali, beside land, housing and services which all is important, is a nation where everyone is seen as God's creation, given equal opportunities, whether you talk of social, economic, cultural and even environmental. We are saying it is important that everyone is seen as God's creation. So our vision is about realising a life where people are treated with dignity and respect like any other human being, where everyone is treated with justice and equality. That is what we want to see and that is the nation we are trying to build. It is important though to mention that you cannot get there whilst there is still poverty and injustice. That is why in our mission we say in order to have justice, equality and happiness, we need to provide a roof over people's heads and land so that people are not landless in their country of birth. Actually it is embarrassing that there are people who are made landless in their ancestral country, that's not justice.

So Abahlali are different from other movements who only demand services and then disband when such services are provided. We are saying as Abahlali we deserve service provision, it's not something we should even fight for. However, we want more than that, we want to reclaim our humanity, our rights, our right to earth, our right to discipline. We want to be part of building and decision-making, particularly if those decisions affect us and our future.

I can say without any doubt that when people insist on nothing about them without them, that is Ubuhlali. Ubuhlali goes beyond issues of delivery and basic services - it is about our politics and identity of who we are. So Ubuhlali is not just a literal translation of citizens. That is why we don't just call any shack settlement Abahlali because Ubuhlali comes with responsibility of being schooled by the movement in its continued struggle. We have developed a step-by-step guide that helps new members to understand the responsibilities of being Umhlali. We make sure that we hold at least three meetings within a settlement to talk about Ubuhlali before we launch an Abahlali branch.

So in order for people to understand about Ubuhlali, we developed the guide to make people aware of the choices they have to make before they join. Even if someone is still fond of his or her ward councillor there are choices to be made. Here in Abahlali there is no room for hypocrisy and cowardice, Ubuhlali comes with heroism and bravery because we know fighting against these injustices and corruption is not easy, we need strong cadres. Therefore the word Ubuhlali comes with heavy weight that goes beyond service delivery and it comes with challenges, but it is our philosophy that goes hand in hand with living politics.

Zodwa Nsibande:

I think one of the pillars that made Abahlali what they are today was to do away with the notion of one person working all by himself or herself. As a result, if a person joins Abahlali as an individual he or she is encouraged to recruit more people so that there can be a branch in that area. This is one way of implanting the idea of a collective. As Zikode used to say, when you cough the only people who hear you are those in your shack or those who are neighbours to your shack, your community and then the whole of Durban. So it is important that whatever you have gained you share it with other people. So Abahlali got rid of the notion of individualism that party politics has planted in people's heads.

For me one thing that has been a wisdom of Abahlali is that Abahlali promoted from the beginning that each and every one counts. Whether you went to school or not does not matter. Things that really helped me grow are things that were shared by people you least expected to share...people were not politicians but said deep political statements, like gogos. Normally when you talk of politics you think of people who are young and vibrant. Now coming to work with people who have experience in life, who have to struggle again, firstly against apartheid and now against the regime...they carry history which they share with us. That has helped me to grow and gave me a new way of viewing the society I am living in and politics at large.

I remember in the early days when the movement was still operating from Kennedy Road, the movement used to have night camps at least every three months. In all the night camps all participants were asked: “What is the meaning of Ubuhlali?” as the first question of the night. Different people responded differently. The whole idea with this question was not to get the same answers but to make sure that as members we all have something that connects us to this movement. For me Ubuhlalism is a politics of Abahlali that connects everyone to the movement. Ubuhlalism is the way you live, it’s the politics of the movement. Although I cannot remember how the word came about, it has become the practice of all members of Abahlali. So in the camps when this question was asked it gave people the opportunity to define why they are in the movement.

The question was also used to prepare people to engage with outsiders, especially journalists who would ask people in the protest marches about why they are participating in Abahlali marches. Journalists would not pick Mnikelo who is the spokesperson of the movement or Zikode who was the president in those days, they would pick anyone and ask them why they were in the protest. So each and every one had to be able to answer that question. I have heard of situations where people when asked why are they in a protest would say they do not know, they were just told to come to the protest. Now to deal with such things it became imperative that in the camps people must be able to talk about why they are in the movement. What does being Umhlali mean to you since you are not here to represent anyone but yourself and your needs?

Thinabantu Khanyile:

It is Abahlali's belief that when there is development, ordinary people are excluded. Abahlali culture is that every person must be part of their development, it's what is called participation. What we want is that when you are talking about us, involve us in that discussion. When you make decisions about us, you need to involve us so that we can see if that connects to our needs and whether or not it will be helpful to us. We want to be able to do things ourselves and not always rely on outside help. You cannot always give people fish, you need to make them know how to fish so that next time they are hungry they can go and fish. We cannot always rely on government. We need to be able to do things on our own but government rules in such a way that we are dependent on their services.

This brings me to our discussion about Ubuhlali. My definition is it's where you are ready to struggle with everything you have including your life, to fight for your rights, particularly poor people. It is rare that you can find rich people in movements like Abahlali. So Ubuhlali is a struggle that you commit to for the rest of your life. Now what do we mean when we say Ubuhlali is a school? I have a belief that where there are more than two people meeting, there is an exchange of ideas. Each of them contributes their ideas in the discussion. New things would emerge there that some people hear for the first time. Some of the lessons that are shared in Abahlali relate to development. We don't believe people can be developed but rather that people must be supported as they develop themselves. We also don't believe that a person can be developed by getting a house, but that the quality of life of that person must change and that must be sustainable.

Mnikelo Ndabankulu:

Ubuhlalism has always required someone to be honest, to be truthful and to always put peoples' interests ahead of yourself. It was always conscientising us that we are not the bosses of this movement, but the general members of the movement are the leaders of the movement.

It always forced us to listen to what general members say so that if they send us to City Hall we go there. If the City Hall says to us "Go to hell" we then come to the people and give feedback. If people say let's take to the streets, we do that. It is easier to organise a protest march this way because it is based on the anger of the people. If you can recall, since I have been part of the movement, Foreman Road has only had two marches. The first one was in

2005 and the second one in 2013. Why does it take so long? Well it's because as leaders we don't decide for people, it's them who must decide. If people have that boiling anger and political motivation, you can be almost certain that they will take to the streets.

Mama Kikine:

The formation of the movement started from there, with that very word, *Ubuhlali*. To be Umhlali or when you are Umhlali your university or school is your experience of oppression and poverty. That is our Ubuhlalism. Whenever we meet and share experiences it is actually about sharing knowledge of poverty. We share our experiences of suffering. Even those who were experiencing police brutality, they will talk about their experience and we will all seek to find solutions together.

Lindela Figlan:

Ubuhlalism becomes the learning and the ideology of Abahlali. It is our way of life. It is the culmination of the teachings of Abahlali. It promotes our indigenous knowledge so that even if you did not go to school you can still learn a lot from the struggle and actually shape that learning through the education you acquire from home and your society. What I am trying to say here is that Ubuhlalism is our ideology and our way of life.

People used to describe Ubuhlalism in different ways and using different words. Just like the tree, it has many branches that grow in different directions but there is only one stem. What we see as the stem is the movement and the struggle of the movement. People were free to come with different interpretations and ideas but the stem is Abahlali baseMjondolo. I remember one day an elderly woman Umhlali said that to be Umhlali is to put a shack anywhere you like, and another one said to talk about Ubuhlalism is about going to protest marches. You know it is for those reasons we decided to have night camps where we actually shape each other and learn from each other about Ubuhlalism. To make sure we all carry the spirit of Ubuhlalism. In these meetings no one said to these old ladies they were wrong but we make sure that there is a way of bringing all discussions to the stem which is Ubuhlalism.

These camps were a very serious space and we were not going there to play but to learn from one another about our way of life which is Ubuhlalism. When we were in these camps we gave each other tasks and areas to share with other members. We were aware that all of us must be able to give something in order for the movement to grow. We made sure that we

spread the time to share so that everyone can talk. We did this as a way of ensuring sustainability. We realised that some people joined Abahlali because they needed legal support but we somehow managed to clarify through these camps that the struggle needs those who are suffering to lead it. If those who are facing evictions and other kinds of misery fold their arms and hand over to professionals, the struggle will die.

We also emphasised that Ubuhlali is not a R10 joining fee and staying at home, it is people taking charge of their struggle and confronting forces that subject them to poverty. It is through these camps that we developed strategies of how to use courts and lawyers and how to exert pressure even when we are in courts. We equip each other on the use of marches and the use of the Constitution so that other members can resist evictions on their own without always expecting Abahlali office staff to rescue them. We were really wanting people to give reports on how they had confronted municipal brutality. That's basically what we use to talk about in the night camps.

5.5 After the 2009 attack

Sbu Zikode:

It is true that these continuous attacks and political repression make it difficult to learn and be taught. Since the 2009 attacks at Kennedy Road we had to do things differently. We learn to swallow things without having enough time to chew them. So yes there are enormous differences, although we still make time for learning sessions, there is not as much flavour as before. For instance during the night camps people stayed the whole night. And that alone was an indication of people's commitment and sacrifice in the struggle. Therefore, night camp discussions were taken very seriously. People chose to be at these meetings instead of resting at their homes or spending time with their families. The content of these discussions was very educational because they were about our future and our children's future. But today after the attacks we can no longer spend that much time discussing issues, time is limited and discussions are during the day. We just deal with surface issues and do not dig deep enough.

We are always looking out for our safety because we know our lives are on the line. You can't eat comfortably knowing you are being chased. This really creates difficulties for the University of Abahlali and we are not happy with time spent on discussions nowadays

compared to before the attacks in 2009. And since June 2013 when Nkululeko Gwala was murdered, people have become even more fearful and really scared about losing their lives.

What really sustains the movement is that it is a mature movement and has been around for a long time and that it no longer relies on one person who if he were to be killed the movement would collapse. I do think even our attackers are now confused as to how many really must be killed in order to finally destroy Abahlali. This is what convinces me that Abahlali are schooled in their politics, it's no longer about a few individuals but masses of people. If the leaders were to die the movement will continue because everyone is schooled in our politics. If our attackers want to kill the movement they will have to kill the masses because people live, think and breathe Ubuhlalism, they have seen the light and it will not be easy to make them change course.

So even when we no longer have night camps, Ubuhlalism does not go away because it is the life of the movement. Even when now we have day meetings to discuss our politics, it is still the same commitment to making time to deepen our sense of our politics. This word Ubuhlali carries the understanding that to be in the struggle is to be in school. We try at every meeting to talk about Ubuhlali and emphasise that it is a commitment that comes with responsibilities and challenges. So the responsibility of growing and sustaining the movement does not only sit with leaders but with every member of the movement by attending meetings and participating in movements activities. If you get an Abahlali membership card you actually commit to carrying the responsibility of fighting injustice, inequality and continued learning of living politics. You are actually committing to resisting forces that want to keep the poor in the dark and keeping them ignorant about their rights.

Zodwa Nsibande:

For me I wouldn't rule out completely the impact of the 2009 attacks as reasons for change in Abahlali practice. That the office is no longer in the [Kennedy Road] settlement but instead in town I don't think is the contributing factor. What I think is contributing is that people who actually formed the movement were mostly from rural areas. People from rural areas are different from city people in terms of how they interact with other people. The way Abahlali were embracing one another you would feel at home and feel loved up until 2009. Then people from the township joined in numbers. I suppose they were so many that they

overpowered the practice of Ubuhlalism with their township tendencies of not caring for other people but themselves.

But things changed a lot after 2009. What I see is that they are here because they want something from Abahlali and when they get it they go. During the early days it was not about your personal problems or your settlement problems. I remember people of Motala Heights who, when they heard that someone has been arrested, would hire a taxi even in the middle of the night to go and be in solidarity with that Umhlali. But now that does not exist anymore. Another contributing factor is the issue of money. That is affecting the movement. Now people ask for money before they do anything, unlike before where people would just go to the police station without asking for money [for taxi fare]. Now if there is no money, there is no activism. In recent times if there is a meeting and you don't participate no one will ask you what is happening or what have you learnt.

The majority of people are literate and are on social networks because it is cheaper. But because people are using social networks to gain popularity and serve their self-egos, it is killing the movement. In old days people were not in the movement to gain popularity but to serve the interests of other people. Now that Abahlali are well-known people think if you are in Abahlali you will also be well-known and travel around. It is also frustrating that when new people come in, older people step back.

I think the philosophy is not under threat, I think the practice is. I think we are all guilty of not making sure that the practice is learnt by each and every person who joins Abahlali. I wouldn't want to point fingers but I think all of us who were part of forming the movement should insist on showing others who come in that this is how we practise. So the practice of Ubuhlalism is really diminishing. If the question that we used to ask old comrades about the meaning of Ubuhlali was to be directed to all these new people, you would be surprised with what you would get. It would be a totally different response. Some comrades have proposed that we need to record these discussions of Ubuhlalism so that when new people come there is something to share with them.

Thinabantu Khanyile:

I may not be too clear but I think we lost the focus of maintaining the political education and induction when people first join the movement. Leaders were too quick to implement ideas that emerged from other members without ensuring that these are democratic space within Abahlali. I think also Abahlali's access to different technologies and resources makes people forget where we come from, our origins. For instance when the movement started there was no money, everyone went to their own wallets, but today nothing happens unless there is money from outside. People come to the movement with a perception that there is a lot of money. People do not offer themselves to serve the movement anymore. Even in communities where we successfully stopped evictions, we do not give ourselves the task of ensuring that the survivors of evictions get development like everyone else. We no longer engage the municipality to ensure development, and access to land and houses.

Although we believe that we need to teach people, we as leaders also need to be taught. We need to go back and revisit our goals and objectives in forming this movement. We need to take time analysing our reason for existence and see how can we revive some of our core values. Otherwise we are no different from political parties and our way of functioning is no different from the dominant capitalist practice. If we do not do all that, it means we no longer believe in socialism. We are increasingly running short of people who feel the real calling for serving the poor. People come when they are facing evictions and when we have stopped the bulldozers, they disappear and never attend Abahlali meetings. So really the question we are confronted with is whether Abahlali will be able to remain the movement that we wanted it to be in the next three to five years. I am not so sure.

Nokukhanya Dlamuka:

Now things have changed. Listening and doing are two different things. Of course in a meeting we will come up with a plan but whether or not that will be implemented is another thing, like in our case, we agreed how the office would support us but then nothing is done, and it creates problems. For example the Executive will commit itself to attending to issues that are facing us in our settlements but then they do not live up to their word. It's not only me who is worried about this, there are others as well. We do not expect Abahlali to do things for us but we expect them to support us. Now when that is not happening it really create problems. Power dynamics play a role. People do not want to vacate their positions. We have had discussions about this. The fact that some people are unemployed in the movement and

are in positions of power, they make sure they hold on to that power, especially if there are some benefits.

Mduduzi Hlongwa:

What I believe is that Abahlali have deflected, they are no longer doing what they were formed for. It's now kind of a business. It's the same as a political party at the leadership level because those are the people who are steering the movement. So I believe that our so-called comrades are no longer for the people but they are about themselves. It's now "viva sisu sami, viva my stomach". It's no longer "power to the people". Power is no longer for the people, it's for individuals. They are turning into the elite. It will continue like this because I don't think there is anyone noticing what I am saying. They believe everything is smooth sailing whereas the organisation is going down.

In most instances the people who started something, be it a business, a creche, etc., you know the basics of why you started it. If for some reason someone comes along, knocks you down and takes over, the truth is that person does not have what you have. What is important to them is to be praised that they now own your business. So it's the same thing with Abahlali. I believe that if all those who were there when we started, the community leaders that started the movement, if they can come together and take over, restructure the leadership, I think it can go forward. Because now current leaders have lost the organisational interest, instead they are focusing on self-interest.

I don't even think there are still campaigns as we used to have them whenever the country is approaching elections. It is impossible now for the organisation to tell people not to vote or to keep away from voting because the leadership is not together, everybody is pulling sideways.

Mnikelo Ndabankulu:

I don't think Ubuhlalism still exists. The word has a rich history and people abuse that word. You find that someone is talking left but walking right. This is because in no way as a movement which is a defender of human rights and which is against injustice can we fight over supporting people who need bail when they are stuck in Westville Prison. Why should there be a war over that? It shows that there is a lack of Ubuhlalism. I understand if we are told there is no money. But it's not about a shortage of money but an element of wanting to use money for other reasons not linked to the Ubuhlalism. I really think it is an indication of

the lack of Ubuhlalism that movement resources can't be used to bail out comrades who are in Westville prison. I don't think now everybody counts. That was a selfish decision, very selfish. Injustice is our enemy. Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.

Mama Kikine:

When the movement grew it attracted many shackdwellers. Those who came around 2010 and later, they arrived when there were not many difficulties. Things were no longer as hard as when the movement was rebuilding itself after the 2009 attacks. Although new settlements were facing problems with the municipality and their councillors, at least there were enough resources to even secure lawyers who could easily deal with their problems. There were even programmes to send some activists to universities, etc.

You see personally I really feel hurt due to what happened in the Kennedy Road attacks. Those attacks were part of creating divisions in the movement. My sense is that it was money that was the root of the evil that happened in Kennedy. Some people began to think they too should be in power so that they can have money and use it for their personal interests. The result of these attacks led to leaders changing how they lead. Now they fight over positions because these positions are linked to access to resources.

Night camps don't exist anymore. Our school is no more. After the attacks in Kennedy Road there was not even a single night camp. For me discontinuing night camps was the loss of a real foundation of Abahlali. It was the abandoning of the only school and a space where we taught each other. Meetings that we have today are only for a few because if you don't have a phone you will not know that there is a meeting and when is a meeting. That is why the movement is divided now.

We have lost Ubuhlali. When we started this movement we were actually creating a place of refuge for those who are victims of party politics and capitalist elites. But now this is right inside the movement. What we were running away from and fighting against has become part of us. The movement is run in a capitalist way. I think some people came for money in the movement. They came to fulfil their personal interests. When they arrived disputes started erupting and it is getting worse. Even when settlements bring issues to the leaders no one responds because no one cares. People are bound to be angry and they will continue to show their anger as happened in the last meeting. Old settlements feel they are no longer welcome

since the arrival of new settlements. It means there are people who cannot be schooled through Ubuhlali.

Lindela Figlan:

Since the attacks in 2009 things changed in Abahlali. We no longer have night camps. We no longer have long meetings, nothing. The love that we shared as the movement has also disappeared. There used to be many of us in the camps. But today the idea of camps has come to have the same connotation as camps that are in the political parties. Instead of having night camps which are our school, we now have groupings (camps) that rally behind certain individuals. This is killing the movement because now people are caught up in favouring certain individuals instead of living according to Ubuhlalism. These things are apparent today.

In the first place in these night camps we talked about real humanity and real love for one another. We used to call each other even when there were no meetings just to check how other people are doing and how they are coping with life. As someone who grew up in the Eastern Cape, I learnt that if you are my comrade, you are my comrade forever. When we are in the meetings we are comrades. The respect we owe to each other is on the basis of being comrades. Now problems start when people start seeing and worshipping their leaders as kings or super leaders creating the situation where leaders begin to see themselves to be above other comrades. Now it is very easy for a person to fall into that trap when those around are actually creating conditions of being seen as a super power.

I think members of the movement are responsible for creating demi-gods out of their leaders and now leaders are actively playing new roles. I will use the metaphor of a soccer game. In the early days there was no dribbling, you received the ball, you looked for the next person and passed to him. But today people keep the ball to themselves, wanting to be superstars, there is no longer teamwork.

Honestly speaking, Ubuhlalism is finished. Maybe I am too harsh, I must say it is too little or it is not the same as the one we had in the early years. If we can find a way to end these tendencies of authoritarianism and individualism maybe Abahlali still have a future. If leaders can listen to the people and not think of themselves as kings but servants of the people, then I think the movement has a future.

5.6 Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, this chapter provided interview data of eight interviews. Most of the people were active members of the movement and they began raising issues that are critical for this study as they responded to questions relating to their learning experience and their sense of how Abahlali struggle contributes to that experience. In addition to interview data that has been presented on this chapter, other data sources such as documents, my own experience and observation, etc., will be used in Chapter Six when I present a detailed discussion of findings and analysis.

Chapter Six: Discussion of findings and analysis

6.1 Introduction

In keeping with a critical framework and qualitative research methods, I have used thematic coding to analyse my data. As discussed in Chapter Four, LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe data analysis as the process of reducing large amounts of collected data to make sense of them. Data are organised, summarised, and patterns and themes identified. In my analysis, I followed Patton's (1987) six steps of data analysis: familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up.

In my analysis, I used both inductive and deductive analysis (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). I read the transcript repeatedly to grasp all useful and workable themes that were emerging and presented in the data. I coded data according to the following themes, which appeared to emerge from the data: becoming a member, participation, leadership, learning, Ubuhlalisms and the aftermaths of the 2009 attacks. I drew on data from my document analysis and my experience of participant observation in this analysis.

I also used themes from Wenger's (1998) diagram of the four components of learning, and his diagram on stages of development of communities of practice. Given what seems to be a thread in all participants' responses regarding the shifts within Abahlali, I applied Wenger's (1998) diagram of four elements and his stages of development timeline diagram to analyse how the shift in learning and knowledge production has occurred over the years. I have also used my own experience/data from my participant observation in my analysis.

6.2 Inductive thematic analysis

6.2.1 *Becoming a member*

Most participants were mobilised to become part of Abahlali between 2005 and 2009. With the exception of founding members, other participants find resonance between their experience as shackdwellers and the Abahlali movement. It seems that joining as individuals was not advised by the movement; instead, it was recommended that people join as a group

from a settlement. For instance, Nokukhanya gives an idea of how in her community at eMmause they became members:

One Abahlali member recruited us and gave us membership cards whilst we were still renting. When we arrived some people who were tenants were already Abahlali members and then we thought maybe we also need to join. Sometimes it is useful to participate in communal initiatives because you don't know what will happen tomorrow.

For some who were already in Kennedy Road the decision to become a member largely rests on the treatment they received from Abahlali. For example, Thinabantu says,

What really made me want to be actively involved in the movement is that Abahlali supported me without looking at whether I was Abahlali member or not.

In my document review, I came across a document that was produced by Abahlali, *Manifesto of Abahlalism* (2007). The first point that is made is that we are all created in the image of God, everyone is important (p. 1.) This affirms what Thina says above. It seems that the experiences of caring and looking out for each other, supporting each other and struggling together were fundamentally the reasons people became members, in comparison with the feeling and the experience of being neglected and lied to by authorities. The very formation of Abahlali baseMjondolo is based on shackdwellers converging to create an alternative space for dealing with the reality of being shackdwellers. In their document they say:

Everyone who is poor is poor. It doesn't matter what language you speak or where you were born or where your ancestors came from. All poor people are welcomed into our movement.

I have seen this in my observation because members of the movement are people who come from other parts of the African continent (i.e. Congo, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, etc.). All have been welcomed.

Perhaps it is important to acknowledge the fact that Abahlali members were actually pushed by their situation of poverty, neglect, anger and the feeling of betrayal, among other things. In

the narrative of the birth of Abahlali, Zodwa clearly points out that residents of Kennedy Road settlement had for years been trying to get information from city officials concerning the development in Kennedy Road but had little response from the officials and in any response they were given, people realised that they were given wrong information. As an alternative space, getting involved in Abahlali seems to have been an experience of freedom. Lindela tells how in the early meetings principles of self-determination were upheld:

When I first got involved the name Abahlali baseMjondolo did not exist. I attended the second meeting where comrades were still forming this movement by sharing ideas of what it means to start our own movement.

As Mduduzi adds:

...it is not a pleasant and good experience to stay in a shack. The government had to do something for the people because it is the people who voted the government into power, so it had to give something back.

In my observation when going around the shack settlements, I have seen that shackdwellers live in appalling conditions. This is clearly a critical realisation in the life of people in an area - their situation is not divinely ordained but can be overturned. As one of the founders, Mnikelo says, "If you have a conscience, and you love yourself and your country then you can't run away from this struggle".

From my observation in the night camps and listening to discussions, it seems that becoming Umhlali involves being active and determined to work towards changing your situation and not waiting for someone to do it for you. There seems to have been a clear agenda to form a mass-based movement that will in turn forcefully engage issues of transforming the realities of shackdwellers. Mama Kikine remembers how they got involved in Abahlali. She says:

They talked to us about the need to unite as shackdwellers because we are all struggling and fighting for a common purpose. They told us about the movement and said it will be much more powerful when most shackdwellers take part.

The first protest action that took place in Kennedy Road in March 2005 shows that members of this shackdwellers formation were self-determined to build an alternative to what they saw as an unproductive platform of engagement. From the beginning, attending meetings and participating in communal activities were critical gestures towards identifying with Abahlali. Most participants clearly point to the fact that they took part in community meetings which contributed to them making a decision to join Abahlali.

6.2.2 Participation

In my observation in the meetings, Abahlali have always encouraged open participation. The more members participate, the more possible for them to learn from other members. As an alternative space for people who live in the shacks it seems Abahlali was a home to most shackdwellers. Nokukhanya says:

Sometimes it is useful to participate in communal initiatives because you don't know what will happen tomorrow. As of now I can say that joining Abahlali was a smart thing to do.

In their own document *Abahlali Manifesto* (2007), it is stated clearly that, "Our politics welcomes everyone who lives in the settlements – women and men, the young and the old, people from everywhere" (p. 1). Obviously, coming from a shack settlement that is constantly facing evictions and demolitions of houses, Nokukhanya knows what it is like to be uncertain about the future. Living in uncertainty disrupts dreams for the future unless one gets involved in community initiatives to change that situation.

This is tied to the notion of collective learning as a principle and practice. Participation was a constant discipline that ensured that Abahlali learn to do things together. Doing it this way, Abahlali ensured that members own, as stated in Thapliyal (2006), "the right to think about the world beginning from your own location/place" (p. 185). Clearly, from the point of building a platform of equals and of people who shape their own history, Abahlali's strongest point was making the movement a home for all shackdwellers. Thinabantu says:

Abahlali is a movement that amalgamates all settlements within Ethekewini municipality. The reason for this was so that all these settlements can have one strong voice when meeting the Ethekewini municipality about development.

In my observation, it seems that by allowing everyone's participation, Abahlali were democratising access to information and sharing knowledge which presumably would have been the main concerns for most shackdwellers from the beginning. Actually, their slogan "nothing about us without us" is testimony to democratisation of access to information and full participation. This clearly links with the Communities of Practice concept of participation as in this theory it is regarded a core underlying factor to ensure member's learning.

6.2.3 Leadership

This is another key theme coming out of participants' accounts of Abahlali's struggle. From the beginning the movement adopted a system of rotating leadership responsibilities or put differently, adopted a system where members of the movement decide and choose who they want to lead the movement.

In my document review I discovered that this practice is enshrined in their Constitution. It states that all members will have equal rights and status in Abahlali (Section, 4.4). As Zodwa puts it, "every year there were meetings to elect a committee". The structure of leadership is vertical or hierarchical, yet the system of getting things done and making decisions is largely horizontal. Clearly from what most participants said, in the early years especially before 2009, Abahlali meetings are where decisions were made and leaders are tasked with carrying the mandate of the collective and not the other way around. Leaders are servants of the masses, as stated by Zodwa in her interview:

Whoever is in power is obliged to make sure that the lives of the people he or she is leading are changed. So that is how I understood the struggle of Abahlali to be different from the struggle of political parties.

My observation has been that the issue of leadership has always been a tricky one for a mass-based movement like Abahlali. However, over the years members have taken pride in electing

leaders they want. As a movement that is made up of many settlements, there have always been questions of where the next leader will come from. The most critical practice has been to rotate portfolios and to leave it open to anyone to stand and get voted in a portfolio. Whilst leaders are expected to take charge of such things as negotiating with city officials and engaging with other networks or solidarity organisations, through mass meetings Abahlali maintains the principle of giving leaders ‘padkos’ (Afrikaans word for food for the journey). Thinabantu puts it eloquently:

The movement has structures to perform certain tasks, but we believe in a bottom-up system, so we allow members to discuss issues in their branches first and then bring them to an open general meeting to avoid decisions being made by the executive only. Differences of opinions are inevitable in any organisation. What we normally do as the committee is to combine people’s ideas to see what works best and how we can move forward. There are moments where we have to choose certain ideas over others but all these ideas come from members.

6.2.4 Learning from the Abahlali experience

Most participants agree that being part of Abahlali’s struggle was like being at school. In fact they see the struggle as a school. But this learning is not under the guidance of a formal institution or formal programme. It is learning as a result of people acting together and is derived from people’s collective actions. In this case, the differentiation of whether one is a founder or joined the movement at a later stage does not make any difference. A number of different things are learnt, as discussed below.

Learning to speak

Everybody learns from everybody. As a movement that created a space for everyone to participate in shaping the agenda, people learn to express themselves without the fear of being undermined. Nokukhanya puts it eloquently by saying:

I can say that I learnt a lot from being Umhlali. When I first came in I could not even speak but now I can address people and express my feelings. I now work with other members from other settlements who are facing the same problems that we are facing here in our area.

This is a profound claim and acknowledgement of a shift due to interacting with other people. For Nokukhanya it is remarkable that not only has she learnt to express herself, but she now supports other people in her area.

Learning about rights

Part of the confrontation with city officials was on the issues relating to shackdwellers' rights to protests and marches. Mduduzi's view of learning in Abahlali is interesting. He states:

I learnt a lot, for instance even when applying for a protest march. I didn't know anything about organising marches and the application process before. It's only when I was in Abahlali that I got that knowledge. I learnt which are the relevant offices to go to when applying for the march and how to secure insurance for the march, etc. That's an experience.

In my observation there is no school to learn how to secure the rights of street marches. As a non-formal learning space Abahlali, through the experience of struggling, rubbed off onto its members the knowledge about defending and fighting for the rights of shackdwellers. In fact, Cooper (2005) has argued the same point. As stated in Chapter Two she argues that, "through their experiences of organizing, meeting, taking collective decisions and engaging in collective action - knowledge is shared and new understandings are sought and produced" (p. 1). In his interview Sbu Zikode goes further to describe this type of learning. He says:

This is what learning as a collective is about, to make efforts to push together for what you believe, knowing that you are not alone.

Learning to theorise - Ubuhlalism

In my document review, Abahlali learn to theorise using Ubuhlalism. Their document *Abahlali Manifesto* (2007) sums up their theoretical understanding of their situation and the world as it is. But as members of Abahlali, they continue to theorise because Ubuhlalism is an ongoing explanation of their lived experience.

Ubuhlalism is an experience in Abahlali life where theorising is embedded in the daily experience of members with an intent to strengthen their struggle. Mama Kikine illustrates:

To be Umhlali or when you are Umhlali your university or school is your experience of oppression and poverty. That is our Ubuhlalism. Whenever we meet and share experiences it is actually about sharing knowledge of poverty. We share our experiences of suffering. Even those who were experiencing police brutality they will talk about their experience and we will all seek to find solutions together.

Zodwa talks about night camps where discussions would often take place theorising about the meaning of Ubuhlalism, thus opening a space for members to theorise about their reality. For Zodwa:

Ubuhlalism is a politics of Abahlali that connects everyone to the movement. Ubuhlalism is the way you live, it's the politics of the movement. Although I cannot remember how the word came about, it has become the practice of all members of Abahlali.

Seemingly as a result of this ongoing practice and learning from the struggle, Abahlali developed a practice and a theoretical formulation of their strategy. All participants talked about Ubuhlalism, putting it differently, but all agreed that it emerged out of the experience of learning from the movement.

In my observation, Ubuhlalism emerged as a uniquely Abahlali praxis as their actions were built from their reflections on their actions and their context. In most meetings there would be discussions about Ubuhlalism. A common feature in these discussions was the simplicity of the definition of Ubuhlalism as the daily experience of poor people, of suffering and resistance, as understood by ordinary people. Here is Sbu Zikode's definition:

I can say without any doubt that when people insist on nothing about them without them, that is Ubuhlali. Ubuhlali goes beyond issues of delivery and basic services but it is about our politics and identity of who we are. So Ubuhlali is not just a literal translation of citizens. That is why we don't just call any shack settlement Abahlali because Ubuhlali comes with the responsibility of being schooled by the movement in its continued struggle.

As an ideological underpinning of Abahlali practice, Ubuhlalism has created a measurement that goes as far as describing their engagement with their reality. It is not an -ism that is derived from any particular book or commentary of social movements' learning but from the day-to-day learning experience of the movement. Thinabantu says Ubuhlalism:

...is where you are ready to struggle with everything you have including your life, to fight for your rights, particularly poor people. It is rare that you can find rich people in movements like Abahlali. So Ubuhlali is a struggle that you commit to for the rest of your life.

Thinabantu continues to connect Ubuhlalism to a school:

Now what do we mean when we say Ubuhlali is a school? I have a belief that where there are more than two people meeting, there is an exchange of ideas. Each of them contributes their ideas in the discussion. New things would emerge there that some people hear for the first time.

Sbu Zikode says: "this word Ubuhlali carries the understanding that to be in the struggle is to be in school" and Lindela's understanding of Ubuhlalism points to indigenous knowledge juxtaposed with theorising from within Abahlali's struggle:

Ubuhlalism becomes the learning and the ideology of Abahlali. It is our way of life. It is the culmination of the teachings of Abahlali. It promotes our indigenous knowledge so that even if you did not go to school you can still learn a lot from the struggle and actually shape that learning through the education you acquire from home and your society. What I am trying to say here is that Ubuhlalism is our ideology and our way of life.

Lindela adds that learning from each other involves specific skills such as: "equipping each other on the use of marches and the use of the Constitution so that other members can resist evictions on their own".

Where do Abahlali learn?

In my observation much of the learning happens during meetings and by participating in actions, road blockades and protest marches, through the generation of press statements, night camps, events, etc. As is stated in their *Abahlali Manifesto* (2007), “We meet by candle light in shacks that we have built for meetings. We don’t need conference centres. We make our politics where we live” (p. 4). This corresponds to what I observed, as many informal settlements did not have electricity.

In my document review I discovered that Abahlali says that they learn from their situation of suffering. The document reads, “Our struggle is thought in our meeting, our suffering is a hidden truth of the world. Our rebellion brings this truth out and shows things that were hidden about the true nature of the world. We are experts in our suffering and in the struggle that stems from our suffering. We are Professors of our suffering and our struggle” (p. 2).

As discussed in Chapter Four, some members of Abahlali learnt during their Living Learning sessions. In these discussions militants drew a lot from Freire’s (1996) idea of self-propelled pedagogy from grassroots and emancipation. They were clear about the role of education and thus critiqued a dominant trend in universities. Figlan et al. (2009) challenge the mainstream university system, when they say that the aim for many people to go to universities is to “learn to teach the poor”. They assume that the “poor are empty enough and stupid enough” that they need people who will come and think for them (p. 19).

How do they learn?

In my observation, this learning is a long process that cannot be short circuited because it is largely influenced by the members’ experience and how they see themselves in the situation. Abahlali learn as a collective. Concurring with this notion Nokukhanya says:

When you are in Abahlali you learn, it does not have to be like in school where someone stands in front of you. In Abahlali you learn through other people’s experiences. Every time we are in meetings we encourage each other that we should not give up and we need to continue thinking of new strategies. If you are not serious you will not learn anything. I know that I am where I am because of committing myself to wanting to learn and then I make sure I attend meetings and activities of the

movement. By taking part in all these meetings I slowly learnt to express my ideas.

It is clear that the learning experience within Abahlali starts from basic and simple understandings of being human. This is completely different from party politics that in most cases appears to be abstract. As Zodwa points out:

It was a big shift for me coming from Greytown where I was living in a formal structure in a suburb where everyone minds his or her business, coming to Kennedy Road where you feel the sense of community as you greet one another, you love one another....we used to play cards as groups of 10 people, sharing jokes.

For Abahlali this way of learning is very important because it reinforces their view of their world that they are on their own and depend on themselves and their relationship with each other to continue with the struggle. Mama Kikine's contention also attests to this. She says:

I learnt that when we are united we are very strong. The municipality cannot touch us because we know our rights and we are able to defend these rights even if it means going to court.

In my observation, the way Abahlali understood their political formation and ideological orientation was everyone's effort. As Mnikelo puts it: "I have learnt that if people speak with one voice where everybody counts, you find that things are done for the benefit of everyone".

In my observation, interacting with people in their homes, it is indeed a striking feeling when one encounters Abahlali. You are left with the feeling of being welcomed and whole. Learning to make another person feel whole and regain their sense of worth is what Abahlali passes to members. As Sbu reiterates:

If we as Abahlali reflect on our journey we realise that we have drawn a map that is part of history about learning in the struggle, which in turn brought us to where we are. I can say without any doubt that there is a lot that we have learnt along the journey. One of the things we learned is to actually see that communities have so much power to bring social transformation, to bring equality, justice, dignity and the respect that ordinary people deserve.

The self-awareness of Abahlali is raised in Chapter Two as Selmeczi describes:

...their politics [is] 1) a space of speaking and listening [and] 2) a form of knowledge that maintains the shack-dweller as the subject and the knower of politics. (p. iii)

As discussed in Chapter Two, Foley (1999) reflects on this learning experience quite eloquently:

Satisfactory accounts of learning in struggle make connection between learning and education on the one hand, and analysis of political economy, micro-politics, ideology and discourse (or discursive practices) on the other. (p. 9)

This way of seeing learning resonates with Thapliyal's (2006) view on social movements when she argues that: "progressive social movements have been at the forefront of exposing the inherent inequity and exploitation embedded in capitalist models of development" (p. 247).

I see resonance in what Abahlali say about participation and Thapliyal (2006) reflecting on MST's process of participation. Thapliyal (2006) says:

...being part of collective action and collective resistance is in and of itself a learning experience because actions set in motion a fundamental pedagogical element which is the interaction between people, how they behave amongst each other. (p. 186)

Harley (2012b) in an article, *We are poor, not stupid*, agrees with this understanding saying that, in fact, Abahlali's learning creates a situation whereby "knowledge, and universal truth is created through the collective learning process of thinking struggle" (p. 11). How they defined themselves was relative to everyone's effort during their meetings.

The accounts of learning that are shared in the discussion above resonates with what Foley (1999) says. As stated in Chapter Two, Foley (1999) says that learning in social movements involves "the extent to which everyday experiential learning is implicit and embedded in other activities, and the extent to which it is, or can be, deliberately fostered" (p. 85). Sbu Zikode's remarks are very telling of the value of learning:

I can say that it is learning that has sustained this movement until today, we make the road as we walk. We are a learning movement, our road is only possible because we walk and experience it.

It is not just learning to advance the political project of abstracts and material gains. It is a political project about becoming humans with dignity that everyone deserves. It is interesting that Meek (2014) makes similar remarks when discussing the learning experience in the MST. As shown in Chapter Two, Meek (2014), using Gramscian thought, argues:

Central to Gramsci's thought is the belief that subaltern subjects have the capacity to both understand and change the world. To do so, there needs to be an 'intellectual and moral reform' involving the critiquing of hegemonic ideas, and the advancement of popular ideologies. Popular 'common sense' can only gain the ability to become hegemonic through a long-term process of movement building that Gramsci termed the 'war of position'. (p. 222)

The making of popular common sense is clearly what has dominated the experience of learning in Abahlali. Although Abahlali was not started in order to become a learning space, as commentaries of learning in social movements have argued, this was an unavoidable process.

As I indicated in previous chapters, Abahlali's struggle became well-known and attracted the attention of a range of groups, particularly politicians. Their insistence on presenting themselves and not allowing representation by politicians created a significantly hostile environment.

6.2.5 The impact of the 2009 attacks

As discussed earlier, in 2009 there was unrest in the Kennedy Road settlement and Abahlali leaders were attacked, leaving the Abahlali offices destroyed. Leaders fled from the settlement. Most participants agree that after the attacks it was difficult for Abahlali to retain their practices and the rhythm that they had built over the years. Sbu Zikode says:

It is true that these continuous attacks and political repression make it difficult to learn and be taught. Since the 2009 attacks at Kennedy Road we had to do things differently. We learn to swallow things without having enough time to chew them. So yes there are enormous differences, although we still make time for learning sessions, there is not as much flavour as before.

It has to be noted that this was a serious setback because Abahlali were physically displaced from Kennedy Road which had been their operational base since they emerged. As a result of these attacks people were suspicious of each other and began to look after themselves and their personal interests. Zodwa elaborates:

Another contributing factor is the issue of money. That is affecting the movement. Now people ask for money before they do anything. Now if there is no money there is no activism. In recent times if there is a meeting and you don't participate no one will ask you what is happening or what have you learnt.

Commenting on what these changes meant in terms of Abahlali's intellectual project, Zodwa argues: "I think the philosophy is not under threat, I think the practice is". Sbu Zikode agrees with this: "So even when we no longer have night camps, Ubuhlalism does not go away because it is the life of the movement". However, Thinabantu argues that after 2009 Abahlali suffered a severe loss:

I may not be too clear but I think we lost the focus of maintaining the political education and induction when people first join the movement. Leaders were too quick to implement ideas that emerged from other members without ensuring that there are democratic spaces within Abahlali to discuss and come up with decisions.

Perhaps this is in fact acknowledging that Abahlali, as Sbu puts it, are now having 'to swallow without chewing'. In addition to this, Nokukhanya raises another concern about this changed practice:

Now things have changed. Listening and doing are two different things. Of course in a meeting we will come up with a plan but whether or not that will be implemented is

another thing, like in our case, we agreed how the office would support us but then nothing is done, and it creates problems.

Although he is no longer a member of Abahlali, Mdu still follows the dynamics in Abahlali's struggle. He points to a bigger problem that sits with the leaders in Abahlali:

What I believe is that Abahlali have deflected, they are no longer doing what they were formed for. It's now kind of a business. It's the same as a political party at the leadership level because those are the people who are steering the movement. So I believe that our so-called comrades are no longer for the people but they are about themselves.

Indeed this depicts a problematic picture of tendencies that were not there in the years prior to 2009. Of course this is not to suggest that prior to 2009 things were perfect and Abahlali were pure. What it means is that during this time Abahlali always found ways of defeating bad tendencies and learning new politics that were based on principles of equality and counting of everyone. The period prior to 2009 attacks evidently showed Abahlali members growing from the periphery towards the centre as they were increasingly learning and participating in the movement. In that process of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), knowledge that emerged strengthened their struggle. Whereas the period after 2009 levels of participation changed just as access to learning was increasingly controlled by leaders in the movement.

6.3 Deductive thematic analysis

I used Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice theory as discussed in Chapter Three to analyse the learning experience in Abahlali. Whilst it is true that the theory is largely silent on the role of power, I however valued its contribution as it provided tools to trace changes in relations as Abahlali learning processes unfolded; and hence track changes in power relations. There is no doubt that power influenced the process of learning. I firstly employed his four components of learning diagram and, secondly, used the diagram on stages of development in organisations to analyse further how learning in Abahlali has occurred. Both of these diagrams are used to explain how learning is understood in movements but also show how

changes occur in communities of practice over time creating undesirable outcomes. In the case of learning in Abahlali, this way of doing it seemed appropriate as an acknowledgement of latest developments. These latest developments do point to contestations of power and positions in the Abahlali which have yielded fall-outs that will be discussed in later sections.

Much of the discussion from the document review from Abahlali shows that learning has always been an important feature of the movement. In my understanding and analysis, Abahlali's struggle and learning that emerges from their struggle fits Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice theory well. Wenger (1998) introduces three dimensions that describe the character of learning in communities of practice. These are:

- (a) mutual engagement, whereby through participation in the community, members establish norms and build collaborative relationships by doing things together;
 - (b) joint enterprise, whereby through their interactions, they create a shared understanding of what binds them together through negotiations and mutual accountability; and
 - (c) shared repertoires, whereby the community produces a set of communal resources characterized by stories, styles, artefacts, tools, discourses, concepts and historic events.
- (p. 2)

All participants in this research, in talking about their learning experience as members of Abahlali, referred to the experience of Abahlali doing this together and building really useful relationships between shack settlements across Durban. The practice of joint marches, the first Kennedy Road blockade, meeting regularly as members and sharing ideas and strategies enabled members to engage with confidence as a result of a continually developed shared understanding of what it means to be Umhlali. As a community of practice, Abahlali have produced shared repertoires and other resources which are authentically Abahlali's, such as slogans, rhythm of meetings, unique celebrations such as Unfreedom Day - all of which are useful for strengthening their struggle.

Thus it is clear that Abahlali constitute a community of practice. Below I attempt to apply the key principles of Community of Practice theory – the four components of learning, legitimate peripheral participation, and the stages of development of communities of practice – to the

community of practice of Abahlali baseMjondolo. I first consider each of these separately, before attempting to synthesise them in order to explain the learning that has occurred within the movement.

6.3.1 The Four Components of Learning

As discussed in Chapter Three, Wenger (1998) argued that there were four components of learning – community, identity, meaning and practice – each related to a kind of learning. Wenger suggests that learning as belonging is related to learning about community, whereas learning as becoming is related to learning about identity. Learning as experience is related to learning about meaning and lastly, learning as doing is related to learning about practice. The point to be noted here is that none of the components is complete without the other.

Community: Learning as belonging

From the discussion above it is clear that for most participants becoming a member of Abahlali was an important step in their lives. Abahlali as a community of practice allowed members to feel and learn a new experience of belonging. Throughout the discussions the common thread that is emphasised is the acknowledgment that Abahlali as a community taught people what it means to belong with others. The result of belonging to this community allowed people to gain confidence and ability to express themselves because they were now part of a bigger community.

Identity: Learning as becoming

Clearly identity as Umhlali contributed tremendously to members of Abahlali. The discussion in Chapters One and Two on the formation of Abahlali shows what it meant for people in the movement to be Abahlali. Chapter Two also showed how the identity of Abahlali created or resuscitated the debate on social movements in academic institutions and elsewhere (Harley, 2012a; Patel, 2006; Pithouse, 2006a; Selmeczi, 2012). For members this became their pride because it made members engage without shame in being shackdwellers. The identity of ‘shackdweller’ was an important thread that allowed different settlements around Durban and later in other provinces to appreciate learning emerging out of shackdwellers' experience. As Mama Kikine illustrates:

To be Umhlali or when you are Umhlali your university or school is your experience of oppression and poverty. That is our Ubuhlalism. Whenever we meet and share experiences it is actually about sharing knowledge of poverty. We share our experiences of suffering. Even those who were experiencing police brutality they will talk about their experience and we will all seek to find solutions together.

Meaning: Learning as experience

The discussion from participants clearly shows that for Abahlali learning comes from their experience. Their reality of living in shacks and their experience of being constantly harassed by police and not getting basic services contributed a great deal to Abahlali developing and formulating their own theory. Discussion on Ubuhlalism emerged out of learning from, and making sense of, their situation as shackdwellers. All participants understand the role Ubuhlalism plays in ensuring that the intellectual and political project of Abahlali remains relevant to people's needs. Clearly Ubuhlalism went beyond Abahlali and made its ways into academic debates about learning in social movements. As a result it is now being written about as an area for further research when theorising about Abahlali (see eg. Harley, 2012a; Selmeczi, 2012).

Practice: Learning as doing

As has been seen from the discussion in earlier chapters, as well as from the data, Abahlali present themselves as a movement of action. The birth of the movement in 2005 at Kennedy Road started off as community action breaking away from the practice of obeying orders from authorities. All participants agree that learning as doing has been an important feature of the movement which allowed even newcomers to learn to do things themselves. In most shack settlements, members have learnt to defend their territories without actually waiting for the founders of the movement to do it for them.

6.3.2 Legitimate Peripheral Participation

In my observation, in recent years particularly after the 2009 attacks, the much celebrated progression of newcomers from the periphery to the centre was now viewed with suspicion. Whereas in the period before 2009 through night camps, as demonstrated in the previous sections, everyone was a teacher and everyone was a learner. Emphasis on everybody matters was fundamental principle in how members gradually move from periphery towards

the centre. Regrettably, due to strong control and consolidation of the power of hierarchy, not everyone can speak; it is mainly old timers who do so. The induction of newcomers through discussions about Ubuhlalism seems to have changed. As Zodwa says:

I think we are all guilty of not making sure that the practice is learnt by each and every person who joins Abahlali. I wouldn't want to point fingers but I think all of us who were part of forming the movement should insist on showing others who come in that this is how we practice. So the practice of Ubuhlalism is really diminishing.

The interview data shows that many old timers blame the newcomers for what has happened; but this is contested. For example, Zodwa says:

In old days people were not in the movement to gain popularity but to serve the interests of other people. Now that Abahlali are well-known people think if you are in Abahlali you will also be well-known and travel around. It is also frustrating that when new people come in older people step back.

And Mama Kikine says much the same. For others, most notably Sbu Zikode, however, there is no real difference in how or why new people become members, or in the way they influence the movement as a whole.

6.3.3 Stages of development of communities of practice

As discussed in Chapter Three, Wenger (1998) argued that communities of practice went through stages of development. Using his understanding of what occurs in each of these phases, on the next page I have attempted to periodise Abahlali's stages of development.

Figure 10: Stages of development of the Abahlali community of practice

| Stage | Process | Typical activities | Abahlali period |
|------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| Potential | People facing similar situations without the benefit of a shared practice | Finding each other, discovering commonalities | Feb 2005 to Nov 2005 |
| Coalescing | Members come together and recognise their potential | Exploring connectedness, defining joint enterprise, negotiating community | Nov 2005 to April 2006 |
| Active | Members engage in developing a practice | Engaging in joint activities, creating artefacts, adapting to changing circumstances, renewing interest, commitment and relationships | April 2006 to Sept 2009 |
| Dispersed | Members no longer engage very intensely, but the community is still alive as a force and centre of knowledge | Staying in touch, communicating, holding reunions, calling for advice | Oct 2009 to May 2014 |
| Memorable | The community no longer central, but people still remember it as a significant part of their identities | Telling stories, preserving artefacts, collecting memorabilia | NOT YET IN THIS STAGE |

My view is that Abahlali are in the fourth stage because many members who were actively involved in learning are no longer intensely engaged, but the movement is still alive. This analysis does point to a weakness discussed in Chapter Three - that Wenger's theory does not sufficiently recognise conflict.

6.3.4 Synthesis

In the following table, I have attempted to synthesise the stages of development of the community of practice of Abahlali with the four components of learning - to show how these have changed as the community of practice has changed.

Figure 11: Analysis Grid: Learning through Stages of Development

| Wenger's Elements | Potential (people facing similar situation and discover commonalities) Feb 2005 to Nov 2005 | Coalescing (people come together, start defining common interest and form a community) Nov 2005 to April 2006 | Active (people develop a practice, engage in joint activities, create artefacts and renew relationships) April 2006 to Sept 2009 | Dispersed (people no longer engage intensely, community is still alive as a centre of knowledge and still holds meetings) Oct 2009 to May 2014 | Memorable (community no longer central but remembers its identities, telling stories and preserving artefacts) |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| Community (learning as belonging) | Common experience: - shack dwellers - lack of basic services - police harassment - shack fires - dehumanising living conditions - creation of Ubuhlalism | - Collective meetings - Shared resources - Caring for each other - Everybody matters - Uniting across race - Demanding rights to land, housing and dignity - Ubuhlalism | - Mass meetings - Prayer meetings Leaders - Loving and caring - one's suffering is everyone's - Collective formation - United across race - Everybody counts - Ubuhlalism | - Leaders are attacked - People flee for safety - Community in tatters - No common meeting place - Interim structures - Unity under threat - Ubuhlalism under threat | |
| Identity (learning as becoming) | - Shack dwellers - Red t-shirts - Poor - Criminalised - Thought-leaders - Ubuhlalism | Shared identity : - Ubuhlalism - Abahlali movement - Non-party politics - left-leaning - mass movement - Disengaged in electoral politics - no vote position | - Ubuhlalism - Development of slogans: "nothing about us without us"/ "talk to us and not about us" - Abahlali baseMjondolo movement as emerging national force | - Abahlali identity under threat - Democracy in tatters - Referral centre for services - Litigation on the rise - Increase of new settlements | |
| Meaning (learning as experience) | University of Abahlali derived from: - experiences of evictions, unlawful detention, discriminatory policies, and - organic intellectuals | - Pronouncement of own politics: - Third Force - Out-of-order politics - At a distance from the state and party politics - Ubuhlalism | - Ubuhlalism - Night camps and debates - Press statements - Engaging scholars about living politics - Produced Living Learning booklet | - Ubuhlalism dying - In-order politics - No more night camps - Press statements written by a few - The rise of individualism | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| Practice (learning as doing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Road blockades - Protest marches - Long meetings - Recruiting other settlements - Setting up settlement committees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protest marches - Road blockades - Night camps - Unfreedom day - Open meetings - Disengaging from electoral politics- "No land, no house, no vote" campaign - Ubuhlalism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resisting evictions and demolitions - Protest marches - Road blockades - Court and litigation - Networking with partners worldwide - Writing and presentation of Ubuhlalism - "No land, no house, no vote" - Democratic practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centralised leadership and control - Institutionalised practice - Embracing party politics - Undemocratic practices - Survival politics | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|

The analysis grid that I present above clearly shows that Abahlali's struggle has been a place of learning, although the 2009 attacks and events that occurred after this, made serious dents to the sustainability of real useful learning in Abahlali. This research has attempted to unearth learning in Abahlali, but it also noted the development that occurred post-2009 which led to a serious leadership fall-out and Abahlali having to reconsider their position on electioneering politics.

I present the four components of learning as the Y axis and stages of development as the X axis to show the shift in learning. What seems to be clear is that it is not easy to separate activities that occur in the four different elements. One of the key issues is that the four elements diagram presents learning as a fundamental feature in all four elements. So in the case of Abahlali, meaning-making emerges from their actions and experience and is largely influenced by their identity and their understanding of belonging. As a result, Ubuhlalism is the common thread that not only describes their actions and defines who they are, but it also presents Abahlali's ideological formulation and the process of learning.

It appears from the discussions above that learning occurs in different and multiple ways, that is to say, during meetings and actions they undertake as they express their demands through road blockades, protest marches, press statements, etc., and also through their experience of how they are responded to by city officials, academics, etc. Using the timeline I showed that in the early stages Abahlali did everything as a collective. How they defined themselves was relative to everyone's effort during their meetings. The way they understood their political formation and ideological orientation was everyone's effort.

In the early years there appears to be a take-off period where there was so much activism and collective forming and development of the formation Abahlali movement and politics. Participants themselves give testimony to a movement forming among shackdwellers across Ethekwini and beyond. Clearly, this was an epic period as struggling and activism was synonymous with learning. Poverty, appalling living conditions, police harassment, etc., all made Abahlali members "professors of their own suffering" (their own claim).

In most Abahlali meetings of their members there would be discussions about Ubuhlalism. A common feature of these discussions was the simplicity of the definition of Ubuhlalism as the daily experience of people, of suffering and resistance, which is understood by ordinary people. For Abahlali this was very important because it reinforced their view of their world - that they are on

their own and depended on themselves and their relationship with each other to continue with the struggle.

Clearly the period after 2009 presents a situation where that intense activism and intense learning drops, resulting in Abahlali having to adopt new practices and finding it difficult to maintain tools, artefacts and systems that have, up until 2009, strengthened the movement.

In my analysis I do not think Abahlali's struggle has reached the last stage of development, the Memorable stage. As unpredictable as it might be, I think only time will tell where their learning experience goes from here. Suffice to say any subsequent theorising about their learning experience will need to be born out of genuine engagement with their struggle and the realities they are confronting. I believe this is what I have tried to do in this research.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have applied both inductive and deductive thematic analysis to the interview data, and have drawn on my document analysis and my experience as a participant observer to get a better understanding of Abahlali experience of learning.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide the overview of what I have done throughout this study. I use the research questions to show that I succeeded in doing what this research has set out to do. I finally give an overall conclusion and my impression of the study.

Based on the hypothesis that I made in the rationale for this study that Abahlali's struggle is a useful place to theorise and understand learning in social movements, I took up this research to understand how learning in Abahlali happens. I searched and read literature on social movement theories and came to understand and grasp the difference between them, i.e. Marxist theory, New Social Movement theory and Resource Mobilization theory.

I also used scholars who have written on social movement learning to understand more about the learning experience in social movement struggles. I drew on the learning experiences of the Zapatista and MST to broaden my understanding of how other movements experience learning, and to provide insights on how social movement struggles become spaces of learning (Kane, 2001; Mentinis, 2006; Rico, 2014; Thapliyal, 2006). I used scholars who have studied social movements in South Africa and have looked at learning experiences in these movements (Cooper, 2005; Endresen, 2010; Harley, 2012; Patel, 2006; Pithouse, 2005a, 2006; Selmeczi, 2012). I then considered the usefulness of learning theories, in particular Experiential Learning theory, Transformative Learning theory, and Communities of Practice theory, in understanding and theorising about social movement learning. I concluded that Communities of Practice theory was the most useful for my study.

I now turn to my research questions:

- ⤴ How is knowledge produced within Abahlali?
- ⤴ How does individual experience and knowledge relate to the collective experience of Abahlali?
- ⤴ How does this collective experience contribute to the theory of Ubuhlalism?
- ⤴ How useful are existing theories about learning in social movements in relation to Abahlali's theory?

7.2 How is knowledge produced within Abahlali?

Throughout this research it has been demonstrated that Abahlali's struggle and their experience of suffering, resisting eviction, police harassment, etc., are the basis for their learning. This research has shown through data presentation and analysis of data that in Abahlali knowledge is produced through theorising that is built on careful and thorough discussions about their experiences and the struggle of Abahlali. Abahlali general meetings, protests marches, events, night camps, press statements, meetings within shack settlements and induction of new members meetings are all important learning sites from which knowledge is produced in Abahlali.

As shown in the data, it seems that in Abahlali everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher because in these learning sites they engage each other as equals. Although this environment is in tension with Community of Practice theory (which as mentioned above developed in and for the hierarchical workplace environment), the theory helped map changes over time, including in power-relations, and hence in knowledge production. From what the research has shown, Abahlali's production of knowledge was built on the principles of respect and of making everyone count. Their manifesto states clearly that it is how they relate to each other which makes their learning and production of knowledge profoundly useful for them. For example, they say that they encourage respect for everyone in the movement, old and young, women and men, new members and old members, and part of respect is kindness and solidarity.

This research has also shown that Abahlali's production of knowledge is in the form of their day-to-day life. Their daily struggle is a lived experience of learning. They consolidated their lived experience and theorising about it in what has been discussed in previous chapters as Ubuhlalism. This research has demonstrated that their knowledge production also lies in the situatedness of their learning experience, thus peripheral legitimate participation features as an important way of understanding how learning occurs.

7.3 How does individual experience and knowledge relate to the collective experience of Abahlali?

In this study Abahlali are seen as a community of practice. Their experience of learning is built on their collective practice of theorising about their day-to-day experiences. The data shows that as new members joined Abahlali, they were not taken as empty vessels having to listen to what old timers said. Rather, newcomers are equals and respected members who are professors of their own suffering. They are welcome to contribute to and shape the learning that takes place in Abahlali. As stated above, in Abahlali everyone decides and all the skills of the struggle are shared. Most members identified key lessons that they learnt through being in Abahlali, ranging from the confidence to express oneself, to tactical skills of organising and applying for marches, to critically engaging with perspectives and assumptions about the experience of poverty. From what has been shown in this research, engagement between members is built on the principle that they start their discussions on the basis of what people know and experienced. In this way, the individual's experience and knowledge becomes the basis from which Abahlali learn.

7.4 How does this collective experience contribute to the theory of Ubuhlalism?

Clearly, Abahlali are not theorising from abstract theories but from real day-to-day experiences of their members. Experiencing learning happens in the spaces and sites mentioned above, making learning experience everybody's business. Their manifesto on Ubuhlalism was a product of a night long meeting that deliberated on their experiences. All that is written in that manifesto is based on their collective learning experience, which makes their collective learning experience Ubuhlalism. In their deliberations, they learn together about the meaning and the implications of living in the shack settlements, being poor. They also learn strategies relating to counter these experiences and build a new politics and a theory of self-understanding. That theory is Ubuhlalism, a theory and praxis.

7.5 How useful are existing theories about learning in social movements in relation to Abahlali's theory?

This study has shown and discussed three of the most used theories of learning applied to learning in social movements. In the study the relevance of these theories was discussed in relation to where and how they were applied. Theorists who have engaged with these theories have illuminated useful insights about learning in social movements. At the beginning of this chapter I have mentioned a few of those theories. To be specific about Abahlali, I see Harley's (2012a) thesis about understanding how Abahlali learn new ways of engaging hegemony and unlearning old and dominant hegemony, to be groundbreaking because she used Mezirow's transformative theory to engage how Abahlali's struggle is understood. Harley's thesis is the first to do this and already it has generated an interest for other studies to see how Abahlali's theory relates to existing theories of learning in social movements, hence this research study.

Using Communities of Practice learning theory, this research has illuminated useful insights about Abahlali's practice of theorising and the usefulness of their theory in strengthening their struggle. This research has made the connections between situated learning in communities of practice, and Communities of Practice theory to Abahlali's learning experience. Through the concepts of stages of development and four components of learning in Wenger's (1998) theory, the research showed how learning in Abahlali shifted due to shifts that were happening in the movement and its context. It is the view of this study that existing theories of learning in social movements are useful and are applicable to understanding learning in Abahlali.

In conclusion, the study has successfully addressed the questions that were set out from the beginning. It has shown that Abahlali's struggle is a learning site from which they gather strength and strategies to pursue their political project. Using Community of Practice theory, the study has addressed the issues of how learning takes place and where the agency of learning sits. The study dealt with shifts in practice and power dynamics that were in play in Abahlali struggle and demonstrated how these have directly affected learning in the movement.

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Photographs:

Church Land Programme (2008)

Church Land Programme (2009)

Google Earth (2014)

Ntseng, D. (2008)

Appendix 1: Interview schedule

This is an open-ended, unstructured questionnaire. It is intended to frame a conversation about knowledge production in Abahlali and the concept of Ubuhlalism. After going through the consent form, I will thus start with few general questions. I will build more questions on responses that I get as the conversation proceeds.

This is research study towards a Master Education in Adult Education. I will be looking at Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement. I am interested in how they produce knowledge and how that process relates to theories of learning in social movements.

1. How did you become a member of Abahlali? Can you share a little bit of background about how you heard about Abahlali and what made you to join them?
2. Do you think your experiences are taken serious by Abahlali? Could you explain your answer?
3. What do you think you have learnt from your own experiences?
4. Do you think other people in Abahlali have had similar experiences and learnings?
5. Since you joined Abahlali, have you learnt anything? Could you say more?
6. Do you think the movement has learnt anything? Could you explain?
7. Have you heard the word Ubuhlalism being used?
8. Where have you heard it being used? How has it been used? Could you say more?
9. Have you learnt anything from other members?
10. Can you tell me what happens when someone describes an experience in night meetings?
11. Can you tell me about discussions in night meetings? Can you give me an example/ tell me everything you remember about one discussion?
12. Tell me everything you remember about a time when people disagreed?

16 July 2012

Mr Bantoe D Ntseng (942413134)
School of Education and Development

Dear Mr Ntseng

Protocol reference number: HSS/0483/012M

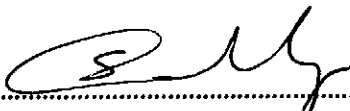
Project title: Knowledge Production in and for action: A case study of Abahlali Base Mjondolo Movement

In response to your application dated 19 June 2012, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee
/ms

cc Supervisors: Anne Harley
cc Academic Leader: Dr MN Davids
cc Mr N Memela / Mrs S Naicker

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