Animating this book is a twofold question: In what ways are adult and popular educators responding to various harsh economic, political, cultural and environmental conditions? In doing so, are they planting seeds of hope for and imaginings of alternative futures which can connect individuals and communities locally and globally to achieve economic, ecological and social justice?

The book illustrates how transformative politics of solidarity often involve actors across vastly different backgrounds. Solidarity is therefore a political relationship that is forged through particular struggles situated in place and time across power differentials. The authors put popular education to work by describing and analysing their strategies and approaches. They do so using accessible language and engaging styles.

Popular education is a medium for dreaming, for imagining other futures. It is also essential for countering the wilful spreading of fake news and propagation of ignorance. Pedagogies of solidarity are necessary to building connections amongst people at a time when competitive individualism and alienation are rampant. Forging solidarity with and amongst communities is a means towards that end, and, indeed, an end in itself.

“Corporate mines and agribusiness poison the water we drink, the air we breathe and the food we eat. Together with their political proxies they destroy the earth and her peoples – too many are killed because of their military, economic, religious and information wars. How do we stand up for ourselves and the earth that nourishes us against this global system?” – Pregs Govender: Author of Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination

“Forging Solidarity is a critical and timely collective intervention that ponders, prods, pokes, and plays in the most generative ways. In so doing, it invites us to continue deepening our engagements with questions of responsibility and justice in relation to education everywhere.” – Richa Nagar, author of Muddying the Waters: Co-authoring Feminisms across Scholarship and Activism

“This book inspires people to realize that not fighting against socio-economic injustices is to side with oppressors.” – Ntombi Nyathi, Programme Director of Training for Transformation

Cover image: The Mask, a play about Tuberculosis, in Khayelitsha; photograph by Astrid von Kotze

Forging Solidarity
INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Volume 22

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Scope:
This international book series attempts to do justice to adult education as an ever expanding field. It is intended to be internationally inclusive and attract writers and readers from different parts of the world. It also attempts to cover many of the areas that feature prominently in this amorphous field. It is a series that seeks to underline the global dimensions of adult education, covering a whole range of perspectives. In this regard, the series seeks to fill in an international void by providing a book series that complements the many journals, professional and academic, that exist in the area. The scope would be broad enough to comprise such issues as ‘Adult Education in specific regional contexts’, ‘Adult Education in the Arab world’, ‘Participatory Action Research and Adult Education’, ‘Adult Education and Participatory Citizenship’, ‘Adult Education and the World Social Forum’, ‘Adult Education and Disability’, ‘Adult Education and the Elderly’, ‘Adult Education in Prisons’, ‘Adult Education, Work and Livelihoods’, ‘Adult Education and Migration’, ‘The Education of Older Adults’, ‘Southern Perspectives on Adult Education’, ‘Adult Education and Progressive Social Movements’, ‘Popular Education in Latin America and Beyond’, ‘Eastern European perspectives on Adult Education’, ‘An Anti-Racist Agenda in Adult Education’, ‘Postcolonial perspectives on Adult Education’, ‘Adult Education and Indigenous Movements’, ‘Adult Education and Small States’. There is also room for single country studies of Adult Education provided that a market for such a study is guaranteed.
Forging Solidarity

Popular Education at Work

Edited by

Astrid von Kotze and Shirley Walters
University of Western Cape, South Africa

SENSE PUBLISHERS
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<td>Airports Company South Africa</td>
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<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<td>ARV</td>
<td>antiretroviral drugs</td>
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<td>ATD</td>
<td>All Together in Dignity</td>
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<td>AVP</td>
<td>Alternatives to Violence Project</td>
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<td>AW</td>
<td>Amazwi Wethu</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCM</td>
<td>Black Consciousness Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDS</td>
<td>boycott, divestment and sanctions</td>
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<td>CERT</td>
<td>Centre for Education Research and Transformation</td>
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<td>CHAT</td>
<td>Cultural Historical Activity Theory</td>
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<td>CLING</td>
<td>Community Literacy and Numeracy Group</td>
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<td>Confech</td>
<td>Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile (Confederation of Students of Chile)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COSATU</td>
<td>Congress of South African Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>DWS</td>
<td>Department of Water and Sanitation</td>
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<td>EE</td>
<td>Equal Education</td>
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<td>ELRC</td>
<td>Environmental Learning Research Centre</td>
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<td>EPC</td>
<td>Education Policy Consortium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exco</td>
<td>executive committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEUC</td>
<td>Federación de Estudiantes de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Students’ Federation of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMF</td>
<td>#FeesMustFall</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPE</td>
<td>feminist popular education</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPRG</td>
<td>Freedom Park Research Group</td>
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<td>IFWEA</td>
<td>International Federation of Workers’ Education Associations</td>
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<td>IOF</td>
<td>Israeli Occupation Forces</td>
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<td>Janam</td>
<td>Jana Natya Manch (New Delhi, India)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LACOM</td>
<td>Labour-Community project of the South African Committee for Higher Education</td>
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<td>LED</td>
<td>Local Economic Development</td>
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<td>LRS</td>
<td>Labour Research Service</td>
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<td>LSO</td>
<td>labour service organisations</td>
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<td>MK</td>
<td>Merging Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOA</td>
<td>Memorandum of Agreement</td>
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<td>MOSSECO</td>
<td>Morning Star Secondary Cooperative</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)</td>
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<td>NECC</td>
<td>National Education Crisis Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIHSS</td>
<td>National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
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<td>NUM</td>
<td>National Union of Mineworkers</td>
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<td>NUMSA</td>
<td>National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa</td>
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<td>ODAC</td>
<td>Open Democracy Advice Centre</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>OMF</td>
<td>#OutsourcingMustFall</td>
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<td>PEN</td>
<td>Popular Education Network</td>
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<td>PEP</td>
<td>Popular Education Programme</td>
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<td>Right2Know</td>
<td>Right to Know Campaign</td>
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<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
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<td>SADSAWU</td>
<td>South African Domestic Services and Allied Workers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>SASO</td>
<td>South African Students’ Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SATAWU</td>
<td>South African Transport and Allied Workers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAWC</td>
<td>South African Water Caucus</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMME</td>
<td>small, micro and medium enterprises</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRCs</td>
<td>Student Representative Councils</td>
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<td>SYM</td>
<td>Socialist Youth Movement</td>
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<td>TAC</td>
<td>Treatment Action Campaign</td>
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<td>TFT</td>
<td>The Freedom Theatre (Jenin, Occupied West Bank)</td>
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<td>TRA</td>
<td>temporary relocation area</td>
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<td>TUT</td>
<td>Tshwane University of Technology</td>
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<td>UDF</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
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<td>UWCO</td>
<td>United Women’s Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWO</td>
<td>United Women’s Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASP</td>
<td>Workers’ and Socialist Party</td>
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<td>WBG</td>
<td>Women’s Boat to Gaza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wits</td>
<td>University of the Witwatersrand</td>
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<td>WNC</td>
<td>Women’s National Coalition</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

Was my freedom not given to me [then] in order to build the world of the You?
(Fanon, 1970, p. 165)

Freedom without equality is exploitation: equality without freedom is oppression. Solidarity is the common root of freedom and equality.
(Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 1990)

We live in the ‘time of monsters’, as Antonio Gramsci put it, in which every person is pitched against the other in competition driven by individualism at all costs, in a life-denying ideology that creates conditions that enforce and celebrate isolation and alienation. For this, ‘we have destroyed the essence of humanity: our connectedness’ (Monbiot, 2014). This is precisely a time when artists and activists have to get down to it and respond, decisively. And so, in June 2016, the writers of this book and other popular educators gathered at a colloquium outside Cape Town to ponder, prod, poke and play with the meanings and implications of ‘forging solidarity’, ‘popular education’ and ‘decolonisation’, and to tell stories of confrontations and struggles with the ‘monsters’. Nearly all of the contributors to this book, coming mainly from South Africa, but also from India, Chile, Canada, Senegal, Scotland, Australia and France, were there, bringing creativity, passion, humour and serious intellectual intent. Although not expressed formally, what brought us together was the burning issue of global politics: the urgent need to restructure and refathom relations and institutions, and the question of how to employ engaged political education for this purpose.

Drawing on our own life histories, at the colloquium we began by plotting a history of past ‘solidarity actions’ that ranged from student politics to women’s struggles, solidarity economics to land and housing issues. In the face of barbarism and oppression, it is crucial to affirm life and hope and to chart possibilities ‘that rearrange structural conditions, including both the symbolic and material dimensions that produce the encounter’ (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 57). The colloquium confronted the challenge of how to devise ‘a strategy to overcome fragmented activism’ (Kip, 2016, p. 397), first, by visualising. Slowly, participants created a ‘solidarity mural’ that depicted figures engaged in a range of relationships and settings. Later, we mirrored and animated the mural with our own bodies by making a 3D sculpture that began to move with a rhythm: popular education engages the arts, and, in the process, hope and determination grow.
Paulo Freire (2014, p. 33) insisted that

Reality can be transformed and must be transformed. The fact is that my dreams remain alive; the power of my dreams leads me to say...please do not give up. Do not allow this new ideology of fatalism to kill your need to dream. Without dreams there is no life, without dreams there is no human existence, without dreams there are no more human beings.

Popular education is a medium for dreaming, for imagining other futures. Solidarity is one of the means towards that end, and, indeed, an end in itself.

RATIONALE

The story of this book – how it came to be, its context and content – broadly echoes themes and concerns of popular educators transnationally, but its tap root is firmly planted in South Africa. The book is part of a three-year project, *Re-membering Traditions of Popular Education*, which is supported by the South African-based National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) and works across universities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The project aims to uncover and recover forgotten traditions of popular education that generated knowledge within oppositional social movements and other civil society organisations, often in imaginative and innovative ways in South Africa and elsewhere.

Animating this collection was a twofold question: In what ways are popular educators in the ‘south’, and particularly in South Africa, responding to various economic, political, cultural and environmental conditions? And in so doing, are they planting seeds of hope for and imaginings of alternative futures which can connect individuals and communities locally and globally to achieve economic, ecological and social justice?

While acknowledging our leadership roles in the project and taking responsibility for the shaping of the book, this was possible because of the trust placed in us, and the ongoing vigorous exchange with all participants. The project illustrated a different way of creating a book together – a collective, highly participatory dialogue of knowledge co-production where there is congruence between means and ends.

The book consists of 19 chapters written by 25 authors. Some are located within universities as scholar-activists, some combine graduate studies with activism and some work within activist NGOs and social movements. Surveying the chapters that we finally have in hand, assessing them in terms of representation of different kinds and contexts of popular education, we recognise the lacunae and imbalances. We certainly see the need constantly to evaluate the politics of representation in the production of collections of this kind, and to work ever harder to encourage and ensure a wider range of voices in print. Despite these reservations, we are satisfied with the variety of accounts of popular education gathered here. We are particularly pleased with the number of novice authors who are joined by very experienced
ones. All of us utilise our locations within local/global struggles and organisational/educational interventions to explore solidarities. We see the heavy weighting of authors and experiences from South Africa not as parochial but rather as a strength given that ‘forging solidarity’ must be situated within particular contexts of time, space, history.

The chapters tell stories of and by popular educators responding to precarious socioeconomic, political and environmental conditions through working with people/groups most affected by those conditions. *Forging Solidarity: Popular Education at Work* contains analytical narratives of popular education and learning that describe and explain why and how people join together to effect change. All the chapters show how educators are compelled by a deep commitment to social and economic justice for all, and the belief that this can, indeed, be achieved together. As reflected in the chapters, popular education is the antithesis of education that is seen as ‘a technical matter’ – it is an unashamedly political process for decolonised human development, mobilisation and building community.

The subtitle of this book, ‘popular education at work’, speaks to our understanding of work not as a commodified relationship between ‘service provider’ and ‘client’. Education is an act of work in the sense of ‘expansion of energy’ on the part of both learner and educator, rather than a relationship reduced to the status of employment or paid work. Further, popular education is underpinned by what André Gorz (1999, p. 68) called ‘unconditional love’ in which a subject emerges ‘by virtue of the love with which another subject calls it to become a subject’.

The stories are rooted in daily experiences of injustice, oppression and abuse. Current calls to ‘decolonise education’ in South Africa echo Julia Preece (2009, p. 587), who has argued that we need to recognise the impact of colonisation on people’s identities, cultures and claims to knowledge:

Neo-colonialism represents the ongoing controlling behaviours by former colonising countries and other superpowers that include monetary controls, influences over educational institutions, conditional aid, and the spread of global capitalist economies.

Colonised people still experience themselves as expendable: as labour they are easily replaced since there is a surplus of unemployed hungry people; as agents of history they have been obliterated; as inventors of cultures and ways of knowing, they are omitted; as inventors of technologies suited and adapted to particular habitats, they are deleted. Their values and worldviews have been denigrated, excluded or destroyed to a point where we think of ‘western ways’ as not only the only legitimate but in fact the only existing ones (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). One important aspect of popular education is privileging and reaffirming cultural, linguistic and social values unique to different participant groups. Adopting what we refer to as a ‘southern perspective’ in telling our stories indicates that we recognise the domination of ideologies, curricula, structures, languages and policies of former colonisers and assert the need to privilege other voices and perspectives.
Popular education denotes a utopian dimension: a look forward towards an alternative that is to be created. Freire (1972, pp. 39–40) proposed that as a moment in a historical process, the announced reality (in popular education) ‘is already present in the act of denunciation and annunciation’. We acknowledge the connectedness and interdependence of all living things, and the mutual obligation to respect (rather than simply use and exploit) the living and the spirit world. Rejecting heroic individualism, we value, instead, ethics of mutuality, friendship and strategies of collectivity. Yet, as Freire warned, utopian hope is engagement full of risk as it involves ‘having faith in the people, solidarity with them’ (1972, p. 47).

Whereas other collections we have been involved in (Walters & Manicom, 1996; Crowther, Galloway, & Martin, 2005; Hall, Clover, Crowther, & Scandrett, 2012; Manicom & Walters, 2012) explore in-depth the themes and influences of pedagogies and possibilities within popular education, the primary focus of this collection is on what it means to ‘forge solidarity’ through popular education.

CONTEXT

There is a long history of people’s resistance to oppression and exploitation in South Africa and elsewhere. Popular education initiatives cannot be separated from political conditions where local/global ideas and practices rise and fall. The history of systematic education initiatives in the search for alternatives has been an ongoing process albeit with interruptions, pauses, varying pulses and intensities, and different strands from Liberation Theology to Black Consciousness, from radical adult education to feminist and workers’ education. Linda Cooper and Thembi Luckett outline some of these initiatives in Chapter 2. The 1994 political transition in South Africa saw shifts in popular education. The main liberation movement became the government and the radical purpose, rooted in collectivism, became increasingly diluted and polluted. After 1994, there was a decline in popular education programmes as efforts went to building the new democratic society and educators struggled with how to position themselves in relation to the government (von Kotze, Walters, & Luckett, 2016). Michael Neocosmos (2011, p. 385) described this movement as a shift ‘from an emancipatory (non-identitarian) conception founded on popular agency in the 1980s to a chauvinistic one based on victimhood in the 2000s’. Popular educators today have identified the dissonance between the notion of ‘the people shall govern’, for which they had struggled, and the reality where, unsurprisingly, popular education practices are not encouraged.

In 2015, student activism reignited across South Africa. It morphed into the #FeesMustFall movement and the related #OutSourcingMustFall of workers on university campuses. There has been a great deal written in the popular and academic press about these movements as they continue (e.g. Luescher, 2016). The source of the movements appears similar to that described by Gillian Hart (2015) at local government level; they arise from systemic contradictions where students and workers are increasingly having to carry the burden of reduced funding from the
state, as higher education is seen as ‘a private good’. In Chapter 17, Sheri Hamilton reflects on university campus workers in South Africa, and in Chapter 18 Sebastián Vielmas analyses student protests in Chile.

South Africa has at times been referred to as ‘the protest capital of the world’ (Duncan, 2016; Hart, 2015). Protests, occupations, strikes, disrupting meetings and so on are daily occurrences. These dramatic, direct actions are not necessarily what is described here – the protest actions that are represented in this collection are more sustained, long-term struggles over land, water, housing, violence, where popular education is put to work. They all aim at unified action for change. While radical education for transformation has a long history, much of this is being buried under the dictates of global capitalism. We have a contemporary challenge to recover histories of popular struggles. The 18 chapters in this book are both accounts and expressions of the solidarity necessary to move towards more just and egalitarian alternatives.

FORGING SOLIDARITY

Acting in solidarity requires processes of actively constructing, shaping, ‘forging’ – hence the title of this book. ‘Forging’ is used deliberately. As participants in the colloquium stated, ‘forging is intentional’; ‘it generates heat and energy’; ‘it is a violent process as it means giving something up to create something new’; ‘this requires everyone to be vulnerable, to trust, to love, to hope’; ‘you need protective clothing to avoid getting burnt’.

Solidarity requires working across a whole range of differences: communities, countries, nations, continents; languages and cultures; class, ‘race’, gender, religions, abilities, rural and urban locations. This illustrates how solidarity is a political relationship that is forged through particular struggles situated in place and time. It is relational and transitive (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 56), that is, a deliberate and purposeful commitment to interdependence and reciprocity as values and outcomes.

All the chapters illustrate how a transformative politics of solidarity often involves actors occupying positions of vast differences in socioeconomic, historical and sociocultural backgrounds. We cannot assume that all speak with ‘one tongue’, even if the common concern, moral standpoint and belief that brought people together suggest ‘common ground’. The separation between ‘them’ and ‘us’ does not merely extend to those in struggle and those whom they struggle against. Power differentials among people, especially those in neocolonial contexts, have to be acknowledged and confronted – Shirley Walters and Shauna Butterwick describe this as ‘decolonising the self’ (Chapter 3). They suggest that stepping forward, standing with, and staying connected’ are moves that require embracing radical vulnerability. Sudhanva Deshpande reflects on political, aesthetic and creative learning in Chapter 11, and shows how the confluence of languages between the Indian street-theatre players and Palestinian actors became in itself an expression
of mutual solidarity. The ‘we’ (as opposed to the ‘them’) is not given – Sebastian outlines how the students’ campaign in Chile involved a careful forging of links between individuals, the personal and collectives (Chapter 18). He illustrates what Nathalia Jaramillo and Michelle Carreon (2014) emphasise as the importance of dialogue, where listening is a crucial part of forging as it requires an acceptance of different rationalities in the construction of knowledge.

SOLIDARITIES

Solidarity has many possible meanings because, as Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2012, p. 46) suggests, it is idealised: ‘the general notion of solidarity gets mobilised for a wide range of projects without a consistent set of parameters’. In Chapter 19, Jim Crowther and Mae Shaw allude to the different meanings ascribed to solidarity, as the term has morphed ‘into diluted or substitute concepts such as “social capital” and “social cohesion”’. Markus Kip (2016, p. 391) concurs: as a result of the tensions among different interpretations, invocations of solidarity ‘have been marked by ambiguity; descriptive and prescriptive aspects blur together’. On the one hand, solidarity is used as an analytical tool in support of a principle; on the other, it functions as an appeal, well illustrated in the South African usage of the term ‘comrade’ that used to indicate a working-together against the common enemy of apartheid, but now is often no more than a call for unity and consensus. Solidarity implies a relationship among individuals or groups, a sense of obligation and a set of actions.

In Chapter 11, Sudhanva articulates clearly that solidarity has nothing to do with charity. Rather, solidarity is a reaction to a condition which afflicts certain ‘others’ independently of their personal or social character; it is at its core ‘asymmetrical, mutual and reciprocal relation’ (Grieves & Clark, 2015, p. 293) where we see our own fate in the fate of the other. The reciprocal relation acknowledges ‘the possibility that one is or could be confronted with the same situation as the other, it means that his fate affects me in a significant way’ (ibid). Shirley and Shauna reiterate this sentiment in Chapter 3 when quoting Lilla Watson, an Aboriginal Australian, who says in the context of development work ‘if your liberation is bound up with mine, let us begin’.

In Chapter 5, Leigh-Ann Naidoo sums up well what motivates all the contributors to this book. Talking about the Women’s Boat to Gaza, she asserts that ‘even as we have choice, the possibility to not hear and not see the injustices next door or far away, is not an option’. The defining principles of solidarity are clearly articulated here: a collective stand against structural injustice, an emerging political relation with/to others in opposition to powerful authorities that oppress and exploit.

Echoing Frantz Fanon’s question in the epigraph, the chapters in this book have a strong common theme of humanisation. The writers ask, ‘What does it mean to be human?’ while acknowledging the deep interdependence and mutuality of all people as well as ‘being the Earth’s comrade’, as discussed by Jane Burt and Thabo Lusithi in Chapter 10. Vaughn John (Chapter 6) demonstrates the importance of what it means to (re)build human relations for both perpetrators and victims of
dehumanising violence. The call by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) that we are all affected by AIDS even if we are not infected, as outlined by Salma Ismail in Chapter 15, is premised on a common humanity.

Many chapters talk about the importance of space, and, in particular, political space. Leigh-Ann travels across a physical space to enter a ‘no-go’ occupied zone (Chapter 5); Bob Boughton and Deborah Durnan (Chapter 4) take the insights and tools for building literacies across country borders, and with the death of Fidel Castro their highlight on Cuba’s international solidarity is particularly poignant. Diana Skelton and Martin Kalisa (Chapter 7) describe the volunteer corps that align themselves with extremely poor people; elsewhere in the book there are numerous crossings from urban to peri-urban, wealthy to poor, formal to informal spaces and places – often traversed in defiance of invisible but enforced borders. Occupying space involves crossing those boundaries of difference: across class, race, gendered identities, sexual orientation, culture, urban/rural divides. In Chapter 12, Astrid von Kotze suggests that in popular education, space has to be ‘curated’ – that is, the space for dialogue is deliberately designed so that all those present can begin to engage (with) each other as different, but equal. Working across the complexities of differences is also an act of defiance against the binaries of either–or, of manufactured opposites, the maintenance of which benefits the powerful. Injustices implicate us all, both perpetrators and victims, through the taxes we pay (Sudhanva, Chapter 11), the information we give or withhold (Vainola Makan, Chapter 9), the denials we harbour (Mudney Halim, Chapter 8) or the accusations we throw.

We ask: Is solidarity primarily a cognitive approach or an action driven by affective energy? Is solidarity primarily a moral or a political relationship? A moral relationship is based on the guiding principle of a ‘common humanity’ that calls upon action irrespective of whether this may involve personal sacrifices on the part of the privileged. A political relationship is based on a shared commitment to alter a specific condition or address a particular cause and, hence, driven by the determination to abolish an unjust practice or institution. Sally Scholz (Wilcox, 2010) defines political solidarity as a unity of individuals who have made a conscious commitment to challenge a situation of injustice, oppression, tyranny or social vulnerability. Political solidarity is fundamentally oppositional: it seeks to abolish an unjust practice or institution. A political solidarity is unified not by shared characteristics, as in social and civic solidarity, but rather by a shared commitment to a social justice cause. This commitment entails positive collective moral obligations. The content of these obligations is shaped by the particular cause, but typically involves some form of social activism. Importantly, the moral obligations entailed by political solidarity, along with the initial commitment that establishes them, are the source of social unity within the solidarity. Thus, political solidarity reverses the ordering between social bonds and moral obligations found in civic and social solidarity; in political solidarity, moral obligations often precede social bonds.

This impacts the relationship between activists and those with whom they stand in solidarity. Is it an evolving solidarity from the grassroots, through collective action...
among equals, ‘bottom-up’, or is it a consciously created solidarity in response to an idea/ideal initiated by a leader where activists act on behalf of others? Greg Jobin-Leeds and AgitArte (2016, p. 157) contend that oppressed groups are best supported by their own constituency: ‘True solidarity requires allowing those most affected to lead and speak for themselves and for those with privilege to organise allies within their own communities of privilege.’ Linda and Thembi (Chapter 2) explain the tension arising from non-hierarchical relationships. How do you assume leadership while at the same time standing back and being ‘of service’, as requested? How best does one balance the conflicting demands of bottom up and top down? Is there a role for vanguardism, as Sheri (Chapter 17) describes in the workers’ struggles for insourcing? In different ways, Vainola, Jane and Thabo, Mudney and Caroln Cornell (Chapters 9, 10, 8 and 14, respectively), outline how they and their organisations ‘walk alongside’ a community, strengthening their struggle through generating important information, and, at times, drawing attention to it through the media. Usually, this is a bottom-up process – meeting in study circles and taking turns to assume leadership, as Saliem Patel outlines in Chapter 16. In the case of Diana and Martin (Chapter 7), this process is described as ‘bottom down’, as activists living in extreme poverty, with the support of allies and volunteers, continually reach out to others mired in poverty in hopes of increasing each person’s freedom.

All chapters take a stand against what Vainola has termed ‘helicopter solidarity’. They illustrate how solidarity is built in a slow, careful, step-by-step sustained process in which relationships are nurtured with care, and a commitment to mutuality is part of the process. Critical reflectivity is crucial, as Caroln warns, especially as the use of the colonisers’ language skews power relations.

POPULAR EDUCATION AT WORK: PEDAGOGIES OF SOLIDARITY

Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) frames his discussion of pedagogies as implicated in three forms of solidarity: relational, transitive and creative. In Chapter 19, Jim and Mae extend this framework to include ‘reflexive solidarity’.

To think of a pedagogy of solidarity as relational

is, first to acknowledge being as co-presence, by deliberately taking as a point of departure that individual subjects do not enter into relationships, but rather subjects are made in and through relationships. (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 52)

In the writing workshops described by Caroln (Chapter 14) with activists from TAC, comradeship and mutual support trumped differences as they embraced opportunities to learn to write English as a pragmatic and political necessity in their organisational leadership development. In the development of study circles outlined by Saliem (Chapter 16), trade unionists learned new socialities through horizontal relationships in learning, educating and co-constructing knowledge together. In the Alternatives to Violence Project which Vaughn describes in Chapter 6, the participatory pedagogy is
used to create safe spaces for people coming from contexts of extreme violence and trauma, to help build deep bonds of human connection.

Transitive solidarity is an act of entering into a solidary relationship with others. Transitive solidarity embraces contingency; it denotes active engagement, a praxis. Sebastian (Chapter 18) outlines a range of strategic activities students embarked on in order to garner public support. As part of movements for socialism and liberation through international solidarity, Bob and Deborah (Chapter 4) describe their support for literacy where international solidarity is an essential component of the curriculum and pedagogy of popular education. The community-based efforts of Right2Know activists are elaborated by Vainola in Chapter 9, as they build horizontal relationships in the interests of deepening democracy in action through supporting skills development for local leadership. These include learning about interacting with media, community mobilising, creating a ‘campaign corner cafe’ for mutual support and organising marches to the mayor’s office.

Creative solidarity is effectively introduced by Gaztambide-Fernández through a quote from Audre Lorde (1984, p. 37):

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

It is the use of the unexpected, playful, embodied ways, so often used by feminist popular educators, which strive to involve ‘heads, hearts and hands’ to challenge power relationships and imagine alternative futures. Not surprisingly, creativity plays a crucial role in the forging process, given that hope fuels political struggles, and, in turn, through struggles hope is generated.

In several of the chapters, creative aesthetic processes are used. In Chapter 13, Eugene Paramoer and Lyndal Pottier outline working with youth to research, make and then show films and how this crosses intergenerational conflicts as elders realise that young people have important things to say. Sudhanva (Chapter 11) tells of an Indian/Palestinian solidarity action by two political theatre groups that learn through making and performing plays together. They use their own mutually incomprehensible local languages and, through use of images and symbols, communicate beyond language to raise consciousness about struggles for the emancipation of humankind. In Chapter 12, Astrid describes the challenges and opportunities to mobilise a sense of solidarity with and for people infected with tuberculosis through producing and enacting street theatre in working-class and poor communities of Cape Town. Creating beautiful images or learning to play musical instruments restores a sense of dignity to people who have been humiliated, as Diana and Martin (Chapter 7) show in their work in All Together in Dignity.

In Chapter 19, Jim and Mae introduce reflexive solidarity as a dimension ‘to place creative and constructive doubt at the centre of the collective process so that ongoing personal and political critique becomes its ontological basis’. This concern is reflected in many of the chapters. Carohn argues strongly for reflectivity
in Chapter 14. Standing back or standing still in order to reflect, contemplate, theorise, question, as part of a pedagogy of solidarity, is captured in the process of writing the chapters and in the production of the book itself. In Chapter 10, Jane and Thabo describe a carefully designed university course for environmental activists that structures reflexive social learning opportunities among students and their communities as they ‘become the Earth’s comrade’.

The partnership between university-based scholar-activists and economically stressed communities is described by Mudney (Chapter 8). They engage in reflective action research and together seek to salvage and (re)build solidarity economies for the benefit of communities. The creation of the Popular Education Network, a ‘space’ for university-based scholar-activists to reflect in a solidary environment among critical friends, is shared by Jim and Mae in Chapter 19. And Leigh-Ann’s (Chapter 5) journaling of her experiences on the Women’s Boat to Gaza, to bring attention to the plight of the Palestinian women, is a moving, immediate example of reflexivity as a process to record, contemplate and understand the personal and political ramifications and impact of forging solidarity in high-risk conditions.

Across all four forms of solidarity, the detailed pedagogical work through careful design and facilitation of processes animates the possibilities for successful forging of solidarity. In addition, there is the central question of the politics of knowledge – whose knowledge counts, when and where?

Elana Michelson (2015) points to the politics of epistemology and epistemology as politics, and traces the relationship between power, knowledge and learning which speaks directly to popular education. She demonstrates how epistemological hierarchies – what and whose knowledge counts for less or more – are embedded within discourses of gender, race and class. In Chapter 7, Diana and Martin point poignantly to the politics of knowledge between people living in extreme poverty and middle-class professionals. Vaughn (Chapter 6) draws attention to the careful negotiation processes involved in confronting people who bring different interpretations and ‘truths’ to a process of reconciliation.

In the Chapter 17 description of #OutsourcingMustFall, the workers’ struggle at the universities, Sheri highlights a tension between ‘authority and freedom’. She cites Freire (2014, p. 22): ‘Freedom invented authority in order for freedom to continue to exist. However, a big mistake is that in creating authority, freedom risks losing freedom.’ A perennial tension in political education is the relationship between ‘leaders and the people’. Should the knowledge of ‘the people’ lead or should a vanguardist party of ‘organic intellectuals’ give leadership? The different understandings of the ‘politics of epistemology and epistemology as politics’ play out in the kinds of democratic practices that are supported within organisations or projects.

While solidarity can be expressed from afar, it can only be practised in person. The readiness to endanger one’s comfort and safety in/for the collective struggle translates into more than a click of a computer mouse in support of a belief or cause.
INTRODUCTION

Many of the chapters in this volume show how solidarity may involve crossing tangible or invisible barriers that separate us from others to truly understand their realities and experiences. Often the actions are demonstrations of the conviction that others’ freedoms are the preconditions for our own freedom. Further, the chapters show that, as Naomi Klein (2016) asserts,

People have a right to be angry, and a powerful, intersectional left agenda can direct that anger where it belongs, while fighting for holistic solutions that will bring a frayed society together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Inspired by the article ‘Feminisms, Collaborations, Friendships: A Conversation’ (Nagar, Hasan, Rahemtullah, & Upadhyay, 2016), we acknowledge that this book is the outcome of friendships and collaborations, some new, some old. Astrid and Shirley have had fun, playfully and seriously envisioning, moulding, crafting the process and the product, of both the broader Re-membering Traditions of Popular Education research project and the book. We have been committed, within the limits of the resources available, to encourage a community of activist-scholars to co-create the production of this book. This involved collective energies to work through questions of intersectional power and knowledge that seek to address inequalities, intellectually and politically.

Along the way, friendships have been nurtured and knowledge co-produced. We thank all the authors for their willingness to participate in the collective undertaking and their trust in us to shape the product. Several of the authors have been working on behalf of their organisations – we thank the organisations for their willingness to participate and to support the authors, some of whom are ‘novices’. We wish in particular to acknowledge Anna James, for diligent, playful research assistance, all along the way; Lydia Steer, for administrative support; the NIHSS for the financial support and for believing in the importance of popular education; and SENSE Publishers for seeing its worth.

The apartheid era in South Africa classified people into racial categories which persist to this day. Different people self-identify differently. In this book different authors use terms politically, from their own standpoints.

In closing, we evoke feminist writer and activist Pregs Govender (2007) when acknowledging the chapters in this book as stories of insubordination, achieved through the ‘love and courage’ of all involved.

NOTE

1 A quote by Antonio Gramsci which is being used in contemporary times in response to the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the USA. Trump’s campaign for the presidency was grounded in fear of the ‘other’.
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INTRODUCTION

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Legacies of Popular Education in the 1970s and 1980s

INTRODUCTION

What is at stake…is really rethinking the human as a site of interdependency.
(Butler in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 42)

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) argues that solidarity entails the recognition that liberation is a collective project: as humans, we are implicated in each other’s liberation. Similarly, Mikhail Bakunin (1867, p. 2) states: ‘I am free only when all men [sic] are my equals.’ The realisation of liberation is thus impossible without solidarity as the recognition of the interdependency of humanity.

The link between solidarity and the struggle for freedom and equality echoes strongly in the history of South Africa, in the collective efforts of people over more than a century to put an end to colonialism, apartheid racism, gender oppression and workers’ exploitation. Their struggles were implicitly, and often explicitly, pedagogic in nature, seeking to change people’s conceptions of themselves and the world around them in order to strengthen their collective agency to change that world.

Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2012, p. 49) argues that solidarity in relation to the project of decolonisation is about challenging the very idea of what it means to be human: ‘It is about imagining human relations that are premised on the relationship between difference and interdependency, rather than similarity and a rational calculation of self-interests.’ Accordingly, a pedagogy of solidarity is concerned with ‘the conditions of possibility for ethical encounters that rearrange structural conditions, including both the symbolic and material dimensions that produce the encounter’ (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 57). Encounters always entail difference and are constrained by existing material and cultural structures but not predetermined by them and can open up possibilities for rearranging structures and hierarchical relations (Ahmed, 2000).

In this chapter, we look at encounters of solidarity in the pedagogical practices of three movements that were part of the anti-apartheid struggles of the 1970s and 1980s – the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), the workers’ movement and the People’s Education movement – and what their legacies present today. Their stated aims were frequently not expressed explicitly in terms of solidarity but
rather in terms of building unity, alliances or collective identity in opposition to an identified common enemy. Nevertheless, solidarity was very often the outcome of these struggles. Encounters of solidarity entail acts of trust, risking one’s future and well-being with strangers, as well as tensions between unity and difference, universalism and particularism.

The chapter will show how each of these education traditions emerged and was carried forward on the crest of a wave of popular struggle, and that each has left a unique stamp on the legacy of popular education that we have inherited.

BUILDING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY: POPULAR EDUCATION AND THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2015, p. 114) describes the BCM as

one of the moments in the internal resistance to apartheid, where education and an engagement with consciousness are placed centrally to the project of political struggle and the fight for freedom.

In the 1960s, in reaction to the apartheid government’s introduction of legislation to fully enforce the racial segregation of universities, students at black university campuses established their own, black-led organisation, the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO). By the early 1970s, SASO had come under the umbrella of the BCM whose broad aims were to build a collective black identity (understood as both a material and political category) among the oppressed, and work toward the psychological and material liberation of black people. Strongly influenced by anticolonial struggles elsewhere in Africa, and by the writings of the Algerian liberation theorist Frantz Fanon, the BCM aimed to free the black majority ‘from the chains that confine[d] them as servants to white society’ (Naidoo, 2015, p. 117).

At first, education work took place mainly among students and intellectuals, who formed study groups and engaged in critical self-reflection and consciousness raising. Later in the 1970s, these activists reached out to the broader black community: under the auspices of the Black Community Projects, activists established a range of community projects among urban and rural poor; and a short-lived Black Women’s Federation as well as a Black Allied Workers’ Union. In this way, they sought to strengthen relations of solidarity across class, status and urban–rural divides and to develop and enhance practices of self-sufficiency in black communities.

With these initiatives also came the idea of launching a national literacy programme, and the beginning of firmer engagement with the ideas of Paulo Freire. Through dialogue with Anne Hope, black consciousness leaders grappled with Freire’s ideas: the link between psychological, personal liberation and sociopolitical liberation; the theory and methods of conscientisation, and praxis – the dialectical relationship between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’.

The BCM did not only engage in education work and ideological struggle, but also placed importance on the building of organisation. In the early 1970s it
conducted systematic programmes of conscientisation among high-school students and youth, and supported the establishment of the National Youth Organisation as well as the South African Students’ Movement. The deep impact of this work was to become visible in the historic youth and student uprisings of 1976, but with harsh repercussions. The BCM was banned in 1977, its leading figure, Steve Biko, was murdered in detention and many other activists were imprisoned. However, the 1976 uprising laid the foundation for student–worker alliances in the 1980s, which were critical in bringing down the apartheid regime.

The BCM Legacies and the #FeesMustFall Student Movement Today

The legacy and influence of the BCM, particularly in relation to traditions of popular education in South Africa, were deep and lasting. BCM popularised the ideas of Franz Fanon, and brought his ideas regarding decolonising the mind and society together with Freire’s notions of conscientisation. For the BCM, the unity and solidarity necessary to bring about revolutionary change was to be forged on the basis of a collective identity and commonalities of experience among those who were black and oppressed. This could be achieved not only through collective conscientisation but also through radical and deep-seated psychological transformation of each individual within the collective. Hence the important role afforded by the BCM to radical pedagogy in the Freirian tradition, which still continues today.

The black consciousness leaders were among the first to popularise Freire’s radical pedagogy of consciousness raising in South Africa, and they also adapted and enriched it with some unique perspectives. Key among these was an emphasis on organisation building. Freire has been critiqued by some for his ‘idealism’ – his apparent belief that education and conscientisation will automatically translate into action for social transformation (Kane, 2001). The BCM brought into their radical pedagogy a significant emphasis on organisation building as a means to give expression to transformed consciousness, and to ensure the sustainability of the solidarity that had been built.

Naidoo (2015, pp. 126–127) has pointed to a tension between the BCM’s educational project and its political project – ‘an ambivalence between the aim of working to build consciousness, and working to forward the institutional or organisational structure’. Working to build organisation often meant providing leadership in the form of a predetermined programme – giving answers rather than posing questions – and as a result, ‘the BCM [was] caught between two agendas, a deep political imperative and the educational imperative, that should feed each other, but do not necessarily do so’. Ultimately, she concludes, ‘the political trumped the pedagogical’. The question of how to strike a balance between provoking critical thinking through problem posing, on the one hand, and providing intellectual and political leadership on the other, continues to be an enduring tension for popular educators. This intersects with the tension between difference and sameness, in thought and identity, and how this plays out in political processes of forging solidarity.
The legacy of the BCM also lies in the rejection of apartheid/colonial education. Black consciousness activists believed that the education system could not be changed from within, and that it was not enough to demand an 'equal education' to that of whites. As Neville Alexander (1990, p. 106) writes,

Until 1969…most people in the liberation movement…wanted…an education that was equal to the education of Whites…And it didn’t strike them until the BCM came into being that that education was an education for domination, that it was a racist education that prepares people for an oppressive and exploitative position in society.

It was necessary to build an entirely alternative approach to, and system of, education under the control of the black, disenfranchised majority. Fundamentally, the BCM raised questions about the value of a system of formal education that reproduced colonialist and apartheid conceptions of knowledge and education.

Forty years later, the #FeesMustFall student movement of 2015/2016 drew inspiration from the BCM to raise similar critiques of the established, post-apartheid education system. This movement reasserted the centrality of a common, oppressed, black identity but complicated it in various ways by challenging patriarchy, heteronormativity, class and other hierarchies within the movement. The tension between unity and difference is central to the project of building solidarity, and the student movement is grappling to find a way to hold this tension, and to avoid political intolerance and fragmentation into narrow interest/identity groups, in order to achieve the vision of a decolonised, radically transformed education and society. The legacy and revival of the BCM leaves us with questions regarding the relationship between the pedagogical and the political; how and when to work across race and class hierarchies in order to build the capacities of the oppressed and when to reject such alliances in order to advance the liberation of the oppressed.

UNITY THROUGH MOBILISING AND ORGANISING: WORKERS’ AND TRADE UNION EDUCATION

The challenge of avoiding political intolerance and fragmentation is currently also being grappled with by the South African trade union movement. Yet the workers’ movement has a long history of building solidarity – the fundamental cornerstone of the workers’ movement internationally – and its traditions of workers’ education have left us with an enriched understanding of what ‘radical education’ means. A central feature of this education is the understanding that learning does not only take place through organised education, but more importantly through processes of workers’ self-education, including political and cultural actions.

In January 1973, a wave of strikes spread throughout Durban, marking the birth of the modern black trade union movement in South Africa. Central to this movement was the focus on building unity through organisation and mass action, and later, building working-class solidarity. As the movement grew, its organised
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education programmes mainly focused on organisational training for shop stewards and organisers, but it also included broader political education. At its launch in 1985, the Congress of South African Trade Unions articulated a clear political purpose to workers’ education, which was to

build worker control, collective experience and understanding, deepening working class consciousness. Education should ensure fullest discussion amongst workers thus building democracy. Education is a weapon for shaping mass struggles of the present and the future of our class. (Cosatu, 1986, in Cooper, Andrews, Grossman, & Vally, 2002, p. 122)

Despite its radical intent, workers’ education was often more didactic than participatory in character, and its education methods often ‘top-down’ and educator-centred, with the issue of content far outweighing that of process (Cooper & Qotole, 1996). This has implications for the development of consciousness and has placed limits on the possibilities for developing human capacities, including the capacity for solidarity.

A range of labour service organisations (LSOs) mushroomed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, alongside the burgeoning trade union movement. Many of them sought to develop links between community organisations and trade unions and some developed more creative, participatory methodologies. Some of their stories have been documented through a series of interviews, as part of a recent research project on popular education in South Africa. For example, a group of LACOM educators recalled how they adopted a popular education approach that built on participants’ experiential knowledge:

And the methodology was also such that, you know, people really built on people’s experiences and then tried to link the theory to people’s experience… Everyone was seen as both learner and teacher and there was a shared understanding that important learning takes place in struggle and in daily activities. (Interview, ex-LACOM staff)

LACOM staff recalled how they strove for a culture of openness, debate, critique, transparency and non-sectarianism. At the same time, they promoted a broad, working-class politics: their methods were ‘not just purely experiential and let things flow’ but connected to ‘a vision of socialist society – an alternative society to the capital(ist) society’ (Interview, ex-LACOM staff). They also adhered to the principle of accountability of LSOs to the mass-based organisations: ‘events were not planned by us sitting in the LACOM office…whatever educational activity was organised, it was planned together’ (Interview, ex-LACOM staff).

Another example of labour education support was in the sphere of workers’ culture. In the late 1970s, a group of activists from the Junction Avenue Theatre Company worked through which worker-actors could take the story of their strikes to other workers and communities, in order to build wider solidarity for their struggles. One cultural activist from that time describes how their pedagogical
approach was ‘not [to] arrive at cathartic moments at the end of the performance, but to create, to scratch people’s brains to make them think about what their situation was’ (Interview, Ari Sitas). By the mid-1980s, workers had begun to establish their own cultural ‘locals’ in their unions, and this period saw a proliferation of music, art and the production of creative materials alongside theatre (for example, Black Mamba Rising, a collection of workers’ poetry – see Qabula, Hlatshwayo, & Malange, 1986). All these cultural initiatives served to reject an identity that reduced a worker to manual labour rather than the flourishing of all human capacities.

Much of workers’ learning arose organically out of the process of building organisation and participation in mass action, and workers also acted as ‘educators’ of the broader community as they took their campaigns for a living wage and workers’ rights out to the general public. In addition, workers engaged consciously in self-education through activities such as ‘siyalalas’ where they debated their political future deep into the night (Vally, Bofelo, & Treat, 2013). Shop steward councils also played a broader educative role by engaging with student, youth and community organisations and popularising the practices of participatory democracy, accountability, worker leadership and workers’ control (Cooper et al., 2002). Through these processes, workers developed pride in their collective identity and built solidarity across different sections of the working class – encounters which laid a basis for the restructuring of racial and class hierarchies in the future.

Lessons from Radical Workers’ Education

At a time when most trade union education in Europe and North America had become institutionalised and technicist in character (Field, 1988; London, Tarr, & Wilson, 1990), trade unions in South Africa adopted a radical, political approach to education that proclaimed that ‘Education is our spear in the struggle for Socialism’ (Cooper et al., 2002, pp. 120–121). It challenged the notion that new knowledge only emerges out of elite institutions and foregrounded the principle that ordinary workers are knowledgeable, that workers can produce new knowledge and that knowledge is a collective resource (Grossman, 1999).

The history of workers’ education points to the contribution that intellectuals from the middle class who are sympathetic to the labour movement and to socialist ideas can make in terms of educational support. Many labour educators came to critically question the divisions between ‘mental’ and ‘manual’ labour in society – the unequal relationship between those that supposedly ‘think’ and those that supposedly ‘do’. Part of the vision of a socialist future was to overcome mental/manual divides and enable the expression of people’s whole beings: their productive, creative, mental, emotional capacities (Interview, Marcus Solomon). Just as workers came to be viewed as having knowledge of value, so intellectuals recognised that they had much to learn, and that they needed to act accountably to a movement in which workers would take the lead. This reversal of traditional learner–educator roles – so
important to the philosophy and practice of popular education – was realised, if briefly and unevenly.

Workers’ education during this period built solidarity not only among organised workers but within the broader working-class community. The radical pulse of its education initiatives was made possible because they were grounded in the struggles within the workers’ movement. As one worker educator stated, ‘It’s clear that popular education in the 1980s rode on the back of the popular movement, and as that movement declined so did the popular education’ (Interview, Linda Cooper). This leaves worker educators today with some difficult questions: How does one sustain such work when mass struggles are at an ebb, as has happened in the periods post-1994? And how does one undertake pedagogical work to build solidarity when mistrust and divisions are rife within the workers’ movement?

Nevertheless, some of these legacies have continued into the third decade of democracy, as seen in the Marikana and National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa ‘moments’, and attempts to build a united front of worker and community struggles as well as a new trade union federation across unions, formal and informal sectors and political traditions. Attempts to build a ‘united front’ lay at the basis of a third strand in the history of popular education – the People’s Education movement.

THE MOVEMENT FOR PEOPLE’S EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE’S POWER

In the 1970s the BCM raised the necessity of building a new, radically different form of education to that of apartheid education. A decade later, during the mass struggles of the 1980s, this vision for the future was rekindled by the movement for People’s Education:

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the concept of People’s Education (PE) captured the imagination of many South Africans...[it] promised liberation from the effects of an unequal and disabling education system and was seen as providing the basis for a future education system in a democratic South Africa. (Motala & Vally, 2002, p. 174)

‘People’s Education for People’s Power’ emerged as a concept, vision and programme of action out of the school boycott movement and education crisis of the 1980s. The first school boycotts began in Cape Town in 1980, where students demanded an alternative curriculum and democratic control of schools through Student Representative Councils (SRCs). They also engaged in solidarity actions by providing support to striking workers. The period between 1982 and 1984 is widely seen as a period of popular insurrection, with massive stayaways organised by the trade union movement and civic associations, and with calls by the United Democratic Front (UDF) to ‘make South Africa ungovernable’. Under the UDF slogan ‘liberation first, education later’, the school boycott became a key element of this struggle (Motala & Vally, 2002, p. 180). In 1985, the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) brought together students, parents and teachers to address the
People’s Education was based on the rejection of apartheid education but it moved further to envision a future education system that would ‘[eliminate] capitalist norms of competition, individualism and stunted intellectual development and… [encourage] collective input and active participation by all, as well as stimulating critical thinking and analysis’ (Soweto Parents Crisis Committee, 1985). According to Glenda Kruss (1988, p. 9), ‘Students, teachers, and parents began to question what a different, alternative education system would be like. What would be its underlying principles? What would be its method and content?’ People’s Education was thus ‘a deliberate attempt to move away from reactive protests around education to develop a counter-hegemonic education strategy, to contribute to laying a basis for a future, post-apartheid South Africa’ (1988, p. 8).

The influence of Freire’s ideas was again evident: People’s Education was seen as a vehicle for conscientisation and promotion of critical thinking and analysis. Like the BCM, the movement prioritised the building of organisation. The NECC challenged the slogan of ‘liberation first, education later’ and urged students to return to school and to use the spaces offered to build alternative governance structures. Influenced by ideas from within the trade union movement, emphasis was also placed on democratic control of education by students and parents via SRCs and Parent Teacher Student Associations. Representative structures in the community were set up in parallel to apartheid state education structures in order to review curriculum and pedagogic practices, and to promote the development of alternative teaching materials. The key principles to form the building blocks of a future education system included democracy, access, equity, antiracism, antisexism, an end to sexual harassment and corporal punishment, better resource provisioning and free and compulsory schooling (Motala & Vally, 2002).

There was a proliferation of non-governmental organisations offering educational support to the popular movement as well as attempts to transform tertiary education. The NECC challenged academics to contribute to the development of People’s Education by building accountability within the university as well as to the communities around them, and by producing alternative course content and teaching methods for use in schools and their own teaching.

In the 1990s, education activists brought to policy debates ideas that had been shaped by the movement for People’s Education, and many of its goals, including redress, equity and participation, became embodied in new policies. However, over time, the content of new education policies shifted from the radical demands of People’s Education to a human capital discourse, which emphasised performance, outcomes, cost effectiveness and global economic competitiveness (von Kotze, Walters, & Luckett, 2016). In time, these crowded out the radical content and transformative vision of the principles and ideals that had underpinned the movement for People’s Education.
A United Front for Education Today?

The People’s Education movement built solidarity between parents, teachers, students, communities and workers and mounted the most significant challenge yet to the control of the apartheid state over education. Importantly, it showed that grassroots interventions in the education arena were capable of having a powerful impact beyond the realm of schools.

The agenda of People’s Education sought to experiment with and develop alternative practices in the spaces that had been ‘captured’ by the movement. Influenced by ideas on the radical transformation of education in Mozambique and Nicaragua (Black & Bevan, 1980; Marshall, 1990), it led a process of imagining an alternative form of education, an experiment in creating the future today, giving people the opportunity to learn about an alternative form of education and a democratic society by ‘doing it’.

Although the key principles of People’s Education became marginalised in post-apartheid policies, they have continued to represent an ideal in the continued fight for greater equity within the school system; in demands to decolonise and transform the curriculum in higher education; in demands for free education for all; in movements against gender discrimination and sexual violence against women and LGBTI* people in the education sector; and in demands to democratise governance of higher education. Many of the questions it posed – about educational change and its relationship with more fundamental political/societal change – remain relevant today.

QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has outlined the growth and development of three strands of popular education and shown how these were intimately linked to cycles of organisational growth and to the ebbs and flows of mass struggle. It has also shown that these three strands were not mutually exclusive and that there was considerable overlap, and intellectual cross-fertilisation, between them.

These movements have left us with legacies that need to be both mined and critically engaged with to enrich our current practices. Popular educators in the past succeeded in foregrounding what was common across class, language, gender, urban–rural and ‘race’ divides, rather than what divided the mass of oppressed people in South Africa. They emphasised education through self-activity – including organisation and mass action – where not only learning took place, but new knowledge was produced. They put forward a vision that was not simply about equal access to education, but also involved the decolonisation and transformation of curriculum, pedagogy and the entire structure of the education system. They evolved new methodologies, produced intellectually stimulating literature and educational materials, and drew creatively on indigenous cultural forms to entertain and provoke debate in order to ensure that education leads to the self-realisation of people’s whole beings.
Critics point to the way in which the concept of solidarity has often been tied to individualised, Eurocentric notions of citizenship, humanity and social belonging (Bayertz, 1999). Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) argues that in order to decolonise the concept of solidarity, we need to challenge the very idea of what it means to be human. These traditions of popular education help us to decolonise and reimagine new forms of interdependent human relationships.

We are also left with tensions and contradictions that are not easily resolved. The question still remains within Popular Education as to how to balance the tension between the political role of the educator (to provide leadership, and, to some extent, answers) and his/her pedagogical role (to pose questions and problems that demand critical thinking). Challenges still remain as to how to sustain Popular Education during times when popular struggles are at a low ebb, and how to hold the tension between forging unity and acknowledging difference between people, particularly during times of division and mistrust. And finally, the messy, slow process of creating a collective emancipatory vision in times of urgency and crisis remains ahead of us.

NOTES

4 Hope had been instrumental in introducing Freire’s ideas into South Africa. See the interview with Anne Hope at http://www.populareducation.co.za/content/remarkable-history-popular-education-learning-through-story-two-feminist-activists-south (accessed December 2016).
5 For more detail, see Fhulu Nekhwevha (2002).
6 For more information on the three-year Re-membering Traditions of Popular Education in South Africa research project, sponsored by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, see http://www.populareducation.co.za/ (accessed December 2016).
7 Labour-Community Sub-Committee of the South African Council for Higher Education.
8 See http://www.populareducation.co.za/content/peoples-education-peoples-power (accessed December 2016) and related materials on the website.
9 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex.

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**INTERVIEWS**

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Interview with Marcus Solomon, 16 May 2014, Cape Town

Interview with Linda Cooper, 15 April 2014, Cape Town

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