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ECOLOGICAL SOLIDARITY AND POPULAR EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This text begins with the assertion that we need to listen to nature and recognise the interconnectedness of all beings and living. I outline three principles central to a Freirean approach in popular education: political purpose and bias of the educator; dialogue as an epistemological and ontological process; and the 'vocation' of humanization. Using an eco-feminist lens, I then suggest that ecological solidarity: being part of, rather than apart-from, nature, must be a crucial part of any education going forward. This leads me to take the notion of emancipation away from individual, personal freedom towards a practical embracing of interdependence and interrelatedness as inscribed in the original meaning of 'ubuntu'.

KEY WORDS

eco-feminism; humanisation; emancipation; solidarity.



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SOLIDARIEDADE ECOLÓGICA E EDUCAÇÃO POPULAR

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RESUMO

Este texto assenta no princípio que devemos ouvir a natureza e reconhecer a interconexão de todos os seres vivos. Destaco três princípios centrais da posição Freiriana sobre educação popular: intencionalidade política e preconceitos do educador; o diálogo como um processo epistemológico e ontológico; e a “vocação” da humanização. Partindo de uma lente ecofeminista, sugiro que solidariedade ecológica – ser uma parte de, em vez de apartada da natureza – deve ser tomada como fator essencial para qualquer educação no/do futuro. Isto faz com que se afaste a noção de emancipação de qualquer ideia de liberdade individual ou pessoal, e a alie a práticas de interdependência e de inter-relações como as inscritas no significado original da palavra “ubuntu”.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

ecofeminismo; humanização; emancipação; solidariedade.



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SOLIDARIDAD ECOLÓGICA Y EDUCACIÓN POPULAR

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RESUMEN

Este texto comienza con la afirmación de que debemos escuchar a la naturaleza y reconocer la interconexión de todos los seres vivos. Esbozo tres principios centrales para un enfoque freireano en la educación popular: propósito político y prejuicio del educador; el diálogo como proceso epistemológico y ontológico; y la "vocación" de humanización. Usando una lente ecofeminista, sugiero que la solidaridad ecológica: ser parte de la naturaleza, en lugar de estar separada de ella, debe ser una parte crucial de cualquier educación en el futuro. Esto me lleva a alejar la noción de emancipación de la libertad individual y personal hacia una adopción práctica de la interdependencia y la interrelación, tal como se inscribe en el significado original de "Ubuntu".

PALABRAS CLAVE

ecofeminismo; humanización; emancipación; solidaridad.



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Ecological Solidarity and Popular Education

Astrid von Kotze

PRE-AMBLE

I wrote this article prior to the Covid-19 pandemic hitting the world. There were many warning signs which we ignored, and as Mike Davis (2020) says, “the long-anticipated monster is finally at the door”, and global capitalism is totally impotent in the face of this crisis. We have been warned of zoonotic diseases. Now, the pandemic throws light on the risk-full conditions we have created and shows how the destruction of eco-social and eco-economic systems threatens our own existence.

INTRODUCTION

These prints in the dry river bed sand belong to the angora goats and here they are, scrambling to the fence asking to be fed by the near-bankrupt farmer who makes furniture out of recycled oil drums to pay for the fodder. Those pipelines in the sand, quite new, were surely built with loans and high hopes for the future, and now the house is abandoned, a saddle and some books visible through the window, left behind with broken dreams, ravished by the drought. The evidence is everywhere, not just the parched river beds. I imagine the people from the farms now living on the outskirts of some town, in make-shift homes, without a future for their children, joining ever increasing migrations of people who become climate refugees. Walking for 400 kilometres through 5 biomes, 3 mountain ranges to support the establishment of a ‘great elephant corridor’ through parts of the Cape, in South Africa, taught me ecological humility. What I carried home in my heart, mind and body was a clearer perspective on what is important and what to let go. If I had ever had any doubt about the climate crisis, here the message was clear: people’s destructive impact on the planet is evident in the economic conditions, the politics of everyday life, the food security, environmental degradation, social relations—and now, in Covid-19. We have treated the world as if it was not alive, as if it was simply our resource to use as we see fit. And if we want to survive, we need a total transformation, a new civilisation, not a tweak here and an adjustment there. It won’t do to appeal to individuals’ personal virtue and persuade them to use less, burn less, ride less. We have created a system that requires us to use, burn, and ride just to survive.

I work mainly with working class women, whose daily struggles to put food on the table, to protect their children from gang warfare and drugs, to avoid domestic violence is much closer, more ‘real’ to them, than the larger emergency of the destruction of ecosystems, global warming, droughts. Their reality reflects what Klein (2017, p. 30) writes about Palestine, too, that in the short term “there are always far more pressing threats to contend with: military occupation, air assault, systemic discrimination, embargo.” Not only



are the daily risks of survival more immediate: according to an Afro-barometer survey in 2019, 59% of South Africans do not know what climate change is and only 17% are climate change literate. Further, as Melwa (2019) admitted, “there is a sense among young people (I don’t speak on behalf of all young people) that although we heed that this is a serious matter, it remains largely a white and middle-class concern.”

This is the framework in which I write this paper, reflecting on my past and present in popular education and asking myself: how has Paulo Freire contributed to the radical impulses in the education for transformation and what can ecofeminism contribute?

THE OLD MASTER

After many years in mainstream academia as a ‘banker’, with a very clear sense that given my own experiences of/with schooling I never ever wanted to become a teacher, I realized one day that all the years I had indeed already been a teacher in the labour movement of the eighties in South Africa. I just hadn’t thought of it as ‘teaching’ as the theatre workshops were so much more a project of dialogue, collective creation and imagined alternatives (von Kotze, 1987, 1988). Salleh (2017, p. ix) has called ecofeminists “both street fighters and philosophers”, and indeed, for me experience and struggle came before theoretical study.

I was introduced to adult education and with it Paulo Freire and the challenge to theorise what I had practiced, much later. Workers regarded the theatre work as contributing to the larger political struggle. The stories of their toils, presented dramatically, put them into the position of teachers and, in turn, they reached others who began to ask questions and critically analyse the world in which they lived and the conditions they wished to change. Freire’s writing, in particular the notion of praxis (reflection and action upon the world in order to change it), gave me the language to talk about the work and to investigate why and how it was both political and educational. Changing curriculum as changing the social relations of power for systems change seemed to sum up a lot of our intentions.

What I liked about Freire, firstly, was his dismissal of education as ‘neutral’, his embracing of political purpose and bias on the side of the multiply oppressed. His utopian dream of a democratic socialist society also underpinned much of our work in the labour movement. Not surprisingly, his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* smuggled into South Africa wrapped in newspaper as a banned book made the rounds, passed from hand to hand as foundational literature for anti-apartheid activists in the Black Consciousness and labour movements.

Secondly, I appreciated how dialogue as an epistemological and ontological process respected participants as subjects and co-teachers. Collectively constructing knowledge and skills for transformation gave the teaching and learning both form and content, process and purpose.

Third, the aim of humanization, of becoming more fully human through the act of learning and teaching with others struck me as an ethical and moral choice worthy of pursuit. Both the recognition that this humanization is only possible through/ with the (different) other, and the importance of caring and care-work appealed to my feminist activism. However, I will suggest that humanisation has to also include explicit respect for and nurture of nature. I only had access to earlier writings of Freire—not the later



Pedagogy of Indignation (2000) and as the anonymous reviewers¹ indicated, this is a limitation of this text. Increasingly, ecofeminism has given me the tools to go forward, and as Salleh (2017, p. 283) suggests: a dialectical ecofeminism asks “Which way of knowing is most helpful in a time that cries out for affirmation of life?” Thus, this is less a critical engagement with the writings of Freire than a tribute to what he had/has to offer radical education practice.

In the following I elaborate these three points, and then add a note on how ecofeminism offers the ecological dimension that must be included in education if humanity is to survive. While the importance of ecology has been there all along, it is only recently being taken up as central to every aspect of life. Hopefully, the Covid-19 pandemic will teach us that it is impossible to have social, economic justice, without ecological justice.

Finally, I will take the notion of emancipation away from individual, personal freedom towards a practical embracing of interdependence and interrelatedness as inscribed in the original meaning of ‘ubuntu’. The paper will end with references to hopeful examples of actions that are freeing themselves from anthropocentric normality, and an appeal towards embracing education and action to support production, life and living, rather than growth and consumption.

TEACHING AS A PARTISAN ACT

Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379) wrote critically about teachers who are facilitators of “verbal ping-pong” about participants’ lived experiences, who orchestrate the process but relinquish authority through their laissez-faire attitude. He maintained strongly that teachers need to have a clear understanding that dialogue is a political project and called educators to be pedagogically and critically radical and this required “an active presence in the educational practice.” He was very clear that teaching is not a process of sharing experiences so that a session becomes a form of group therapy that focuses on the psychology of the individual, but rather a dialogue with the objective of analysing and dismantling oppressive structures—both in the classroom and society: “The educator who wants to be dialogical cannot relinquish his or her authority as a teacher, which requires epistemological curiosity, to become a facilitator who merely orchestrates the participation of students in pure verbalism” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 383). Further,

The educator who pretends to be objective and, in doing so, denies the oppressed the pedagogical space to develop a critical posture towards the world, particularly the world that has reduced them to a half-human object, exploited and dehumanized, is an educator who is complicit with the ideology of the oppressor. (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 389)

Education is a partisan act. hooks (2003, p. 128) points out that “Embedded in the notion of objectivity is the assumption that the more we stand at a distance from something the

¹ I would like to gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments from two reviewers who pointed out the limitations of this paper and gave references of where I might find further insight into Freire’s later ecological thinking. Sadly, these writings were neither accessible nor affordable to me.

more we look at it with a neutral view.” The worker plays we co-produced in the eighties and more recently (von Kotze, 2020) combined stories of exploitation told in often deeply emotive ways, drawing on local, inherited/historical knowledge that demonstrated ways of coping and responding to crises, and sharp analyses of the imbalance of forces that entrench oppressions. It was/is embodied work: analysed, understood, explained through the ‘heads, hands and hearts’ of the teacher-narrators (Butterworth & Walters, 2017). My role was and is as deliberate co-learner with interests that I lay out clearly, if asked to do so. There is a constant attempt to working together consistent with ‘conscious partiality’ (Mies & Shiva, 2014). As hooks (2003, p. 129) argues: “[But] the student who longs to know, who has awakened a passion for knowledge is eager to experience the mutual communion with teacher and subject that makes for profound engagement.” What I contribute to the work is experience in theatre-making; what the other participants bring is life-long experiences of injustices and stories that illustrate those. We all share a curiosity to explore deeper underlying causes of those injustices and do so in the process of dialogue and later performances that trigger further dialogue with audience members. At best, this process results in the production of ‘really useful knowledge’—that is, the knowledge necessary for transformative action:

Really useful knowledge is created when individuals and groups begin to reflect upon their experience with each other, in ways that lead to greater insight and understanding, and which enable theories to be developed linked to strategies for bringing about changes. (Thompson, 2000)

Aimed at challenging and changing the status quo this knowledge is therefore deeply biased and interested; further, knowledge that was previously deleted is now uncovered and explicitly included.

Directive teaching is not the same as ‘closed’, ‘banking’, ‘imposing’ or manipulating: “There is a big difference between giving information and telling people how to use it” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 138). For example, an exercise of constructing a ‘knowledge tree’ asks participants to identify and name knowledge and skills acquired at different times, in different places, and through different means. Participants often struggle to think of anything ‘learned from nature’. We explore experience in and with the natural world and question why we do not associate nature with ‘teacher’: how has our relationship with nature become so alienated and how does this alienation reflect other separations and tensions? Participants identify the powerful forces that benefit from what Freire called “a crime against humanity” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 391) and make connections with the dominant political economy. The questions that generate new insights are directive—but the dialogue that ensues is propelled by its own logic and participants’ interests.

DIALOGUE: MAKING REALLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

Writing about the influence of colonialism, Mbembe (2015) rejects the “Eurocentric epistemic canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production” and that “disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray



colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.” Colonialism all over the world managed to devalue people and turn them into objects of development agendas, epistemologically, socially, politically. Thus, if education is to contribute to re-humanising both those who have been excluded, denied, deleted, and those who have been denied to learn from other cultures, it requires political clarity. As Freire said in his dialogue with Horton,

Respecting the knowledge of the people for me is a political attitude consistent with the political choice of the educator if he or she thinks about a different kind of society. In other words, I cannot fight for a freer society if at the same time I don't respect the knowledge of the people. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 101)

This is not a welfare project of therapy or restoration, nor does it simply serve to reinstitute rights to people who have been denied human dignity—it is a project that underpins the very foundation of humanization: both oppressed and oppressor draw on their knowledge in the process of new understandings towards transformation and the liberation of both can only be mutual.

Clearly, it is not enough to change the subject matter of education by introducing hitherto omitted knowledge. The social relations of power in educational settings have to be altered from subject to object, towards subject to subject, in which all present are co-producers of knowledge. Freire put it clearly:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (1972, p. 31)

This relationship is epistemological: “I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379). As different voices articulate their views, what was previously regarded as ‘natural’ and common sense is revealed as contradictory and in need of critical examination. Importantly, as hooks (2003, p. 132) points out, “When students are encouraged to trust in their capacity to learn they can meet difficult challenges with a spirit of resilience and competence.” Similarly, Gorz (1999, p. 68) reminded us that education should bring out the capacity in individuals “to become the subject of their relation to themselves, the world and others.” He suggested that “This cannot be *taught*; it has to be *stimulated*” (his emphasis). Dialogue is a political and moral practice that offers opportunities for creating the knowledge, skills and social relations “that enable students to explore for themselves the possibilities of what it means to be engaged citizens, while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy” (Giroux, 2010).

Through dialogue, building consciousness is a process of re-knowing, that is, going back to something prior, an existing awareness, and re-experiencing it a-new. Freire

(1972 p. 51) called this 're-creating' where teacher and participants are co-intent on reality, both subjects "not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge." In his discussion about environmental consciousness, Gosh has written about the passage from ignorance to knowledge and how "(T)he knowledge that results from recognition [then] is not of the same kind as the discovery of something new: it arises rather from a renewed reckoning with a potentiality that lies within oneself" (2016, p. 6). This process has nothing to do with educators lifting a veil and disclosing hitherto hidden connections, but rather a collective process of participants and teacher together questioning and exploring in dialogue so that the learning becomes knowing. Freire summed it up thus: "We must avoid thinking that *we are* the illuminators. I think that liberating education implies illumination of reality, but the illuminators are the agents together in this process, the educators and the educees together" (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 49).

To illustrate: At a national popular education workshop for/with educational and environmental activists in 2019, groups of diverse South African participants were asked to translate key environmental terms into other languages. The purpose was to check understanding, draw attention to the way in which jargon excludes and objectifies and to highlight the importance of using accessible terms when dialoguing with other-language speakers about these issues. The task generated a lot of laughter, but also irritation: participants found it frustrating to translate some of the concepts so commonly used in environmentalism into other languages and hotly contested various more nuanced renditions given in local African languages. As one participant commented: "tapping into my home language was quite difficult. I am colonized—I do not know the words in Xhosa. We use a lot of metaphors to make some people understand." Another exclaimed: "The arrogance of English: we need to be more conscious of dominating English!" and "when I think of 'biodiversity' or 'biosphere' in isiXhosa they mean 'indaba'— we had to unpack the meanings." All experienced Freire's assertion that 'language is never neutral'. The activity generated unforeseen insights as we explored notions of biodiversity as 'indaba', that is, 'gathering', 'chronicle' and 'tale': a mix of active engagement with, historical understanding of and creative story-telling about nature.

Radical educators take the decision to act politically rather than simply revealing a particular capacity to interpret and make sense. Rather than verifying, re-creating suggests making something new; it is not some form of assessment, but rather critical comment that takes understanding beyond previous insights. Furthermore, dialogues of teachers and participants can be rehearsals for new relationships of mutual respect, as all practice changed relations of learning and knowing. If this experience can show how the process of knowledge production is a model of how to re-make society, or even the planet, the act of dialogue is a necessary exercise towards the action that is to flow from the learning /knowing.

BECOMING MORE FULLY HUMAN

Differentiating sharply between colonization and civilization, Aime Cesaire asserted that not a single human value could come out of colonization. He described the dehumanizing effect of colonization as a 'boomerang effect':



colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out². (1972, p. 5)

The African concept of 'ubuntu' (literally: a person is a person through other people) articulates this reciprocity. The radical devaluing of local languages and cultural norms and beliefs was one of the most vicious and lasting effects of colonialism. Not surprisingly, therefore, many writers from the South have commented on the loss of old wisdoms. Palestinian writer Abulhawa explains:

Building the world of the you requires more than one knowledge discourse, and it necessitates dialogue to ensure the inclusion of different views and experiences. In contrast to western social philosophies—which are generally predicated on the primacy and exceptionalism of the human experience, and human domination over all there is—those that emerged from indigenous or First Nation peoples, and which are available to us principally in the form of proverbs and observable ways of life, are informed by a humility that places humans in a larger natural order. (2017, p. 103)

Similarly, Indian author Gosh laments that we have forgotten old wisdoms:

The cumulative effect is the extinction of exactly those forms of traditional knowledge, materials skills, and ties of community that might provide succour to vast numbers of people around the world—and especially those who are still bound to the land—as the impacts intensify we must look to the past for some solutions. (2016, p. 216)

Indigenous knowledge systems, first nations all over the world, extend the interconnectedness, interdependence and reciprocity to include both people who have passed and live in the spirit-world, and nature itself. The African law of 'ubuntu' includes all living forms, 'reasoned' beings as much as inanimate ones, such as rivers and mountains, time and space and even beauty are interconnected in the mutuality of all sentient beings and the earth. The past that Gosh and Abulhawa speak about suggests a life/living in which all parts of an ecosystem depended on another and humans were not separate from nature but intimately linked. This necessitated that people lived sustainably with, not against, nature, that living embraced the value of sufficiency rather than over-consumption and exploitation. Full humanity must include respect for the

² The boomerang was recently illustrated in South Africa when erstwhile Archbishop Desmond Tutu insisted that it is our interconnectedness that humanizes us. Speaking about the apartheid president de Klerk who had claimed that 'apartheid was not a crime', Tutu quipped "I'm deeply committed to reconciliation and I care enormously for all the people in this country (...) You see, we can't go to heaven alone. If I arrive there, God will ask me: 'Where is De Klerk? His path crossed yours.' And he also – God will ask him: 'Where is Tutu?' So I cry for him, I cry for De Klerk – because he spurned the opportunity to become human" (Krog, 2020).

natural world, both around and in us. It is not enough to eradicate exploitative relations amongst people as violence inflicted on the earth harms people, too.

Freire (1972, p. 58) asserted that “The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity.” He excluded nature and people who have walked before us and will come after us, from this notion of humanity. Kahn has taken Freire to task over his problematic discourse on people and animals:

The language in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* wherein he codes animals as mindless, timeless and merely instinctual beings, no different in “the forest or the zoo,” lost in “an overwhelming present,” and lacking individuation is unfortunate and politically regressive in the context of our current situation. (2003, p. 28)

When Freire speaks about humanisation, there is the underlying assumption that ‘human’ is generally male to the exclusion of both the particular knowledge, wisdom, skills of women and those of indigenous people. Further, there is an assumption that ‘man’ justifiably dominates nature. He suggested that it is wrong to pollute and destroy—but there is no allusion to living in a way that nurtures, cares, sustains life. Humility begins with acknowledging that all our sciences and ideas have not helped us to make the world a more equal, just place.

EMANCIPATORY SOLIDARITY

Acts committed in the spirit of modernisation, progress, development contributed substantively to degradation of the natural world. Relations of domination also underpinned the enlightenment concept of emancipation: freedom from necessity, it was argued, would bring about emancipation. Working with our hands was considered not important, as bigger profits could be achieved through machine fabrication. Caring work, sewing seeds, cooking etc—largely the work in the home ascribed to women—has remained ‘unproductive’ labour and a whole host of inventions aimed at ‘freeing’ women from social reproductive labour so they could be productive, alongside men. Self-determination was considered liberation and the independent, autonomous female was regarded as truly ‘liberated’, as if patriarchal relations had magically disappeared.

In my context of South Africa, emancipation has been primarily about freedom from bondage—from slavery, racial discrimination, colonial legacies. The basic freedom of dignity, to be recognized as and treated like a human being was enshrined in the South Africa constitution, but the majority of people do not yet enjoy this freedom. Fanon (1970 p. 165) asked: “Was my freedom not given to me [then] in order to build the world of the YOU?” (his emphasis). We are far from this ideal. Emancipation, freedom from inequality is the aim of social justice—but as argued before, there is no social justice without ecological justice. The ‘burden’ of subsistence activities has still not been recognised as the most basic life-preserving labour to meet the fundamental basic needs that are common to us all. Freeing ourselves from the realm of necessity is neither possible, nor desirable. Survival requires cooperation and



an acknowledgement of our interconnectedness with each other and the environment. Our real challenge is to reject the notion ‘that Man’s freedom and happiness depend on an ongoing process of emancipation from nature, on independence from, and dominance over natural processes by the power of reason and rationality (Salleh, 2017, p. 6). Emancipation must be compatible with preserving the earth: “To find freedom does not involve subjugating or transcending the ‘realm of necessity’, but rather focusing on developing a vision of freedom, happiness, the ‘good life’ within the limits of necessity, of nature” (Salleh, 2017, p. 8). Thus, I would argue that ‘emancipation’, now as ever, should become the realization that freedom is always ‘with’, not ‘from’ others, from basic needs, from the natural world. This becomes doubly clear in the time of a pandemic when there is a call for ‘physical distancing, social solidarity’, and many people realise their dependence on others’ care.

What is this ‘solidarity’? Grieves and Clark (2015, p. 293) suggest that solidarity is at its core, a symmetrical, mutual and reciprocal relation where we see our own fate in the fate of the other. In the context of dialogic teaching, solidarity requires working across a whole range of differences: communities, languages and cultures, across class and gender, rural and urban etc. The differences illustrate how solidarity is a political relationship that is forged through particular struggles situated in specific place and time. Gaztambide-Fernandez (2012, p. 52) propose that solidarity begins with acknowledging “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”. Thus, solidarity is “a deliberate and purposeful commitment to interdependence and reciprocity as values and outcomes” (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012, p. 52).

An emancipatory solidarity then becomes a commitment to the ‘you’ that Fanon spoke of—an understanding that freedom and social justice is contingent upon all our (not just my) freedom and that it is a process rather than state of being. It is not a project of individuals but must be undertaken together, from the grassroots up, through a process of learning and struggling together. This both requires and leads to ‘being fully human’—the reciprocity, interconnectedness, mutuality that forms the bedrock of our actions. If we go beyond polarisation and accept that ecosystems in which each part depend on another part, and each part offers gifts to the whole are interdependent with humans, emancipation becomes building common purpose with all living organisms, ubuntu-solidarity so that we can become ‘earth’s comrade’ (Burt & Lusiki, 2017). This is a slow, careful step-by-step sustained process of radical transformation.

THE FUTURE

Emancipatory solidarity—the collective work driven by common purpose for the good of all—can be found in many of the movements across the world. Klein (2017) suggests that “it’s time to unite a common agenda that can directly battle the political poison spreading through our countries. No is not enough—it’s time for some big, bold yesses to rally around” (p. 234). She rightly points out that while the climate crisis acts as an accelerant of many social, political, environmental, economic ills, it can also work in the opposite way “for the forces working for economic and social justice and against militarism” (2017, p. 48). Indeed, some of the ‘yesses’ can be found in the myriad of actions performed by activists around the world. Salleh (2017) devotes an entire chapter (“Ecofeminist



Actions”) to an examination of a range of ecofeminist social movement actions by women from all corners of the earth. These actions are focused on, for example, mining, militarism, sexual violence, pesticides, nuclear power, police violence, biocolonisation, and misogyny in popular culture. We find emancipatory solidarity in women in Poland who have freed themselves from the dominant view that growth is the answer to all woes, and got together as ‘River Sisters’ demonstrating against the canalization of the Weichsel river as their inheritance and treasure. We also find it when all different kinds of people get together to co-conceptualise and co-formulate a ‘climate charter’ (COPAC, 2019) that seeks to forge “a common vision, clear goals, guiding principles and alternatives from below to lead the climate justice movement to secure a different future, where all human and non-human life is sustained”.

One lesson the Coronavirus crisis is showing is that the world has the technologies, the resources, the means to respond in a co-ordinated way to the great existential threats of our time. What remains to be seen is if it has the political will. Popular education as a political and moral practice education that can connect and build on people’s experiences and knowledge can play an important role in strengthening political will: Holding leaders accountable, formulating, circulating and using policies and charters to enlist support, forge solidarity and pressurise can be stimulated by education. Crucially, making connections between all aspects of life and living, reminds us that what we need is a large ‘revolutionary’ transformation, a new civilisation. Herein lies our hope for the future: we must live simply to simply live.

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