8

Popular Education and Democratization

What is the relationship between changing perspectives and social transformation? Is adult education still a democratizing force in our societies, and if so how? In this part of our pilgrimage we meet the idea of popular education and dialogue with some significant thinkers. It has represented a form of intentional and collective action, historically aimed at bringing about major changes in social and political contexts, beyond single lives. Popular education evolved in relationship with political, social and cultural change, and adapted to local contexts. Now, it is almost invisible in many societies, where the dominant perspective on learning is individualistic and narrowly instrumental. But how can complex, multicultural societies change in sustainable and ecologically sensitive ways, if citizens are treated as competing entities, shaped to be separate in a game that gets harder and more frenetic in liquid modernity? We have suggested throughout the book that any change in perspective needs new qualities of conversation and co-evolution with others, with the material/natural environment, and in a social context. Individuals are parts of interacting systems of families and institutions and must learn to adapt as well as challenge contexts. This involves them changing their (reciprocal) positioning and perspectives by talking

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back to power, disrupting discourse, and refusing to accept their own (self) representation as passive, powerless, or incompetent. There is a very transgressive edge to social transformation.

This chapter has a strong auto/biographical flavour: we both are products of lost worlds, where popular education was a vital democratizing force and recognized as a practical and political necessity for progressive change. Not least in its power to challenge discourses and structures that limited freedom, justice, and the possibilities of creating more inclusive and better societies. We reflect now, historically and auto/biographically, on who and what shaped our different perspectives. We cannot offer, in limited space, a complete map of a phenomenon that found expression in diverse places and cultures, under the inspiration of the Enlightenment project, the stimulus of the French Revolution or religious movements. Popular education, for example, found vibrant expression in North America with the Antigonish movement and industrial renewal networks, in Black consciousness and in the women's movement (Brookfield and Holst 2011). Antigonish blended adult education, diverse forms of cooperation, financial assistance and community development in Canada's Maritime Provinces and beyond. It was designed to improve the economic and social circumstances of those who lived there. Priests and educators like Moses Coady inspired this from a base in the Department of Extension at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Their work produced credit unions while the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier has been involved in diverse community initiatives in 'developing' countries (Alexander 1997).

In southern Europe, the theory and practice of popular education was rooted in Catholicism as well as Marxism: churches and trade unions had a powerful role in its development. In northern Europe, especially the United Kingdom, the universities played a role in alliance with workers' organisations while workers themselves were often motivated by non-conformist religious conviction more so than Marxism (Goldman 1995; West 2016). Paulo Freire (1970) inspired popular education worldwide: he drew on Martin Buber and liberation theology (Kirkwood 2012) in developing his pedagogy of dialogue. Dialogue is a major tenet of popular education, but there are contradictions and tensions here: in the danger of patronising people by claiming to have the truth, on their behalf; or where there is too strong an emphasis on words and cognition, especially in the case of women, indigenous peoples and minorities.

The history of the Twentieth Century contains several rich examples of education explicitly aimed at social transformation, albeit with different aims, targets or epistemologies. We can only explore some, mainly from our own countries and experience, and we are aware that this is a limitation. We also want to keep in mind questions about popular education's transformative role in a liquid modernity. The mantras of Europe as the 'knowledge society', with its rhetoric of adaptation, is a perspective in which citizenship, life skills, and inclusion tend to be about people fitting in to an established order. Of learning to be the good citizen by accepting particular values and priorities. Can education still build hope and justice, when constrained by funding policies and driven by calculations of economic return? If the dominant rhetoric is of education as 'investment' to make 'us' richer and stronger than 'others', can we build greater justice and democracy across the planet? Knowing is about liberating people from ignorance and sustaining their capacity to think, feel, to be critical and discriminating, and to fight for social justice. It is also about claiming dignity and building mutual recognition: so, we might need new, or reinvigorated forms of adult education beyond capitalism's human resource perspective.

The political is a crucial dimension of the human condition, marked by action and plurality (Arendt 1958): when we think of education as a form of human action we realize it is far from neutral. Every choice has effects: when education neglects the social, it depletes it, and human well-being in consequence. So an engaged education is a struggle for sustainability, the abolition of poverty, and for peaceful and more equitable coexistence. A perspective solely focused on technology, finance, the labour market or adaptability will not solve these problems or help us imagine better and sustainable ways of living together.

We want to learn from history, from critical reflection on theories and practices of education then and now, from the utopian ideas that inspired adult educators and intellectuals. We want to retrieve and dialogue about the meaning of 'oppression', as thematised by Paulo Freire

(1970), and of ‘hegemony’, a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci (1975/2007). These ideas retain a potency in countries ruled by brutal power, where education is not a citizen’s right; but also in our so-called democratic countries, where common sense and consensus often constrain and imprison the mind, hearts and imaginations of ‘silent majorities’.

It seems that mass schooling is unable, as promised, to guarantee that all citizens will grow to ‘think like adults’. Jack Mezirow argued that ‘the assumption in democratic societies is that an adult is able to understand the issues; will make rational choices as a socially responsible, autonomous agent; and, at least, sometimes, is free to act on them’ (2012, p. 88). This assumption fails if people are not *treated* like adults and as potentially self-determining persons. Transformative learning needs transformative education. We must learn that our experience and knowledge count and can be used to talk back to power, in collective as well as individual ways. Moreover, we are never totally autonomous, and depend on others. As Freire argued, it depends on our awareness of the workings of oppressive patterns in our lives, including how language shapes us. Movement towards freedom, however defined, is as much social as individual; it requires concrete contexts of interaction to build awareness. And yet, awareness raising can result in greater inequality rather than emancipation (Wildemeersch 2018); in the emergence of new elites who know the truth, while the majority learn to follow.

Nowadays, the term popular education is almost abandoned in favour of the generic ‘informal’ education; or worse, blurring all differences under the banner of ‘lifelong learning’ (Zarifis and Gravani 2014). The latter, in its individualistic guises, can obliterate any concern for the marginalised, the poor, or undereducated, apart from for their economic utility. The dream of many, the *real* transformation of building a peaceful world of reciprocity and rights for everyone, and sustainable development to avoid destroying the planet, seems hopelessly elusive. We seek therefore to dialogue with the ideas and enterprise of engaged educators and scholars who dedicated their lives to such goals. They may have been utopian, but then we are mindful of the present dystopic, liquid modernity.

Collective Disorientating Dilemmas

Stephen Brookfield, writing about dystopias, and the collective and political aspects of transformative learning (Brookfield 2000; Brookfield and Holst 2011), applies Mezirow's idea of 'disorientating dilemmas' to wider economic, social and political dislocation, such as the 2008 financial crash. This brings transformative potential, if only we realise that an entire system is dysfunctional, and its frameworks of meaning must be changed (Brookfield and Holst 2011, pp. 32–33).

In fact, dislocation and disorientation are systemic features of our times, presenting themselves in the form of war, mass migration, terrorism and wider political crisis. They might be opportunities for new ways of seeing and being in the world. Why does this not happen, though? Brookfield (2000) considers the deep social origin of 'cognition', as a 'function' of the way societies work, and our positioning within them. He quotes Mezirow in developing the idea that our thoughts are often the products of our 'webs of affiliation'. So, 'our' cognition gets shaped by the structuring influences of class, race, gender, sexuality, family or religion and ideology. We exist in particular 'cultural streams' that appear natural and common sense; so, to understand collective disorientation we must shift the focus to, as it were, the souls of whole societies.

Gramsci (1975/2007) referred to 'hegemony' as the social transmission of values and ideas based on—and confirming—the interests of dominating groups (Mayo 1999). Common sense is infused by power, but nowadays it is no longer forced on people by dominant groups, as it was in Gramsci's time, and still is in totalitarian societies. It is a form of invisible oppression without an obvious oppressor. De-centralized global domination, ruled by finance, anonymous organisations, media, as Bauman observed, are obvious examples. Hegemony is so widespread that it becomes natural, and we naturally adhere to it. 'It's common sense, isn't it, for people to want to live among their own; too many immigrants cause too much trouble; well inequalities are just natural, aren't they? The migrants are stealing our jobs!', we might say. 'They' of course are not like 'us'. They might be strangers, asylum seekers, or women, or any 'other' social group.

Social transformation, then, is no bed of roses. When common sense is shaken by political, economic, and ecological turbulence, or war and terrorism, efforts are made to restore normality. To reaffirm the existing 'order', often out of fear and panic over something potentially worse. Scapegoating can be a consequence. Or giving renewed emphasis to security, control, surveillance, building walls, and creating myths and narratives to divide and separate. There are echoes here of processes at an inter and intra psychic level; of controls over what we think, of building walls between different parts of our personality, and of internalising demeaning myths directed at people like us. Neoliberal politicians use such methods, because they know they work among the 'silent majority', who have never adequately been encouraged to think, or act, like adults. The neoliberal dystopia infantilizes. Its leverage is the economy of automatic thinking, the commodity of letting others take decisions. Social transformation is a major challenge and some pessimism is understandable, not least in regard to the potential role of transformative adult education. Brookfield and Holst (2011, p. 102) quote Coady as saying that people are rarely able to see any bigger picture, or act, when they are on their own; but when they come together they are more likely to understand that their situations are not individual eccentricities or failures, but rooted in asymmetrical power relations, inequalities and constraining discourse.

Leaders, and Beyond: A (His) Story of Workers' Education

Popular education has had its advocates in every country. We will dialogue with leaders and, for us, inspiring figures. Raymond Williams and Richard Henry Tawney in the United Kingdom, Dolci, Capitini, and Manzi, among others, in Italy: brave and intelligent men, 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci 1966), moved by the 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. They used their own will and power to make things happen. They employed every means—like the Italian Danilo Dolci in hunger striking, or Raymond Williams in his prolific literary and critical output—to highlight the rights and celebrate the voices of people they loved, those often unseen and abandoned. This is a story, however, where other voices have been silenced and patronised: women, in the main, who were active in literacy courses, tutorial classes, factory councils, cultural centres, and who struggled to build better lives and communities. A (his) story of popular education must find better ways to chronicle gender, and the reciprocity and interdependence of women and men.

While preparing this chapter, Laura realised the innumerable autobiographical notes written by nearly illiterate working-class men and women, in the 1950s, as a mandatory part of their application to become members of PCI, the Italian Communist Party (Baroni 2008). She was struck by the thoughts of unknown thousands, in those years, learning to write and read, as a necessity both for a job and to enter political life. She remembered her aunt Gina, an unschooled housewife, who read the newspaper every morning at the kitchen table, commenting aloud to her as a little girl. Zio Nino, her husband, was a survivor of the Russian campaign and a local socialist activist. Years before, Gina's father (Laura's great-grandfather) had a leading role in a big strike of farm workers, fighting for their rights against the 'padrone' (the 'big father', the land-owner). Nonno Satiro, was her great grandfather, and he was in fact the only one in the village who could read and write. The liberating value of education is woven into these old family memories. Linden talks of how members of his family were autodidacts and dreamt of a better future through education. The history of popular education is partly about the history of people we have known, our parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and their wider families, in which the autodidactic tradition was strong. When both men and women insisted on asking awkward questions and challenging received wisdom. They valued knowing, non-conformist religious ideas, or challenging patriarchal religion, alongside political awareness, and the right to vote, because these things made a difference in their own lives.

Workers' Education and the Struggle for Democratic Transformation: Richard Henry Tawney and Raymond Williams

The history of workers' education in the United Kingdom has an important place in Linden's research and writing (West 2016, 2017). Most recently, in the rise of racism and fundamentalism, he revisited his earlier historical work on twentieth century experiments in democratic transformative education. Jonathan Rose's (2001/2010) research on the history of popular education in the United Kingdom concluded that workers' education had a central role in social transformation, in the first part of the twentieth century. The establishment of a welfare state, and more egalitarian society, after the Second World War, was partly the outcome of the war itself because it served to stimulate progressive adult education among soldiers. The Welfare State followed, in many countries of Western Europe, bringing relative transformations in individual and collective lives: and some freedom, at least, from ignorance, insecurity and poverty. The point is that meaningful transformation depended on collective intellectual, democratic, imaginative, heartfelt and even spiritual effort, in which popular education had a central place.

There is a strong auto/biographical edge to our writing at this point. Workers' education in the United Kingdom, and the autodidactic tradition, was, as noted, alive in Linden's family; and deserves more respect than he once gave it (West 2016). A better and more inclusive health service was one aspect of a utopian educational dream. A National Health Service, free at the point of use, was established in 1947, as was the wider availability of subsidised public housing, which brought relief to families like Linden's. Having a home with an inside bathroom and a garden was a liberation. As was not having to pay to see a doctor when someone in the family was ill: this had deep meaning for members of his family. It was often too expensive to see the doctor before the War. The new public housing estate, on which his parents lived, was a glimpse of a New Jerusalem in its spaciousness, abundance of trees and gardens. New public housing, cleaner air, relatively secure employment and employment rights, alongside expanded educational opportunity and the development of municipal resources like libraries, recreation centres, and adult education, served to transform the quality of the lives of the mass of the British population.

Tawney, Fraternity and the Idea of Social Transformation

Richard Henry Tawney was born into a privileged English upper middle-class family, while Raymond Williams was the son of a railway worker. Both, however, in their differing ways, thought of workers' education as a prime vehicle of social and cultural transformation. The influence of Christian socialist ideas was at work in North America too as well as in continental Europe: scholars and community-workers like Myles Horton were concerned with the relationship between Christianity and everyday life. Horton was involved with the Highlander Folk School. He studied at a theology seminary in New York, in the 1920s, and the movement he and others inspired paralleled the emergence of liberation theology and popular education in Latin America (Horton and Freire 1990).

Herein lay an idea of Christ socially incarnate, and of building the Kingdom of transformation on earth. It encompassed respect for the divine in the other, and of the importance of creating relationships of equality and fraternity. This ideal had a central place in the stories told about popular education in the United Kingdom. Workers' education like this was a 'ministry of enthusiasm', in the words of Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, the first ever President of the Workers' Educational Association. Temple was alluding to the early Christian church, of teaching as well as learning, in a spirit of fraternity, and his comparison would have been understood by many in the workers' education movement, schooled as they often were in non-conformist Christianity (West 2016).

Popular or workers' education represented, in its spirit of conviviality and cooperation, glimpses of transcendence, of the Kingdom, of the possibilities of transformation grounded in human beings living and learning together, in fraternity, and in a spirit of truth seeking for a common good. Lawrence Goldman (2013) argues that we should look to the early Tawney and his work in adult education as a guide in our present malaise; rather than be preoccupied with Tawney's later Fabian socialism in which elites continued to hand down prescriptions from on high. We should remember too that workers' education in the UK was a distinctive alliance between progressive elements in universities and workers' organisations. It was characterised by a mix of Enlightenment idealism, the aspirations of democratic socialism and a quasi-religious commitment to serious study. It was as much a spiritual as a socio-cultural, political and educational movement. If God really was present in everyone—the Asylum seeker, the Jew, the beggar, the Muslim and women—it had profound and inclusive implications. The democratic workers educational group could represent transcendence in the immanent.

An Experiment in the City

Workers education, in the form of what were called tutorial classes, once thrived in Stoke, in the English Midlands, where Linden was born (West 2016). The first ever university/workers' tutorial class took place in 1908 when 30 or so worker students gathered together on Friday evenings, for 2 hours, over a period of years, with their tutor, Tawney. The classes were free from prescribed curricula and members were encouraged to explore issues in their working lives from the perspectives of history, politics, economics and literature. Fortnightly essays were required, and the standard of some of these was high (West 1972; Goldman 1995). There were no formal examinations or qualifications due to a desire to eliminate competition and vocationalism, as well as teaching to the test, from the classroom (West 1972; Rose 2010; West 2017).

The students were potters, miners, clerks, shop assistants and elementary school teachers, women as well as men (West 1972). Many came from non-conformist backgrounds, from families, in short, that encouraged them to think for themselves. The Marxist Social Democratic

Federation made up the nucleus of the first class. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) was formed in 1883 under the leadership by Henry Hyndman, the son of a business man who became a journalist and political agitator (Macintyre 1980). The Federation was opposed to the British Liberal Party of the time, and its programme was progressive, calling for a 48-hour working week, the abolition of child labour, compulsory free secular education, equality for women and the nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

However, some SDF members held an extremely 'mechanical version of the materialist conception of history' in which the whole of human life 'was controlled by economic forces independent of human volition' (Macintyre 1980, p. 17). Education, politics and consciousness were epiphenomena of the techniques and relations of production. The students could be rigid in their economic doctrines (ibid.), and this played out in tutorial classes. We can observe Tawney's own struggles, and those of the students, to keep the dialogue going and the spirit of collaborative enquiry alive, when conflicting views clashed. Tawney thought transformation lay in people's spiritual life, in how they treated each other, as much as economics.

The Workers' Educational Association, WEA, through which the classes were organised, was founded on three core principles. First, opposition to revolutionary violence, a theme across much popular education. Second, no institution, however perfect in conception, could work effectively with individuals whose morality was inadequate—which sounds archaic, now, even Victorian in its evocation of hard work, clean living and dedication to the welfare of others. Third, where a sound morality was lacking, this could be forged in a community of scholars seeking truth and the common good (Dennis and Halsey 1988). There was an Aristotelian ideal at work, as well as Oxford idealism (Goldman 1995): of the fully developed person living in communities, building and sustaining virtue, in relationship—communities cultivating not self- but other-regardedness (Dennis and Halsey 1988). The Oxford idealists influencing Tawney were opposed to individualism, utilitarianism and social atomism and drew on German philosophers, especially Kant and Hegel, to assert that individuals best realise their potential, or are transformed, in the collective.

People were part of webs of social, political and cultural as well as economic relationships, from which they could never be divorced for analytic purposes.

However, Tawney understood (Goldman 1995, p. 160) that the same spirit of non-conformity driving some worker students could narrow viewpoints and bring a tendency to over-proselytise, making dialogue difficult. Dogmatism and even fundamentalism of a Marxist, free market or religious kind, existed in the classes. But many of these worker students admired tutors like Tawney who remained steadfast as well as respectful when harangued by a fundamentalist. Leftist fundamentalists, sometimes from the Social Democratic Federation and later the Communist Party, (as well as free market ideologues), would quote texts like *Das Capital* with religious fervour. One student recalled a Marxist member—the SDF could dominate the first tutorial classes—challenging Tawney point by point and referring to classic Marxist texts. Tawney took it in his stride but insisted that there were other points of view. The student accused the tutor of hopping around like a bird, from twig to twig, and bad temper pervaded the room. But Tawney insisted that everyone, including his challenger, take tea together afterwards and tell stories, read poetry and sing songs. A shared humanity and a spirit of fraternity and conviviality were restored (Rose 2010, p. 266). The class in fact stayed together despite the local secretary of the SDF demanding that his members withdraw for fear of ideological contamination (Goldman 2013). We can detect something of the spirit of a genuinely transformative social education here: of remaining open to others and otherness, despite the strength of our own beliefs. There is a fine line to be drawn between a passionate desire to change a world, and being open to others and otherness, and to the possibility that we might be wrong. The divine, after all, was present, in each one of us, and could be speaking through the person sitting opposite.

In the 1960s, Tawney's Christian socialism was often derided as pious by mainly Marxist critical sociologists and historians. The tradition was considered paternalistic and even accused of constraining radical proletarian energies, and thus the possibility of more fundamental transformations of capitalism (see West 2016, 2017). Notwithstanding, Tawney's contribution to theorising the role and practice of socially transformative education is now positively re-evaluated by several scholars, in the light of the earlier critiques (Holford 2015; Goldman 2013). The tutorial classes sought to make university education available to everyone, in their own localities: very different to today's meritocratic assumptions about higher education for individual social mobility. Tawney was committed to a liberal and humane view of education, for everyone; individuals and communities should not be privileged or discounted because of their wealth or poverty. Moreover, Tawney represents a 'constructivist' pedagogy: classes were not lectures, and ideas were explored and developed in discussion; students engaged in research through using original source material, like historical documents, rather than simply relying on secondary texts.

Linden's views have changed towards the above. There is convincing evidence in his own research of the powerful spirit of the tutorial class students and their motivation to create a wider workers' education/cultural movement across the mining communities of North Staffordshire. He chose to ignore or minimalise this and to dismiss the role of non-conformity in a modish, quasi-Marxist scepticism (West 1972, 2016, 2017). We can now, in fact, form a highly nuanced, interdisciplinary understanding of processes of dialogue, and self/other recognition as well as transformation in these classes, drawing on the testimony of students themselves. Of how they describe learning as cultivating a democratic and fraternal sensibility (West 1996; Rose 2010, pp. 274–275). Human flourishing requires in fact sufficient experience of what Honneth (2007, 2009) calls self-recognition: of love and experience of self-other affirmation, at different levels. It includes recognition from significant others, like Tawney, and more experienced students. When we feel recognised, in good enough ways, in intimate relationships and valued groups, like the tutorial classes, and when we are considered as making important and wider social contributions, we are better able to recognize others, from which stronger social solidarities and transformation can flow.

Raymond Williams, Building a Common Culture of Transformed Meanings

Williams was of the same broad tradition as Tawney, although of a later generation and with a somewhat different political outlook. As a humanistic Marxist, notions of human agency, equality and cultural creativity were central to his ideas about democratic transformation. He understood that the WEA's historic mission was far from over by the 1950s, when he was active. If 'exceptional minds' from diverse backgrounds went to university more easily, wrote Williams in a letter to WEA tutors, the remaining question was what about everyone else? Were they simply to be treated as rejects, suitable only for narrow vocational training? The WEA stood for something that even educational reformers tended to forget, obsessed as they might be with schooling: 'It stands for an educated democracy, not for a newly mobile and more varied élite', wrote Williams in 1961 (cited in Goldman 1995, p. 252). Like Tawney, he was critical of people who presumed to deliver answers, or monologues, using ideological texts to shape minds and actions, without fostering any active or critical engagement. In contemporary societies, powerful forces act to persuade us to confirm the social order. He was critical of the advertising industry and the reduction of people to masses, to 'demographic profiles' and even of elitist tendencies in 'liberatory' popular movements, among those who claimed to have the answers. Transformation of any kind was not to be delivered from on high.

Williams wrote of 'culture as ordinary' (Williams 1989), and observed that various elites—whether advertising men and women or the authoritarian left—hold de-humanised and reductive views of the masses. Manipulation rather than education preoccupied them. Expensively educated people were 'now in the service of the most brazen money-grabbing exploitation of the inexperience of ordinary people' (Williams 1989, p. 6). 'The new cheapjack is in offices with contemporary *décor*, using scraps of linguistics, psychology, and sociology to influence what he thinks of as the mass mind' (Williams 1989, p. 7). His scorn was also directed at those Marxists who insisted that people must think in prescribed ways. 'It is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings (within cultures) can in any way be prescribed: they are made by living people, made and remade, in ways that we cannot know in advance' (1989, p. 9).

The Marxist interpretation of culture, he argued, was unacceptable if it retained a directive element: that if you desired socialism, you must learn to write, think, and learn in determined ways (Williams 1989, p. 8). Williams, like Tawney, was critical of militaristic metaphors and the fetish of violent 'solutions' among some on the left. When power is monopolised by unresponsive elites, divisions can constantly open among those who seek to oppose them: some will find violence attractive. Metaphors of assaulting citadels, he observed, are the wrong kind of transformational metaphor. The struggle needed to be slow, democratic, non-violent and fundamentally educational. 'Active reception', Williams suggested, was a living response that real communication elicited, in adult education, as in life, which depended on creating 'a community of experience, of human and intellectual equality'. Adult education was 'a crucial experience', a central way of getting in touch with ourselves and others in new ways, cultivating a collaborative conscientization (McIlroy 1993, p. 6).

Williams focused on ordinary everyday lives, within a never complete, long revolution. Of how women's lives, for instance, had been transformed by industrial and technological change. The washing machine and vacuum cleaner were to be celebrated. Of course, this may smack of a highly gendered view: of women being left to do the housework, as Laura has observed. A horrible view, she remarked, as we drafted the chapter. But liberation from certain kinds of domestic tyranny—of never having time—brought space for some to engage in popular women's education.

Williams continues to inspire various popular educators in the Philosophy in Pubs movement and other initiatives (West 2016). There is a growing awareness too, if still limited, of the role many women played in popular education, including in bodies like the WEA, over the course of the twentieth century (Roberts 2003). Linden's recent work on Stoke-on-Trent, and problems of racism and Islamism, encompasses various new initiatives in women's popular education, including working class white and Muslim women learning together in health programmes that can lead to social action, using digital media. This is a response to the threatened closure of community resources like swimming baths, in the politics of austerity (West 2016). Popular education, however fragile, can still inspire movements of social transformation and more fulsome recognition of the other.

Freire, and Dialogic Transformative Action: Two Case Studies and Feminist Critiques

Movements for popular education have also been inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, in the United Kingdom, in Europe more widely, and in North as well as South America. His theory and practice of education (see a review in Lucio-Villegas 2018) brought social transformation to the forefront of adult education worldwide; his philosophy was rooted in both classical scholars such as Plato, and in modern Marxist anti-colonialist thinkers as well as liberation theology. Linden first engaged with Freire's ideas in an urban project located in Edinburgh, led by Colin and Gerri Kirkwood (2013). There is more on this below.

In many ways, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) can be read as a dialogue with Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon emphasized the importance of providing oppressed populations with new and modern education (rather than traditional), but also with anti-colonial perspectives that transcend the culture of the coloniser. Freire sought transformation beyond the oppressor and oppressed binary, looking towards Hegel for a new kind of synthesis. Education should allow the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity, as a basis for changing their condition. It requires 'critical literacy', a basic skill of reading 'the world' besides and through 'the word'. The oppressed play a fundamental role in their own liberation, in new qualities of relationship. No truly transformative pedagogy could treat the oppressed as unfortunates who must be filled with specific knowledge. Ordinary people will find their own examples in struggles for redemption; likewise, if true liberation is to occur, those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly, as Colin and Gerri Kirkwood have done.

Colin Kirkwood (2012) notes that Freire's view is essentially interpersonal, as opposed to a Lockean view of self as an isolate. The way students are taught and what they are taught serves a political agenda. Teachers, themselves, have political notions they bring to the classroom. Teaching and learning, then, are political acts and teachers and students must be aware of the 'politics' that surround education, which is a central tenet of critical pedagogy.

Colin and Gerri Kirkwood project in Gorgy/Dalry a working-class district of Edinburgh, was a living embodiment of Freire's ideas (Kirkwood 2012). The Adult Learning Project (ALP) involved local people in a process whereby they identified significant situations and concerns in their lives, codified these in visual, auditory or written form, or in combination, and then decoded meanings and established themes for longer term study, working with experts, and using dialogical methods. Issues of children's play and wanting to write better, as well as the wider quality of life in the area, came to the fore, alongside questions of Scottish identity and English colonisation. Kirkwood (2012, p. 167) regards Freire as being 'literally fundamental to the life of ALP', but in ways that were adapted to an urban Scottish city. Transformation involved dedication and creativity, over many years. It is interesting that Kirkwood's (2012) interpretation offers a clear link between social and personal transformation in his ideas about persons in relationship. He draws on Scottish psychoanalytic traditions to emphasise how we are born in relationships, and that the personal is in such terms deeply relational. Kirkwood (2017) also confirms that Freire was influenced by liberation theology and the struggle to make the Kingdom incarnate through good enough, loving human relationships here on earth. Such religious influences have been downplayed by some radical popular educators and readers of Freire's work.

Freire has inspired popular education movements and experiences everywhere in the world (Kirkwood 2012), including the Centre for Research on the Education of Adults (CREA) in Barcelona, Spain, influenced by Habermas as well as Freire. Here too a dialogical approach and radical practices were developed enabling historical, cultural and political change (Merrill 2003). By collaboratively engaging with people in a working-class area of Barcelona, the Centre brought local residents to establish an adult education school and cultural centre within an occupied building, along with other services, all run in non-hierarchical ways. The participants' relationships with the local council changed significantly, over time. The council initially refused them access to the buildings, but then changed its mind. Here, again, the political context matters. The post-Franco era in Spain created a dynamic of debate, demands and hope. Local groups and associations were formed, in which people could share knowledge and learning for a democratic purpose; a place where people dared to dream collaboratively. It would be interesting to return to the project today, in the light of the turbulent politics of Catalonia, and how accusations of Spanish colonialism have nurtured a narrative of 'us' against 'them', on all sides, fuelled by the violent reaction of the central government. How can the collective dream of dialogue, reciprocal understanding and peace be maintained in such a context?

Kirkwood (2012) talks of the challenge to Freirean ideas by feminist scholars, around the issue of gendered identities. Tracy Essoglou and Angel Shaw (Essoglou 1991) offer a critical understanding of Freire's idea of dialogue (1973), as possible and desirable, but not necessarily viable. Freire defines dialogue as 'the loving encounter of people, who, mediated by the world, 'proclaim' that world. They transform the world and in transforming it, humanise it for all people. This encounter in love cannot be an encounter of irreconcilables' (1987, p. 115; quoted by Essoglou 1991). The feminist exploration of subjectivity, however, considers uncertainty, silencing, and negation as inherent in dialogue, and not only forms of anti-dialogue. Since language and 'naming' are not neutral, but potentially colonizing, silence can be a way to free oneself from the Master's language. Freire also had focused on the tension between certainty and uncertainty: 'The world is not made up of certainties. Even if it were, we would never know if something was really certain. The world is made up of the tension between the certain and the uncertain' (1987, p. 58; quoted by Essoglou 1991). But in his view 'magical thinking' had to be put aside, as well as messiness.

So, if his ideas seem close to a ‘feminine’ sensibility and relationality, and he recognizes in women and peasants a common bond with nature and the relational, he does not fully recognize their connection to messiness, to the unspeakable, as ‘the place from which each woman attempts to speak her language. Such speaking remains uncomfortably in the master’s language, even in dialogue, often making it more difficult to practice dialogue critically’ (Essoglou 1991, p. 12). It may also be the case that Freire privileges rationality in his work on conscientization: it is juxtaposed against ‘magical’ or primitive modes of relating to the world. But the primitive, including respect for the earth, and a spiritual quality in all things, is not to be dismissed in such peremptory ways. The privileging of rationality, and the neglect of other ways of knowing, may itself be a form of colonialism. So, Freire’s work contains dualities to be challenged: around subject and object, speech versus silence, and perhaps rationality against (or controlling) emotionality. These dualities fail to do justice to the complex struggles of women, indigenous people, or any identifiable ‘other’. All of us, in fact, when positioned as ‘the other’ and pushed to speak a master’s language, may find life and meaning in different ways of knowing, beyond and beside that language.

Italy, the ‘Two Churches’ and a Peaceful Popular Education

There are many ways to tell the story of popular education in Italy; Laura’s narrative focuses on a pattern of polarisation, contradiction, and dilemmas which connect politics, culture and education. Namely, the hegemony of institutional power in popular education, with the two so-called ‘churches’, i.e. the Catholic and the Communist Party, both fuelling and hampering democracy and the role of education in social transformation. Marginal voices of nonviolent educators and feminists have also been loud and effective at particular times, and still inspire through their prophetic power. But they were insufficient in sustaining a wider and durable culture of democratic transformative education.

So, now we will dialogue with inspirational people like Gramsci and diverse women, on what can be learned from their experience.

Gramsci, a humanist Marxist, a deputy and co-founder of the Communist Party in Italy, is recognized worldwide as an influential intellectual and political philosopher, and a precursor of popular education. While imprisoned by the Fascist government, he wrote the Prison Notebooks (Gramsci 1975/2007), an open, fragmented, incomplete text, as well as ongoing dialogue (not least with himself) that marked a transition in his life and thinking; from active politics to a critique of politics and building a clearer pedagogical perspective (Fernández Buey 2001). This happened at a time when he was 'the subaltern', disempowered, at risk for his life and 'uncertain as to whether his work would ever be read' (Almeida Rodriguez 2010, p. 12).

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci assigns a central political and cultural role to the working class, as one of the most important transforming forces in society. He also claims a political role for 'organic' intellectuals, those who are aware of the need to engage with people's struggles:

> There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: homo faber cannot be separated from homo sapiens. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher,' an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (Gramsci 2005, p. 51)

Organic intellectuals exert their pedagogical function when engaging in real relationships in public spaces: in the party, works councils, and cultural centres. Gramsci claims the necessity of a classical education and criticizes the split, in the left, between technical/vocational training and the humanistic tradition. People must learn how to deal with complex knowledge, combining 'new' proletarian knowledge with the traditional historical and cultural knowledge of dominant classes. While considering work councils as ideal places for reciprocal education, sustained by informal relationships, Gramsci continued to attribute a relevant pedagogical role to vertical organisations—the party and union—as 'agents of liberation'.

After the Second World War, popular education was a necessity for the country, for the whole of Europe, in fact, to fight illiteracy as well as to build participation, democracy and trust, with the help of 'organic' intellectuals, inspired by Marxism and Catholicism. Those, that is, who were committed to the struggles of antifascism, and for justice and peace. However, the 'two churches' often acted in ways suffocating critical voices. Their strong vertical organization, ideology and power relationships reproduced elitism and exclusion, not least for women. They had participated in the Resistance Movement against fascism and were involved in the moral reconstruction of the country, but were marginalized and unrecognized in terms of their own needs. During Fascism, women's 'permanent duty was to bear the nation's children' (de Grazia 1992, p. 72). Brainwashing mass 'operations' were used to reinforce a traditional Italian patriarchy and to discipline women's bodies, as 'the main instrument to achieve the Fascist dream of a new Italian nation' (Malagreca 2006, p. 75). Post-fascist patriarchy was likewise based on deeply entrenched gender roles and the idealization of motherhood, which continued to exclude women from political life and work. This, despite the foundation, in 1944, of two associations of women: The Union of Italian Women, a hybrid coalition of militant communists, socialists, grass-roots Catholics; and the Italian Feminine Centre, aligned with the Catholic Church. They worked within civil society for the development of democracy through literacy, the women's vote[1] and civil rights, to enhance women's responsible citizenship, and new gender models (Passerini 1996). However, their very existence embodies the split within Italian society, whereby each church tried to 'educate' people in its own credo, enforcing their hegemony by ideological and concrete means.

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[1] Women's suffrage was proclaimed in 1945, and the first vote on June 2, 1946, to choose between a monarchy and a republic.

Danilo Dolci and Aldo Capitini; the Utopian Dream of a New Society

An inspiring figure, for Laura, was Danilo Dolci (1955, 1960, 1965, 1968), named the ‘Gandhi of Sicily’ because of his belief in nonviolent methods in the struggle to create better life conditions for the hungry and invisible people. A proto-Christian idealist, he dedicated his life to implementing collective action and education for justice, freedom and peace. He bravely fought the Big Powers, such as the Mafia, corrupt politicians, and even the State, that imprisoned him for ‘occupation of public land’, when he organized workers themselves to repair the ruined roads of their town as a form of protest. Winner of the Lenin Peace Prize (despite not being a communist) and twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, he received support from many intellectuals: Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, Aldous Huxley, Carlo Levi, Jean Piaget, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Leonardo Sciascia, among others.

Dolci’s *dialogic pedagogy* was based on ‘reciprocal maieutic’, as in Socrates’ practice of ‘giving birth’ to truth by conversation (maieutic is the art of midwives). Truth can only emerge from the meeting of different perspectives; hence it requires weaving together many voices. Education, as communication, is always bidirectional, or even pluri-directional. At each moment, it entails giving and receiving, asking and answering; hence, education is the work of a group, any group, where each person becomes a midwife to the others’ ideas. We educate each other, reciprocally, unceasingly, in our relationships. Dolci reinterpreted power positively as the outcome and process of acting together, dialogically, while it can degenerate into domination and violence, when the desires of a few are achieved to the detriment of the many.

In education, the transmission of knowledge can itself be a form of violence, an abuse of power. He wrote, ‘It is not true that people do not understand, would not understand. Instead, it is true that people are grown with many invisible as well as monstrously robust blinkers, so as to prevent them facing their problems’ (Dolci 1993, p. 144, *Laura’s translation*). Thus, to transform a society based on domination and transmission, he claimed, the best thing to do was to create and sustain dialogic spaces for people to meet, discuss common problems, become aware of their situation, and begin to act collectively to transform relationships and context. Education is an open-air laboratory, where planning can be based on open research among people about their needs and desires, and the 'concretization' of dreams (from the Latin *cum crescere* that means 'growing together').

Dolci was moved by curiosity and wonder, by the desire of knowing the other, by respect for diversity, and an openness to change. His relationship with nature was intimate, as it was for the fishermen, peasants, and field hands that he worked with, and whose culture he respected as sacred. His book *Report from Palermo* (1959) is an example of a sociological imagination, where statistics are only used as background to the lively representations of people's voices and lives, primarily aimed at raising political awareness of the terrible conditions in which people lived. Besides being an activist, sociologist, pedagogue, and anthropologist, Dolci was a poet, capable of touching hearts and making the invisible visible (Dolci 1974). His most quoted verses are the poetic expression of his pedagogical manifesto:

> ***Each one grows only if dreamt of***
> *There's some who teach others as horses, step by step.*
> *Maybe some feel satisfied, driven like this.*
>
> *There's some who teach by praising what they find good and entertaining.*
> *There's some as well who feel satisfied, being encouraged.*
>
> *There's also some who educate without hiding the absurd in the world*
> *Open to any development,*
> *Trying to be frank to the other as to oneself, dreaming of others as they are not now.*
>
> *Each one grows only if dreamt of.* [*Laura's translation*]

Aldo Capitini (1967, 1968) was another visionary, trusting in nonviolence and bottom-up processes as transformative forces. A socialist and anti-fascist, after the Resistance he undertook a deep de-mystification of any method using violence to 'transform' society and 'liberate' the oppressed. Violence merely reverses power—the dominated becoming the dominant—not challenging this fundamental problem. After dictatorship and civil war, relationships were torn apart, not least between citizens and institutions; Capitini saw the defects of democracy—what he called the 'tyranny of majority'—and asked who are 'the people'? How can minorities achieve relevant power? He answered by creating adult education centres, with weekly open assemblies where any issue could be debated, from everyday problems to cultural, political, philosophical, and religious topics. This would have nurtured, as he saw it, the elaboration of a new culture of shared values and truer politics that is not the administration of power, but the common construction of ethics through the free exchange of ideas.

Capitini was especially critical of institutionalization, and the manipulation of consent. He saw the 'two churches' as dominating and suffocating structures with their bureaucracy and hierarchy, both at fault for using force, war and violence. He exhorted them to recognize nonviolent roots both in Marx's antimilitarism and in Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Dissatisfied by reformism (leaving 'man' as he is) as well as authoritarianism (confirming the old overpowering 'man'), he disclaimed what he saw as institutional 'closure', in favour of open and participatory processes.

His 'prophetic' and 'open' pedagogy (Capitini 1968) acts at the edge of betterment: the teacher who can see and trust the other's capacity to go further, beyond the present, is acting for freedom. However, he argued, Maria Montessori's and similar educators' idea of 'liberation' is overly individualistic and cognitive; it misses 'the unconscious creative zone from which the cohesive society springs, that is coexistence of everyone from which the unity of love comes' (Capitini 1955, p. 4, *Laura's translation*). So, while respecting Gramsci's ideas, he criticizes socialist pedagogy for its materialism that excludes the spiritual dimension. This material/spiritual dualism is a perpetual theme in our book and will be a central topic in Chapter 10.

Coexistence is a keyword for Capitini: to achieve the democratic ideal, each citizen must be aware of being part of a larger system, that can confer responsibility and dignity. It needs our joint participation in the world, beyond our existing webs of affiliation, beyond the human species, and even beyond the living, so as to comprise history, culture, and nature, and the spiritual heritage conveyed by individual and collective memory.

> I also see man's inner participation to the creative coexistence of all, hence the development of coexistence contributes to his liberation. (Capitini 1968, pp. 129–130, *Laura's translation*)

Capitini was also the initiator of the Peace March in Assisi (in 1961, and still happening today): a symbolic and literal event where many people, from different directions and creeds, walk side by side over many kilometers, sacrificing their ego-centrism, to reach the birthplace of Saint Francis, a prophet of nonviolence. A dynamic, embodied, inclusive way to sensitise, build reflection, and to co-educate. This modern pilgrimage reinterprets a practice of transformation that was and still is common to many cultures and religions: a symbol of transcendence, beyond the individual/collective dualism, as we argue in Chapter 10. Our book, as stated from the outset, is a pilgrimage, and a potential symbol of dialogical transcendence.

Social Transformation in the Seventies: The 150-Hours Scheme and Movements

My own understanding (Laura) of 'popular education' was biographically shaped: as a four-year-old child, of relatively uneducated parents, I learned to write and read by watching television—the famous broadcast *'Non è mai troppo tardi'* (It's never too late) hosted by Alberto Manzi. He was a visionary educator and innovative pedagogue whose programme ran from 1959 to 1968 and became a national experiment in mass education for literacy. It worked! I will tell the story, in the next chapter, of learning to draw among groups of adults, at courses organized by the local Mutual Society, where many kinds of technical skills were taught.

In the Seventies, I entered a mixed group of workers and students who founded a free radio station, to celebrate their quest for free information, new music, and alternative lifestyles. And later, during the university years, I profited from several 'informal' activities jointly organized by students and teachers, often in collaboration with political groups. At the time when credits did not exist, open events and seminars, with no exams, attracted several followers. My ideas of freedom, creativity, respect, conflict, agency, and the values that must be learned for social transformation, are rooted in those experiences. They were not learned in institutional courses. Formal education is not, for me, any guarantor of democracy.

In Italy, as in many parts of Europe, the cultural and political transformations of the Seventies pushed popular education towards more institutionalised and, paradoxically, more informal, bottom-up learning. The need of education among the working class became increasingly recognised and organised, through a process that found its apex in 1973, with the 150-Hours Scheme. The meaning and effects of this measure changed in time, with the increasing and then decreasing power of workers' unions (Lumley 1990); and the birth of new social 'movements' such as feminism, the New Left as well as later the Extreme Left, Autonomia, and its idealisation of terrorism.

The story of such movements begins in the so called Hot Autumn of 1969 which forced the State to begin reforms called for from the end of the Second World War. Mass strikes and protests were organized, debated and discussed in assemblies and study groups: hence, informal learning was a central aspect of these movements, where the process of reification of a 'working class' identity and culture left room (at least for a while) for the establishment of richer and creative, if more fragmented, identities and subjectivities. For the first time, in fact, diverse social groups—workers, tenants, women, migrants, students, and intellectuals—converged to imagine a project for a new society. They used strategies of social conflict and protest, for example with self-organised action in schools and further education, in housing estates, prisons, and factories. They profited from the cultural/educational work of unions and political parties in previous decades, but they educated people, implicitly and informally, to go beyond the worker identity. A larger sense of popular solidarity was nurtured in that period, not least by identifying new 'enemies': the establishment and the State. The unions were ambivalent: if protests meant more bargaining power, it was fine.

But student agitators, southerners and especially women were 'unexpected subjects' (Bono and Kemp 1991): they did not belong in traditional working-class organizations. They played with difference, refusal, and revolt.

The 150-Hours scheme (paid study leave of 150 hours a year) was established to enable workers to gain a certificate (around 80% of engineering workers did not have any), which affected their promotion. But it also gave expression to the 'positive utopias' of the 1960s, with innovative pedagogies, curricula, and assessment methods (State examiners, for example, accepted collective assessment, as a rule). The scheme was not geared to the needs of industry, or run by the State, as was the case in France (Lumley 1990), but it fitted the needs and culture of the working class, born from factory militancy. A booklet of those years stated:

> 'The use of the 150-hours courses is of great importance since it will involve a large number of workers in implementing this contract, allowing a mass growth in the cultural and political knowledge of the working class.' It also warned against using classes to foster 'capitalist technological development'. (cited by Lumley 1990)

Workers wrote enthusiastic commentaries: 'For the first time the principle of education as a right in general has been introduced, not tied to company interests, but […] as an attempt to break down the separation between work and study' (cited by Lumley 1990).

Huge numbers of workers, peasants, and then women (Caldwell 1983), used the entitlement to achieve a qualification, but new needs were also emerging, especially in big urban areas. Issues related to mass migration from the South to the industrialised North, housing problems, changes in family and school, mental health issues. Besides, women were signaling discrimination in the workplace, deregulated labor, sexual violence, and struggles around bodily and health issues. So, the 150-Hours became a framework where new and shared forms of knowing could be developed, especially among women, of their situation—enabling them to take collective action against oppression.

However, in the Seventies, radical Italian feminists choose the 'separatist' way: they abandoned male dominated public spaces and refused the dominant master-slave narrative of class struggle, since it excluded women (Lonzi 1974). The 'feminism of difference' (Bracke 2014) invites women to act as 'unexpected subjects' (Bono and Kemp 1991), by bringing to the forefront of the political agenda, as a priority, the quest for a fuller expression of subjectivity. This entails rejecting institutional fixed identities (Leccardi 2016), as well as going beyond mere introspection, to enhance the relational and social value of narration as self-interrogation by reciprocal witnessing, which in turn enables the collective recognition of multiple and creative identities. As Cavarero (2000) argues, feminism has a relational grasp on narration: we tell our story because we are moved by the desire for a self, but we need the other to really hear and recognize who we are. Entrustment, or *affidamento*, a political and relational practice between women, 'establishes a paradigm of women's relations connecting "weaker" and "stronger" women' (Parati and West 2002, p. 19).

So, the feminist movement (de Clementi 2002) chose to cultivate the private sphere, consciousness, and nonviolence; they reinvented the political (Bracke 2014), not least by reading psychoanalysis and philosophy—Freud, Lacan, Sartre, Foucault, besides Marx and Gramsci—through an activist, rather than an academic lens (Sapegno 2002; Malagreca 2006). Textual analysis became a form of self-interrogation and collective quest, as in the activities of the Women's Collective Bookstore (1987, 1990), or the philosophical community Diotima and feminist scholars like Muraro and Cavarero (2000). They reframed the North American feminist practice of 'consciousness raising' as 'a practice of the unconscious', focused on desire and the symbolic order (Sapegno 2002), and aimed to disrupt the stereotypical patriarchal representation of women as passive, consumerist, sexual objects, or child-bearing bodies with no will of their own. And to build, among themselves, in the first instance, more creative and freer ways of being a woman (Bracke 2014). They took direct initiative against the Catholic Church, the capitalist/consumerist society and the Communist Party, the latter being blamed for acting as a 'benevolent father', silencing 'overly autonomous' women, and encouraging their partners or fathers to stop them, violently, if required.

The 150-Hours frame, then, became an opportunity to create alternative spaces for learning that were not meant to improve productivity or performance, or to achieve a qualification, but to foster new forms of subjectivity through meaningful experiences. In cultural centres, bookshops, and universities, free exchanges between students and teachers, workers, migrants, and women of different social classes, were sustained by new group pedagogies based on lived experience, enhanced discussion on work, health, oppression, and social change as well as activism. Movements grew and drew into their orbit intellectuals from the New Left, to promote Gramsci's dream of a 'positive counter-hegemony'. The impact of social movements, and namely feminism, on Italian society was considerable (Bracke 2014), in terms of new laws and reforms, and the diffusion of a new culture of subjectivity, respectful of feelings, experience, and desire, and critical of societal representations, stereotypes, and clichés that imprison not only women, but every 'category' of people.

All the above, however, was fragile and short term. Tensions and social turmoil became stronger, as did the polarisation of left and right. In his novel, *The Unseen*, Nanni Balestrini (1989) explores his generation's hopes, struggles, and defeats, by telling the story of a working-class youngster who walks the path from high-school rebellion to squatting, then to a failed attempt to establish a free radio station, only to be finally arrested and imprisoned. Extra-parliamentary groups introduced new violent forms of protest, such as the 'proletarian expropriation', bank robberies, kidnappings, and the aggression or execution (after a so-called 'regular trial') of 'State servants'. As witnessed by Marco Tullio Giordana's film '*The best of youth*' (2003), they depicted themselves as 'guerrilleros', young people using violence to make justice and to realise revolution for a better society; they thought they were in the right, little different from today's terrorists or fundamentalists who turn to violence. Only, they were children of the bourgeoisie, not marginalized people.

I, Laura, was 17 in 1978—the apex of violence, with the kidnapping and slaughter by the Red Brigades of former Prime Minister and leading

Christian Democrat Aldo Moro. Very rapidly, the dream of dialogue and reciprocity, and of a new creative articulation of politics, was disrupted by violence, justifying anti-democratic laws, and the increased manipulation of consent against 'politicisation'. I remember my own disorientation, disillusion about the will and capacity of institutions to listen and answer real needs, and the split between those who trusted and justified violence as a path to social change, and those who were too frightened to risk participation. At that time, nonviolent, dialogical methods found little support in the university, no safe space for discussion: the universe was split in two, with nothing in the middle. My suspicion of formal education and institutionalisation was born then, and I still struggle, as a professor, with the same dilemma. I likewise see the polarisation of individual interests and organisational purposes as crucial to understand the decline of popular education in Italy, and maybe in Europe. But I cannot separate my own biography, and struggles, from this idea and from the excruciating feeling that a few have prevailed over the many, and bottom-up processes that were so lively, creative, and potentially transformative, were de-vitalised by the control of bigger powers.

Many Women

Writing this chapter I, Laura, became increasingly aware of the many women to whom I am a debtor. Women of my mother's generation, working in the post-war years, sometimes after fighting Fascism at the risk of their own lives; protagonists of a first, incomplete and 'wounded emancipation' (Bravo, in Bracke 2014), with hidden oppressive effects. It did not address contradictions of roles and the loss of identity due to a false promise of equality. Then other women, in the Seventies, were able to fuel my imagination and consciousness, by their creative forms of civic engagement, weaving social and existential themes, shared practices of self-consciousness, entrustment, narration, and discourse analysis. Transforming reality by transforming our relationship to it and among us: something that any woman can achieve, which makes us, me, a subject in my story, and possibly a living mediator of change.

The feminism of difference achieved a silent revolution, maybe one whose memory is lost (Melandri, in Bracke 2014); one illustrating how self-narration and self-questioning among friends can be a political and educational experience, maybe the most relevant for many of us. It creates meaning and bonds, and generates a sense of 'we': *Who am I (becoming) for you, who is telling my story? And who could you be for me, whose story am I telling?* The basis of auto/biographical learning exists in these reciprocal questions. In feminist circles, biography was a learning space: I owe to Lea Melandri, a leading figure of Italian feminism, the practice of 'experiential writing', using citation and annotation from different texts, along with self-narration, to create new, highly personal and yet universal texts. An embodied practice of writing as inquiry, to excavate stories and those meanings that were overlooked and silenced by dominant narratives.

I, Linden, am left musing over Laura's thoughts and of being a man in struggles for social transformation and democratisation. As part of the problem, perhaps, rather than the solution. There is a men's movement, but it is not equivalent to the women's movement because men are the ones who tend to hold the power and control access to resources. In the context of psychoanalysis and depth psychology, many men have questioned what being a man could be, beyond fierce competitiveness, uncontrolled acquisitiveness, brash display and destructive sexual power games. After all, this is a historical moment when an unreconstructed, power obsessed, and narcissistic form of masculinity has seized the commanding political heights in the United States, and parts of Europe. But it is also a moment when many men are struggling to rethink what it means to be masculine, and to transcend simple binaries with the feminine. Maybe we need to look towards single fathers for some of the answers. They too can learn to play with their children, to take emotional care of family context and local environments, and even to channel their aggression (which is far from simply undesirable) into new social movements. Ones that seek to open space for women and diverse families too (Samuels 2015). By giving some thought to her-story we can try to compensate, in some way, in our own struggles to transform.

Concluding Thoughts

In writing the chapter, we became painfully aware that most references in our book—most of our cultural references indeed—draw on the work of western educated men, and this contrasts with the basic ideas of popular education to do with inclusion and social justice. But women and people from all groups and cultures, not least indigenous, have been extensively involved in popular and adult education, in research and, more specifically, in the practices of transformative learning. Out of 44 authors of the handbook of transformative learning (Taylor et al. 2012), 29 are women, indeed, and some of Eastern or mixed origins. For example, Nadira Charaniya is 'an Afro-Indian, British, Canadian, American Muslim woman', 'raised in four different countries on three different continents' (Charaniya 2012, p. 233), who has studied the connections between transformative learning and cultural-spiritual processes, not least in the context of interreligious dialogue. We need more 'unexpected' perspectives, from Asia, Africa and Latin America, maybe to discover that popular education is still alive in places where individualism, consumerism, and competition are less powerful (but then, for how long, under the pressure of globalisation?). The voices of millions of people who participated in popular education, and still do, in many parts of the world, could help de-centre our perspective further, by bringing greater diversity, different epistemologies, and new and differently nuanced ideas of social justice into the space.

We have also shown the impact of feminism in the Italian context. Why, then, is adult education research and transformative learning theory only tangentially affected by feminist work? Catherine Irving and Leona English (2011) argue that, while Mezirow's empirical work started with women returning to college, neither his deliberations then nor in more recent work have focused specifically on women and structural issues; only a few feminist studies were published in the *Journal of Transformative Education* in the period examined, and they were based on consciousness raising and/or participation. A neglect of gender issues seems to apply more generally to adult education, for example in the United Kingdom, as Munby (2003) notes with reference to the WEA.

Apart from a few feminist scholars, the same applies in Italy. It is paradoxical to talk about, and research perspective transformation, when gender can be so invisible.

We have also noticed common themes across popular education in our different analyses. Of the temptation to violence but also strong resistance to it, in non-violent social movements. We have observed tensions around knowledge, the role of rationality, and the silenced need for imagination and creativity, and to acknowledge messiness; and maybe the case for good enough praxis, rather than the dangerous idea of the perfect perspective in the theory and practice of transformation. We have witnessed strong spiritual and even religious influences and the importance of seeing the divine in the other, and of adult education as the Kingdom socially incarnate. There is emphasis given to the sacred in the earth, in all her splendour and frailty.

We have noted how interconnections can be woven between the personal, the interpersonal and the political, transcending a myopic individualism. And of the place of love and recognition in struggles to transform ourselves and society. The history of popular education provides both warnings as well as possibilities, optimism and pessimism, in the struggle for more equitable and just collective transformation. As in in any personal effort to transform, we question whether a state of complete repose, or perfection, is ever possible. The important point may be to keep on keeping on trying and to learn from our failures. And from the awareness that others have tried to make things better, and have occasionally succeeded, if never in conditions of their own choosing.