contested terms, supportive relationships, & historical omissions: a critical response to _frontiers of solidarity

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Serving as a response to the entirety of on_education volume ten, _frontiers of solidarity, the following essay questions the absence of takes that 'nurture and enact anti-capitalist, anarchist, feminist, anti-racist, de-colonial, anti-fascist, queer, trans[, or] sex worker- inclusive values through conversation and direct action' in the manner advocated by Antiuniversity Now (n.d.). A Community Development practitioner and educator by trade, the author addresses the significant gaps within this volume, identifying a failure from a majority of contributions to appropriately define the issue's very focus of 'solidarity'. Indeed, that amongst the papers is a proclamation that solidarity is contrary to the human condition is of great concern, with Negrea-Busuioc's assertion that '[s]olidarity […] is not a natural human emotion' (ibid) or that it 'is not an innate human characteristic but one that can develop in a nurturing environment (e.g. family, school, community)' a particular issue given the wealth of anarchistic literature which attests to the contrary. The contributions of Fichtner, Bajaj, and Tow are, however, recognised for their value in advancing this issue.

Keywords: anarchism, crisis, mutual aid, reply, resistance, social activism, solidarity

A Situated Response: Academic & Frontline

> As the pandemic painfully uncovered where global solidarity fails and where education becomes an 'essential' service to society, populist messages, conspiracy theories and socio-economic and educational injustices persisted and even grew. It may thus seem paradoxical that a common threat with the potential to unify has actually polarized societies further. (Editorial Team, 2021, p. 1)

A community development practitioner for close to fifteen years – operating across a range of contexts including anti-racism (Campbell & Hay, 2018; Hay et al., 2020), youth anti-homelessness, queer support, and broader anti-poverty partnerships (Campbell, 2020a; Campbell, 2020b) – I have dedicated my life to informal and community-based practice, the majority of that spent in the Scottish central belt. I have spent four years teaching Community Learning and Development across two universities in the west of Scotland working with would-be community workers from dozens of nation states and been fortunate enough to guest lecture in several other countries. Where the Editorial Team (2021) communicated their ambition of considering education "from the early years, through school, university, and beyond" within issue ten, my practice and educational contexts fall

primarily into that 'beyond' component. That is: learning spaces that defy the "unified tabular schemes" Frank and Meyer (2021) warn of, instead existing in contexts generally distinct from the "expectation of individual economic success following education engagement" that Cunningham and Samson (2021) wrote of. The focus of the edition _frontiers of solidarity – part of a growing literature base on social action during the pandemic (see e.g., Sitrin & Colectiva Sembrar, 2020; Skegg, 2020; Spade, 2020a) – pushed me to respond.

Community Development centres upon ambitions of collaborative practice[1], social justice[2], dialogue[3], critical consciousness, and community-led action (Ledwith, 2005; Craig & Mayo, 1995; International Association for Community Development, 2018). Such forms of educational practice are, however, unfortunately, largely negated within the issue. Whilst many "local educational organizations derive significance from their status as instances of global institutions" (Frank & Meyer, 2021), plenty community development and adult education organisations boast international reputations based on their radical approaches as they defy the qualification-driven market and neoliberal agendas that plague modern education. Indeed, many remain unattached to the 'supra-national levels' described within the papers. To name but a few examples, readers can find examples of cutting edge practice, past and present, in Industrial Areas Foundation (Alinsky, 1971; Industrial Areas Foundation, 1990; Rogers, 1990), the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for School Children Program and their Oakland Community School (Abioye, 2019; Gebreyesus, 2019; Heynen, 2009), Slum Dwellers International who operate across an estimated 1,238 settlements throughout the global south (Lobo, 2018; Marshall, 2013; Seckel, 2018), and Antiuniversity Now who "desire to create and sustain safe autonomous spaces for radical learning that follow, nurture and enact anti-capitalist, anarchist, feminist, anti-racist, de-colonial, anti-fascist, queer, trans and sex worker- inclusive values through conversation and direct action" (Antiuniversity Now, n.d.; Ashman, 2016; Shalmy, 2016).

Yet, in reading the journal issue, Cunningham and Samson's (2021, p. 3) England-centric account of neoliberalism's proposed "path to economic success and social mobility" in the U.K.[4] which, they argue, "merely ratifies existing class privilege and elite entitlement" or their citing the Social Mobility Commission (2020) felt completely out of place regarding a focused issue on solidarity – four of their five uses of the term 'solidarity' occurring in the closing tenth of the submission. Very few of those I am surrounded by in practice have ever voiced some aspiration of what the authors termed 'genuine social mobility'; rather, most would align with Scottish socialist John McLean's (n.d.) advocacy to "[r]ise with your class, not out of it". Indeed, even upon my third read through, Cunningham and Samson's definition of 'solidarity' appears more akin to suggested benevolence or 'the charity work' that Fichtner (2021), citing Bierschenk (1988) and Rossi (2006), warns many misconstrue as support and solidarity[5]. There are some useful reminders though – albeit little analysis beyond recounting the neoliberalisation of the university – concerning the perpetuation of class structures, marketisation of the 'university experience', and the unsustainability of the neoliberal model that "literally depends on the debts of students" to remain in-business (Cunningham & Samson, 2021, p. 4).

The Burning Issue: Identifying and Defining 'Solidarity'

Premised on the notion that "[s]olidarity is one of those multifarious ideas that appears to gain popularity in times of crisis", the Editorial Team (2021, p. 1) rightly emphasized that the "pandemic has provided us with compelling examples" of solidarity in-action. The suggestion that such direct interventions (re)surface within the mainstream during crises is a fair working hypothesis. Certainly,

moments of localized crisis such as the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017 in London (England), or the rally at Kenmure Street (Glasgow, Scotland) to prevent Home Office deportations – described by Page (2021) as one of "10 protests you may have missed that made a difference in 2021" – led to immediate supportive direct action from local communities, sometimes extending to businesses and places of worship. So too, the suggestion that "politicians, the media, celebrities[6], and the general public"[7] begin to adopt – or, indeed, co-opt – the language and discourse of solidarity is somewhat accurate. Yet, a deep contradiction, one only partially addressed by the comment that such rhetoric may be espoused by "diametrically opposed ideological positions" (Editorial Team, 2021), arises in such a passive initial take. Though several of the articles in volume ten work to sincerely define solidarity or engage in histories of mutual aid in-action, others struggle to recognize the attempts by elite political or managerial classes to distance themselves from their social responsibilities by simply praising 'solidarity' and mutual aid, thereby advocating so-called 'resilience' instead of reflecting on their own failed state practices.

It is, therefore, ironic that several contributions, here, add to Dillinger's (2021, p. 1) warning that "common use of solidarity, as it occurs in public discourse, is [often] misleading and lacks content" (see also Negrea-Busuioc, 2021; Scholz, 2008). Clearly, there is room to offer more concrete distinctions – or at least clearer explorations – of service provision as aid versus community-organised, direct and / or mutual aid. Negrea-Busuioc (2021) attempts this, albeit with a rather concerning analysis (detailed later). Bajaj and Tow's (2021) example of "schools bec[oming] hubs for technology for students and their parents, as well as food distribution sites for meals" offers one such opportunity to consider whether these initiatives were organised by the state or district, workers at the school itself, or local community members. Their portrayal of "students […] as an audience that must be reached" (Bajaj & Tow, 2021) by the schools may provide an answer to that very question. However, that the authors advocate increased student power over their own learning experience does indicate a desire for mutuality and more horizontal power structures.

Kymlicka (2021), I believe, offers a useful exploration of solidarities and the ways in which these may manifest through examples surrounding migrant rights, the impact of state exclusions of children and young people in their education and citizenship – a topic linked intimately to the 'political logic' solidarity is often premised upon. With Derpmann (2021) describing several forms of solidarity, we can easily understand the way this manifests within trade unions and through industrial action[8] (echoed later by Dillinger as she evokes Durkheim [2013]). In reality, solidarity is practiced in abundance in the everyday – albeit to varying degrees of 'success' and evoking radically different levels of respect and agency for those in positions of marginalization – especially so when we accept Dillinger's (2021) envisioning of "a group banding together in the face of an experienced subjective injustice to take action against it". However, to reduce solidarity 'movements' as Frank and Meyer (2021, p. 2) do, to mere "inchoate social movements" located "[a]t the periphery of this mass of organizations and associations", betrays generations of theory, action, and struggle. Derpmann (2021, p. 1) does far better than several other contributors simply by suggesting that solidarity fosters "multiple facets of moral obligation", and that the "obligations within groups […] are defined by morally relevant commonalities in identifications" thus further implying that solidarity-related obligations are defined as "shared opposition to being subjected to a social position" (Derpmann, 2021, p. 4).

Narrow Visions of Autonomy: Sincere Solidarity

> Solidarity requires constant reflection upon who we are and which of our experiences, characteristics, or convictions we deem central enough to substantiate and justify special moral relations. (Derpmann, 2021, p. 4)

Across these papers, there are some attempts to consider what solidarity can manifest as – even if certain contributions struggle to adequately define the term. For example, "how a cause is communicated (worded, narrated, pictured)" is considered as "decisive to our understanding not only of what solidarity is but of what citizenship is and how it should best be enacted" by Chouliaraki (2021, p. 3). The context for this is, however, limited. Frank and Meyer (2021), for example, list "pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools (junior and senior[9]), universities, and graduate schools" as evidence of education as a 'global institution'. Yet, the global traditions of adult education and lifelong learning (Fleming, 2012; Hamilton et al., 2012; Lindeman, 1926, 1951; Mezirow, 1990; Tett, 2010), youth work (Booton & Dearling, 1980; Davies, 1999; Gilchrist et al., 2001; Jeffs, 1979), social[10] or critical pedagogies (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Eriksson & Markström, 2003; Kaska, 2015), popular education (Freire, 1972), and community development (Jeffs & Smith, 2011; Nicholls, 1997; Twelvetrees, 2008) are essentially absent[11]. Smith (2019) notes that, for example, the term social pedagogy "first started being used around the middle of the nineteenth century in Germany as a way of describing alternatives to the dominant models of schooling", demonstrating the immense history of this domain in Europe. Connections are made between some of these institutions and solidarity being encouraged at the state level through "the closing of schools and nurseries" being described as "a symbol of solidarity with those more likely to suffer serious health consequences [from Covid]" (Editorial Team, 2021, p. 1); yet, such suggestions fall short of addressing the questions raised by Derpmann (2021, p. 1), who provides a meditation on solidarity, asking "[w]hat significance can my fellowship with you have, if I understand myself to be everyone's companion alike?" His stressing that "[t]he unlimited extension of the scope of these forms of moral relatedness eventually renders their original meaning and significance empty" pushes the reader to consider where their allyships lie, demanding reflection on how one invests their time, energy, emotional and mental capacity, and financial resources (if these exist) – a far more grounded proposition than anything offered in the early papers from Frank and Meyer (2021) and Chouliaraki (2021).

As regards to defining 'solidarity', attesting – according to Frank and Meyer (2021) – within past literature of 'solidarity' as merely "the opposite of conflict" appears to this reader as a poor interpretation. Advocacy of "solidarity and conflict as mutually dependent (Simmel, 1955)" is closer to the mark. So believing solidarity to be merely a generalisable approach negates the realities of agency, intent, and choice to act from whatever one's own position may be – with comfort and privilege contrasted against necessity or drive towards equity, equality, and justice. For this very reason, witnessing articles that reduce social movements as a whole to "[e]ducated individuals […] mobiliz[ing] around universalized identities and abstractions far beyond local meanings and first-hand experiences" or "around phenomena manifested only, or mainly, in school classrooms and laboratories" (Frank & Meyer, 2021, p. 3) is disheartening. There is no sure-fire way to quantify it, but surely a majority of 'movements' stem from individual or collective experiences of injustice and oppression? Though, as Dillinger (2021, p. 2) highlights, within many undertakings "there is rarely a determination of the content of this demand". Despite their works' other shortcomings, Frank and Meyer (2021) do recognize an opportunity to "elevate formerly local issues – around work, pay, food, or [unfair taxation], for example – into instances of global efficiency or injustice". This is to be praised for connecting interrelated struggles to the crisis of capitalism, rather than criticized as

the result of heavy theorisation and "professional – often scientized – bases" (Frank & Meyer, 2021, p. 3).

> Solidarity points beyond one's own individual interest and allows people to collaborate with each other in the face of crises or injustices without inevitably being affected or equally affected. (Dillinger, 2021, p. 2)

The assertion that "[s]olidarity [...] is not a natural human emotion" (ibid) or that it "is not an innate human characteristic but one that can develop in a nurturing environment (e.g. family, school, community)" (Negrea-Busuioc, 2021, p. 3), is offered seemingly without consideration – or perhaps outright dismissal – of the lifeworks and global legacy of, for example, Kropotkin on mutual aid (1902; see Kinna, 1995; Quarshie, 2020). In her opening paragraph, Chouliaraki (2021, p. 1) suggests that solidarity is "a public disposition that is nurtured by our culture and institutions[;] shaped by its own time and place [as it] requires active work in order to emerge and to continue to thrive". Such interpretations posit mutual aid exclusively as an opt-in activity rather than an innate approach to survival – what Malabou (n.d.) termed "a bodily memory" – and may support Cunningham and Samson's (2021) suggestion that Thatcherite "privatisation of the public sphere assumed that competition and economic gain were at the root of human nature" (see Hall & Jacques, 1983, in Cunningham & Samson, 2021). Kropotkin (1902) had communicated mutual aid as "deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race" and "much more advantageous to the species than the development of individuals endowed with predatory inclinations". Chouliaraki (2021) recognizing the "importance of historicizing solidarity as a pedagogic strategy, [as] a key aim for us as teachers and educators is to try to better understand and communicate to younger generations how we got here and what could make alternatives possible" suggesting the absence of solidarity and mutual aid as the natural way of being – instead, accepting capitalist competition and Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' – is, despite a claim to the opposite, "pedagogically reductive and socially pessimistic".

Empathy, alone, is identified as a key tenet of fostering solidarity in other contributions (Bajaj & Tow, 2021) and despite the "difficult work of relinquishing various privileges so that those who are participating in the community space can unpack tensions, learn from dialogue, and reimagine a future that is inclusive of poor and working-class communities; gender fluid, queer, and trans people; and differently abled" (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021, p. 11), this empathy is very much a natural and central element of the human condition. Such counterclaims are particularly frustrating as Chouliaraki (2021, p. 4) offers, undeniably, the best of her work in the very closing paragraph citing "the international wave of volunteers and activists in the Greek islands and Italian coasts during the massive migration flows of 2015 that continue to offer their support to asylum seekers encamped in the edges of Europe or the volunteer movement that developed during the pandemic in underprivileged neighbourhoods of UK". In contrast, Fichtner (2021, p. 2) establishes a distinct power dynamic from the onset, working towards a fundamental of the approach – "relating to others, from a certain power position, driven by a common cause, while acknowledging the differences between those who show solidarity and those, they show it for".

'If You Don't Know Where You've Come from, You Don't Know Where You're Going'

Though Christian-influenced practice and the Red Cross are named, both embodiments bear significant relationships and shared histories with anarchism, Dillinger (2021, p. 3) emphasizing that "[t]heories of moral education are as old as education itself". The Anarchist Black Cross, for example, emerged following the Red Cross' refusal to engage with political prisoners (Anarchist Black Cross Network 2008; Hackett, 2015; Meltzer, 1996). The legacies of such movements and collectives live on in bodies such as Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (Romanos, 2009; Sanz et al., 2013) who demonstrate the very antithesis of the "NGOs […] competing for money, attention and prestige" (Chouliaraki, 2021). Though critiques of "including only the digitally-privileged and not others" are apt, where these radically-inclined, inclusive, and intersectional movements do utilize social media platforms, information sharing, debate, invitations to dialogical spaces, and – importantly – calls to action are rife. It would be disingenuous to reduce these to "depoliticized, consumption-oriented and networked-driven forms of activism" (Chouliaraki, 2021, p. 3). Thus, queries over "the moral validity of solidarity [and whether it is] dependent on the morality of its underlying identifications" (Dillinger, 2021) provide the greatest conundrums for readers to engage with beyond this volume.

Whilst I am concerned about the sustained lack of recognition within the issue around the impact and influence of anarchistic ideas and practices, seeing Bajaj and Tow (2021) draw on core theorists within Community Development, namely hooks (1993; 2003, in Bajaj & Tow, 2021) and Freire (1970, in Bajaj & Tow, 2021), offers some hope. Having produced my own Masters dissertation examining the precise ways that the theoretical positionings and philosophies of these two educators bear for contemporary anti-austerity movements in areas of severe multiple deprivation, peer-education networks, and intersectionality-informed activism reassured me that the broader educational context was not entirely absent from this issue. Bajaj and Tow's (2021, p. 2) description of "solidarity as a multivalent and multidimensional set of community behaviours" aligned perfectly with hooks' (1984) advocacy of "multidimensional gatherings" across lines of gender, class, race, residency status, and any number of other factors or identities. Indeed, I would argue that utilizing source materials such as these helps demonstrate the manner in which community development settings may directly contradict Frank and Meyer's (2021, p. 1) assertion that "[w]ere one to teleport from a classroom in Manila to a classroom in Montréal, the culture shock would be minimal". Although theorists such as hooks, Giroux, Boal, Darder, Macedo, and Valdes Villalva have built on Freire's ideas, the contexts in which adaptations and reimagining occur differ radically – thereby demonstrating that their contribution fails to understand the relevance of the issue theme to the broader educational context. Without doubt, Frank and Meyer defaulting to notions of a 'schooled meaning' of solidarity borders dangerously close to proclaiming that it is only banked-education rather than lived experience and a belief in what is right, fostering and acting on organic knowledge that creates spaces for solidarity and mutual aid.

In no sense, however, am I claiming that anarchism holds monopoly over concepts and approaches to solidarity. Indeed, that would be antithetical to the core premise of such approaches; the very "ideological indoctrination" and "paternalistic" attitudes of ownership and hierarchy Dillinger (2021) fears. What I am contesting, however, is whether _frontiers of solidarity can truly be said to have achieved its aim or lived up to that title. Derpmann's (2021, p. 2) conclusion that solidarity is "the comradery of class struggle", moments whereby community members "share a conception of obligations of solidarity that are not obligations towards others as moral subjects but as members of distinct groups striving for distinct aims or devoting themselves to distinct values" is, I assert, the most significant definition offered within the volume, even when the mechanisms through which connections occur are complicated12.

Little Things I Should Have Said and Done

I am happy to advise that Bajaj and Tow's (2021) *Towards a praxis of educational solidarity* and Fichtner's (2021) *Can solidarity be taught?* have been added to the reading list for my students as we commence our final taught course of the semester, *Empowerment & Social Change*. These contributions deservedly sit alongside the likes of Kinna (1995, 2001), Federici (2009), Gelderloos (2007), della Porta (2014), and the Curious George Brigade (2002, 2003, 2009) on my co-created programme for their arguments centring lived experience, building towards this 'pedagogy of resonance'*13*, and the proposal that "[t]o show solidarity with others, you need to relate in a meaningful and care-full manner (Lynch et al., 2007)" (Fichtner, 2021, p. 3). The latter stages of Negrea-Busuioc's (2021, p. 2) paper – where she considers "[p]eople's urge to help others seems to be based on moral commitments grounded on shared values and norms, and their acts of solidarity imply some sense of moral obligation towards others" may yet be drawn upon for in-class discussion, though given the suggestion that solidarity as aid and assistance occurs categorically "between the helper and the needy" (i.e. vertical solidarity), such dialogue will centre around whether this interpretation reduces solidarity to charity*14*. Thankfully, other articles offered far more astute assessments, such as Wallaschek (2021, p. 1) identifying "reciprocal help, social cohesion, fight against inequalities and injustices, questioning modes of domination" as the core premise that can help challenge limited interpretations such as the above. From a personal perspective, Fichtner (2021) articulates it best, suggesting that "[i]f solidarity were to be taught […] a space for such discussions would need to be facilitated: a space for discovering and understanding solidarity – and its politics – in practice". Some of the contributions here made a great indent in carving that space within *on_education*, so all credit to Sarah Fichtner, Monisha Bajaj, and David Tow. I hope your drives towards sustained solidarity and mutual aid remain a default approach post-pandemic.

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standard criteria of quality, relevance, and civility. Please make sure to follow editorial policies and
formatting guidelines.

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roughly fifteen years of professional experience. They've worked with a range of local and
national organisations, primarily centring on anti-racist initiatives, programmes for social
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1. A dimension Negrea-Busuioc (2021) stresses the significance of.

2. A concept Wallaschek (2021) suggests includes making "visible what previously was unnoticed or hidden".

3. Raised by Dillinger (2021, p. 3) when advocating the "exchange (of) ideas and positions and to develop a common cause".

4. Any attempt at a U.K.-wide analysis is immediately abandoned. Indeed, the conclusion talks of 'English society'…

5. Fitchner's (2021) contribution to the journal issue demonstrating the problematic interpretation of solidarity (sloganed as "(j)e suis solidaire de l'éducation, et toi?") that occurred when state officials imposed an obligatory tax – this being in absolute opposition to the premise of communities banding together voluntarily to combat issues affecting their members.

6. Chouliaraki (2021, p. 1) offers an example, citing "the March 2020 Instagram-based celebrity-driven campaign for compassion and resilience in the face of suffering during the pandemic, which figured a range of celebrities, each signing a verse of John Lennon's 'Imagine' to spread a message of universal togetherness while accumulating likes and consolidating personal brands (Caramanica, 2020)".

7. Chouliaraki (2021), rightly, adds artists to this group, whilst Negrea-Busuioc (2021) proposes that solidarity "is frequently evoked by medical and public health contexts".

8. "The disposition to stand in for others increases the bargaining power of the collective, and thus enables a joint enterprise that could not be taken on by its dissociated individual members" (Derpmann, 2021).

9. Negrea-Busuioc's (2021) article also centres on young adults, focusing on 'citizenship education'.

10. Sozialpädagogik (Otto & Thiersch, 2005).

11. Where they have occurred, insights are sparse, with little to no detail. Frank and Meyer (2021), for example, suggest that "lifelong learning has grown routine (Jakobi, 2011)", adding that "(s)chool-like arrangements have extended to touch even the beginnings and ends of the life-course, with pre-natal and death education programs". What they mean, however, is less than clear – particularly so when these informal educational contexts manage to avoid entanglement with the employability agenda. The suggestion of education as 'universalistic in orientation' is true if the authors are communicating this to mean capitalism (even if they do not term it as such); yet, a near universal desire to challenge authoritative and hierarchical systems through critical consciousness and counter-hegemony also exists within these alternative and subaltern approaches to learning.

12. See, for example, Dillinger (2021, p. 1) reflecting on how "education can only help to cultivate the ability of solidarity but should not prescribe on what grounds or whether solidarity is then actually practiced".

13. Fichtner (2021) suggests this term – meaning to 'experienc(e) the world as relation' – stems from the works of Endres, 2020, Felski, 2020, Rosa and Endres, 2016, amongst others (as cited in Fichtner, 2021).

14. A sentiment embodied in her suggestion that a "lack of assistance may lead to lack of solidarity, which translates into marginalization, exclusion, isolation" (Negrea-Busuioc, 2021, p. 3).