

## **Education for Black Liberation: Freire and Past/Present Pan-Africanist Experiments**

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*Popular education has played a central role in Pan-African liberation struggles historically and in the present moment. In the period following African independence, social movements that emerged around and through education in Africa were informed by and in dialogue with related decolonial movements of the Global South. However, the specific contributions of Pan-Africanist revolutionaries to the broader philosophy and praxis of education for liberation is often under-appreciated. This paper explores this impact through Paulo Freire's political and intellectual engagement with Pan-Africanist popular education movements, radical intellectuals, and broader revolutionary struggles. In considering Freire's work in dialogue and practice with African revolutionary thinkers, this paper shows that, while Freire shaped elements of liberation education in Africa, he was also deeply shaped and influenced by the historical conditions of the time and key African revolutionaries who were struggling towards similar objectives. Additionally, we explore the continued salience of Freirean educational praxis in contemporary Pan-Africanist social movements, through the example of a present day online pedagogical experiment, the Pan-African Activist Sunday School and Solidarity Collective.*

### **Introduction**

Popular education has long been part of struggles for liberation in Africa and the cultivation of Pan-Africanist philosophies, consciousness, and solidarities that have historically made these struggles possible. With roots in global decolonization movements as well as the rich traditions of African indigenous education, popular education has politically shaped revolutionary cadres, organizers, activists, and broader processes of social transformation across the continent in the form of national and universal education, radical print media and radio, political education, and literacy campaigns (Choudry & Vally, 2017). Though radical social movements that emerged around and through education in Africa were informed by and in dialogue with related decolonial movements of the Global South, the specific contributions of Pan-Africanist revolutionaries to the broader philosophy and praxis of education for liberation is often under-appreciated. This paper explores this impact through Paulo Freire's political and intellectual engagement with Pan-Africanist popular education movements, radical intellectuals, and broader revolutionary struggles.

With his role as a chief architect of popular education, Freire has a mixed legacy in Africa that is only beginning to be explored (Assié-Lumumba et al., 2019; Freire, 2006; Freire & Macedo, 1995; Kirkwall, 2004). On the one hand, his exchanges with African revolutionary leaders, including Amilcar Cabral and Julius Nyerere, situated his work at a critical stage of decolonizing efforts for education in the 1960s and 1970s following the independence of many African nations. On the other hand, the educational projects implemented directly under his supervision often fell short of expectations (Thomas, 1996). The role of Paulo Freire—and his educational philosophies—in Africa during this immediate post-

independence period highlights the challenges of decolonization in enduring imperial systems like education, as well as the possibilities of radical movement building through popular education across cultural, linguistic and class divides.

In considering Freire's work in dialogue and practice with African revolutionary thinkers, this paper shows that while Freire shaped elements of liberation education in Africa, he was also deeply shaped and influenced by the historical conditions of the time and key African revolutionaries who were struggling towards similar objectives. Additionally, we explore the continued salience of Freirean educational praxis in contemporary Pan-Africanist social movements, through the example of a present day online pedagogical experiment, the Pan-African Activist Sunday School and Solidarity Collective. We argue that contradictions of culture and language, which were once the chief preoccupation of Freire and his contemporaries in the liberation movements and nation-building projects of post-independence Africa, have been subsumed within considerations of technological access and inequality, especially with the global surge in online learning and digital organizing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pivot to participatory and online modes—of education and struggle—signal new directions and possibilities for revolutionary movement building through popular education, and we conclude with recommendations for the contemporary praxis of education for liberation in Freirean and Pan-Africanist traditions.

### **Freire and African praxes of education for liberation**

Prior to the need for education for the purpose of liberation from colonialism in Africa, education in indigenous African societies had multiple social purposes including socialization, specialization into a trade or skill, civic orientation, and training to become a full member of society (Abidogun & Falola, 2020; Fafunwa, 2018). However, the advent of imperial forms of Western and Islamic education in Africa shifted the purpose, content, structure, and relations embedded within learning and teaching, disrupting indigenous ways of life including the role of African languages, customs, and traditions within formalized schooling (Rodney, 1972; Nafziger, 2020). Missionary schools and early colonial schools, for instance, were designed in service of empire, destabilizing both the organic social evolution of young people into active members of their communities, and creating deep divides between the school, teacher, and student on the one hand, and the family and community on the other (Ekechi, 1972; wa Thiong'o, 1992). As independence movements swept across the continent, the newly independent nations of the 1960s and 1970s saw great potential in popular education as a springboard for accelerated development as well as the spread of revolutionary ideas to the broader masses (Turner, 1971). While there has not been extensive documentation of education for liberation within African social movements more broadly (Tijani, 2012; Vally & Treat, 2013), the documented role of education within student movements in Africa provides a rich archive of the role of popular education in radical change (Choudry & Valley, 2017; Federici et. al, 2000; Nafziger & Strong, 2020).

In the struggle to build emancipatory education in early African independence movements, African leaders were in critical dialogue with educators from the Global South, including Paulo Freire (Assié-Lumumba et al, 2019). Freire worked as a consultant in the establishment of popular education projects in former Portuguese colonies, like his home country, Brazil. His early work in Tanzania later expanded into the newly liberated Lusophone states of Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, and Sao Tome in Principe. These experiences were molded by the revolutionary contexts Freire met on ground, which in turn informed his approach to a broad range of educational issues, including culture,

language, and the politics of education within revolutionary struggle. Freire's collaborations with revolutionary leaders such as Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania occurred at a time when African theories of education for liberation were already challenging colonial education across the continent. Examples of these emancipatory paradigms include Nkrumahism, developed by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana to advance African liberation through socialism (Nkrumah, 1963), and Zikism, put forth by Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, which concerned methods of mental emancipation (Azikiwe, 1961).

Freire's lifetime of work brought together different global theories and praxes into a coherent articulation of radical and critical education, and African praxes of popular education impacted Freire's philosophy. Though much of the literature on Freire in Africa focuses on his impact on Africa (Godonoo, 1998; Assié-Lumumba et al., 2019), we argue that a closer examination of Freire's influence on African popular education reveals that he often borrowed heavily from African revolutionary leaders, whose rich ideas were often unacknowledged or only narrowly theorized in his writings. We explore the reciprocal influence between Freire and African revolutionary thought through an examination of his educational work in two African countries, Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau, and then turn to his intellectual engagements with revolutionary African thinkers around the role of culture and critical consciousness before discussing a present-day experiment with Pan-Africanist popular political education, which builds on these legacies.

Freire's sojourns in Africa began as a guest professor at the University of Dar es Salam, Tanzania, in 1971, while serving as a Special Consultant in the Department of Education in the World Council of Churches during his exile from Brazil (Abraham, 2013; Sing, 2004). In Tanzania, Freire encountered President Julius Nyerere, whom he had admired from afar and expressed his appreciation for Nyerere's 'practicalization' of the connections between education, national liberation, and community life (Hall, 1998). Nyerere is also reported to have read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and had conversations with Freire about his work (Hall, 1998). Nyerere, who is affectionately known as *Mwalimu* ('teacher' in Swahili), had implemented a large-scale educational experiment in Tanzania, integrating popular education into the nation building project with a focus on human liberation and social change, guided by the African indigenous philosophy, *Ujamaa* (familyhood in Swahili). When Nyerere became President of a newly independent Tanzania in 1962, over 80% of the population was illiterate. Nyerere believed that each person needed to be valued for their worth in society (Nyerere, 1961; Nyerere, 1968). Although Nyerere's philosophies were not named 'humanism', there is a clear linkage between his ideas of innate value and contributions that is reflected in Freire's writings. But while Freire often did not articulate how his ideas could be implemented at national or international scale, Nyerere's philosophy of the state's responsibility in ensuring equal rights was fully implemented through policies such as the nationalization of all the major means of production in Tanzania in 1967 (Mulenga, 2001 p. 450).

Kirkendall (2010) and Hall (2013) describe Freire's admiration of Nyerere's approach to development and the concept of 'ujamaa' as a democratic model where popular participation was 'indispensable' (Kirkendall, 2010, p. 105). Unlike most other African countries, which officially maintained colonial languages, the indigenous African language, Kiswahili, was adopted as Tanzania's official and national language, to unify the over 126 ethnic groups which make up Tanzania. Today, Tanzania remains one of the only African countries to return fully to an indigenous language after colonialism, though South Africa did follow suit after the end of apartheid. Freire's ideas of 'cultural action'

were no doubt influenced by the time he spent in Tanzania where he urged President Nyerere to set up an international institute for popular education, which would be based on their shared ideas (Hall, 1998).

Freire's second stay in Africa was upon an invitation to Guinea-Bissau in 1975 by Commissioner of Education Mário Cabral to lead revolutionary revisions to the education system. Freire was invited by the government to oversee the efforts for universal education and Freire led the literacy campaign for the African Party of the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) from 1976 to 1979. Freire's book, *Pedagogy in Process* (1989) describes his sojourn in the country and their efforts to construct a national literacy campaign after a prolonged liberation struggle and the assassination of revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral. As in his Tanzanian visit, Freire came in his capacity as a consultant to the World Council of Churches and, after five years of work in Guinea Bissau, had mixed results (Chicana & Cecon, 2017). These efforts faced several challenges, including the problem of teaching in Portuguese while most of the population spoke Creole, bureaucratic red tape from the government, and other issues such as a lack of trained teachers and educational resources (Kirkendall, 2010; Moran, 2014). Thomas describes some of these challenges:

These experiments were by no means successful; as Freire has himself admitted, centralised bureaucracies, programmes de-linked from the production process and communicated in the language of the coloniser, Portuguese, in this case, blunted the radical potential of the method and the objective of literacy as a means to coming by a new consciousness, and stymied the capacity of people to '...read not only the word but also read the world' (1996, p. 24-25).

The many challenges of the literacy campaign cannot be attributed to Freire alone. Freire acknowledges some of these in his epistolary memoir of the campaign (Freire, 1978). Even if Freire held overly romanticized views of the revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral and his philosophies of re-Africanization as a method of decolonization, difficulties in the implementation of education for liberation in post-independence African societies were widespread. Dreams of African independence were compromised as disruptions caused by counterrevolutionary forces, civil wars, and the continued imperialist tactics of Europe and the United States destabilized young nations and stymied their efforts towards national development. Unlike Tanzania where Nyerere held a stronghold and was able to implement his ideas, Cabral was assassinated in 1973, leaving behind the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné-Bissau e Cabo Verde* to continue as a central ideological force in the global Pan-Africanist political struggle to transform class structures in Africa and reclaim culture for liberation. Cabral's vision of a unified sovereign nation was never fully realized, as the nation descended into conflicts, never fully realizing Cabral's vision of an educated and liberated Guinea-Bissau (Forrest, 1987, p. 116).

Freire was part of an important moment in the history of education for liberation in Africa. His ideas were borrowed from and applied to the struggles in Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau. However, it is important to emphasize that education as a force of revolutionary struggle was already in place when Freire arrived in these nations, and his role in these movements should not be over emphasized, nor should the role of African leaders such as Cabral and Nyerere be diminished.

### ***Culture and Liberation***

Beyond the implementation of national experiments with popular education for liberation, Freire's ideas on the role of culture and language in the struggle for liberation

were themselves in conversation with African revolutionary scholars, who were all struggling around the role of colonialism in undermining African cultures and identified the destruction of culture as a primary means of oppression. In his writings, Freire conceptualizes the role of colonialism in the destruction of native cultures and the imposition of a foreign culture. The destruction of culture is also articulated by Cabral, who offers a more expansive theorization of power and domination.

In Freire's formulation, cultural inferiority and superiority work to inculcate the values of oppressors and alienate the oppressed from their own cultural values:

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. The values of the latter thereby become the pattern for the former. The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders; to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them." (Freire, 1970, p. 153).

Freire's language of cultural destruction and invasion reflects a more militarized description of the influence of colonialism on indigenous cultures, in a way, removing some of the agency of the oppressed. In contrast, Cabral uses the term cultural 'domination' in describing the influence of colonizers on indigenous cultures. In Cabral's view, liberation requires a return to culture as an active form of resistance: "national liberation is necessarily an act of culture [that] every liberation movement should be capable of making in relation to the imperative of the struggle" (1974, p. 43-44). Nyerere was also a strong proponent of culture as resistance, and he advocated for re-Africanization, or a return to African cultural values and norms, as foundational to the struggle for freedom. The idea of culture as resistance resonates across the writings of Cabral, Nyerere, and Freire and speaks to the multifaceted nature of the struggle against colonialism to transform not just the material conditions of the people, but psychological conditions as well. The strategy to pursue cultural liberation, and the timing of it, was an enduring question as articulated by Cabral:

A reconversion of minds of the mental set is thus indispensable to the true integration of people into the liberation movement. Such reconversion—re-Africanization, in our case—may take place before the struggle, but it is completed only during the course of the struggle, through daily contact with the popular masses in the communion of sacrifice required by the struggle (1973, p. 45).

At this time, newly independent African nations were still struggling against the realities of colonialism and the threat of Cold War neo-colonial and counterrevolutionary forces. Cabral and Nyerere, alongside other revolutionary leaders, were actively fighting to shed the yoke of colonialism, while preparing the people they fought alongside for mental as well as physical battles.

### *Dialogue and Conscientization*

Beyond their articulation of education's role in combating the cultural domination of colonialism and restoring the cultural sovereignty of the oppressed, the critical role of education in cultivating political consciousness through dialogue cuts across the ideas of Freire and his African contemporaries. Dialogue was part of the praxis of revolutionary ideas; it is a demonstration of the acknowledgement of the humanity of the oppressed,

and the need to engage them fully in the struggle for their own liberation. Freire argues that dialogue must be carried out at every stage of the revolution and cannot be compromised to ensure that the oppressed masses are liberated and fully empowered in the process:

Critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation. The content of that dialogue can and should vary in accordance with historical conditions and the level at which the oppressed perceive reality...But to substitute monologue, slogans and communiques for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication. Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses that can be manipulated (Freire, 1970 p. 65).

Freire emphasizes the need for reflection and action to transform the world as well as the need for revolutionary leaders to work with the oppressed and not for them. African leaders understood that dramatically changing the colonial system of education to a liberatory form of education would not only build up the consciousness of the people but their capacity to act as well. In fact, one aspect of Cabral's leadership that Freire admitted a deep admiration for was how Cabral worked with the people towards the revolution in Guinea Bissau. In his description of Cabral's practice of teaching seminars in the bush during the revolutionary struggle, Freire described how Cabral used the story of an amulet to explain revolutionary struggle, highlighting Cabral's respect for African cultures (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 134).

Nyerere also saw the need for Africans to challenge colonial repression by regaining critical consciousness. However, the methods through which African people would return to this consciousness would necessitate refocusing on African traditional values, communalism, and cooperation. For both Nyerere and Cabral, the process of being at one with the oppressed could not be separated from the process of regaining African culture. The importance of culture in raising critical consciousness, as theorized by African revolutionaries, is reflected in Freire's discussions of 'cultural action' (Freire, 1970), which also leans heavily on the work of another scholar who wrote earlier on the role of culture in African liberation struggles, Frantz Fanon (1961; 1963). The efforts of cultural reinvigoration and re-Africanization could not take place without consciousness raising. However, the practical steps that this would take differed widely by country, as did the results that emerged from the process of cultural action and conscientization.

### **The Pan-African Activist Sunday School and Solidarity Collective**

Despite the centrality of popular education to struggles for African liberation and nation-building, radical Pan-Africanist movements in theory and praxis suffered a stark decline in the last decades of the twentieth century, due to the assassination and exile of a generation of revolutionary African leaders, the infiltration and co-optation of African states, and the larger effects of neo-colonialism, militarism, and neoliberal capitalist entrenchment (Ackah, 2016; Adi, 2018; Mazrui, 2005). However, in recent years, popular forms of political education and Pan-Africanist solidarity are witnessing a resurgence with the growing frequency of political movements throughout the Pan-African world aided by the mobilizing power of social media platforms and digital tools. The convergence of political struggles and digital mobilization tools has been the subject of

considerable research on contemporary global protests (Castells, 2015; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Gerbaudo, 2012; Mason, 2013) and African Diasporic social movements more specifically, which have struggled to overcome digital divides and parochial solidarities (Royston & Strong, 2019; Strong, 2018; Taylor, 2016). In this section, we examine one ongoing experiment in popular education for liberation, of which we are conveners and participants, the Pan-African Activist Sunday School and Solidarity Network, which formed in response to the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria and speaks to the continued necessity and ongoing challenges in implementation of popular education for liberation in Pan-African struggles.

In October 2020, #EndSARS protests formed after the murder of a young man by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a rogue unit of the Nigerian Police Force, went viral. After nearly three weeks of the largest mass mobilizations in a generation led by the country's youth, on October 20<sup>th</sup>, Nigerian soldiers massacred dozens of youths protesting the country's rampant police violence. As the rise and violent state suppression of the #EndSARS movement sparked global attention and outrage (Strong, 2020), we collaborated to convene an intergenerational, gender- and class-diverse group of Pan-Africanist organizers connected to anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and police abolitionist movements throughout Africa, North America, and Europe collaborated with grassroots Nigerian organizers to share political strategy and build solidarity for the #EndSARS movement during a moment when the struggle was facing intense suppression and violence from the government led by former military dictator General Muhammadu Buhari. Out of this solidarity work—which expanded to include support and amplification of other radical movements attempting to sustain struggles against state violence—emerged the Pan-African Solidarity Collective, composed of organizations that explicitly center Pan-Africanist political ideologies and goals, and which are situated in four continents including Black Lives Matter (USA), Pan-African Community in Action (USA), Afrosocialists and Socialist of Color Caucus (USA), Black Alliance for Peace (USA, Haiti, Colombia), Coalition for Revolution (Nigeria), Socialist Workers League (Nigeria), End Museveni Dictatorship Mutual Aid (Uganda), Red Pearl Movement (Uganda), and Ubuntu Reading Group (Uganda).

The most public-facing manifestation of this collaborative solidarity work across movements is the Pan-African Activist Sunday School (PASS), an intergenerational, popular education series that uses virtual live streams to foster critical dialogue between Black activists and organizers from around the world and political consciousness around Pan-African strategy and movement building through social media. Before forming into a popular education series, the seeds for PASS began with a more narrow purpose: to bring together grassroots organizers based in Nigeria, who were urgently seeking support to sustain their movement after the massacre of youth protesters and the announcement of a protest ban by the Nigerian government, with grassroots organizers outside of Nigeria who had experience with sustaining movements against state violence and could amplify the struggle in Nigeria under conditions of escalating repression of media, financial resources, and political action.

Prior to the 2020 #EndSARS protests, we previously collaborated on research on the revolutionary legacy of the Nigerian students' movement (Nafziger & Strong, 2020) and, in our different institutional settings in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and State College, we separately joined grassroots efforts around police violence and social justice issues impacting these communities. Krystal joined the leadership of the Philadelphia chapter of Black Lives Matter. Nanre organized around police murders and for Black lives through the 320 Coalition, and around racial and economic justice through the Afrosocialist

Caucus. During the historic 2020 uprisings in the U.S. after the murder of George Floyd, our respective organizing efforts shifted to waging local campaigns and direct actions around police abolition and racial justice, which were met with state suppression and opposition. As two U.S. based scholar-organizers of African-descent (Nigerian American and African American), who are connected to organizers and youth activists in Nigeria through research and activism and also had recent experiences in sustaining struggles around police violence, we saw the emergence of #EndSARS protests as a critical opportunity to create space for solidarity and dialogue among Pan-African organizers around immediate political strategy during a vulnerable moment in the #EndSARS movement. In recent years, social media has become critical to the amplification of social movements, particularly in contexts where state suppression of movements is an impediment to grassroots mobilization, and as a tool for connecting organizers and supporters of movements and social justice to direct lines of communication with activists on the ground. Previous social movements in Nigeria were activated and strengthened through social media and grassroots mobilizations such as #OccupyNigeria, #BringBackOurGirls, and #RevolutionNow, as have global Pan-African movements like #WeAreRemovingADictator in Uganda, #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, and #BlackLivesMatter in the United States.

Our solidarity efforts began through convenings on the Zoom and WhatsApp platforms, which gained global utility in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic as both a method for virtual communication and a means for sharing publicly accessible educational resources. We reached out to activists in Nigeria, who were at the forefront of the struggle, many of whom we had prior relationships with through movements such as #BringBackOurGirls and student organizing, or through our prior research in the country. After a few initial dialogues among activists with participants from Nigeria, the Nigerian Diaspora in Europe, and Black organizers in the U.S., the first Pan-African Activist Sunday School session was ideated as a way to directly lend support to the #EndSARS movement by raising awareness about the conditions of the movement and its root causes, given the growing international interest in understanding and supporting the movement, which trended internationally with 48 million tweets in just 10 days (Nendo, 2020). After deliberation on how to most effectively design a popular education format for the purpose of (1) reaching the largest global audience to put international pressure on the Nigerian government, (2) cultivating space for fostering critical dialogue, and (3) creating an effective channel for sharing accurate information directly from organizers on the ground on how to interpret the political moment and support protesters, the global group of organizers (at that time, approximately 20 people) decided to move away from the Zoom platform being used for internal conversations among organizers, to a virtual livestream format that would allow the broadcast to be simultaneously streamed on multiple social media accounts across platforms for maximum impact.

The technical form and pedagogical approach of the Sunday School, which we began to internally define as a popular education series by and for activists, explicitly borrows from historical examples of popular political education in Pan-African organization traditions such as those pioneered by Cabral, Nyerere, and Nkrumah, as well as the conventions of contemporary digital organizing that have been made possible by the growth of social media infrastructures. With the shift of academic and political organizing work online in the context of the pandemic, closed virtual platforms (i.e., Zoom) and livestream and multi-stream services (which are capable of simultaneous broadcasts to platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook) have emerged as the primary options for popular online (political) education. With consideration of Zoom's closed platform and limitations for number of live participants, we settled on a multi-stream service that would allow viewers



to join the stream from multiple social media platforms and accounts, to comment on the live stream feed through text messages which are visible to all participants and could be highlighted on the livestream, and to view an archived version of the session at any point. Streamyard, our platform of choice, had other limitations around the number of participants who could appear on the broadcast: no more than 10 simultaneously in the virtual broadcast studio. In some ways, the livestream approximates the experience of the mass rally or lecture, but without the intimacy and dialogic nature of the political study circle. This was a trade-off we weighed but decided to air on the side of maximum viewership and circulation given the goals of this aspect of our collective organizing work to amplify the needs of organizers on the ground as widely and effectively as possible.

Given the limitations of the live stream form, which only permits dialogue with viewers in the form of text-based comments on the various streams, our first session designed to amplify and build solidarity for #EndSARS protesters, titled, "From Protest to Movement: Intro to #EndSARS and the History of Activism in Nigeria," was organized as a series of short talks of fifteen minutes or less from an intergenerational group that included #EndSARS protesters as well as movement elders who represented decades of experience in student, labor, and feminist organizing in Nigeria (see Figure 1). The informal presentations were followed by moderated questions to these organizers that focused specifically on the connections panelists saw between the #EndSARS movement and past historic struggles in Nigeria, struggles against police brutality and government in Africa and other parts of the world, and strategies and tactics from moving from a protest to a sustainable movement that can withstand efforts at government suppression. This was then followed by questions from the audience that were offered during the broadcast by viewers, which included requests for additional educational resources, how to connect with the organizers featured on the broadcast, class privilege in the struggle, and what the #EndSARS movement should learn from other movements. The first session, an experiment for all the organizers who were accustomed to boots-on-the-ground mobilization and more intimate forms of political education (i.e., study circles, organizational meeting), was received with great enthusiasm.

**Figure 1**  
*Pan-African Activist Sunday School Promotional Graphic*



*Note.* Graphic Design by Krystal Strong

The livestream garnered over 8,000 views across Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts. In the comments on the livestream broadcast, viewers offered the following assessment of the impact of the Sunday School (emphasis added):

Greetings Africans! Thank you all for *this important conversation in Pan African unity and struggle!* Especially today, as we observe the 22nd anniversary of our dear brother and comrade, Kwame Ture, joining the Ancestors . . . . our victory is certain!

*I'd love to see more cross-cultural exchanges like this* that is student centered. I think *it would go a long way in bridging the gaps* that too often exist among Black students from various different cultural backgrounds.

This is very important information to know. *It highlights the need to understand and know the background of how these things came to be.*

the panAfrican (sic) mindset has definitely decreased in the US movements since the 90's and then further with the election of Obama, however *I hope it will encourage people that there is an upturn, and a new wave of solidarity is building.* I believe that we are seeing a resurgence of panAfricanism (sic) in the movements in the US, and *things like this great discussion will move it further, broader, deeper and more quickly than ever before!*

These responses draw historic connections to revolutionary movements and pioneers of popular education for African liberation like Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the All-African People's Revolutionary Party. They affirm the political importance of revitalizing "a new wave of solidarity" given the decrease "since the 90s"; the usefulness of "cross-cultural exchange" and historical and political "background" in "bridging the gaps" in political consciousness; developing political analysis to understand present conditions and struggles; and strengthening global movements for liberation.

Seeing the unexpected reach of this livestream format, which permitted us as grassroots organizers to engage with other organizers, allies, and interested parties beyond our local organizing contexts, we continued with further sessions to amplify active movements in need of support and solidarity. Over the next six months, we hosted four additional sessions on the following topics: the movement to defund the police in the United States, resistance movements in South Africa, the struggle to end the Museveni dictatorship in Uganda, and a session providing updates from the frontlines of movements in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Colombia, Haiti, and Palestine. In each of these sessions, we emphasized historical analysis of imperialism, militarism, and capitalism as the context for the contemporary struggles, specific political tactics and strategies organizers were employing and the limitations of them, and direct ways that viewers and other organizers could support these efforts (i.e., by donating to organizations on the ground, following their social media platforms, and amplifying their message). Across these sessions, nearly 20,000 viewers tuned in. Along the way, we made shifts in the design and pedagogical approach after recognizing the limitations for dialogue with the livestream format. For example, PASS organizers created presentation slides to make the speaking segments more accessible and engaging; we tried to limit the length of presentations, which proved difficult to manage for facilitators; and we tried to increase the overall time for questions and answers from the audience. As scholar-organizers whose scholarship and political work often reaches limited audiences due to the paywalls of academic publishing and the

ebbs and flows of public support for social justice organizing, our experimentation with the Sunday School pedagogical model in comradeship with Pan-African organizers has generated new methods and possibilities for challenging the boundaries that often exist between the academy and political movements: collaborative virtual instruction; multimodal discourse; mass remote learning; digital archiving; and community-centered political pedagogy.

The Sunday Schools also revealed two major obstacles in Pan-African solidarity through popular education. The first is the challenge of technological access for organizers and viewers in the Global South, where bandwidth is often limited and internet access costly. During several sessions, organizers based in Africa who were scheduled to appear on the livestream struggled with slow internet speed or were not able to participate at all due to challenges with bandwidth or restrictions around electricity or internet access. The second was the way these technological challenges limited the ability of organizers in Africa to fully participate in other aspects of organizing the PASS sessions, planning content and to a lesser extent shaping the ideological direction of the collective, in ways that were not a barrier for organizers located in the Global North.

These specific challenges of access and accessibility would become much more pronounced as our collective organizing effort transitioned from supporting #EndSARS with solidarity, to cultivating the Pan-African Activist Sunday School popular education platform, to expanding the scope of the organizing effort to the "Pan-African Activist Solidarity Collective," which reflected shared goals of building power across political movements through popular education, collaboration, direct solidarity work, and movement building. This expansion has created opportunities for the development of collective solidarity campaigns around the End Museveni Dictatorship (EMD) campaign, international advocacy for members who were being threatened with political imprisonment for protest, and political strategization around the planning of protests under the threat of government repression. Still, as with the example of literacy campaigns and state popular education efforts in Africa in the 1970s, the implementation of these efforts was compromised by structural conditions: in our case, the ability to build strong solidarity campaigns has been limited by barriers to participation and a deep digital divide for activists on the ground in Africa, where movements that need the most material support and amplification were located.

### **Strengthening Practices of Education for Liberation Today**

Today, liberation is a continuing process. It signifies not only the consolidation of victory but also makes concrete a model of society already, in a certain sense, designed during the stage of struggle... (Freire, 2016, p. 68).

Despite ongoing forces of neo-colonialism and militarism, African organizers and social movements continue the quest for decolonization set out by earlier generations of African revolutionaries, whose experiments with popular education continue to resonate today. From our analysis of the recent experiment with popular education for liberation in the spirit of Freirean and Pan-African traditions for which we are co-conveners and participants, the Pan-African Activist Sunday School, several important themes emerge related to the continued relevance of popular education in radical movements and the critical role of leadership and solidarity during times of political upheaval in sustaining the conditions for revolutionary action. These themes offer valuable lessons that we can learn in applying Freirean concepts to contemporary Pan-African movements. This paper

thereby makes the following recommendations for the theory and practice of education for liberation as a historical legacy and an ontological reality:

### **1. Education for Black Liberation**

Revolution and education are irrevocably, though not inevitably, intertwined. The theory and praxis of revolution in Africa and the Global South during the decades of decolonization, as characterized in the intellectual and political leadership of Amílcar Cabral and Julius Nyerere, powerfully demonstrate the role of popular education in creating the conditions for oppressed people to understand and struggle for liberation, beginning with the liberation of the self. We find ourselves in a historic moment of global Black rebellions across the African continent and throughout the Diaspora that is not unlike the revolutionary period of the 1960s and 1970s. As with past Pan-African experiments with education for liberation, the Pan-Africanist Activist Sunday School as one contemporary example brings back into focus the necessity of equipping grassroots activists who are in the streets fighting for freedom—and radical educators who are in the classroom raising consciousness—with the tools of liberatory education as a pathway to strengthening and sustaining this new phase of struggle under the banner of Black Liberation. Learning transversely across our struggles illuminates commonalities in the conditions of anti-Black oppression and state violence, which imperil the lives of Black people in Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, the United States, and around the world that might otherwise be lost. As Black Liberation has emerged as a grammar for the present, popular education for Black Liberation is a critical tool in envisioning and building the world that we want.

### **2. Action as antidote to disillusionment**

At a time when there is massive democratic recidivism in Africa and politicians continue to manipulate political and economic systems to suppress the will of the people, there is a need for popular education to create and sustain radical movements which advocate for inclusion and participation, particularly among the most marginalized populations. Godonoo predicts that the Freirean legacy of education for liberation could empower "disillusioned" Africans across the continent:

Freire's work has resonated with millions of Africans who have become disillusioned with failed regimes across the continent. Thus, many Africans who have read and listened to Freire have become willing risk-takers for the sake of social justice, building social movements and organizations that seek to challenge the various regimes (1998, p. 26).

The teachings of Nyerere and Cabral, among other African revolutionaries, similarly articulate the important role of culture and consciousness as sites of struggle and a necessary element of education for liberation. Thus, deepening the capacity for oppressed people to articulate—through critical consciousness—and then struggle to create the world that we want—through action—is a necessary condition for collective liberation. While many Pan-African social movements have emerged over the past decade to fight for social change across the continent and throughout the Diaspora, severe repression and human rights violations have become the normative state response to grassroots struggle, as we witnessed with #EndSARS. It is therefore also critically important for popular movements to build stronger structures at the grassroots level, which can combat disillusionment and building the critical consciousness needed to sustain movements. Cultural and political study circles and digital forms of engagement and mobilization are useful starting points for attracting, retaining, and empowering people within our

movements, as we experienced with the reception of the Pan-African Activist Sunday School.

**3. *Learning across cultural and geographic divides***

This article examined the flow of ideas and practices between revolutionaries and scholars, who were at the forefront of decolonization movements in the Global South. They understood culture and consciousness as key terrains of liberation struggles, and popular education as an indispensable weapon. The nascent work of the Pan-African Activist Sunday School offers an example of how transnational solidarities are re-emerging in a new phase of the fight for Black liberation, in which the structures of white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, and militarism are alive and well. The efforts from this group of activists on the frontlines of contemporary radical movements to create mechanisms for popular education in a moment of global upheaval and state repression reveals the constant need for movements to reinvent themselves and for modes of movement learning to be passed down not only from generation to generation but also transversely across geographic contexts. With access to digital tools that facilitate mass remote learning and rapid mobilization, radical movements from below can broaden our pedagogical approaches to popular education for liberation in the current moment and, ultimately, transforming the ways in which a new generation of activists understand the political stakes and global implication of our collective struggles.

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