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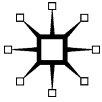
*Feminist Popular Education in
Transnational Debates*

Building Pedagogies of Possibility

Edited by

Linzi Manicom and Shirley Walters

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FEMINIST POPULAR EDUCATION IN TRANSNATIONAL DEBATES

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Series Editor's Foreword

A woman carries a sign in the “Occupy Wall Street” (OWS) movement that says: “Women are 1/2 the world’s population, working 2/3rds of the world’s working hours, receiving 10% of the world’s income, owning less than 1% of the world’s property. We are part of the 99%!” Another woman carries one that says: “Warning: Don’t mistake the complexity of this moment for chaos!” I write this foreword at a moment of great possibility—it is six weeks into the OWS movement—an unprecedented mobilization of “the 99%” around the world standing together against corporate greed and government complicity. OWS reveals that imagination is the most subversive thing a public can have. If we can imagine a more “civil” and compassionate way to live, we can act on it. It is this ongoing social experiment of living together in community, sharing resources, honoring differences and interdependencies, while building a common vision of justice for all that is most stunning about the OWS movement. This is the big “we”; the big “we” of us all who are suffering and have the courage to stand up to the 1 percent (see Eisenstein and Mohanty, *feministwire.com*). What is remarkable about *Feminist Popular Education in Transnational Debates: Building Pedagogies of Possibility* is that the authors in this volume enact and reflect on the very strategies that make movements like OWS a reality. Drawing inspiration from the legacy of Brazilian educator/philosopher Paulo Freire, the volume brings adult educators, community organizers, and practitioners of feminist and participatory education together to engage the affinities and overlaps between feminist practice and popular education.

The year 2011 has already witnessed historic people’s revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and we continue to witness the rise of social movements against autocratic rulers, occupation, and neo-liberal economic policies in other parts of the Arab world. The last two months have profoundly changed the landscape of democratic and social justice struggles in the Arab world, and while women are perhaps less visible than we would like, gender politics remain at the center of these human rights struggles. Perhaps we need better lenses, better feminist analytics to “see” women’s participation and leadership in these revolutions, and better feminist pedagogies to bring women’s critical agency to the forefront of our social-justice struggles. The

mobilization of transnational organizing and knowledge networks is readily acknowledged in the current antiauthoritarian social movements, and women's broad-based participation in creating sustainable infrastructures is evident to some of us. But, many of us still ask, "where are the women—and what are they doing?"

Feminist Popular Education provides innovative feminist pedagogical and methodological lenses that allow us to "see," analyze, and enact pedagogies of personal, cultural, and political resistance to inherited patriarchies and misogynist practices across borders. Above all, the book offers radical and transformative pedagogic practices designed to speak truth to power, and thus transform ourselves in the pursuit of gender justice in the world. Perhaps some of the work here can help us understand the much touted "horizontalism" of the OWS movement as an inheritance of the popular education and feminist pedagogical strategies of the last few decades. *Feminist Popular Education* is thus a perfect fit for the Comparative Feminist Studies (CFS) series.

The CFS series is designed to foreground writing, organizing, and reflecting on feminist trajectories across the historical and cultural borders of nation-states. It takes up fundamental analytic and political issues involved in the cross-cultural production of knowledge about women and feminism examining the politics of scholarship and knowledge in relation to feminist organizing and social-justice movements. Drawing on feminist thinking in a number of fields, the CFS series targets innovative, comparative feminist scholarship, pedagogical and curricular strategies, and community organizing and political education. It explores a comparative feminist praxis that addresses some of the most urgent questions facing progressive critical thinkers and activists today.

Over the past many decades, feminists across the globe have been variously successful at addressing fundamental issues of oppression and liberation. In our search for gender justice in the early twenty-first century however, we inherit a number of the challenges our mothers and grandmothers faced. But there are also new challenges to face as we attempt to make sense of a world indelibly marked by the failure of postcolonial (and advanced) capitalist and communist nation-states to provide for the social, economic, spiritual, and psychic needs of the majority of the world's population. In the year 2011, globalization has come to represent the interests of corporations and the free market rather than self-determination and freedom from political, cultural, and economic domination for all the world's peoples. The project of US Empire building, the rise of Islamophobia in the United

States and Europe, alongside the dominance of corporate capitalism and neoliberalism, kills, disenfranchises, and impoverishes women everywhere. Militarization, environmental degradation, heterosexist state practices, religious fundamentalisms, sustained migrations of peoples across the borders of nations and geopolitical regions, environmental crises, and the exploitation of women's labor by capital all pose profound challenges for feminists at this time. Neoliberal economic policies and discourses of development and progress mark yet another form of colonial/imperial governance masking the exercise of power over peoples lives through claims of empowerment. Recovering and remembering insurgent histories and seeking new understandings of political subjectivities and citizenship has never been so important, at a time marked by social amnesia, global consumer culture, and the worldwide mobilization of fascist notions of "national security."

These are some of the very challenges the CFS series is designed to address. The series takes as its fundamental premise the need for feminist engagement with global as well as local ideological, historical, economic, and political processes, and the urgency of transnational dialogue in building an ethical culture capable of withstanding and transforming the commodified and exploitative practices of global governance structures, culture, and economics. Individual volumes in the CFS series provide systemic and challenging interventions into the (still) largely Euro-Western feminist studies knowledge base, while simultaneously highlighting the work that can and needs to be done to envision and enact cross-cultural, multiracial feminist solidarity.

Focusing on the notion of "pedagogies of possibility," the authors in this volume define feminist popular education in both pragmatic and visionary terms: as that which is possible given material constraints of place, time, and resources, and as that which is possible to imagine, "that which might become thinkable and actionable when prevailing relations of power are made visible, when understandings shake loose from normative perspectives and generate new knowledges and perspectives for engagement" (chapter 1, this volume, page 4). Combining the political and ethical commitments of popular education to marginalized, subaltern communities of learners with feminist commitments to gender justice for women across race, class, nation, ability, and culture, *Feminist Popular Education* breaks new ground in offering a range of methodological and pedagogical strategies for educators interested in activist and emancipatory knowledge production. The volume offers exciting and provocative (new) formulations such as "feminist decolonizing solidarity" (D'Arcangelis and Huntley): a "politics of listening across difference" (Butterwick);

“autonomy building” (Meckesheimer and Williams); and “mind-body healing practices” in overcoming trauma, deeply entrenched gendered practices, and violence (Friedman). The geographical and disciplinary range of feminist popular educators in this book is truly impressive—as is the sustained commitment throughout the volume to engage in a decolonized feminist practice in pursuit of solidarity. A volume that is hard to put down—and one that will be of interest to all scholars, educators, and activists interested in pedagogies of possibility. This is a rare and unusual book—one that helps us “see” what we so often miss in the grand narratives of revolutions, social movements, and knowledge paradigms—the day to day sustained and hard work of excavating experiential knowledge, and of teaching/learning how to change the world.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty
Series Editor, Ithaca, New York

Reference

Zillah Eisenstein and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “In Support of Occupy Wall Street” in the *feministwire.com*, October 14, 2011.

Acknowledgments

This book is testimony to our friendship and to our determination to make more visible and more widely appreciated the innovative, challenging, intellectually engaging, creative pedagogy being undertaken by feminist popular educators around the globe in enormously varying and sometimes trying conditions. The book can trace its genesis to 1989, when we set out to compile its forerunner, *Gender in Popular Education: Methods for Empowerment*, a collection similar to this one, which was inspired by a transnational community of feminist popular educators, several of whom have become close friends.

We would like to thank the nearly 60 women and men, adult and popular educators from around the world, who responded to our call for proposals in 2008. About 30 potential contributors began working closely with us as we set out to mold the project through email correspondence, occasional meetings with authors in the same locale, and as editors talking for hours on Skype. Inevitably, over the extended period of communicating, writing, and encouraging, some people's personal or professional lives changed course, or were just too burdened by other commitments, and they had to withdraw. Their enthusiastic support for the project, however, was encouraging and supportive. With very limited resources at our disposal, and everyone having to find time in the cracks of their complex and busy lives, this has been, at times, a challenging and unevenly paced process. The contributors, who persisted through the long process of production, have demonstrated generosity of spirit, humor, resilience, and stamina demonstrating their sharing in our commitment to deepen the theory and practice of feminist popular education. We have valued and been inspired by their intellectual curiosity and analytic rigor and the pedagogical insights that they have shared. They have shown solidarity and friendship through times of both exasperation and exhilaration.

It is impossible to name and thank every individual or institution that has shaped our ideas and efforts over these years. We wish, at least, to acknowledge, with gratitude, the encouragement from colleagues at University of Western Cape and University of Toronto, the (relatively) uncomplaining support from our domestic partners, Eric and Johan, and the goodwill and handholding of our friends (even as they bemoaned our social unavailability). Liz Mackenzie provided

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Several friends, family members, and colleagues have been lost along the way; we wish them, *hambani kable*, to go well, as we are reminded to stay well, *sala kable*.