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Reflections on Knowledge, Learning and Social Movements

History's Schools

**Edited by Aziz Choudry and
Salim Vally**

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6 African history in context

Toward a praxis of radical education

Koni Benson, Asher Gamedze, and Akosua Koranteng

This chapter reflects on the *Know Your Continent* (KYC) popular education course, which we ran in Cape Town in 2015. The eight-part workshop series explored various themes and debates in African history and brought together people from local high schools, community activist networks, universities, and elsewhere. Collectively we engaged questions like: ‘Why study African history now?’ ‘Is it relevant?’ ‘How do we put this knowledge into conversation with our own contemporary contexts of struggle?’

Since the 1980s, there have been four incarnations of KYC which have been collaborations across educational institutions, NGOs, and activist organisations/movements. The 2015 programme was an initiative of the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA) and the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT).¹ Sessions were held on Saturdays, either at UCT’s campus in Rondebosch or at Equal Education² in Khayelitsha, and covered these themes: (1) Introduction: Africa, South Africa, and History; (2) Nile Valley; (3) African Social Formations, People With States, Without States, and Empires; (4) Popular Education: Reflections on the work of Neville Alexander (special memorial session); (5) Invention, Innovation, and Technology in Pre-Colonial Africa; (6) Contact Before Conquest: Trade and Cultural Exchange in Pre-Colonial Africa; (7) Slavery in Africa; (8) Colonisation and Decolonisation.

The 2015 course was organised in the context where student movements in South Africa had brought the decolonisation project back to the table – a moment marked by a hunger for both content that engaged issues of power and liberation of/in African history, and new ways of imagining and organising the dynamics of teaching spaces. In a powerful reflection on generational divergences around interpreting the present historical moment in South Africa, Leigh-Ann Naidoo, a student, a radical educationist, and one of the important thinkers in the student movement, described how the RhodesMustFall³ occupation of Azania House at UCT became a space where:

All meetings and seminars engaged both the theme or topic under discussion while at the same time engaging the ways in which power was working to silence and alienate certain people in the conversation, and amplify others’ voices. These sessions were chaired by students who tried to implement, in

the time of the occupation, the philosophies and practices of the movement’s three pillars: Black Consciousness, Pan Africanism and intersectionality. They called this work decolonisation.⁴

In her speech, Naidoo goes on to ask how we might move beyond the tactic of shutting down universities to not only arrest the present but to imagine and start building an alternative future university and society. As we see it, the practice of radical education in the present is an important intervention in helping us imagine and envision a different future; this was a foundational impulse of our approach to KYC.

Drawing from and contributing to discussions around what a decolonial approach to education might look like, some practical questions at the heart of designing curriculum and content for KYC have been: What does it take to bring people into classrooms across a divided and segregated city? Once in the classroom, how can we challenge forms of hierarchy that dominate it, and build alternatives? While questions of pedagogy have been important in some popular education and political education processes that have been critical of reproducing hierarchies in educational spaces, reimagining both the colonial (racist, patriarchal, neo-colonial) content *and* racist patriarchal neo-colonial *formats* of researching and teaching history in South African universities have rarely been examined.

Building on the longstanding KYC approach of creating and sharing critical African history content beyond the university, the 2015 moment was right for challenging both the formal and hidden curriculums embedded in education dynamics. This was a moment of critique of education and its role in the reproduction of an oppressive society. It was an opportune moment to think about how history and which histories are important in a liberatory educational project *and* think about what it takes to create potentially liberatory educational spaces. We were able to approach the series as a space to experiment with critiques and questions raised by the epistemological dimensions of the decolonisation project – questions put forward by RhodesMustFall (RMF), in particular in our contemporary UCT context: Part of this entailed re-using old materials, creating new materials, and practicing alternative ways of building relationships and teaching and learning in the classroom.⁵

To share and reflect on KYC 2015, this chapter first locates the history of this form of African history education work in the 1980s and the struggle against colonialism/apartheid, and in the present context of student movements – in particular, RhodesMustFall – which was largely catalytic for KYC 2015. The chapter then moves on to reflect on the practicalities and politics of KYC 2015, the methodologies and approaches used in attempting to develop a praxis of African history education that can expose and challenge relationship hierarchies in the past and present. This reflection builds from our involvement with the student movement, with formal African history education, with popular political education initiatives, and through conversations with key people and groups involved in KYC in the past and the present.⁶ This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive evaluation or history of KYC, rather it aims to contribute to conversations about radical collaborative history and the possibilities of pedagogies that engage history in order to disrupt the languages and practices of power in the classroom.

KYC in historical context

Between 2011–2013, HUMA and the International Labour Research Information Group (ILRIG), a labour research and education NGO ran *Know Your City*, a workshop series on Cape Town's historical geography. This programme built on a series called *Know Your Continent* that Neville Alexander headed from 1982 until the escalation of the States of Emergency and intensified school boycotts around 1985. The course was revived around 2008.⁷ KYC began in the 1980s with a commitment to the urgency of African history education with an approach to working on multiple educational fronts and across different parts of the city. From the start there was a need to create resources (from scratch or remixing what was available) and to create communities of learning.

The main point of Know Your Continent in the 1980s was because you cannot imagine how there was nothing on Africa. No book material. No knowledge of any history. Yes, knowledge of struggles in the present in other countries as present tense history. If you knew any actual history, it would be what was in your text book in high school – a straightforward British imperial/Afrikaaner nationalist version.⁸

A small team of interested educationists and activists scoured libraries, acquired banned materials, and set up various spaces to delve into, share information, and have discussions on African history.⁹ Through three programmes based at the South African Committee on Higher Education (SACHED) (see Motala in this volume), they created African history materials for high schools, students, and activists and together with members of a sewing project at COBERT (the Council for Black Education, Research, and Training), hosted monthly lectures on African history. These sessions were for people interested in Africa from a Pan-Africanist orientation, and they attempted to highlight the multiple and complex histories of pre-colonial African societies.¹⁰

Some of the people we worked with on the 2015 programme had been participants in the 1980s programmes. They were former high school students and teachers from the Committee of '81 (coordinating student boycotts across the city), and who continue to work on various educational fronts today.¹¹ For example, Shamil Jeppie was one of the 12 participants of SACHED's first full semester course on African history in 1982. He went on to become a historian at UCT and HUMA and also gave lectures at the second iteration of KYC, which was initiated when the Zabalaza Youth Movement held a lecture series in Langa with Neville Alexander in 2008.¹² In 2011 he partnered with ILRIG to run *Know Your City*.¹³ There he worked with Koni who had a background in studying the history of forced removals in Cape Town and was working at ILRIG with community activists on collaborative history writing in ongoing struggles across the city. These *Know Your City* sessions were open to the public and hosted at venues like the Slave Lodge social history museum in Cape Town and I.D. Mkize Secondary School in Gugulethu.¹⁴

In 2015, the fourth iteration of KYC was initiated partly in response to the student movement at UCT. Collectives such as the UCT-based RMF, of which two of us – Asher and Akosua – were part of in different ways, drew connections between

the violent relations of hierarchy and domination on which the colonial project is built and reproduced, and the way in which our educational experience and content are constructed.¹⁵ Emerging from the critique of Eurocentric knowledge dissemination techniques, RMF made calls for more history of the African continent that predates the periods of European domination and plunder and demanded more radical approaches to knowledge production. In response to discussions in the Department of Historical Studies about responding to the call for more pre-colonial history courses, Shamil proposed that *Know Your City* be re-incarnated but be extended back to *Know Your Continent* and be hosted beyond UCT. He met with interested folks in the department who asked Koni, who was then a post-doctoral fellow there, to run with the project.¹⁶ Her request was to hire a graduate student to work with to develop the curriculum and do the organising work. Asher – who had been doing contract research and tutoring for a few years, and was doing writing and education work in RMF as well as some education work with high school students – was hired from May–August 2015. After Asher left the country at the end of August, Akosua, who was doing her Master's on gender dynamics in Ghana's past and present, was hired from September–December 2015.

We met with interested people from HUMA, History, Education, and with Shamil proposed a broad outline for the course. Various historians agreed to give inputs and suggested extending invitations to others. The initial idea was to host open sessions and invite university students, community activists, and high school learners; to host the events both on and off campus; and to translate some of the core materials into isiXhosa and Afrikaans and create resource packs that could be used beyond the sessions. We felt that prioritising relationship-building with particular organisations, and planning KYC around them would enable us to shape a pedagogical process that could hear and respond to peoples' needs and experiences. This was to enable us to better challenge the alienating dynamics that often structure education – even education with supposedly radical content. In discussion with the small steering group from HUMA and History, everyone agreed to target local high school students and youth activists. Asher and Koni connected with young organisers (Community Leaders) from Equal Education (EE), students from Claremont and Philippi High Schools, and youth from the Housing Assembly and asked them to join the course.¹⁷ KYC committed to organise transport for this core group and we committed to shape the course in relation to where the majority of this group was at – a key political/pedagogical decision that also gave us space to use popular education methods and a community building approach to develop and run the 2015 KYC programme.

On critique and creation: reflecting on pedagogy as process

In a context of intensifying campus politics, we were able to secure a small space from which to mobilise certain resources of the university¹⁸ and build on previous KYC initiatives in an attempt to liberate knowledge and create a space for a practice of collaborative radical education. Reflecting on our own experience of KYC and speaking to participants about theirs, this section attempts to share some of what we experimented with and learnt in this process of attempting to challenge the content and format of African history education. We were trying to build a

radical alternative of collaborative education, from an institutional context (an elitist university) which is based on various forms of hierarchy that are inimical to the type of project we envisioned.¹⁹ What was our approach? What worked? What could be taken much further? One of the main themes that threads through this section is the ever-evolving relationship between critique and creation. *Critique* of university-based forms of knowledge. Attempts at *creation* of a space that is not based on hierarchy but seeks to unravel hierarchies and, in so doing, allows us to imagine and practice different ways of being together and relating to each other as people, and ultimately build community. Critique and creation constantly informed, contradicted, and constituted our thinking, approach, and practice in KYC 2015. They enabled us to shape and expand our definition of pedagogy as something that transcends the classroom to become a broader process encompassing relationship building and community learning.

Deconstructing, reimagining, and reconstructing the classroom

In KYC we wanted to avoid isolating, alienating, and boring academic teaching. We wanted our sessions to be fun, enjoyable, interactive, engaging, as well as politicised. We wanted to be able to open up conversations about the present by critically engaging the past. Much of our thinking and preparation went into creating a dynamic space that was welcoming and interesting for the people we had identified as our core group – high school students and activists. A typical session included a welcome and round of introductions, an interactive game (usually bingo), a collective debrief after the game with audiovisuals/multimedia, an input/lecture, small discussion groups, plenary feedback, and lunch.²⁰

One of the most interesting, exciting, and challenging characteristics of the KYC classroom was the mixed makeup of the participants; people came from all over Cape Town's class and race-segregated areas. On any given Saturday morning, the course drew together high school students, education and housing activists/organisers, some activists from student formations like RhodesMustFall, and a few (very few) interested academics, and other interesting and interested characters who had heard about the sessions through word of mouth or through HUMA's mailing list. By any measure, be it age, gender, class, race, home language, sexuality, personality, area, occupation, etc., we had a very mixed group of participants. We were expecting about 35 people but an average session ranged from 40–80 participants each week.

Once we had people in the room, the question was: how could we undermine the usual dynamics of academic history where the past is far away and the professor is in front? These dynamics tend to alienate, silence, and exclude many from the process of learning. We had deep details we wanted to share, but not at the expense of reproducing the kinds of authority, hierarchy, and patriarchy that are institutionalised in the university and practiced in many movement education spaces. The project, for us, was to challenge the dominant hierarchies and relations of mainstream education practices (and society) and, from fumbling through critiques, to stumble forward and toward potential alternatives.

A significant challenge to hierarchy in the classroom was language. In Cape Town, the most widely spoken home languages are Afrikaans, isiXhosa, and

English (all of which were represented in the classroom). But as the primary facilitators of KYC, we are all first-language English speakers.²¹ Because of our inability to facilitate a multi-lingual space, and in our attempt to disrupt the dominance of English to create a different space linguistically, we planned and carried out a number of 'interventions' in the classroom. In one of the sessions, our friend, comrade and HUMA colleague Zethu Matebeni helped translate some of the bingo cards and facilitated the bingo feedback session mostly in isiXhosa. During this activity, some people who had been quiet in the big group space became more engaged and participated in isiXhosa; and many of those who were often vocal and confident in group settings in English, were quiet, listening, perhaps slightly confused. Another notable moment of disrupting English was a word game involving memory and translation which was played in the session reflecting on Neville Alexander's work.²² This game was able to both undermine the hegemony of English and frame Xhosa and Afrikaans as resources and sites of knowledge in ways that are impossible if everything functions in English.

We also experimented with opening up the classroom space for different registers of English to be shared, using musicians, bands or other figures, for instance from popular culture as clues in bingo.²³ When these clues came up, participants often had personal stories that they shared from encountering the music or legacy of these figures in their own lives and this meant that people spoke in quite personal ways from their own experience. The diverse forms of presentation and diverse content at times challenged the language of knowledge, and opened up the space for people to engage without any prior 'academic knowledge' necessary. One student activist said:

In class or a meeting, if I hadn't sat down with an academic paper I would not be about to contribute to the discussion, but with KYC the way documentaries and different methods were used and how people came to demonstrate Capoeira for example, made it possible to engage.²⁴

As a result, people shared really interesting information, perspectives, and experiences and spoke in ways in which they were comfortable. In response to questions about what their favourite aspects of KYC were, many of the high school students and EE organisers said that engaging with and learning from people of different ages and backgrounds was their favourite part.²⁵ One of the EE organisers said:

Often people referred to people in the group, not to what the Prof said – you remember what Asher said in the group because you are interacting with him as an ordinary person. . . . You needed to create more time for us to engage with each other based on what Prof says, but not give Prof too much time.²⁶

We attempted to construct a classroom that paid as much attention to building relationships between people in an inherited hierarchical environment, as we did to the content of the history we were presenting. This we tried to do through using pedagogical methods that decentred the expert where all participants interact with each other. For many participants, many of whom had never been exposed to popular education, KYC was an introduction to a different type of classroom for which there was an urgency and hunger. It was an attempt at an alternative

education process that responded to some of the urgent questions raised by the student movement. This was particularly evident when people spoke about the human and historical interaction available through the bingo activity:

The bingo session makes you believe that another way is possible. It does many things – you have fun with difficult content. You can spend all morning not getting the answer right – the point is to find a different way to getting the answer. . . . It made you think about accessing information differently. . . . [You] realise the person you think has knowledge doesn't. You think 'oh, ok!' It breaks down barriers and hierarchies. For me the bingo was great, it was the highlight.²⁷

If you give participants the space and encouragement to engage and interact with each other, it is possible that they will take the space and create it in their own way. Many participants spoke about how they shared both the methods and the content of what they had learnt about in KYC sessions with friends or to structure their own classrooms/educational spaces in different ways. The more space given to interactive activities, the more it becomes possible to draw on and draw out the diverse resources of a mixed group rather than allowing the dominant hierarchies of knowledge creation and dissemination to silence and marginalise.

Production and planning

There was a balance between a space that is held and predefined and is by definition open, responsive. I was always impressed with all the thought that had been put into each aspect of it. For example, the way we broke into groups by song. It was so fun. And someone had taken the time to print out the names of the songs for everyone to take one. It was small things that put a structure in place . . . that allowed for the thing to flow because there seemed to be a plan and contingency plan and materials. The space was held. I hope I carry that through into other things – where you want open things, you put careful thought into it beforehand. . . . It's important to be real about what it takes and goes into it.²⁸

This quote speaks to probably the best instances of when the planning and preparation for a session paid off and went well. As the UCT student activist noticed, a lot of work went into planning the sessions, selecting content, and producing the materials. In this section, we reflect on the intertwined and mutually constitutive processes of developing material and planning the sessions pedagogically.

While there is a growing literature and many resources online, especially compared to when KYC was first initiated in Cape Town in the 1980s, we found a significant lack of historically rigorous and critical, up-to-date, intellectually interesting, and accessible materials. One of the most rigorous and accessible sources that we used was a series of unpublished African history chapters that were developed by Neville Alexander for KYC in the 1980s, of which Shamil Jeppie still had copies. We had ongoing conversations with the larger KYC team about whether these and other sources produced in that period were appropriate to

use now and what that meant about African history writers/writing today. Because of the lack of readily useable materials, a large part of our time was dedicated to producing our own content.

Regarding the lack of ready-to-use materials, there are very few people in the academy who are interested in, and feel capable and responsible for producing *and teaching* educational content that is rigorous, interesting, politically engaged, and accessible. Development of this type of material requires both political commitment and time to creatively work against the conventional compartmentalisation of these necessary components. In this context of limited resources and personnel that 'ticked all the boxes', we had to take bits of this and bits of that – an image from a website, a chapter from a book, a cue card write-up from willing graduate students, a video found on YouTube, a slide from a professor's PowerPoint, and so on. Our materials reflected a process of collecting and carefully selecting content for each session.

As part of this process of collecting, before the course started, Asher was employed for about three months to do curriculum development work. He was tasked with doing broad, general research on African history, particularly looking for texts, films, and other materials that might be useful in running sessions that explored the eight themes from the course outline. Along the way, among other gems, he found Mahmood Mamdani's curriculum, *Problematising Africa*, which was very helpful as a preliminary guide to a number of the topics that we explored in KYC.²⁹ Following this initial process of selective collecting, from August onwards, we spent about ten days preparing each session. We would meet and brainstorm a possible approach to the theme, an entry point to its exploration, and we'd identify and highlight key issues. We would meet several times with potential speakers, plot out a possible session plan, and we would then think about how to transform the content and the questions it raised into interactive games, prepare readings for the coursepack, and write an introductory essay – a conceptual roadmap to our collective historical journey. We aimed to frame each chapter of history in conversation with a set of contemporary issues and debates about relations of power in studying and writing history. A lot of time went into thinking about how to share or present some of the details and depth of this historical knowledge (which tends to be stored in libraries, people's offices, and professors' papers at universities).³⁰

Importantly, this work to produce materials was not done separately from the session planning work. This was essential to building the bridge we wanted to cross, and in fact, the course benefited from this approach of developing the major pieces of the programme in conversation with each other. The content and the pedagogy continually influenced and constituted each other. Sometimes we first thought of an activity we wanted to use because of how it might shake up the gendered, generational, linguistic, or race dynamics of the classroom. Then, second, we thought of content that would be good for that activity in the broader theme of the session. On other occasions we had content and needed to figure out how to present it, a way to put it into conversation that would relate the content to people's own contexts. In all these senses it becomes difficult to speak separately about content/curriculum and pedagogy, because at all points in the planning process and in the sessions they existed and evolved together. This process was key

because it put the past – the curriculum content – into a particularised context and conversation in the present.

Building relationships, community, and the future

For us, radical collaborative history education is about understanding the present through critical engagement with the past such that we are able to act in and on the world transformatively in order to imagine and build a different future. Part of any radical project, and part of building a different future, involves building relationships, collectives, and communities in the present.³¹ In our context, we think that means building different communities to those of the racist, segregated, historically traumatised city of Cape Town. In this final section, we discuss African history in the contemporary context of Cape Town and why we think African history is a useful space from which to reimagine ourselves, our relationships to the rest of the continent, and from which to build communities.

In reflecting on the 1980s, from a South African context where ‘Africa’ was made invisible, Karen Press said that even just ‘to say “know your continent” was revolutionary’.³² Thirty years later, the most consistent, almost ubiquitous responses of youth who participated in *Know Your Continent* workshops were: ‘I can’t believe we don’t know about this history!’, ‘why don’t we know this history?; it’s so important!’, and ‘wow, this really showed me how much I don’t know about African history.’ These responses come from a context in which Africa, on its own terms, as a unit of serious intellectual inquiry is not frequently encountered within mainstream education at any level. At Claremont High – where some of the KYC participants go to school – history as a subject is not an option after grade 9. At other high schools, where history is offered, Africa is largely invisible in the curriculum, and, where visible, it is largely taught as an appendage to European history, through processes like colonialism or the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The curriculum, which is often reduced, as students repeatedly told us, to ‘Hitler and Mandela’, is mostly made up of European history and South African history which are taught in complete isolation to that of the rest of the continent.

This absence of Africa is both a product and a cause of South African exceptionalism – the ideological perspective that South Africa is somehow exceptionally different to other countries on the continent and in the world (Mamdani, 1998). This form of ignorance and conservatism permeates multiple levels of society and manifests itself in many different ways. We understand this to be intimately linked to the ways we think about ourselves as people, as well as how we understand South Africa, the rest of the continent and how we relate to it. A troubled and indeed tragic exposition of these fraught relationships is a pervasive ‘xenophobic/afrophobic’ sentiment which has periodically erupted in violent attacks targeted at people who are assumed to be non-South African Africans.³³ We understand some of the causes of this exceptionalism to be an ahistorical South African consciousness – built on an erasure of deeply intertwined histories of what we now call ‘South Africa’ and the rest of the region and continent. This is the reality of the situation: an invisibility of Africa in relation to an intellectual isolation of South Africa. A Pan-Africanist approach to African history has been key to our orientation to the histories.

Part of what we attempted to show was that from the range of contacts before conquests – trade routes and the movement of ideas, materials, and people; and from systems of slavery and colonial-forced labour migration; from anti-colonial liberation struggle solidarities – the current physical and intellectual borders between African people are new, imposed, and require, amongst other things, limited and guarded versions of history to justify/maintain. Responding to this, there is an urgent need to revisit these historical relationships, to reimagine and build new ones in the present.

A pedagogy of relationship building was as important as designing the materials and educational methods for these sessions. This is often subsumed, undermined, and undervalued under ‘administration’ or ‘logistics’ within the university. Shifting these dynamics requires prioritisation. Because we were working with people and places beyond UCT’s campus, KYC required a lot of ‘logistics’ and ‘administration’. It required care. Crossing social, historic, and geographic boundaries in Cape Town is not just a question of logistics which is why we approached this as relationship-building. Contacts with all of the constituencies that formed the core group all came through links and relationships that we had established through prior organising and education work around Cape Town and through RMF on campus. We built on and maintained these through KYC, and they were essential to the more logistical aspects – such as ensuring that there was transport each week for those who needed it, but also, to how the sessions were facilitated and how they felt. An EE organiser reflected on the change in KYC after Asher and Akosua went to check in with them a few weeks into the course: ‘After the first feedback we said the words are too academic and bombastic and [you are] lost and bored and checking Facebook – but after that session things changed, it was light’.³⁴ Because we understood these relationships as important in the context of the collective project, we made plans to visit participants, hear about their experience of the space, and then, because we were the same people producing and facilitating the sessions, we were directly able to take their feedback on board and adjust our pedagogical practice immediately.

This is an approach to pedagogy that thinks and practices it as something that not only structures the classroom but also informs, holds together, and, ultimately, is the whole educational process. It is a pedagogy that has people and the relationships between them at its centre. This allowed us to improvise answers to the challenging questions posed by the task of doing radical work with/in the university. If we can, in a history classroom, challenge the layers of hierarchy and alienation – from the past, from ourselves, and from each other – perhaps we can create a space for a different kind of relating to each other, a different kind of community, and collectively imagine and build the future based on clues from the past.

Notes

- 1 HUMA is a social science research unit based at UCT. It was the primary funder of KYC, the other being the Department of Historical Studies.
- 2 Equal Education is an NGO supporting ‘a movement of learners, parents, teachers and community members working for quality and equality in South African education, through analysis and activism’. <https://equaleducation.org.za> (Accessed on 28 April 2017).

- 3 RhodesMustFail/#rhodesmustfall/RMF was a Black-led student movement based at the University of Cape Town which started in March 2015. The movement critiqued institutional racism and sexism and how these are manifest in the pedagogical project, curriculum, and day-to-day operation of the university. But crucially RMF also experimented with creating and curating different types of educational spaces to those of the University and invited supportive Black academics to come and share ideas and engage with students.
- 4 Leigh-Ann Naidoo. 2016. "Hallucinations." 15th Annual Ruth First Memorial Lecture, University of the Witwatersrand (17 August). Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-08-17-leigh-ann-naidoo-delivers-compelling-speech-at-ruth-first-memorial-lecture>. Also see Thuli Gamedze. 2015. "Azania house – intersectionality as a catalyst for black imagination." *The Johannesburg Salon* (July).
- 5 This chapter is a reflection on our own involvement in KYC in relationship to our aspirations towards radical collaborative African history education and does not claim to represent the views or experiences of everyone invested and involved in running this programme.
- 6 This chapter draws on our experience on the coordinating team, as well as interviews with Karen Press, Derrick Naidoo, Shamil Jeppie, Lance van Sittert, Zethu Matebeni, and focus group discussions with participants from Equal Education, Philippi High, Claremont High, and with UCT and RMF students.
- 7 Neville Alexander was a revolutionary and intellectual with a deep commitment to education in the service of struggle. He had, amongst other things, a radical approach to the university and he used its resources for education work outside the confines of the isolated, elite institution. In that vein he did a lot of important work, including setting up PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa) at UCT. His writings on the national question, language, and socialism are widely available, but less well known are his unpublished resources on African history. Brigitta Busch, Lucijan Busch and Karen Press (eds.) 2014. *Interviews with Neville Alexander: The Power of Languages Against the Language of Power*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press; Na-iem Doilie. 2015. *Dialogical Narrative: Reading Neville Alexander's Writings* (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria).
- 8 Karen Press in conversation with Asher Gamedze and Koni Benson, Salt River, Cape Town, 15 June 2016.
- 9 An in-depth and critical history of the people involved, the materials developed and the relationship of KYC to other African history and political organising work going on in and since the 1980s is beyond the scope of this chapter. For more context and debates involved in various popular and academic history initiatives like SACHED, Khanya College, and the History Workshop from this time, see Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool. 2017. *Unsettled History: Making South African Public Pasts*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press and Enver Motala, in this collection.
- 10 Karen Press in conversation with Asher Gamedze and Koni Benson, Salt River Cape Town, 15 June 2016.
- 11 Derrick Naidoo in conversation with Koni Benson and Akosua Koranteng, Lavender Hill, Cape Town, 29 Sept 2015.
- 12 Shamil Jeppie in conversation with Asher Gamedze and Koni Benson, University of Cape Town, 24 August 2016.
- 13 ILRIG is a political education organisation that grew out of an outreach initiative of activist academics in the Department of Sociology at UCT in the 1980s and continues to do popular education work with worker and activist organisations.
- 14 The last session in 2013, for example, was a 100-year anniversary reflection on the 1913 Land Act with community and farm worker activists.
- 15 2015. "Rhodes must fall writing and education subcommittees." *The Johannesburg Salon*, vol. 9 (July), special edition with guest editors. Available at: http://www.jwtc.org.za/resources/docs/salon-volume-9/FINAL_FINAL_Vol9_Book.pdf
- 16 Lance van Sittert in conversation with Koni Benson and Akosua Koranteng, 13 June 2016.
- 17 *Equal Education* is an education NGO. Its Community Leaders (CL's) joined KYC as part of their political education training for the work they do with equalisers (school students who are EE members) in their respective areas. Asher had been facilitating critical discussions around history and identity and consciousness at *Claremont High School* – a local public high school in the suburbs whose students mostly live in townships; the school has a curricular focus on mathematics and science. The *Claremont High* sessions came about after some of the students approached their supportive teacher Daniel Gray, a good friend of Asher, requesting a space to engage, initially, with the urgent issue of xenophobia in our communities. Some of these students joined the KYC group. A contingent of politically active and interested *Philippi High School* youth had been protesting to hold the Western Cape Education Department to account for the dire material conditions of their school where students have shipping containers for classrooms. They were also involved in a Current Affairs club with ILRIG (International Labour Research and Information Group), and had been making links with RMF—through these links many of the *Philippi* students joined KYC. The *Housing Assembly* is a grassroots organisation mobilising for land, water, and housing with whom Koni had worked with for years and some of the organisation's youth activists participated in KYC.
- 18 Above and beyond the 'resources of the university', a lot of the work that it took to make KYC work in the way we envisioned is based on political commitment which goes beyond any paid hours of work time as well as relationship building-skills that the university has no way of valuing/quantifying. And while difficult to quantify, but for some context as to what we are referring to, in the KYC process, the resources of the university included: money for 20 hours of paid work to one graduate student at a time for six months, libraries, photocopiers, printers, Internet, money for transport and catering, as well as individuals' labour/time/skills, be they of an 'academic' or 'administrative' nature.
- 19 For a similar conversation about past and current approaches to working against the grain of university institutional hierarchies, see Robin Kelley. 2016. "The University is not an engine of social transformation: Activism is." *Forum: Black Study, Black Struggle in Boston Review*, 7 March. <https://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle>
- 20 For example, the session on slavery started with an activity where participants were asked to respond to the question 'do we live in a slave society?' by deciding where they wanted to go and stand at a point on a line which spanned from 'agree' to 'disagree'. After rounds of hearing why people chose their positions, people could change their mind, and move to another spot for a next round of discussion. We then played a round of human bingo where each participant was given a page of 16 blocks of questions and a cue card with details of one answer about a person/event from history. The object of the game is to go around the room finding out who/what each person is and be the first to have all 16 answers to shout 'bingo'. This session's cards included Toussaint Louverture, Jazz, Elmina, the Zanj Rebellion, Eric Williams, Middle Passage, Tweede Nuwe Jaar, Bisho Jarsa, Social Darwinism, Marcus Garvey, etc. Using multimedia in the debrief we went deeper and wider into the topic – using a video clip from musician Kyle Shepherd's South African History X with tracks from Xam premonition poems, slave labour tracks, and a Cape Flats lament, as a way of speaking about how the majority of Cape Town's population have histories related to slavery. We showed a clip from Ali Mazrui's documentary film series, on comparing the Trans Sahara/Indian Ocean and Trans Atlantic slave trades. We showed a controversial Cape Town Hip Hop video by Dookoom, with references to slavery and farmworkers' conditions, deep racism, sexism, and recent farmworker strikes. Friends did a Capocira demonstration, and there was an input from Lance van Sittert on what he teaches on histories of slavery in and from Africa between 1300–1900, including issues of representation and reparations, and slavery today. We then broke into small groups for digestion, discussion, and debate, providing guiding questions. The week of this session, UK Prime Minister Cameron responded to the call for reparations for the crimes of slavery by saying that

- Jamaica should 'move on'. Instead, it was revealed that he was planning to use foreign aid money to build a prison in Jamaica and transfer Jamaican-born UK 'criminals'.
- 21 Although we are all at various stages of learning other languages, none of us have the linguistic capacity to facilitate an education process, or produce content in languages other than English. Shamil is currently working on translating some of his lectures from KYC into isiXhosa.
 - 22 The game works like this: the facilitator recites a list of ten words in English, Afrikaans, or isiXhosa which everyone has to try to remember. Some of the words we used were: saamstaan (stand together), stumela (train), amandla (power), ekasi (location/township), bourgeoisie, ideology, and mlungu (white person). While the facilitator recites, no one can write. Once the facilitator is finished reciting, everyone has to try to write down as many of the words as they can remember. They then make groups of two and share notes to help each other with whatever they might be missing. Then they make groups of four and they have to translate each word into three languages and discuss its meaning.
 - 23 For example – Sun Ra, Sathima Bea Benjamin, Sir Vivian Richards, Erykah Badu, Tinariwen, etc.
 - 24 La'eeqa Mosam at UCT students conversation with Koni Benson and Akosua Koranteng, University of Cape Town, 14 June 2016.
 - 25 Equal Education Community Leaders in conversation with Koni Benson and Asher Gamedze, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 15 June 2016; Claremont High School student participants in conversation with Asher Gamedze, Claremont, Cape Town, 14 June 2016.
 - 26 Bayanda Mazwi at Equal Education Community Leaders conversation with Koni Benson and Asher Gamedze, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 15 June 2016.
 - 27 Zethu Matebeni in conversation with Koni Benson, University of Cape Town, 29 August 2016.
 - 28 Kyla Hazell, at UCT students conversation with Koni Benson and Akosua Koranteng, University of Cape Town, 14 June 2016.
 - 29 Mamdani put this course together when he was at UCT in the late 1990s, but was barred from teaching because it subverted the type of Eurocentric approach to studying Africa in which UCT was epistemologically rooted. See Mamdani. 1998. *Teaching Africa at the Post-Apartheid University of Cape Town: A Critical View of the 'Introduction to Africa' Core Course in the Social Science and Humanities Faculty's Foundation Semester*. Rondebosch: Centre for African Studies, UCT; and Mamdani. 1998. "Is African studies at UCT a new home for bantu education?" *Seminar on the Africa Core of the Foundation Course*, University of Cape Town, 22 April.
 - 30 For example, in one session we opened up conversations on the Nile Valley by using Black American cultural icons like Sun Ra to speak about Afrofuturism and the referencing of ancient Egypt to imagine a different kind of future for Black people. This allowed us to speak critically about a white supremacist world as well as both Eurocentric and Afrocentric constructions of the African past, how they have been mobilised in the present, and, from there, debate what value, if any, these approaches might hold for us at the southwestern tip of the continent, today. These conversations included debates about romanticisation of elements of African history and challenged participants to consider both the dynamics in the past and the implications for the present. Zethu Matebeni in conversation with Koni Benson, University of Cape Town, 29 August 2016.
 - 31 These aspirations are not new or unique to South Africa. See, for example, Robin Kelley. 2016. "The university is not an engine of social transformation: Activism is." *Boston Review*, 7 March.
 - 32 Karen Press in conversation with Asher Gamedze and Koni Benson, Salt River, Cape Town, 15 June 2016.
 - 33 Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe and Eric Worby. 2008. *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
 - 34 Sindisa Monokali at Equal Education Community Leaders in conversation with Koni Benson and Asher Gamedze, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 15 June 2016.

Part III

Lessons from liberatory and anti-imperialist struggles