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Paradoxes of Solidarity: Democracy and Colonial Legacies in Swedish Popular Education

Magnus Dahlstedt and Henrik Nordvall

Over the years, there have been several attempts to spread the “Swedish model” of popular education, i.e. study circles and folk high schools, to countries in other parts of the world. In this article, we analyze the large-scale project of establishing Folk Development Colleges (FDCs) in Tanzania in the 1970s and 1980s, by emphasizing the ways in which Swedish popular educators have described the FDC project. Theoretically, the article is based on a postcolonial framework, highlighting the continuing importance of the legacies of colonialism in today’s society. One of the main conclusions in the article is that in the process of “exporting” the idea of popular education to other parts of the world, there is an on-going formation of national self-images in contrast to images of the Other, where there is a constant risk of reproducing ideas from a colonial past.

Keywords: *popular education; post-colonial theory; folk high schools; Sweden; Tanzania; Folk Development Colleges*

The purpose of this article is to discuss adult education in the context of international solidarity work and to critically analyze the ways in which the notion of adult education may contribute to the formation of national self-images influenced by the legacies of colonialism. Several key concepts and ideas in the field of adult education, as well as in philosophy of education in general, have been racialized, i.e. based on an unspoken norm of whiteness and a range of Eurocentric views (Abdi, 2008; Brookfield, 2003; Kapoor, 2009). As Brookfield (2003) underscores, these assumptions have rarely been problematized in research on popular and adult education. Our intention in the following article is to contribute to such problematization by analyzing the establishment of Folk Development Colleges in Tanzania, a large-scale attempt to disseminate ideas of Swedish adult education through interventions of foreign aid (Rogers, 2000), as described by Swedish popular educators.

When it comes to adult education, Sweden is in several respects quite unique compared to many other countries, in terms of volume as well as form, especially when it comes to adult education in civil society. Most significant are the study circles and folk high schools, often referred to as *folkbildning* in Swedish (roughly translated as “popular education”), which receive substantial state subsidies and involve a large part of the population in Sweden.

In Sweden, folk high schools have historically been an alternative educational pathway for groups who have not gained access to universities and other established educational institutions.

The pedagogy developed at the folk high schools is characterized by horizontal relationships between teachers and students. In Sweden, and even more so in its home country Denmark, the school form has had an identity of being an alternative to the established educational system, focusing on competition and formal merits (Arvidson, 1989; Canfield, 1965).

This form of adult education has historically been emphasized as an important force in the emergence of democracy in Sweden, often characterized by its strong popular movements and a relatively extensive welfare state (Micheletti, 1995). During the last century, democracy and popular education became more or less key elements of the Swedish self-image. According to this self-image, Sweden stands out as a democratic role model for other countries (Ehn et al., 1993). According to the national self-image, vigorous popular movements are one of the factors that make Sweden unique.¹

Such national self-images are not only reproduced within Swedish borders, however, they are also distributed outside Swedish borders. In Sweden and among Swedish popular movements, there has long been a great willingness to share “Swedish experiences” with countries in other parts of the world. In this effort, popular education has played an important role through the years.

In this article, our aim is to analyze the formation of national self-images vis-à-vis images of the Others in the process of “exporting” the idea of “Swedish popular education” to other parts of the world. With a post-colonial approach as theoretical point of departure, the article draws attention to the risk of reproducing a colonial legacy with such an “export”. Empirically, the article focuses on how Swedish popular educators describe the process of establishing and supporting the Folk Development Colleges (FDCs) in Tanzania, inspired by the folk high school in its Swedish version.

Our ambition in the following article is not to analyze the multifaceted activities in the establishment of FDCs in Tanzania. The actual work carried out in establishing and supporting the FDCs, which started in the latter part of the 1970s, has been described in previous literature (see e.g. Albinsson et al., 2000; Rogers 2000). The starting point for our analysis is, rather, the way in which Swedish popular educators describe and interpret the various processes and relationships in this work.

The article is organized as follows: we start by presenting the post-colonial framework used in our analysis. After that, we describe the empirical material that the article draws on. This is followed by a brief historical background of the FDCs. Thereafter, we present the main findings of the study. Finally, we discuss some of the paradoxes in international solidarity work, in adult education and in general.

Theoretical perspective

Folkbildning – or popular education – is a contested concept (see Bergstedt & Larsson, 1995; Laginder & Landström, 2005). When it was first coined, during the 19th Century, the linguistic structure of the concept, consisting of *folk* (people) and *bildning* (education), could be seen as revolutionary in the sense that it put together two supposed opposites. Education had been seen as a privilege for the established classes, which by definition was not the same thing as the people, in the sense of the broad masses (Larsson, 1995). What is usually referred to as the first initiatives of popular education, however, were not at all intended to bring about revolutionary social change. During the second half of the 19th Century, so-called social pacifist popular educators argued that popular education among the broad masses was a way of preventing the rise of rebellions and the attraction of socialist ideas (Skoglund, 1991). With the rise of the labor, Salvationist and temperance movements, another notion of popular movements emerged, emphasizing the need to strengthen the movement by training its leaders and disseminating its culture. It is primarily popular education of this kind, aiming at societal change, which has been associated with Swedish democracy (Arvidson, 1989; Larsson, 2001).

One of the critical questions raised is what actually constitutes “the popular” or “the people” to be educated. An important theoretical point of departure here is the idea that the category of people is not given but rather defined in an ongoing struggle over meaning, reflecting as well as affecting power relations and hierarchies in society (Hall, 1981). Critically analyzing categories such as “the people”, with its historical connections with notions of race, ethnicity and nation in the shadow of colonialism, has been an important challenge for the wide range of researchers working in the field of *post-colonial theory*. This theoretical approach has a great potential to make important contributions to research on popular education, democracy, and social change, not least by highlighting issues of global relations of power and the construction of identity on the basis of inclusion and exclusion (cf. Brookfield, 2003; Nordvall, 2005; Osman, 1999).

Post-colonial researchers have argued that today’s society is still influenced by the history of colonialism (see e.g. Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Gilroy, 2005). This is also true in the case of contemporary Sweden. “Sweden was never a colonial power, but the colonial mentality is very much present in the Swedish history of ideas” (Paulina de los Reyes et al., 2002, p. 18). In the post-colonial tradition, there is a desire to closely analyze the complex chain of processes and social relations, structural conditions and lines of thought that have taken shape in the wake of colonialism. The post-colonial approach draws attention to Eurocentric features in the thinking about Enlightenment and modernity, development and democracy, of which Sweden

has also long been a part (de los Reyes et al., 2002; Pred, 2000).

Departing from such a critical approach, a number of post-colonial scholars have highlighted how the image of the West as enlightened and modern was based – and continues to be based – on descriptions of “alien” continents and peoples as outdated, mystical and traditional (Mohanty, 2003; Said, 1979, 1993). Race, culture, ethnicity, nation and religion are some of the markers of identity used in order to make distinctions between Us and Them. The relationship between “the West and the Rest” is described consistently by the use of binary oppositions (Hall, 1992), where Europe and the West is associated with culture and reason, while Africans, Orientals and other peoples, on the peripheries of the world, are associated with nature and emotionality. In these dichotomies, one side appears to be more desirable – or at least more enlightened – than the other (Said, 1979, 1993).

In the public imagination in the West, Africa has long been described as different and under-developed. This has helped to legitimize the idea of the “white man’s burden”, the idea of Westerners’ responsibility to “bring[ing] light to the dark places and peoples of this world by acts of will and deployments of power” (Said, 1993, p. 33). However, the representation of Africa as being at the earliest stage of development has not only been used to underline the barbarity and chaos of the continent. The representation of Africa is, however, not one-dimensional. At the same time, the African Others have been portrayed as bearers of characteristics sometimes highlighted as desirable and lust-filled in the West. In time, “the African” has come to be represented as natural, spontaneous and unspoiled. However, both the exoticism and the explicit condemnation of the Others help to reinforce the image of Them as fundamentally different from Us (Julien & Mercer, 1996; Said, 1993).

Swedish popular movements, as well as Swedish popular education, emerged and developed in the context of Western modernity and the tradition of the Enlightenment. Although the roots of the various movements go far beyond Swedish borders, they soon, step by step, become carriers and administrators of what was seen as specifically national Swedish values, ideals and traditions (Edquist, 2001; Lindborg, 2001). As in the case of a number of popular movements in Sweden, a nationally rooted self-image, where the popular education is primarily understood as something “typically Swedish”, has emerged historically in popular education. In the self-image of popular education, *people*, *democracy* and *nation* were woven into a natural trinity. With the logic that a democratic spirit can be a fundamental feature of a certain “people”, it follows that other “people” can be fundamentally undemocratic. Democracy thus becomes a marker that somehow distinguishes “us Swedes” from certain “other people” (Edquist, 2001; Nordvall, 2005).

With the interweaving of *people* and *popular education*, *nation* and *democracy*, “educated” and

“uneducated people” tend to appear as each other’s absolute opposites. In order for Them to be able to “lift themselves” to Our previous “level”, they need – in short – to undergo a radical transformation. This means that the idea of popular education may in some sense be understood as part of a broader colonial project (cf. Jonsson, 2007). According to several post-colonial scholars, the colonial legacy does not belong to the past. Rather, the echo from a colonial past can be heard well into our own times (Gilroy, 2005; Said, 1993). A number of studies also show how movements engaged in solidarity work around the world are still strongly shaped by the global divisions and inequalities developed in the wake of colonial projects. The colonial legacy can be identified, for instance, in the striving for global solidarity in foreign aid (Eriksson Baaz, 2005), the women’s movement (Mohanty, 2003) and the trade union movement (Sjölander, 2005), as well as in adult and popular education (Brookfield, 2003; Nordvall, 2005; Osman, 1999). A post-colonial approach helps draw attention to the fact that also a well-meaning defense of “democratic values” can rest on colonial ideas, which even today too often tend to be uncritically taken for granted (Wickens & Sandlin, 2007; Begaye, 2008). In studies using this kind approach, it is therefore important to critically examine the assumptions and underlying lines of thought glimpsed in the pictures and narratives also used in our own thinking about people, democracy and popular education.

Research methodology

The empirical material on which this study is based consists of documents from the voluntary association Karibu (which means “welcome” in Kiswahili), a Swedish “friend association” for the Folk Development Colleges, formed in 1982. In particular, the article draws on material from the *Karibu Kontakt*, the official member Journal published by the association. The project to establish the FDCs represents the most large-scale attempt to disseminate Swedish popular education abroad. In other words, this project constitutes a reasonable empirical basis for studying the research problem addressed in this article. Karibu was an important actor in the process of developing the extensive exchanges between folk high schools in Sweden and FDCs in Tanzania. As a result of Karibu’s efforts, a number of schools across Sweden are still involved in formalized friend relations with Tanzanian FDCs.

When it comes to the FDCs, Karibu is by no means the only link between Tanzania and Sweden. For example, Linköping University, the Swedish Association of Folk High School Teachers and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency have all been highly involved in the FDC project (Albinsson et al., 2000; Rogers, 2000). However, within the

framework of this article, it is particularly interesting to study Karibu in greater detail, as one of the main aims of the association has been to disseminate knowledge in Sweden about the FDCs.

In this study, we have analyzed material from the first ten years of the association, when a network of friend-school relations was established and knowledge about the FDCs was introduced in the Swedish context. The material analyzed consists of thirteen issues of the journal *Karibu Kontakt*, published between 1982 and 1992, covering altogether 210 A4 pages of text (mainly articles, news items and editorials). The authors are generally members of the board and members who have visited Tanzania. In addition, mass correspondence to members, activity reports and information material have been taken into account. The material is available in the collection of documents found in the Karibu archive.

In accordance with a theoretically informed methodology (cf. Willis & Trondman, 2002), the empirical material has been read and interpreted on the basis of the post-colonial framework presented above. Inspired by the ‘decolonizing’ approach developed for instance by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2008), the aim of the analysis has been to problematize taken for granted assumptions about Swedish national identity and its relation to the Tanzanian ‘other’, as a way to challenge ‘hegemonic structures that have traditionally and historically neglected and impeded the intellectual, social and cultural contributions of African... knowledge’ (Dillard, 2008, p. 278). Obviously, other theoretical perspectives may shed light on other aspects in the material. Accordingly, we do not claim to present the only possible or definitive interpretation. Based on the theoretical perspective presented, the following questions have guided our analysis of the material. What characteristics are attributed to the Swedish popular educators and their Tanzanian partners? How is the relationship between Swedes and Tanzanians described in the FDC project? In this context, how are binary oppositions, such as nature and culture, reason and emotion, modern and traditional, construed? The results of our analysis are presented together with a number of examples (translated from Swedish by the authors) illustrating central patterns and lines of thought in the material.

The background: Folk Development Colleges

Before going into greater detail about the results of our investigation of how self-images of Swedish popular education/Swedish popular educators and images of the Other are constructed in the material from the Karibu association, we first need to say something about the background of the establishment of Folk Development Colleges in Tanzania.

Between 1975 and 1980, 51 FDCs were established in Tanzania, as a result of a large-scale project in Swedish foreign aid policy. Since then, a few more have been established. Today, there

are a total of 58 FDCs. The model for these colleges was initially the Swedish folk high school, and they have sometimes been called “the Tanzanian folk high schools”. In addition to financial support to the colleges, Sweden assisted with a number of counselors with a background in Swedish popular education, who helped to design and establish the FDCs.

The country of Tanganyika, which later, together with Zanzibar, formed Tanzania in 1961, had gained its independence from colonial Britain. In the building of the new state, Julius Nyerere, President and leader of the ruling party Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), launched a Tanzanian version of socialism (*ujamaa*), where adult education played an important role. Nyerere, who had good personal contacts with Swedish Prime Ministers Olof Palme and Tage Erlander, was familiar with Swedish popular education and expressed an ideological affinity with Swedish Social Democracy. These ideological and personal connections with Swedish Social Democracy were an important reason for Sweden’s extensive foreign and development aid to Tanzania, where FDCs was a large part (Rogers, 2000; Sellström, 1999).

What has often been highlighted as the starting point for the establishment of FDCs is a visit to Sweden in 1971 by a delegation from the Tanzanian Ministry of Education in order to more closely examine Swedish adult education. This visit was followed by a formal request by the Tanzanian government for Swedish assistance in the construction of one hundred schools in Tanzania based on the folk high school. Within a short period of time around half of these schools were set up with economic as well as educational and consultative support from Sweden.

However, relations between Tanzania and the Nordic countries go even further back in time. Swedish missionaries had worked in Tanzania long before independence. In an early study of the international spread of folk high school ideas, Jindra Kulich (1964) mentions Kivukoni College, an important training institution for the TANU Party, as an example of schools influenced by the Nordic folk high schools. The entire FDC project was also preceded by significant Swedish foreign aid activities in Tanzania and a striking presence of Swedish adult educators in the country. But it is not until after Sweden had received an official request for special aid for building folk high school-like institutions from the Tanzanian government that the establishment of FDCs took off (Albinson et al., 2002; Rogers, 2000; Sellström, 1999; Vestlund, 1998). In addition to financial and educational support on the ground in Tanzania, headmasters and teachers have on several occasions attended courses on popular education in Sweden. The support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency provided directly to the FDCs ended in 1996 (Rogers, 2000). But FDCs are still supported by cooperation of various kinds between schools in both countries and the Swedish Union of Folk High School Teachers – SFHL (SFHL, 2005).

There was thus a request from the political leadership in Tanzania, which had acquired a positive image of folk high schools and popular education in Sweden, for Swedish assistance in establishing educational institutions for adults in Tanzania. This is fully in line with the aspirations expressed in the *ujamaa* ideology of Nyerere and the TANU Party as well as the large investment in adult education in Tanzania. We can also note that this request was preceded by a long period of Swedish presence in and assistance to Tanzania, and some “missionizing” for Swedish popular education.

There was early a clear interest among popular educators and foreign aid workers from Sweden in disseminating the idea of folk high schools. This determination, often rooted in a strong democratic pathos and commitment to issues of solidarity (see e.g. Albinson et al., 2002), will be problematized in the following subsections.

The challenge: educating autonomous Tanzanian democrats

The interest among Europeans in contributing to the “civilization” of people and countries, considered to be in certain respects “underdeveloped”, has a long history. For most popular educators this historical legacy, closely associated with the colonial project, is now regarded as both oppressive and disgraceful. Hence, the ambition among Nordic popular educators has been, rather, to fight colonial relations and fantasies. Here, popular education has been seen as an important force in the process of decolonization, making it possible, for instance, for the former colonies to “reclaim” their “own” culture and language.

The explicit anti-colonial ambition is evident also in the case of FDCs in Tanzania. In recent decades, there has been an ongoing discussion about the necessity of critical awareness of the history of colonialism in the establishment of the FDCs. For example, in the mid-1980s, Johan Norbeck (1985), one of the pioneers in the FDC project, talked about the risk of spreading popular education through foreign aid turning into a neo-colonial project. When the history of the FDCs is described in the material from Karibu, we can also see that anti-colonial ambitions are clearly stressed.

Tanzania wanted to liberate themselves from the educational traditions of the colonial powers and in the Swedish folk high schools they could see a form of adult education pretty much matching the ambitions of the young State. Folk Development Colleges are inspired by the folk high school – but they are no copies. FDC has been developed according to Tanzania’s own conditions and needs (Mossige-Norheim, 1986, p. 2).

The quotation above, describing the historical background of the FDCs, clearly highlights the anti-colonial aspirations among the popular educators involved in the FDC project. It is clearly

stressed that the schools are designed independently by the Tanzanians and on their own terms. However, the accounts of the Swedish popular educators about their relationship with the FDCs are somewhat contradictory. Although it is maintained that the schools *should* be designed according to local preferences, and that it is not a matter of creating a copy of the Swedish folk high schools, a number of issues repeatedly reported concern a serious lack of “folk high school-likeness” at the FDCs. The kind of problems reported in the material are most often related to the presence of authoritarian structures in the educational institutions, which is claimed to make the development of a folk high school ideology, according to the “Swedish model”, very difficult. In order to deal with these difficulties, emphasis is placed on the importance of training teachers and headmasters in Tanzania.

For the folk high school idea to have a reasonable opportunity to develop, the teacher recruitment and training of teachers is of fundamental importance (Vestlund, 1991, p. 2).

This kind of training has been organized continuously since the establishment of FDCs, in Tanzania as well as in Sweden. These efforts are continuously reported in both the journal *Karibu Kontakt* and information material from the association.

The most important for the development of the FDC:s in a “folk high school-like” direction is the contacts with the headmasters and teachers. Fortunately, there is now a large number, perhaps 70-80, who has been in Sweden and is beginning to understand the idea behind the folk high schools (Vestlund, 1991, p. 4).

Throughout the material, the descriptions of the relationships between Sweden and Tanzania are based on the assumption that there is *one* folk high school idea, which can be *understood* – and *misunderstood*. It was thus important that teachers and principals should learn how a folk high school works, which was encouraged through training and visits to folk high schools in Sweden. According to this line of argument, knowledge – about the idea behind the folk high school, about its practice and history – would function as a kind of marker of identity, as a basis for distinguishing Us from Them. According to the line of reasoning found in the material, there seems to be two parties: the Swedes possessing the desirable folk high school knowledge and *teaching* it, and the Tanzanians who do not have this knowledge – and are consequently in need of *learning* it.

The time machine – democracy, popular education and (under) development

The desire to disseminate an understanding of how Swedish folk high schools work, which is highly visible in the material, can also be linked to notions of modernity and development, which several post-colonial scholars have highlighted as key coordinates in a colonial world view (Mignolo, 1999; Young, 2001). Here, we can see a parallel with a study by Kerstin Wallin (2000) of trade union foreign aid activities in Chile, involving among other things the introduction of study circles in Chilean trade unions. The solidarity work carried out by the Swedish trade unionists was most often informed by the idea, Wallin writes, “that the comrades in the developing countries face problems similar to those in Sweden at the turn of the century: a need of knowledge so large that it can not be satisfied within the existing education system, with limited resources and generally difficult working conditions” (p. 33). Thus, the suggested “solution” to the problems facing the Chilean trade union movement was to follow the “Swedish example”, where popular education was seen as one of the most important features.

Similar ideas about modernity, development and the exchange of experience can be found in literature discussing the importance of folk high schools as well as adult education in general in so-called developing countries (see e.g. Kulich, 1964; Simon, 1989; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). This chain of arguments is also present in the material from Karibu. The following quotation, taken from the journal *Karibu Kontakt*, is a telling example of a way of describing Us and Them in terms of different “levels” of development.

Being at a Folk High School in Tanzania gave a sense of having access to a time machine. Despite the different conditions, it must indeed have been like this here, when the Swedish Folk High Schools were established (Kihlén, 1984, p. 14).

They thus are considered to be in the same situation as Sweden was a century ago. Following this line of thought, it is imagined that if folk high schools functioned as a road to democracy and prosperity for Us, they could also provide a way forward for Them. Using the metaphor “time machine”, learning and democratic education is described as an *evolutionary process*, whereby the Other is explicitly transferred to another time (cf. Dahlstedt, 2009). The idea of a parallel between Our history and Their present time was wide-spread in the Swedish and Danish folk high school debate during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (cf. Bugge, 2001; Kulich, 1964). In the Karibu material, this is visible for instance through reports from events such as the 1980 conference in Bakkerne (Denmark) about “the Possible Use of the Nordic Folk High School Idea in the Developing Countries”. According to a report in *Karibu Kontakt*, the conference concluded that

there were certain similarities between the situation in the Developing countries of today, and the situation in the Nordic countries of the past, in the first half Century in the life of the folk high schools (*Karibu Kontakt*, 1983, p. 21).

There are further indications on the presence of this evolutionary idea also among other Swedes in the process of spreading the Folk high school idea to Tanzania. One of the Swedish pioneers behind the FDCs, Johan Norbeck, has made self-critical remarks about his own motives and desires in his initial work:

I was burning with a fervour to spread the Swedish folk education ideas, which, I had no doubts, would contribute a great deal to accelerating the development efforts of the Tanzanian people. If the Tanzanians had the opportunity of hearing about the birth of the Swedish folk movements and how people at the grassroots level in Sweden took education into their own hands and became a strong force in the development of the Swedish society, if they could only have this opportunity, they would surely benefit much (Norbeck, 1996, p. 118).

This way of reasoning is based on the same kind of linear notion which has long dominated the public debate as well as research on the Third World. In recent decades, this notion of development has increasingly been questioned as both simplified and Eurocentric, not least by post-colonial scholars (Mignolo, 1999; Mohanty, 2005). According to these scholars, the linear notion of development is based on the idea that it is the historical development of Europe that constitutes the ideal model for how the development of society is to be understood generally. This particular idea does not take into account the various relations of power and dependencies that create conditions for countries in contemporary Africa dominated by agricultural production that differ from the conditions for agricultural communities in Europe during the 19th century. The linear notion of development creates an illusion that Europe and large parts of Africa exist in two completely different worlds and eras, when they are in fact part of the same global world system, in the same historical era, where the economic and political subordination of one party is directly related to the dominance of the other party (cf. Wallerstein, 2004).

The idea that We can help Them to follow our path in the development of democracy and prosperity, by introducing the notion of popular education, is also based on another assumption. It presupposes that there exists among Swedish popular educators some kind of inherited knowledge, which is possible to teach, of how folk high schools can contribute to social development and democracy in an environment like that of the agricultural society in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although there may in fact exist an idea that folk high schools *have had* such a historic role among many Swedish popular educators, of course none of them here and

now have this kind of practical experience or knowledge. It is, rather, the case of a self-image based on a particular interpretation of history, according to contemporary ideas, interests and needs. Obviously, the ideas about ways of organizing folk high schools that dominated during the period studied in this article do not necessarily have much to do with the way in which folk high schools were actually organized in Sweden in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

The dialogue: the metaphor of mutual learning

Although most of the descriptions of the exchange between Swedes and Tanzanians in the material seems to be based on the assumption that We (the Swedes) know something They (the Tanzanians) might benefit from, it is repeatedly emphasized in the material that the relationship between the two parties has to be characterized by *equal* and *mutual learning*. In the following quotation from the Journal *Karibu Kontakt* we can see an illustrative example of this idea.

When we build and develop a good contact between the FDC:s in Tanzania and the Swedish FHS, we must remember that this contact shall be on equal level, i.e. we must be aware that it is not only we who have something to give them, we also have much to learn from them (*Karibu Kontakt*, 1985, p. 23).

The parties are described as equal, but fundamentally different. What, then, should be learnt from one another? As mentioned above, there is an explicit ambition in the FDC project that the Tanzanians should learn about Swedish popular education. However, what the Swedish popular educators should actually learn from the Tanzanians not always made clear. In the material there are glimpses of what it might be. The quotation below, also from *Karibu Kontakt*, gives some examples of what it might be.

Our friend-school-contacts are needed, and in particular the dialogue between Swedish and Tanzanian folk high schools is needed, to strengthen the Tanzanians in terms of discussions about democracy, participation, “folk high school-pedagogy”, etc. They need our solidarity, not primarily material things. It is our own commitment as popular educators they need to meet, all the enthusiasm that makes us tirelessly working for the ideals of popular education: democracy, social equality and gender equality, community, responsibility, solidarity. In the same way that we ourselves need to take part of the Tanzanians’ culture, warmth, pride and joy. We have much to learn from each other (Marcusdotter, 1992, p. 4).

In the quotation, we can see a self-image of Swedish popular education appearing, which contrasts with the Tanzanians and their imagined characteristics and assets. Swedish popular education is related to the pathos of “democracy”, “equality” and “responsibility” – historically associated with the white, enlightened, male European and his intellectual abilities. This is, in

turn, contrasted with the Tanzanians, who are associated with “warmth, pride and joy”, which are abilities that relate to more emotional abilities. In line with a chain of ideas resembling the kind of exoticism that post-colonial scholars have drawn attention to, the picture emerges of the natural and spontaneous Africans contrasted with the intellectual Europeans, pressured by their responsibility.

In other examples of what the Other is claimed to represent, images of spontaneous and natural joy or social skills are highlighted in a positive way in contrast to the more broody and rigidly organized Swede.

And probably many Tanzanians are a bit like social geniuses. No matter how much a group of Swedish colleges would have thought and planned, we would never be able to create a week like the one we received on Mamtukuna, so full of friendship, joy and an obvious concern. If only we could learn (Kihlén, 1984, p. 15).

Another proposal for what kind of learning the Tanzanians could offer the Swedish popular educators is disseminating knowledge about the situation in other parts of the world.

And let us not forget the importance that the Tanzanian guest lecturer at Nordic folk high schools may have among other things for the understanding of conditions in the third world! (*Karibu Kontakt*, 1982, p. 15)

Here, and elsewhere in the material from *Karibu*, the Tanzanians are described as representatives of the “third world”. They may, among other things, share their insights into and experiences of economic vulnerability with Us in the relatively prosperous part of the world. Referring to the post-colonial scholars Isaac Julien and Colin Mercer (1996), one could say that the Tanzanians bear the “burden of representation”. They not only have the *right* to speak, in a way they are *required* to speak, not for themselves, but as spokespersons, “ventriloquist[s] for an entire social category” (p. 454) – the “third world”. In the descriptions of the establishment of the FDCs, mutual and equal learning is repeatedly emphasized as a pedagogical ideal. However, the picture emerging in the material indicates the following logic: We teach Them popular education and democracy, while They teach Us social and emotional skills. In addition, They are in themselves living examples of under-development, which may be useful for education in folk high school courses in international relations. In other words, there is a tendency to construct the Tanzanians as a collective group, characterized by their emotionality, lack of economic assets and democratic skills. In contrast, the Swedish collective is imagined to be a collective characterized by its specific knowledge and democratic values and preparedness to help.

The description of Us and Them, and the self-images of Swedishness and Swedish popular education constructed in this relationship, is thus based on the principle that one party represents

the Enlightenment and what is intellectual, while the Other represents what is natural and emotional. This description very much resembles a Swedish national self-image, imagining the “Swedish people” as the vanguard of Modernity (Ehn et al., 1993). In a broader context, this also has similarities with the descriptions of the meeting between the “West and the Rest” problematized by post-colonial scholars.

Concluding remarks

With post-colonial theory as our point of departure, we have analyzed the way in which popular educators from Sweden have described the establishment of FDCs in Tanzania and the relationships between Swedish popular education and “the Tanzanian folk high schools”. The analysis in several respects points to a contradictory picture. The way in which the establishment of the FDCs, the relationships between the different parties and the learning that takes place between them described in the material clearly show, on the one hand, a strong anti-colonial desire among popular educators to break with the colonial heritage and to share the lessons learned as well as the experiences of practicing popular education in Sweden. On the other hand, there is a colonial legacy present in the description of the FDC project, visible in a series of ideas and notions of identity and belonging (what is seen as “Swedish” and “Tanzanian”), democracy and modernity (the “level of development”, “developed” versus “backward”). We can thus talk about a kind of *paradox of solidarity* in the FDC project. From a Swedish point of view, the ambition seems to be to share one’s lessons and experiences in order to “liberate” a former colonized “people” from the various hardships they have had to suffer. However, in the material, “liberation” is understood to mean that it is “We Swedes” who essentially define the conditions and set the framework for success and failure, based on specific “Swedish” premises and interpretations.

However, the issue of representations of Sweden and Swedes in relation to certain Others is not specific to the Swedish popular educators and the case of “the Tanzanian folk high schools”. It is more general in nature. In a way, it has to do with the formation of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) in the meeting with the Other in a broader sense. As we noted earlier, in this process “civilized people” have tended to associate themselves with Enlightenment and democratic ideals, which has been contrasted with the Others, uncivilized and foreign peoples on distant continents, but also on the “dark peripheries” of the host society (Sibley, 1995). Such notions are, often unconsciously, still present when we orient ourselves in the world. National stereotypes of the genuine “democratic Swedes” do not in any way belong solely to the past. In popular education, myths about Swedes as “the most curious, concerned and enlightened people”

(Swedish Adult Education Association, 2007) still belong to common sense, a characterization very much reminiscent of national mythologies of earlier times. The post-colonial approach applied in this article is fruitful when trying to critically reflect on how contemporary thinking may still retain colonial patterns, regardless of intentions.

Given this, the question is whether it is in such a context even possible to create relationships that are *not* characterized by colonial patterns. Exchanges between North and South, either cultural/ideological or economic, always bring to the fore the importance of global hierarchies still marked by a colonial past. This applies also to those democratic and emancipatory endeavors trying to transcend these global conditions (Eriksson Baaz, 2005). This does not mean, however, that such efforts are doomed to failure. Nor does it mean that it is possible to draw simple conclusions about the actual effects of the work carried out within the FDC project at different levels. In this article we have only focused on one, albeit important, aspect of a complex problem in work involving international solidarity, such as foreign aid or cooperation in the field of popular education. To further understand the significance of the FDCs, both for the formation of identity and wider social change, in both Sweden and Tanzania, additional knowledge and research including a wider range of voices and perspectives, capturing further nuances, is required. In research on adult and popular education there is still a lot to be done in studying the role and importance of FDCs in the local context, where attention is drawn to the complex connections between global, national and local processes – and where also the voices of the Others are heard.

Hence, further research on the importance of anti-colonial political efforts in Tanzania, parallel to the implementation of the FDCs, would be relevant for understanding the complexity of transferring emancipatory adult education ideals in a North – South direction. Although traces of colonial legacies may be found in the Swedish identity formation related to the development of FDCs, the FDC-project as a whole needs to be further investigated in relation to a social and historical context, if conclusion are to be drawn about its role in transforming and/or reproducing colonial structures. One important issue to be addressed in such an investigation is of course the active role of President Julius Nyerere in initiating the FCD-project, as mentioned initially in this article. In the light of the issues discussed in this article, there is every reason to believe that contemporary researchers as well as internationally engaged popular educators are still facing the same kind of challenge, i.e. both to further develop the understanding of the complex terrain of global solidarity work and to establish conditions for joint action that may contribute to a change in the prevailing global order.

Notes

¹ However, the Swedish origin of the study circle could be questioned. According to Bjerkaker (2006, p. 50) the study circle originally was an American idea, developed in New York during the 1870s.

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