# Solidarity:
# The history and future of Canadian BIPOC co-operation and co-operatives in context

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## Abstract

This paper is a reflection of my research and experiences over the course of my Masters of Environmental Studies degree, which culminated in my co-founding Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, an organization designed to educate about the co-operative model from an intersectionality lens specific to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour communities and to enable coalition building in the solidarity economy. Culturally diverse forms of co-operation are not recognized or understood well by the Canadian co-operative sector, which has led to a dominant model of co-operatives held up by and continuing to perpetuate colonial, heteropatriarchal constructs. This is problematic in the active erasure of BIPOC contributions to the co-operative sector, ignoring the diverse, rich cultural traditions of co-operation, and leaving out demographics of groups and individuals who may benefit from the co-op model.

My research was guided by the following questions: How do Canadian co-operators and co-op activists engage more diverse communities in the co-operative model and establish more equitable and inclusive co-ops? How does the co-op sector introduce tools and education to form co-ops for interested BIPOC co-operators? What is it about the Canadian co-operative model that has made it inaccessible to many BIPOC communities? Through my primary and secondary research via interviews, focus groups and a literature review I draw on what I have learned from various communities of Black and Indigenous co-operators, and engage with critical pedagogy, Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), and decolonial theory. I argue that this is a pivotal time to reassess the Canadian co-operative sector in making room for more diverse voices and action, strengthening the wider solidarity economy with co-operative action and bringing co-operative values to work led by BIPOC co-operators, youth, and allies.

The key findings of this research were that culturally diverse co-operation in Canada faces barriers of language, racism, and a lack of time, resources and trust. This paper is part of a portfolio which explores these themes and connects them to the broader body of work that explores co-operatives and the solidarity economy through an intersectional lens. This portfolio also includes a an appendix of partners building solidarity economy in Canada, a business plan outline for Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education and the framework for an upcoming workshop series analyzing the 7 Co-operative Principles using an anti-oppression lens, each intended to build on this reflection paper by creating practical tools for the co-operative sector.



Keywords: co-operative, intersectionality, culturally-diverse co-operation, Canadian co-operative model, decolonization

## Foreword

This paper fulfills the requirements of the MES Degree by demonstrating Graduate Degree level depth of knowledge and a deep level of comprehension of the diverse cultural context of co-operation as it relates to the Canadian co-operative sector. It highlights the ways in which the Canadian co-operative sector produces barriers to entry for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) along with resistant knowledges that have emerged from BIPOC communities. The methods employed in the co-founding and co-creation of the Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education organization were selected with a view towards transferring the knowledge produced in this final project into real-life community enacted change. This paper further demonstrates Graduate Degree competence in the development and support of a sustained argument in written form, as well as originality in the application of knowledge as demonstrated through the development of the Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education Business Plan Outline and Workshop Outline for the *7 Co-operative Principles: A Blueprint for Equity* workshop series. It applies a critical analysis of an existing body of knowledge in co-operatives through a literature review, interviews with key informants in the co-operative sector and produces original thought with a view towards enabling continued development in co-operative theories and practice.

## Acknowledgements

**Land Acknowledgement**

I acknowledge that the land upon which my research has been conducted, primarily known as Tkaronto, is the traditional territory of many nations including the Anishinabek, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat, the Métis and the current treaty-holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject to the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement which all residents of this land are subject to in peaceful relations of care for the Great Lakes region where we reside. I acknowledge my privilege as a settler here, that these statements are not enough, and as my Major Research Portfolio will hopefully demonstrate, policies and statements are not meaningful unless they are supported with action towards rectifying harm and constantly revisiting these relationships. In doing this work, I commit myself to being open to continuously learning, and trying to put into action the lessons I take with me.

**Gratitudes and dedications**

When I applied for this program in February of 2020, I had no idea that the next month the whole world would shut down due to COVID-19. This degree, this program and in particular the friends I made along the way were huge motivations and a guiding light for me during some of the most difficult pandemic, lockdown days.

Thank you to my Supervisor Professor Lisa Myers, for your support during my major research. Thank you for believing in me, for pushing me to continue to think and write critically. Thank you to my Advisor Professor Ellie Perkins, for always being there and for always encouraging my ideas. Thank you for your dedication to my success in this program, and for your wise advice and kind heart.

Thank you to my research participants, Arlene, Juliet, Obie, Trista, Esther, Eric and Erin. Your input has really made this project what it is, and your stories are important. Thank you for trusting me with them. To all of us building solidarity economy throughout so-called Canada.

The motivation for doing this portfolio stems from the loneliness I have felt in over a decade of work in the co-operative sector, wondering if anyone was questioning the same things I was about this sector. I knew that if I was going to do this degree, I had to have a community-based action as a result. It was not until I encountered Christine Clarke and the beginnings of Freedom Dreams Co-op Education that I knew how my research was going to have true praxis and practical application. Christine, thank you for being there for me to bounce ideas off of, for riffing with me and for co-building this movement. Getting to do this work with you is a dream.

A special thank you to my MES alumni, colleagues and friends Tamo, Snjezana, Andrea, Jess. I cannot thank you enough for the encouragement, support and cheering me on when I wanted to give up. I would not be here without your checking in on me, the hangouts, the Zoom sessions, study groups and drop-by hangout times and delicious food.

Thank you to my family, to my mother who inspires me daily, who knew I would love completing a Masters program one day, and knew that I had to do it my way. To my father who I know is proud of me, watching over me. Thanks to my brother, my stepdad, all of my friends who have encouraged me, read a draft of my paper, endured me waxing poetic about co-ops, or who have stepped in with last minute childcare - it takes a village and I look forward to returning the favour someday soon.

Thank you to my incredibly supportive children Sylas, Cedar and Oren and my husband Mathieu. Thank you for enduring the late nights, for pulling together to keep our household going and for cheering me on when I've accomplished milestones. Part of my motivation to do this degree was to prove to myself I could go after my dreams, write from my heart and contribute a small piece of empathy and justice to the world in the way I knew how. I always tell you to go after your dreams, and this is my way of doing that. The sky's the limit, my dears.

## Chapter 1

*"What are today's youg activists dreaming about? We know what they are fighting against, but what are they fighting for?"*

- Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002, p.7-8)

To be able to dream beyond our current reality is to create new possibilities and to begin building a new future. The work and research I've been building with the organization Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, which I co-founded during my Masters program at York, is precisely this. Neither I nor my co-founding partner, Christine Clarke, had come across an organization doing co-operative education that felt engaging, relevant and exciting. We had not experienced an organization that was run by BIPOC facilitators, merging lived experiences with co-operative education and critiquing the existing co-op sector. So we dreamed it up. We received funding. We put it out there, and the response has been incredible. This paper is a reflection of my experiences over the past year and the process of undertaking the project of realizing our own collective *freedom dreams*, building bridges between various kinds of co-operation rooted in cultural traditions and the formalized Canadian co-operative sector. This paper explores the solidarity economy, the care-centered practices that embody our work, and next steps for keeping co-operatives relevant as we move into new post-COVID realities.

I have spent many years working in the not-for-profit sector. This is a sector that has no shortage of critiques, often referred to as the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, in the ways that it perpetuates oppressive hierarchical top-down relationships with communities and harmful white supremacy frameworks, and maintains inequitable, neoliberal ideals of wealth

distribution (Morgan-Montoya 2020; Haber 2019). The Non-Profit Industrial Complex is run by wealthy, mainly white male executives who continue to make money off of the marginalized beneficiaries of their non-profit work (Leach and Nickels 2021; Heckler 2019). In these organizations, the power lies with the decision-makers, almost exclusively white managers. Typically, even if the front line employees of an organization may be diverse, this gives a false sense of inclusion as the managerial decision-makers, executives and board members are usually white (Morgan-Montoya 2020; D5 Coalition 2016). Some organizations are now writing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies to ensure they work towards better inclusivity. However, inclusion written into policy can only go so far. A recent Statistics Canada study of charities and not-for-profit board of directors demonstrated that even when a policy on board diversity is in place, only 14.2% of board members are visible minorities, compared to 10.2% when a policy on board diversity is not present (Government of Canada 2021).

When I entered the co-operative sector, I imagined it would be different from the non-profit sector. A model which promises 'open and voluntary membership' as its first principle and 'democratic decision making processes' as its second, surely would be more intersectional and attract more diverse communities with its people-power model. If this is truly the case, then why do the vast majority of Canadian co-operatives still emulate the same patterns found in the Non-profit Industrial Complex? This was the main question that drove me to dive into a Masters program after twelve years of working in the co-operative sector.

My Major Research Portfolio encompasses parts of my research exploring the Canadian co-operative sector with a lens of intersectionality. This research directly informs my work with Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education (FDCE). FDCE is an educational organization, a hub for

intersectional co-operative resources and a connection space for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC)-led co-operation in Canada. Having co-created this organization during the time of my Masters research has been a true exercise in praxis: developing tangible, on-the-ground work alongside my theory and research. Through this process I have recognized the importance of developing services while consulting with communities who are often left out of the mainstream Canadian co-op sector, as much of my work has been informed through the relationships developed via Freedom Dreams Co-op Education. The methods of engagement we use within FDCE include community-based research, interactive workshops, engaging potential participants, and learning from co-operators from all across this country and beyond. This is important work, and an important de-colonial way of putting my research methodology into practice. The more I learned by being in this space of developing FDCE, the more I recognized that our work is emerging and we are getting ready for what co-operative systems change looks like as we develop it together, alongside our workshop participants and co-conspirators across the country.

This systems-level change includes more diverse definitions of co-operatives and co-operation, connecting the means of holding democratic economic power to a wider network of individuals and organizations who may not fit the traditional description of incorporated co-operatives. The incorporated co-op is the main legal structure of co-operatives that the sector at large recognizes in Canada. Co-op associations and development organizations measure metrics for how many co-ops have been incorporated in a given time frame for their annual reporting. As we learned from leaders in the sector at the Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada (CMC) Congress in Calgary in June 2022, the Canadian co-op sector is trying to stay

relevant in 2022. This work will need to include a broadening of the notion of co-ops in order to bring financial benefits and support to grassroots, culturally-rooted organizing groups who may share co-operative values without the need for or interest in incorporation.

## Components of my Portfolio

The components of my portfolio are as follows:

- An outline of an upcoming workshop series from Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, analyzing the Co-operative Principles within a framework of intersectionality and anti-oppression
- A business plan outline for Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education*
- This reflection paper on the process*
- An appendix of selected partners of Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education exemplifying intersectionality in co-operative efforts*

*(*note: these pieces of my portfolio were submitted for the MES final examination)*

This portfolio aims to address my main research questions:

- How to engage more diverse BIPOC communities (including youth) in the co-operative model?
- How to introduce tools and education to support interested BIPOC co-operators in forming co-ops?
- What about the Canadian co-operative model has made it inaccessible to many BIPOC communities when Canada is thought to be such a multicultural mosaic?

In this reflection paper I critique the Canadian co-operative sector from an intersectionality perspective. After gathering data from interviews with BIPOC co-operators and co-op sector

leaders as well as my secondary research, I discuss my understanding of the various barriers to entry into the co-operative sector for many marginalized communities including those of Black, Indigenous and Persons of Colour. I list concrete suggestions for engaging more diverse communities in co-operatives, thus diversifying the models and types of co-operatives in Canada, and how to introduce tools and educational resources to form co-ops and structures of economic empowerment which also prioritize relationship-building, care-centered practices and sustainability. This is a departure from the messaging in the mainstream current co-operative sector which prioritizes financial stability, worker ownership and co-op conversion primarily in order to preserve jobs (Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada 2022; Vieta et al 2021), without looking deeper into the root causes of injustice, social ills or climate crisis.

My research goals have evolved over my time in the MES program, but have always returned to my initial burning question: "why are co-ops so homogeneously white?" If co-operatives typically arise from within a group of people whose needs are not being met, then why is there a lack of diversity in the sector in co-op membership and leadership? If co-ops have taken a step towards recognizing their lack of diversity, often the next step is to write and enact a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policy. However, what does a DEI policy do when no further action is taken? We've seen the statistics (mentioned previously) that change very little with diversifying board leadership in charities and not-for-profit organizations after DEI policies have been established (Government of Canada 2021), and there's little reason to expect the co-operative sector to do this differently. As Dr. Caroline Shenaz Hossein, an academic who has spent the last decade researching Black social economy and BIPOC contributions to the co-operative sector, explains:

> The sector is *"pale, male and stale"* and no effort is being made to change co-operatives. Yet a decline in membership (and the struggle to attract members) points to a need to rethink co-operativism for racialized groups (Shenaz Hossein 2020, p. 26).

This sentiment echoes what I've witnessed and experienced in the co-operative sector, as well as various experiences shared through research participant interviews. The founding history of co-operatives in Canada is from a Eurocentric perspective, often ignoring or actively erasing co-operative contributions from BIPOC co-operators, most notably Black and Indigenous contributors (Shenaz Hossein 2020; Lee et al 2016; MacPherson 2009). This has led to a sector which is not accustomed to critiquing its own roots, its whiteness and how growing the co-operative model, when unchecked, may end up perpetuating colonial and capitalist interests.

Regarding my research goals, I expanded my initial research questions and I used concepts of food sovereignty and climate justice. Both of these angles are important facets of co-operativism and of community care, particularly in ever-rising concerns of climate change effects and its impact on food supply chains. Food sovereignty can be determined as the peoples' rights to define their own food policies and agricultural policies free from influences of colonial state pressure, industry or other outside forces. This includes how people access food, the ability and rights to freely determine methods of defining and obtaining healthy foods including access to lands and waters, the working conditions and quality of life for those workers involved in the entire food value chain. Food sovereignty is important in relation to co-operatives and the broader concept of solidarity economy, as democratic control of one's

food system is an essential stepping stone towards self-determination. This is significant particularly for Black and Indigenous communities who systematically score some of the lowest determinants of overall health in Canada, are at risk of higher proportions of household food insecurity, (PROOF and Foodshare 2019; Black Health Alliance n.d.) and also often receive the brunt of global climate change effects or the localized impact of COVID-19 within their communities (Black Health Alliance n.d.; Canada 2020; Yang et al 2020).

## Methodology

Decolonial theory provides the theoretical grounding for the work described in this portfolio, as discussed later in this section, and I use critical pedagogy and Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) as methods in my research. Using critical pedagogy in the facilitation of FDCE workshops offers the framework and guiding method for these workshops, getting participants to think critically about what we're learning together, what we're unlearning together and where we as facilitators are positioned as active learners in the process. Using CBPR as a method invites participants to be actively part of the research in sharing their lived experiences while "building on the strengths and resources of the community; integrat[ing] knowledge and action for mutual benefits of all partners; promot[ing] a co-learning and empowering process that attends to all social inequalities and involves a cyclical and iterative process" (Drawson et al 2017, p.7).

To understand how we engage more BIPOC communities in the co-operative model, I held informal focus group sessions, seven interviews and co-hosted over fifteen one-on-one

community chats including BIPOC co-operators, youth who have expressed interest in co-operatives, and BIPOC co-operative leaders who have spent well over a decade in co-ops and credit unions. I inquired about what they know of co-ops and if they want to know more, how they get their information, how they would like to see co-op education be talked about and shared. I asked about what tools or educational resources would be needed to support more BIPOC co-operators developing and launching co-operatives. I listened to their stories, compared and analyzed their answers about barriers to entry in the Canadian co-op sector. I developed a business plan outline for Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education as well as an outline of a new seven-part workshop series we propose to facilitate as parts of this overall project in order to have something tangible to continue this work beyond the completion of my Masters degree.

If I were not operating under the constraints of time, budget, COVID-19 protocols and other circumstances outside of my control, I would have invited a larger sample size of interviewees and focus group attendees to participate in my research. Initially, the idea of a formalized focus group was agreed upon in collaboration with the Ontario Co-operative Association, coinciding with their interactive workshops on Principle 8, which is a principle of equity, diversity and inclusion. However, time and budget constraints on the organization's end meant that this opportunity fell through without adequate time to arrange an alternative. I was able to successfully host seven one-on-one interviews and I am grateful to my research participants for trusting me with their stories and I hope this reflection paper does them justice. Should I be offered the chance to extend this research further, there are some exciting opportunities I've been invited to explore including traveling to visit other BIPOC co-operatives

and Indigenous-led land trust initiatives outside of Southern Ontario. Through my research process, I have obtained the most valuable insights while in conversation with others who are also working and living in the informal spaces outside of the formal co-op sector in Canada, creating co-operation on their own terms – just like we're doing with FDCE. Throughout this section and the rest of the paper, unless otherwise indicated, when I use the word "we" I refer to Christine and myself, the co-founders of FDCE.

While Christine and I were in Calgary at the Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada Congress, presenting about Freedom Dreams Co-op Education, piloting our new workshop, and speaking on panel discussions regarding the future of co-ops and youth, I truly experienced the CBPR process come to life. The real value in the Congress was not in the scheduled programming, with many credit unions and multi-million dollar agriculture co-ops presenting to each other about their recent accomplishments and how great the co-operative sector is. Instead, the greater value for me was in connecting to others who were doing their own localized regional projects of co-operation within the siloed pockets of "community" sprinkled throughout the country, without the formalized structure of large incorporated models like the provincial or federal co-op associations. These were the conversations that were not given a spotlight or a high-profile panelist spot on the program. These were the discussions over dinner, the moments walking to a scheduled session while talking with someone else bound the same way, or the informal group we convened. These social connections were vital to finding other like-minded co-operator individuals and groups and we began thinking up ways in which to connect with one another and stay in touch about our various initiatives all across the country.

## No Bullshit Co-operation: coalition building

*No Bullshit Co-operation* is a coalition building effort we initiated along with other attendees of the CMC Congress event who have had similar critiques of the co-op sector and who are ready to do some dreaming and collaborating together in an online forum. The other organizations and individuals we connected with during the CMC Congress who joined this effort were involved in a range of formalized co-operatives and informal co-op initiatives. These co-collaborators are involved in efforts from across the country including creating youth newcomer co-op entrepreneurship in BC, a social justice co-op in Newfoundland and a group of young BIPOC folks from PEI, who have created an app to track social lending and to build credit among youth. We collectively decided that we would convene a group that puts human connection first before the red tape, and called ourselves *No Bullshit Co-operation*. While initially I had set out to illustrate a snapshot of the histories and contemporary uses of co-operation among BIPOC communities in Canada for my final Masters Research Portfolio, the more I researched, the more I recognized this historical context work has already been brilliantly laid out in articles and contributions by influential thinkers such as Dr. Caroline Shenaz Hossein in her 2020 article *Locating the Contributions of the African Diaspora in the Canadian Co-operative Sector* and does not need to be retold here. What I did want to analyze was the current scene of co-operation happening outside of the mainstream Canadian co-op sector, particularly looking at these examples with a lens of relevancy to our post-COVID realities. The more I tried to work on this piece, the more I realized that what is most useful to this project is to outline our various partners in *No Bullshit Co-operation* coalition-building, to capture the ways in which alternative co-operation is happening throughout the country right now. This list

is not exhaustive and will be subject to change, as is the nature of relationship-building. The following partners and intersectional co-operators across Canada building the solidarity economy have been part of initiating this coalition:

- BC Co-operative Association's In Our Hands program, BC
- Social Justice Co-op, NL
- MIQ, PEI

There are also various organizations who have been building solidarity economies within their own networks across Canada. These organizations have been very supportive of Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education even without having been an initial part of building this network of *No BS Co-operation*:

- Solid State Community Industries, BC
- Black Women Professional Worker Co-op, ON
- Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham (WMRCC), ON
- Social Economy Through Social Inclusion (SETSI), ON

What these organizations and partners do all have in common is the vision and dedication to working towards supporting their communities within the broader solidarity economy; whether it be through launching co-operatives, connecting their communities with needed resources, or approaching their work with an intersectional framework taking into consideration the lived experiences of their membership.

When meeting at the CMC congress, many of us *No Bullshit Co-operators* recognized the need to create space to discuss our collaborative ideas, to share about what kinds of

co-operation projects we were working on and how to bring these together. Most of us are BIPOC, youth, and/or LGBTQ+ and allies. We had not seen ourselves widely represented at the Congress so we created our own space. We nearly got a crowdfunding initiated to fund the development of our coalition, but settled on creating an online forum for us all to stay connected and share resources. This has been a great space to freely explore ideas, theories and practical actions in an immediate space that's not bound by borders or timezones. We created an online forum group on the Discord platform to continue bouncing ideas back and forth. So far we've initiated a study group looking at alternative modes of non-hierarchical governance, we have initiated the beginnings of a social credit investment circle and it has been a great place to connect about what's going on in our respective co-operative communities. While we began with just our convening group at CMC, this has now expanded to include more co-operators invited by existing members as it organically grows.

## Using decolonial theory

Decolonial theory informs my research as I employ the praxis of research inquiry from within BIPOC communities and explore the power dynamics within and outside of the co-operative model. Understanding that the target audience for our FDCE workshops are both the active subjects of this research as well as the participants who decide upon the direction of our workshops, my research included both casual conversations with communities of practice across the country as well as formalized interviews with a range of BIPOC co-operators, BIPOC leaders in the co-op sector, and white leadership in the formalized co-op sector who facilitate co-operative education programs. Using CBPR is part of a critical decolonial praxis of

de-centering the researcher, involving community within the discourse of co-operative educational materials, and adapting our approach to community feedback. These decolonial practices are done in the present; building spaces for critical reflection and meaningful action in working against colonial systems is work that is never done or complete, but requires frequent, active revisiting.

When researchers include the focus community in part of the research process via CBPR, this de-centers hierarchy and power structures while respecting notions of culturally based exchange. As stated in Smith, Tuck and Yang (2018, p.xvi), “Research methods, particularly those driven by an ethics of community participatory design, have developed greatly through different Indigenous understandings of reciprocity and intergenerational relationships”. Reciprocity is important for our co-operative futures as we recognize value in various ways outside of the monetary economic system such as knowledge exchange, gift economy, and solidarity economy. Intergenerational relationships based in ancestral ways of co-operation have come up in conversation often during our informal discussions and interviews with BIPOC co-operators. Concepts emerge from these conversations such as *wiiji'idiwin* meaning “mutual aid or helping others'' in Ojibwe to *Onye aghana nwanne ya* meaning “no person left behind” in the Igbo language of Nigerian culture; these cultural concepts are practices that are simply part of life and not separated into formalized business structures (Meekis-Jung, personal communication, May 15 2022; Ume-Onyido, personal communication, May 6 2022).

Through my interviews I was intrigued how integral these cultural concepts are to every facet of life in Indigenous communities from both Treaty 3 territory in Canada to Nigeria, no matter the separation by physical distance. Meekis-Jung discussed how in Ojibwe culture, when

there's a crisis in a community, a response team from another neighbouring community will come in and work to support those in crisis (personal communication, May 15 2022). Rather than formal agreements, these care actions are part of the foundation of these communities. These cultural practices of care manifest in other ways, for example, when it comes to food and hunting, those who hunt take what they need and share the rest in community freezers for those families who couldn't access hunting and "country meats" themselves in many First Nations communities (Meekis-Jung, personal communication, May 15 2022; Settee and Shukla 2020). Food sovereignty is tied to land sovereignty, and these community-led initiatives have deep cultural roots, which could be interpreted as de-colonial practices.

Another example of community care is how a community contributes to the care of a new mother who is adjusting to the new role of parent. This kind of community support, "it's just what is done," says Ume-Onyido (personal communication, May 6 2022) and affirms the practice conveyed in the idiom *it takes a village to raise a child.* Ume-Onyido explains that no parent is meant to do this alone, which stands in strong contrast to conventions set out in mainstream individualized parenting roles perpetuated through the trope of the nuclear family and westernized Canadian culture. The interviews revealed that the lack or loss of community structures of care within the co-operative sector challenges newcomers and First Nations peoples alike to feel valued, to feel that sense of belonging and place within the sector. The resulting disconnect is ironic within a sector that purportedly bases its core co-operative principles on values such as democratic decision-making, concern for community and co-operation among co-ops, to name a few (International Co-operative Alliance 2017). I will revisit these principles shortly.

One of the intergenerational, culturally rooted models I learned about through this research is the Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) which have deep roots within the African diaspora, India, Latin America, the Caribbean and other Global South or "Majority World" communities. As Shenaz Hossein explains:

> ROSCAs are rotating savings and credit associations and they are also referred to as mutual aid groups, where the members make the rules and make regular contributions to a fund that is given in whole or in part to each member in turn. These collectives, practiced for centuries by people in the global south (Bouman, 1977), have become part of the financial landscape in large cities and towns. ROSCAs—locally known as susu, tontines, partner, meeting-turn, box-hand, sol, and many other names—are long-standing traditions of pooling resources that have historically helped excluded groups engage in alternative financial services (Shenaz Hossein 2017, p. 30).

These financial mutual aid collectives described by Shenaz Hossein are an important means of creating a localized economy for marginalized, racialized groups, women in particular. In Canada, newcomers bring their cultural traditions and economic practices with them and ROSCAs are being used to generate wealth, especially for communities who face barriers to the Canadian banking system. Whether it be because of a lack of trust, language barriers or racism and discrimination they face, newcomers are using circles of trust and social lending like ROSCAs to pay down debts, supplement income and launch entrepreneurial businesses because these

are safe options when faced with social and economic exclusion (Shenaz Hossein 2017; Galabuzi 2006).

My initial inquiry into BIPOC led co-operatives was in relation to food sovereignty, since community control over food access, food supply chains and culturally appropriate foods are all indicators of self-determination. As Bradley and Herrera explain:

> Decolonizing food justice and food justice research must emphasize praxis because of the ways theory and practical action can be used iteratively in social change. Frameworks of explanation and on-the-ground strategies inform each other (Bradley and Herrera 2016, p.104).

I chose to use the lens of decolonization theory for its applications to this work in which we are taking apart systems that have been used to exclude, oppress and disenfranchise BIPOC communities – in particular Indigenous and Black peoples – and using traditionally-rooted or new, creative ways to inspire economic models and means towards self-determination.

As a Person of Colour and being mixed race but not self-identifying as either Black or Indigenous, I strive to tread carefully in these terms such as 'decolonization', to be empowered by doing this work while being cognizant of my footsteps to not be replicating patterns of oppression and harm aimed at others along this path. I aim to enact this balancing act by prioritizing the voices of Black and Indigenous co-operators in this paper, by uplifting the work already being done in these communities and by inviting Black and Indigenous co-operators to be active participants in this research. The relationships I've begun building with my research

project are only the beginning, and I am dedicated to continuing to build on the work that has started here beyond this MES degree, carrying forward these relationships on behalf of Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education. I recognize that the patterns of oppression found in the Canadian co-operative movement have been and continue to be used in harmful ways, even when unintentional. I also recognize that there are empowering ways to use the co-operative model and forms of co-operation which can enable pathways towards economic self-determination, the preservation of Indigenous culture and land sovereignty. I aim to be cautious when using the term *decolonization*, as to not detract from its implications particularly for Indigenous communities such as suggested by Tuck and Yang (2012). Decolonization must include the restoration and rematriation of lands for Indigenous self-determination and food sovereignty (Grey & Patel 2014; La Via Campesina 2021). This is something I explore further in Chapter 3 (see section *Degrowth and the return to Indigenous land-based practices for an equitable future* for more details).

Indigenous-led co-operative development could be a way to view a form of decolonization through Indigenous-led worker ownership, economic development and self-determination, yet I feel it would be too simplistic to make such a bold statement. There are complex histories of colonial imposition that are too strong to ignore in entirety. I learned a lot about this from Trista Pewapisconias of Little Pine First Nation, the Indigenous Relations Lead for Co-operatives First, an independent co-op development organization funded by Federated Co-operatives Ltd (FCL) specifically geared towards co-op education and development in rural and Indigenous communities in Western Canada. FCL is a wholesale, manufacturing, marketing and administrative co-operative owned by more than 160 independent local co-operative

associations including multi-million dollar agricultural co-ops, gas bars/convenience stores and food retail stores (Federated Co-operatives Limited 2022). When Pewapisconias took a course in Indigenous leadership, she began to approach her work with Co-operatives First and their Indigenous-led program, *Your Way Together*, differently:

> I changed my way of doing this work in the community. Instead of a deficit mindset, I now am thinking of the gifts and community structures that are seen as important. It's an abundance approach first. The job is to create long-lasting co-ops, starting with people and how they work together, then build it (Pewapisconias, personal communication, June 9 2022).

Pewapisconias approaches Indigenous communities to understand their needs and priorities first, to see if they see the benefit in co-operative economic development. She works with communities "where they're at," in other words meeting their objectives and considering their context. Some of her recent projects include establishing artisan craft co-ops to better support economic development for Indigenous makers, and language and culture co-ops whose intergenerational membership goals are to preserve language and traditional culture for future generations (Your Way Together 2022; Pewapisconias personal communication, June 9 2022). However, Trista recognizes that this model does not suit everyone, and the most successful Indigenous led co-ops she's seen are either off-nation in urban centres or when the members are the leadership, particularly women. Pewapisconias states, "Relationship building is important in matriarchal societies but women and children are often not seen as valued or

engaged (in the co-op sector). When women are involved, the importance is put on "working together" (personal communication, June 9 2022), a sentiment echoed by all of the other Black and Indigenous co-operators I interviewed, who stated that leadership in sustainable, co-operative initiatives most often involved women (Agusiegbe, Enyolu, Meekis-Jung, Ume-Onyido, personal communications, May 2022).

This matriarchal, Indigenous-led leadership is strikingly different from the Canadian co-operative sector which has been traditionally led by white men (MacPherson 2009) and that despite co-operatives being initially created as a structure to resist capitalism, they are maintained by a generally more privileged group who push their own agendas and get funding for their co-operative movements. These top-down structures are inherently colonial, in that they are created by and for white members and audiences. This is problematic, because if there is no room for thinking critically about who occupies a given space, there is no consideration for who is not at the table, whose voices are being left out and why.

A co-operative model also cannot be created for another demographic without their involvement and be expected to succeed. Particularly if there is zero representation from the community a co-op purports to serve at the decision-making level, this is not in line with co-operative principles. Both Meekis-Jung and Pewapisconias described failed co-operative efforts when a co-op model was created outside of a specific First Nations community, and assumed that it would suit the community members well if the First Nations community members were to then take over the co-op once it was established. In these cases, the Indigenous community members were not adequately included in the decision-making planning phases, and these efforts were not successful. The members will have a hard time seeing the

value in a co-operative if they have not been involved in laying the groundwork, determining community needs or deciding how the co-operative will run sustainably (Meekis Jung personal communication, May 15 2022; Pewapisconias personal communication, June 9 2022).

By using a decolonial theoretical framework, my work with FDCE in creating the *7 Co-operative Principles: A Blueprint for Equity* workshop series we developed takes a deeper analysis into the power structures in the co-op model and creates new pathways to co-operative development that are more inclusive and embody what's often referred to as the "8th Principle" in co-operatives: diversity, equity and inclusion. All co-operatives follow the 7 Co-operative Principles: open and voluntary membership; democratic member control; members' economic contribution; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; co-operation among co-ops; concern for community (International Co-operative Alliance 2017). There has been a move towards incorporating this 8th principle of equity in recent years for a number of co-operatives as they recognize the need for explicit incorporation of these values into their principles. However, my argument is that instead of tacking on an additional principle to try and adhere to an adoption of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies, the existing co-operative principles can be implemented in action with an anti-oppression lens and cultural inclusion framework. This work must be done prior to any meaningful discussion about adopting an 8th principle of equity. See my workshop outline in the *7 Co-operative Principles: A Blueprint for Equity* workshop series (located within this portfolio) for details regarding how we propose to do this with each co-op principle.

In the co-operative sector, the majority of online and in-person educational resources I have been able to find all lack a diversity of co-operative historic examples and cultural training.

From provincial co-operative development organizations such as the  Ontario Co-operative Association, national organizations like the  Canadian Worker Co-op Federation and Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada, as well as the internationally-reaching organization Co-op Zone, all of these practical toolkits for educating co-ops, training co-op developers and supporting the co-operative movement demonstrate a need for a wider, more diverse perspective and approach to reaching BIPOC and youth audiences.  Underscoring this gap, representatives from all of the organizations working with Freedom Dreams have indicated that our work is not only welcomed but absolutely needed in the co-op sector (Tusz-King, personal communication, May 10 2022; Morgan, personal communication, May 17 2022).  The following chapters in this reflection paper discuss the Canadian co-operative sector, the solidarity economy, intersectionality and how Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education positions itself to provide solutions to common barriers experienced by BIPOC co-operators in the co-op sector.

# Chapter 2

## The Canadian Co-operative Sector

*"Once again, movements in struggle produce new knowledge and new questions."*

-Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002, p.152)

In order to understand my research and how it is situated within the context of the co-op sector, it is important to understand co-operatives and the Canadian context. According to the International Co-operative Alliance (1995), co-operatives are defined as "as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, as well as cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise." This is a model I have worked with for quite some time, having co-founded multiple co-operatives in the food sector and childcare sector and as a member of housing co-ops for over 10 years. This definition of co-operatives seems to be something that would align well with marginalized communities, to gain people power where structures of colonial, capitalist governments have failed to provide adequate resources like housing or steady employment. But co-op development experts and academics in this field alike agree that the sector has failed to adequately reach racialized communities successfully, Black and Indigenous groups in particular (Shenaz Hossein 2020; Morgan, personal communication, May 17 2022; Tusz-King, personal communication, May 10 2022). My inquiry included this question: where has the

co-operative sector failed to engage more diverse audiences and to take an intersectionality approach?

As highlighted previously in Chapter 1 and in my *Co-operative Principles Workshop: A Blueprint for Equity Outline* for Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, co-operatives unintentionally perpetuate systemic oppression within themselves because of being founded by a white working class demographic which has generally not taken the time and effort to look critically at its own whiteness, to look beyond the self-imposed status quo to question who's missing at the table and why this is problematic. For this reason, intersectionality is crucial to the sustainability of the co-op movement, for keeping relevant in our present reality. Law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality, breaking open the ways in which we talk about the compounding oppressions that exist when someone's identity is complicated by the multiple axes of power dynamics including race, gender, sexuality, and ableism within the feminist movement. This intersectionality analysis has not happened within the co-operative movement.

I liken the need to take a critical intersectionality lens to the co-operative sector to the evolution of the feminist movement and the use of labour power (see the section *Feminist Economies of Labour Power* in Chapter 3 for further analysis). Similar to the co-operative movement getting a resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s with the empowerment of activism bringing new forms of people power, second-wave feminism was also getting a resurgence. This second-wave feminism was led most visibly by white women. Crenshaw's (1989) experience and witnessing Black women's oppression through the US legal system revealed the compounding oppression of being a woman and Black, thus this intersectionality lens opened

new paths to thinking and through action within a more relavant intersectional feminist. The Canadian co-operative movement has not had such an analysis in a concrete, systematic way as of yet. However, there are many smaller movements of solidarity economy, mutual aid networks, land trusts, led by co-operators and organizations throughout the nation – although not recognized by the formalized co-operative sector – which take more of a critical, intersectional lens to co-operative development and co-operation in general.

Throughout this paper I distinguish between co-operatives as organizational entities, typically incorporated under the Canadian Co-operatives Act, and co-operators as individuals. Co-operators may refer to those who are part of formal co-ops in the sector or those who practice informal co-operation such as various forms of solidarity economy, often rooted in cultural frameworks of co-operation.

## Solidarity Economy in practice: beginnings in Brazil and the USA

> *History has shown that co-operatives are an important strategy for economic collaboration, racial economic independence, and community well-being…Combining Du Bois' concept that through economic racial segregation African Americans could create, and position themselves at the cutting edge of, new economic relationships and formation, with the notion of a solidarity economy among subaltern populations creates a powerful tool for analyzing African American co-operatives and their potential for future growth.*

- Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (2014, p.235)

Gordon Nembhard's words above situate the empowerment of African American-led co-operatives among the solidarity economy, demonstrating the potential for growth. Black-led co-operatives in USA have formalized and informal histories, both contributing to successful community well-being indicators of improved health, food access and economic prosperity (Gordon Nembhard 2014). The informal forms of co-operation are considered to be perhaps outside of the scope of the co-operative sector as a business model, but are part of the wider solidarity economy and absolutely considered as valid co-ops in Gordon Nembhard's ground-breaking book *Collective Courage* (2014). Whereas the co-operative sector is clearly defined and somewhat regulated as co-operatives must abide by the 7 co-operative principles and must adhere to specific details as they incorporate as either not-for-profit or shareholding co-ops, the solidarity economy is much broader in scope. In the United States, at the 2007 World Social Forum (Allard et al 2013) there was a critical mass of innovative co-operative leaders who were tired of feeling as outsiders in the co-operative sector therefore they took it upon themselves to create a new movement taking an intersectional approach which they called the solidarity economy.

The solidarity economy is a term that has gained notoriety in South America, most notably Brazil, in the 1990s particularly describing the ways in which co-operative self-management was being practiced among enterprises (Ferrarini et al 2013; Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy 2006). This has since grown and expanded to informal income generating

groups, farmers and producers, local exchange networks of goods and services, Indigenous farming communities, and credit associations to name a few. As mentioned in the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy, “the priority of solidarity in these ventures is evident in its members' involvement in day-to-day management, the socialization of productive resources and the adoption of equality principles” (2006, p.2). By placing value on social labour, relationships between the economy, people and the planet, the solidarity economy is a nuanced way in which more social actors can contribute value to a society - particularly as marginalized individuals or as those living in impoverished conditions.

The solidarity economy, as it is used in a North American context, is a term used to define ideas and activities that encompass ways in which we support each other in formal and informal ways. This includes various forms of co-operation such as mutual aid, land trusts, bartering and culturally rooted forms of co-operation such as Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). The solidarity economy is important in validating these efforts of co-operation with a lens of intersectionality not applied to the Canadian co-operative sector which bounds itself in the formalization of bylaws, incorporation and government bureaucracy legitimizing their use of the term “co-op”. According to Michelle Williams, who states in Satgar (2014), the solidarity economy is distinct from social economy which includes the co-operative sector, non-profit organizations and social enterprises that “seek to achieve limited, progressive change within the confines of the current social order by ameliorating the effects of market failure, unemployment and poverty”(as quoted from Solidarity Economy Principles, 2022). The solidarity economy is important to my research, as many forms of culturally rooted co-operation are not confined to market pressures, formal employment or even a profit-making structure.

The Solidarity economy is defined as a "transformative vision of society based on democratic self-management, redistribution, solidarity and reciprocity" (Solidarity Economy Principles, 2022). This system is governed by a set of principles being developed by the Solidarity Economy Working Group (2022) including *1) accountability and relationship, 2) shared resources and shared vision, 3) liberation culture, 4) democracy and process, and 5) education and leadership development*. The impact of the solidarity economy may be more difficult to track in measurable, quantitative data than the development and launch of incorporated co-operatives because the activities are so wide ranging and the ripple effect can have an impact upon many different actors and aspects of life. As Gordon Nembhard states, in reference to co-operative efforts:

> We tried to calculate the worth of all these services but it was impossible because there were so many indirect and informal services and benefits attached to every service. In addition, other services and benefits were leveraged from the direct services, and many unintentional benefits thus spilled over (Gordon Nembhard 2014, p.203).

This quote demonstrates that the value that solidarity economy and informal co-operation provides goes beyond what's quantifiable. While this may be difficult to formalize, difficult to track metrics and show profitability, the true value is in overall improved social wealth and improved overall societal well-being.

One of the major challenges of the solidarity economy movement, and co-operatives as well, is translating these concepts to a popular education model in plain language to reach a

wider, more diverse audience. It may do us academics well to read case studies and conference papers, but this stranglehold of knowledge caught up in academia is a privileged space, recognizing only a limited scope of epistemologies and educational pedagogy (Lucio-Villegas 2022; Freire 2007). I recognize this as part of critical pedagogy: critiquing our resources, who wrote them and whose voices are missing. This outdated knowledge access model charges obscene fees to scholarly articles for public access, imposing a capitalistic model of educational resource accessibility. If those in the solidarity economy movement and co-operative sector want to recruit more supporters in order to continue sustaining these movements, they will need to reevaluate how they reach their audiences and to focus on a wider-reaching, more accessible model of opening up education.

Black women have always played a leadership role in the Black co-op movement and solidarity economy movement in the USA. Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard (2014) documents this, likening their organizing roles in co-operatives to the similar roles women have played in Black church movements, mutual aid societies and the civil rights movement and how:

> (Women) have been the ones organizing and managing in the background…without the glory or formal recognition bestowed by a title or a paid or board position. At the same time, African American women in some cases were not just members but also the founders, managers, and directors of co-operative enterprises and co-operative activity in the United States (Gordon Nembhard 2014, p.149).

This intersectionality of being women / Black women / Black women leaders / Black women providers for their families  is inseparable from the compounding oppressions that these women face just by simply existing in a racist society.  By taking an intersectionality approach and addressing the status of Black women in co-operatives, we are not only addressing racism and sexism, but also considering ways to approach a broader range of issues vital to co-ops, the wider co-operative movement as a whole and the effectiveness in reaching a more diverse audience.  As Hammond Ketilson puts it, “thinking about equity for women in democratic and management structures is one of a number of ‘ways in’ to thinking about the relevance and effectiveness of co-operatives in general.  It is also a way to begin considering barriers that affect all under-represented groups” (Ketilson, 1998, p.33).  This is exactly what was happening when the solidarity economy was established in the United States (Allard et al 2013).

## Meanwhile, in Canada

In Canada, the co-operative movement had a resurgence as part of the radical movements towards democratizing people power in the 1960s and 1970s, echoing the history in the United States (MacPherson 2009; Gordon Nembhard 2014).  However, the solidarity economy movement did not take the same shape.  While there are numerous culturally rooted examples of co-operatives and engagement with solidarity economy in Canada, both formal and informal, these often pop up in silos and are localized to specific neighbourhoods or regions. I’ve experienced these culturally-rooted examples of formal and informal co-ops, localized to specific regions in my research and in informal conversations with numerous BIPOC co-operators from coast to coast, from connecting to small-scale and localized co-operators

from BC, Alberta, Manitoba and PEI at the Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada Congress in Calgary June 2022 to academics discussing a stark lack of Indigenous social economy institutions (Settee and Walker 2022). In Canada, the solidarity economy is siloed into smaller, regional movements with local impact but the momentum to connect us all has not built strong momentum (yet). I believe some of the work we're embarking upon with Freedom Dreams Co-op Education now may be the beginnings of this work; something I plan to explore further beyond the confines of this paper. I believe in the potential for the small coalition building we've started with Freedom Dreams Co-op Education and *No Bullshit Co-operation* to grow into a movement of diverse co-operativism that's bigger than all of us. After all, it is in the space of dreaming where radical ideas, and then following movements, are born. We need to think beyond the confines of what we know and accept as our present in order to bring about new, radical futures. These futures must be sustainable, and these futures must include all of us.

## Chapter 3

Freedom Dreams: Intersectionality as an approach to diverse co-operativism

> *Radical black feminists have never confined their vision to just the emancipation of black women or women in general, or all black people for that matter. Rather, they are the theorists and proponents of a radical humanism committed to liberating humanity and reconstructing social relations across the board… We are not talking about identity politics but a constantly developing, often contested, revolutionary conversation about how all of us might envision and remake the world.*
>
> - Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002, p.137)

Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education was developed out of a need to create something that did not yet exist. This quote above from Kelley is something I had considered when developing FDCE, asking the question of how I might envision and remake the world. My journey towards co-founding Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education in 2021 came together with a perfect storm of wrestling with my research questions, meeting my brilliant friend Christine Clarke who was embarking upon creating an online workshop series about BIPOC co-op education with the beginnings of Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, and taking a course from Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley, the author of *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination (2002)*. Christine had received a grant through the City of Guelph's circular economy project to produce a series of educational workshops about the histories and today's complexities of

BIPOC co-operatives, something close to her heart as a Black farmer seeking community in the spirit of Fannie Lou Hamer, a forerunner of the farming co-operative and land trust movement (Clarke 2021).

My research interests and Christine's beginnings of Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education harmonized well, resulting in our hosting an online workshop series together in the Fall of 2021 called *Transformation On Our Own Terms* (see Figure 1). This series brought together voices from the Black food sovereignty movement in Toronto with Afri-Can Food Basket founder Anan Xola Lololi; social justice and social economy with Victor Beausoleil, the Executive Director of Social Economy Through Social Inclusion Coalition (SETSI): a Black-owned social economy, coalition-building, educational and consulting services organization; and community-led action through intergenerational co-operation with Josephine Grey, Co-Founder of St James Town Community Co-op. This workshop series was advertised online and had more than 200 attendees, from BIPOC co-operators across the globe to seasoned Canadian co-op developers who have been in this sector for over 30 years - and gained praise from BIPOC

co-operators and white co-op developer leaders in the co-op sector alike.

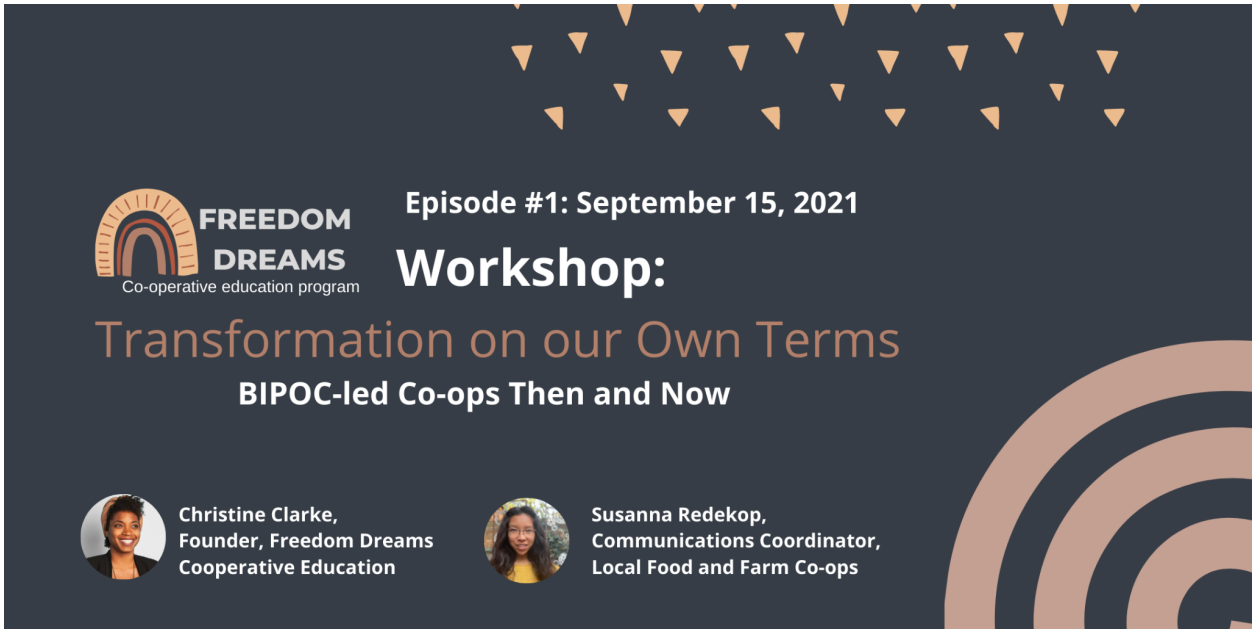


*Figure 1: poster for the first session of our September 2021 workshop*

In the 5 months following that webinar series, Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education was invited to do a workshop we developed called *Radically Transforming Work*, initially created for BIPOC youth who are inbetween employment. The workshop was sponsored in partnership between the Canadian Community Economic Development Network and the National Association of Friendship Centres for their program called *CreateAction*. We also adapted this *Radically Transforming Work* workshop for an impact film production team called *Story Money Impact* and their Pod internship program. Our workshop offered team-building skills in this emerging, innovative sector of impact film-making, blending community activism with film production. We received multiple requests for partnership to join multi-million dollar funding proposals, invitations to develop our dream educational curriculum, invitations to speak on panels and at conferences, even a keynote speaker request and an article in a reputable online

publication (Chollangi 2022). While all of this action was happening, the demand for our services was rapidly increasing and we quickly had to learn how to adapt.

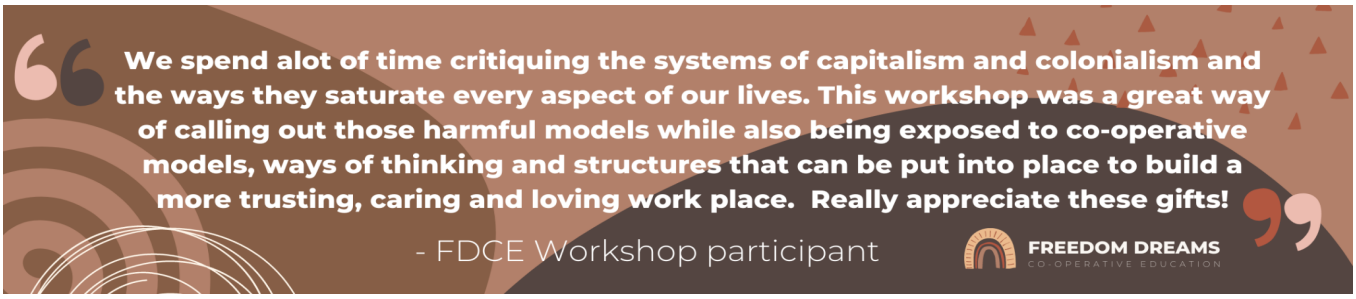


*Figure 2: quote from FDCE workshop participant*

Part of the effectiveness of our work, and I feel the reason for such fast growth, is our ability to bridge grassroots community initiatives that encompass formal and informal co-operation with the Canadian co-op sector. As two university-educated, well-spoken, young BIPOC women with experience working/living/volunteering in the co-op sector, Christine and I recognize and understand the privilege and power dynamics as we work with BIPOC communities. Most others have been struggling to secure funding for their co-operative work and have come up against multiple barriers when trying to have their co-operative systems recognized by our Canadian banking system (Shenaz Hossein 2017), or legislative and funding bodies (Agusiegbe, personal communication, May 6 2022).

Part of our work is highlighting those doing work in these spaces, connecting BIPOC co-operators and connecting women and gender diverse individuals from equity deserving communities to opportunities, and uplifting the voices of others who have been doing this work. In my interview with Esther Enyolu, Executive Director at the Women's Multicultural and

Resource Counselling Centre of Durham (WMRCC), she recounted how she started this work after being inspired by another immigrant woman. Together they launched seven immigrant and newcomer women-led co-operatives within a 2 year span, along with community resources such as Business Advisory Council Durham (BACD) providing business fundamentals to the co-operatives (personal communication, May 19 2022). When her collaborator left and the funding ran out, Esther had to choose to either focus on her own work and leave these start-up co-ops or find a way to continue supporting them. This resulted in partnerships with such community builders and co-operators as Dr. Caroline Hossein continuing to amplify the work through providing research assistants working directly with these cooperative groups for their sustainability. Showing her commitment to the movement and to these co-ops, Esther continues to offer her skill-set in support as best she can, she is a co-operator after all, but it's always off the side of her desk and without the true capacity to provide adequate support. As Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education we are now in discussion with Esther, working towards building a partnership with WMRCC to provide co-operative development support to her existing co-ops.

Esther's co-op development support program with WMRCC is a great example of how BIPOC co-operators are innovating new economies and taking it upon themselves to create what was previously not there. Another example comes from the Black Women Professional Worker Co-op (BWPW), a group of 10 Black women who started their own Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA) network and launched four successful food businesses from among their members (Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe, personal communication, May 6 2022). Their innovative model of what they term "ROSCA+" means merging their ROSCA with the formalized

Canadian co-op sector, incorporating as a co-op with share capital, where capital is reinvested into supporting their ROSCA members. They also provide a support network lending their services in financial planning, marketing, communications, food business coaching, and more (Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe, personal communication, May 6 2022). As we've discovered along the way, this is a new model that has not been done before in Ontario. I've personally had the pleasure of working with BWPW co-op as they navigate the systems that don't understand cultural co-operation like ROSCAs. One barrier we navigated was that the Financial Services Regulatory Association of Ontario (FSRA) lacks the understanding of why a co-op would invest their funds into their multiple member businesses, fully knowing the risks of market failure and not trying to protect their financial contributions (Morgan, personal communication, May 17 2022). This is where the context of culturally based co-operation comes into context, where it is fully recognized that relationships based on trust and support come first instead of guaranteed financial security.

## Cultural Forms of Co-operation: Similarities Across Diasporas

> *They are innovating with new economies rooted in justice, fairness, and inclusion. No matter how relentlessly colonizers tried to make Black people conform to the masters' norms, the Black diaspora has held onto its African traditions. These traditions of living in society and making a living unfold in myriad ways - and much of what they do is grounded in co-operation.*

- Dr. Caroline Shenaz Hossein, *The Black Social Economy in the Americas: Exploring Diverse Community-Based Markets* (2018, p. 4)

The interviews for my research project included BIPOC co-operator participants: two Indigenous co-operators and three Black co-operators. It was interesting to me to see so much overlap in how co-operation practices are simply integrated into all parts of life and not separated into formalized business structures for these participants. These practices may have slightly different translations across cultures, but they involve similar concepts of helping each other out due to a common connection as humans who face barriers such as discrimination and they permeate daily life practices including, but not limited to, value exchanges and economic interaction. As mentioned previously, these culturally-rooted practices are about uplifting family values in all aspects of life, taking care of each other even when you may be strangers: from *wiiji'idiwin,* meaning "mutual aid or helping others'' in Ojibwe, to *Onye aghana nwanne ya,* meaning "no person left behind" in the Igbo language of Nigerian culture, or the South African concept of *ubuntu* relating humans to each other in an interconnected way that is incorporated into culture, cosmology and ontology (Meekis-Jung, personal communication, May 15 2022; Pewapisconias, personal communication, June 9 2022; Ume-Onyido, personal communication May 6 2022; Murove 2012). *Ubuntu* is at the heart of African co-operative economics, as Murove describes: "Ubuntu means humanness – treating other people with kindness, compassion, respect and care… Ubuntu is well captured in the adage which says Umuntu ngomuntu ngabantu (Zulu) – a person is a person because of other persons" (Murove 2012, p.37).

One might think that the ways in which cultural forms of co-operation integrate into the Canadian co-op sector would perhaps be evident, but there are many barriers that exist. When Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe's co-op applied for a grant earlier this year with their ROSCA+ model, the funder was confused and had never heard of such a co-operative business model, despite being a co-operative service provider for over 75 years and one of the largest in the country. Thankfully, they took the time to reach out and connect with Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe instead of passing off their ideas as too "outside of the box" (Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe, personal communication, May 2022). The disconnect from cultural co-operation is very real and even enviable once these ways of integrating values and life are understood. Erin Morgan, Director of the Ontario Co-operative Association, noted a sense of longing for this kind of culture which she has heard about and witnessed directly through her work with Dr. Caroline Shenaz Hossein's ROSCA network. It's something Erin felt she was missing in her life growing up in Canadian society, and now feeling that the co-op sector is trying to "play catch up" to understand these rich traditions which are so embedded in culture (Morgan, personal communication, May 17 2022).

## Barriers to the Canadian co-operative sector

Through my research, including interviews with co-op sector leadership and BIPOC co-operators, I have learned how numerous barriers prevent a greater diversity of co-operatives and co-operators from entering the sector. I've highlighted the top overlapping themes which came through during my interviews, and are consistently mentioned as barriers to entry into

the sector. While some of these themes are rather different from each other, the topics below are grouped together in how interview respondents discussed them:

- Language, bureaucracy
- Racism
- Lack of time, resources and trust

**Barrier: language and bureaucracy**

Language is an enormous barrier to participation in the formal Canadian co-op sector. This is not limited to the language barrier which newcomers and English Language Learners experience, which is significant on its own; but the terminology many co-operative development programs use may be outdated and feel disconnected with how most people communicate in 2022. In order to stay relevant, organizations in the co-op sector need to be aware of this communication issue and they need to work towards using more accessible language and marketing strategies to reach more diverse audiences. In order to attract new co-operators, these new audiences need to see there's a place for them in the co-op sector. Trista Pewapisconias explains, "The jargon (used by the co-op sector) is a barrier. Communities don't connect with the messaging unless they see themselves in it," (personal communication, June 9 2022). Juliet 'Kego Ume-Onyido, co-founder of the Black Women Professional Worker Co-op adds that more education is really needed to get the message out about what co-ops are and what they do, this affirms that access to information is so important towards growing the co-op movement (personal communication, May 6 2022). Arlene Meekis-Jung, Anishinabe-kwe Knowledge Keeper based in Sioux Lookout and Indigenous Relations Coordinator for Local Food

and Farm Co-ops states that when you say “co-op” around her community, this terminology has been so deeply branded with big federations like Federated Co-operatives Ltd. that people associate this with the gas and oil companies (personal communication, May 15 2022). The issue with language is again evident here, as more education could be done to provide context about what co-ops are and how this model can be used for a range of community-led, self-determined purposes.

Additionally, the bureaucracy of having to navigate through systems that are not user-friendly or built in plain language can be really difficult for immigrants and newcomers and those who are not familiar with having to go through filling out government forms, understanding bylaws and incorporation articles. For this reason, Enyolu, as the Executive Director of Women’s Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham region (WMRCC), oversaw the development of their own co-operative development program and materials produced specifically for their newcomer women participants. I have personally been working with Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe to support the development of their bylaws and governance structure as Black Women Professional Worker Co-op, and recently we discovered that they were forced to incorporate as a worker co-op when they initially inquired with the Corporations Canada co-operative incorporation department and consulted the federal Canada Co-operatives Act (Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe, personal communication, May 6 2022). They were not informed that this was likely because they had 3 Board directors at the time, whereas incorporating as a general co-op requires 5 Board directors, according to the provincial Ontario Co-operative Corporations Act. Had this been communicated clearly to them, they may have

simply recruited two more directors and kept their original name and concept of Black Women Professional Co-op.

**<u>Freedom Dreams Co-op Education approach to this issue:</u>**

As demonstrated in figure 3 and figure 4, Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education (FDCE) uses a popular education pedagogy, creating highly interactive workshops led by ERGA techniques (Experience, Reflect, Generalize, Apply) relying on strong visual content in small, digestible bits on wide-reaching social online platforms like Instagram and Facebook. For FDCE, using accessible language to convey important concepts is an anti-colonial strategy exercising critical pedagogy and practice that provides as many folks as possible with publicly available, free information and in this way avoids the paywall doors of academic journal articles.


*Figure 3: sample of FDCE popular education pedagogy*

The language of co-operation can take many forms, especially outside of the narrow confines of the Canadian co-op sector. Mutual aid, barter and trade networks, Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCAs); all of these are forms of co-operation, and many are so deeply embedded within cultural norms that it's hard to distinguish them from other facets of how life operates. Instead of leading with the incorporation and bylaws needed to formalize the structure of a co-op, as most co-op development programs do, FDCE starts with human-centric approaches to relationship building.

Our workshops have been well received with participants requesting more content from us. The ability to navigate some tricky spaces within co-operative development while also using an approachable popular education model that reaches a wider audience than expensive co-op development courses as offered by co-operative associations is something that has resonated with our audience.

**Barrier: racism - systemic and interpersonal bias**

Each of our interview participants discussed the barrier of racism faced by BIPOC co-operators within the larger sector. Though some further distinctions were made between systemic racism and interpersonal biases, systemic racism is most evident in the erasure of BIPOC co-operative stories, retelling ourselves and in the mainstream rhetoric that the co-op movement began only with the Rochdale pioneers, the white men founders of the modern co-operative model. This narrative in particular leaves out important accomplishments of BIPOC co-operators, negating the ways co-operation manifests through the ways of life in

Indigenous communities and African diasporic traditions, this omission does a disservice to these histories and to ourselves in creating this narrow definition of “co-operative”.

Furthermore, many BIPOC co-operatives that existed within the incorporated model in the 19th and 20th centuries were systematically erased. An excellent example being Japanese fishing co-ops in British Columbia which significantly contributed to the thriving Canadian fishery economy for 40 years until World War II broke out and the government seized all assets and fishery property in the violent internment of Japanese Canadians (Lee et al 2016). It may be argued in mainstream scholar academic texts written about co-operatives that specific “ethnic” based co-operatives were not technically following the 7 co-operative principles if they did not have an “open membership” per se, as they focused on their own ethnic group’s economic development (Hill 1967, p.217). Due to the exclusion and erasure of BIPOC community approaches to co-operation within the colonial Canadian context Lee et al (2016) critique the concept of “open membership” in co-operatives. Countering the notion that co-operatives are inherently inclusive, they argue for the urgent need for marginalized ethnic groups to start their own co-operatives on their own terms:

> The exclusion of nonwhites by white-dominated fishing co-operatives and associations is taken as normal. Hill (1967) not only fails to recognize the closed, exclusionary membership of white-dominated co-operatives, he also fails to note that [Japanese Canadian] fishers decided to form their own fishing co-operatives because they were refused membership in the ‘white’ fishing co-operatives (Lee et al 2016, p.543).

This experience of racial bias provided by Lee is a common theme for BIPOC co-operators. In addition to systemic racism which is pervasive and underlying racism, the outright racism that comes with interpersonal racist biases, as described by members of Black Women Professional Worker Co-op, is a painful experience. From directly targeting BIPOC leadership to microaggressions, interpersonal bias is more insidious, as people are willing to choose ignorance over learning to recognize and then unlearn personal bias (Ume-Onyido and Agusiegbe, personal communication 2022). Compounding systemic racism with willful ignorance builds multiple layers of barriers to entry for BIPOC co-operators in the co-op sector.

**Freedom Dreams Co-op Education approach to this issue:**

I am not going to say FDCE has solutions to systemic or interpersonal racism and interpersonal bias. However, we are using approaches with FDCE that begin to address some of these issues. By using our connections within the co-operative sector, FDCE aims to bring our educational workshops to places where many co-op managers and board directors might not have thought of these issues previously. Breaking down barriers when it comes to racism, whether it be systemic or interpersonal bias, involves education and relating experiences as key components of this work. In our ongoing development, FDCE has engaged an organizational partner called Challenge Accepted, an anti-oppression, intersectional education consultancy group with lived

experience to support the development of our *Co-operative Principles workshop* series.

*Figure 4: sample of FDCE popular education pedagogy*

**Barrier: Lack of time, resources and trust**

Lastly, a shortage of time, resources and trust are common issues in the barriers to the Canadian co-op sector. Co-ops and start-up organizations often start as 'passion projects' where staff working full or part-time jobs elsewhere will volunteer their time to these initiatives.. Adding to this is a lack of accessible co-op education materials.

Trust takes long-term relationships to build, needing an appropriate amount of time to prove that the co-op sector will be trustworthy and that this relationship will be reciprocal and not extractive from communities. This is evident, both for Indigenous nations and newcomers. North America has a history of using farming co-operatives as a tool of oppression alongside a complex web of the interacting impacts of the Indian Act, the Pass System and colonialism (Bateman 1996). Farming and co-operatives have legacies of colonial trauma as they have both been used as government-imposed tools of control and coersion to destroy Indigenous self-determination and food sovereignty practices (Bateman, 1996; Sengupta et al, 2015; Treaty 6 Education, n.d.). According to Aguisegbe and Ume-Onyido, newcomers don't always trust the co-operative sector and credit unions because of past experiences in their home countries (personal communication, May 6 2022). This lack of trust and resources can be built up over time, given the right educational materials, the right approach and connections to other co-operators who can relate to the target audience.

**Freedom Dreams Co-op Education approach to this issue:**

To combat the lack of time, resources and especially trust in the co-operative sector, more active outreach with BIPOC communities using targeted educational efforts is greatly needed, to help address the various barriers experienced in the sector. Having cultural ambassadors who can do the outreach into specific communities is an important part of building relationships with those who are the desired customer base. For example, the Multicultural Health Brokers co-op in Alberta is a co-operative agency that works in this way, specifically as cultural brokers connecting newcomers to health services in their region (Multicultural Health Brokers 2022). Part of what we have been doing at FDCE is having community chats, casual conversations with those in BIPOC communities who may be interested in starting co-ops and who are part of the wider solidarity economy. It's important to us to stay connected to those we may be able to work with and support in their efforts some day. Additionally, with the connections we've made with a few groups who are already doing this work in their own regions, we continue to support their efforts by connecting them with others, supporting their grant applications or introducing them to funders.

Seeking and providing information about available funding for co-ops and social enterprises in their start-up phase would be significant support that many don't have the time to pursue on their own. People who are in these early stages often are struggling to keep afloat as they build a new business. Co-op development organizations understand this, yet they often charge significant fees for service in order to cover their own operational costs. It leads to a situation where readily available funding is lacking. Credit unions or larger co-op federations could consider funding start-up co-ops as a form of enhancing their community service profile.

From the credit union representatives I've spoken with, there's a significant disconnect between credit unions as service providers and communities who need funding. Credit unions may spend a lot of money on marketing campaigns, but they often don't have the time or capacity to go into communities regularly to do outreach. All of the above examples demonstrate challenges and opportunities in this sector, particularly when taking an intersectional approach in an attempt to reach a wider audience. Care-based practices can help support the work of breaking down barriers, such as institutionalized systemic racism, and connecting with people on a more person-to-person level.

## Care-centered practices and pleasure activism: putting humans first

One of the most challenging aspects of co-operative education has been relating the co-operative model to solving the issues we as a society face today. Nearly all of the co-op development education I've come across has been rather bureaucracy-forward, starting with the principles, policies and bylaws. It is a challenge to make co-op education exciting and relevant. When co-op education starts out with policies and bylaws, it has become so far removed from the human-centered element, the common denominator that connects all of us. Co-operatives are ways in which humans build relationships with other humans. The York University course I took in summer 2021 with Professor Jin Haritaworn on *New Social Movements, Activism and Social Change* helped me recognize that creating care-centered practices is a radical act, particularly within a capitalist society which thrives on keeping its workers dissatisfied. It's the connection to other humans that needs to be re-focused. An

ethics of care philosophy argues that we are all connected as humans, tied together through emotion, empathy and regard for others. Sandberg and Elliot state:

> People and their needs are not treated in the abstract, but as the very basis for ethical decision-making. Consequently, an ethics of care emphasizes the significance of relationships, responsiveness to the needs of others, and a sense of mutual interdependence (2019, p.291).

It is this mutual interdependence Sandberg and Elliot mention that also resonates with the kind of cultural co-operation previously mentioned by our Black and Indigenous interviewees; the kind of co-operation that needs to be re-centered in the co-op sector, and it is at the heart of the co-operative education we do at Freedom Dreams. Whether we may be doing a workshop for established co-ops, BIPOC co-operators or for groups who may be looking for tools to better work together - all humans benefit from learning how to better work co-operatively together. Care-centered practices are people-skills that are undervalued, but are perhaps crucially needed most in our current society where isolation is a significant issue, whether due to COVID-19 lockdowns or the ills of a capitalist-focused society.

Care-based practices also engage with the concept of pleasure activism, a term coined by Adrienne Maree Brown (2019). In her seminal book, *Pleasure Activism*, Brown makes the valid points that we are currently creating change for a future that may not include us - therefore we need to find ways to create joy in our lives while doing this important work. These practices are radical in inserting ourselves into this work, centering the human experience, and our workshops with Freedom Dreams inspire participants to do exactly this. We root into body based practices such as breathing and grounding exercises during our workshops, to offer up an

invitation to return to our physical bodies, and to visualize and dream about how we imagine our radically transformed work will look. Building communities of care is an act of political resistance against the heteropatriarchal capitalism that we live within. To center the care for each other, within such practices as mutual aid or bartering, is to take our transactions at a person-to-person humanistic level instead of superficially dealing with economic exchanges.


*Figure 5: quote from FDCE workshop participant*

## Feminist economies of labour power: disrupting heteropatriarchal capitalism

Co-operatives are created as a means of decentralizing decision making power to bring more autonomy to members, often the workers, producers or consumers. However, the other side of the equation here must be analyzed when discussing care-centric practices. To decentralize economic exchanges is to place increased value upon unpaid labour, which often disproportionately falls to women and members of marginalized communities. Unpaid household labour is the backbone upon which capitalism thrives; it is invisibilized and yet essential to the ongoing functioning of capitalist society. Unpaid work contributes to the whole picture of the functioning home, considered to be part of the reproductive labour discourse, not only in how a mother reproduces children but also in how the repetitive,

never-finished tasks of domesticity that are reproduced over and over fall on the shoulders of women, with little recognition for the amount of labour involved (Toupin & Roth 2018; Kisner 2021). My use of the term 'feminist economy' encompasses critiques of economics with a gender-inclusive lens, paying attention to the ways in which alternatives to patriarchal norms are expressed and analyzed.

Just as the food sovereignty movement is a means to democratize the food system through all of its various stages of production, distribution, consumerism and consumption, the work that trailblazers such as Selma James or Silvia Federici have done over the years could be considered to be ways of empowering women in the domestic realm through fighting for wages for housework (WfH), challenging the roles of expectations of women, and building solidarity and community through various aspects of domesticity and reproductive labour (James & Beese 1975; Federici 1975). There are differences between James' and Federici's work, and these two women had a falling out partially due to James' insistence on prioritizing Black women's unique position of both experiencing the role of wife/mother and simultaneously also being in a position without power, being 'othered' within a white supremacist society, as a historically enslaved or paid domestic worker within the Wages for Housework movement (Capper and Austin, 2018). These multiple identities complicate the relationship that Black women have with their labour power, and within the Wages for Housework movement, as does the queering of the role of lesbians as a threat to the capitalist ideas of reproduction theory. The US/UK based Black Women for Wages for Housework (BWfWfH) and the Canadian/UK based Wages Due Lesbians (WDL) were split off from each other, under the Wages for Housework banner (Capper and Austin, 2018). While these organizing groups were not technically co-ops, they

were analyzing and dismantling labour power, working co-operatively to bring value and solidarity to women, including with an intersectional lens. I argue that this is an example of informal co-operation and solidarity economy.

Both James and Federici were pivotal writers and scholar-activists of their time, and I do not intend to collapse their work as one. However, both BWfWfH and WDL were united in a call for a commons grounded in housework as a unified site of struggle:

> BWfWfH and WDL's vision of a "reproductive commons" issued the demand for an alternative, collective, organization of reproduction that would not replicate existing sexual and racial divisions of labor and initiated a praxis of forming alliances among reproductive workers against neoliberal enclosures (Capper and Austin, 2018 p.448).

An example relating to use of the idea of commons is that food sovereignty is partly about creating food systems based in a community setting, with self-determination allowing for the flexibility to address whatever local issues may be most pressing, while empowering the marginalized to create and implement their own solutions for sustainability. This 'commoning' of food in a community setting also allows for better transparency and more local control over the food value chain. BWfWfH argues for compensation for housework tasks, yes, but also challenges the concept of the commons. Since not all women doing housework are equally impacted by our racial capitalist society, not all have equal access to a sense of the commons; therefore, using the term 'commoning' instead was seen as more fitting for their purposes:

> By organizing autonomously under the banner of the WfH movement, BWfWfH and WDL, in turn, transformed the meaning of the WfH perspective, elucidating the uncommon reminders that fissured (feminist) community, even as they simultaneously advanced a politics of what Cohen (1997: 438, 452) calls "progressive transformative coalition work" through a practical-theoretical centering of the entanglements between housework and (sexual) nonnormativity. These groups therefore imagined commoning precisely as the refusal to seek a communitarian horizon entirely free of the divisions, antagonisms, or, in Lauren Berlant's (2016) parlance, ambivalences about being, working, and struggling together (Capper and Austin, 2018 p.460).

What I deeply appreciate about this analysis is that there are complexities in the struggle, in being together and working together that can't be shied away from. These movements and the work to be done can't be simplistic or linear. Life is messy and people are living their truth in all of their whole personhood of complex relations and identities. What we do need to do is to continue finding ways to bridge gaps and to continue the coalition-building between movements and differences so that we have the collective people power to demand better of our governments, of our co-conspirators, and of ourselves.

There's an urgency to figuring out solutions, as the climate crisis intertwines with heteropatriarchy, with neoliberal capitalism, within the white supremacist and corporate control that prioritizes greed over humanity. COVID has made more of the mainstream public face these realities. It has meant that many have had to experience threats and realities of living "without"; without their standard routines, their reliable sources of entertainment, services,

and how life used to work pre-pandemic. Yet, it has also brought people together in mutual aid to check on our neighbours and vulnerable ones, when governments have failed us. Many BIPOC working class families and individuals fell through the cracks during the pandemic: slipping through cycles of layoffs, evictions from housing, drastically rising costs of living and rent, receiving government assistance and then having to figure out how to pay it back - all in higher proportions than non-minority Canada Emergency Response Benefit recipients, Covid patients, or food and housing-insecure people according to Statistics Canada (Government of Canada 2021). The pandemic has demonstrated how fragile and detrimental late-stage capitalism is to our general well-being and health; personally, socially and for our planet. It's easy to forget that life hasn't always operated this way, but the opportunities and conversations of dreaming of new ways forward have been opened in corners of our society where they were stagnant and where they haven't happened before. When we reconceptualize what we consider to be of value, this changes the narrative. When we prioritize helping others over greed, prioritize other humans' health and wellbeing over money; each time we choose these options we are shifting our own values and centering care. A care-based economy operates on commoning, mutual aid and co-operation - all things we've seen operating on a grassroots level during the pandemic. This gives me hope, but more than hope, I have seen that the doors are opening for real opportunities to work together for real change - something that our collective coalition-building is working towards.

Feminist economists have long discussed women's unpaid, undervalued labour as significant contributions to our society from James and Federici's ground breaking work mentioned above highlighting the ways in which unwaged housework is at the heart of every

economic sector (James & Beese 1975; Federici 1975) to more recent analyses of degrowth and climate justice requiring a lens of intersectionality, considering the role of women's unpaid labour and the role of nature's free ecological services in creating viable, long-term solutions (D'Alisa and Cattaneo 2013; Perkins 2019). By taking an intersectionality lens and feminist economics approach to unwaged labour and its use value, we can see the rich conversations and analyses that open up around how race, gender and care-based economies affect each other. This example could be related to the co-operative sector, to open up further conversations in this sector with an intersectionality lens, to consider the current pandemic landscape where we have the ability to position co-operatives as a relevant option for establishing worker ownership, for reimagining how it can be possible to merge your livelihood with your social, ethical and sustainability values.

## Degrowth and the return to Indigenous land-based practices for an equitable future

Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education's impact in pushing forward the solidarity economy has implications towards models of degrowth, decolonization practices and sustainability focused on the micro-community, local level. Indigenous nations in the land we know as Canada have long-established traditional governance systems reliant on values of co-operation, reciprocity and solidarity. Although many operations in Indigenous communities may not necessarily define themselves as co-operatives in a definitive sense, many have traditional economies that function on principles that, to me, echo similarities in

relationship-based epistemologies and practices that are also found in co-operatives principles. The concepts of being in relationship with land as opposed to proprietary ownership of land is important to understand, and in reconciliatory work with Indigenous communities a priority must be the rematriation of Indigenous land.

As decolonial studies academic Eve Tuck states, “A rematriation ... is concerned with the redistribution of power, knowledge, and place, and the dismantling of settler colonialism” (2011, p. 37). The concept of rematriating lands is a return to mother earth, a return to life without heteropatriarchy as the norm. Part of decolonial practices must be in our actions to return lands to Indigenous nations, part of establishing better Indigenous-led food sovereignty. Some scholars are researching and working on settler-led and allied collectives towards land remaitriation such as the *Relational Accountability for Indigenous Rematriation (RAIR)* collective (Rotz 2019). Community land trusts are a way to enable more of this work, establishing ways in which to protect lands from further industrial development. While many community land trusts exist to remove property from the prospective housing development market, others exist to protect land and a growing movement of rematriating lands to Indigenous nations via ecological gifting or Indigenous-led land trusts is furthering Indigenous sovereignty across this country (Big Canoe and Molodecky 2022). Community-led land trusts are a part of the solidarity economy, a way of utilizing a co-operative model for land use, removing lands from the prospecting market for self-determined community use. While Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education has yet to engage with land trusts, we recognize that land trusts are a viable way to secure community control over decision-making related to physical space. Land is a key issue with regards to use and ownership/title, and if we cannot have full democratic community control without

discussing food sovereignty, we also need to include land sovereignty in the conversation as well.

## Freedom Dreaming: The Future of Co-operation and Solidarity

*"Without new visions, we don't know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics, but a process that can and must transform us"*

- Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2022, p.10)

When I see the direction of the paths we've been invited to walk with Freedom Dreams, I think about what responsibility we have to each other and to those who came before us to continue this sharing economy. There's a triangle of success in this field: 1) the recipients of co-operative education, for their own interests and development; 2) our network of partnerships in delivering this work with Freedom Dreams; and finally 3) the Canadian co-operative sector including credit unions and other funding bodies who are willing to support this work. I also recognize the power we have when we support each other, truly building this solidarity economy movement from coast to coast throughout this country and beyond.

The 2022 CMC Congress was a great way to connect with others across the country who are doing co-operatives and co-operation with intersectionality and a critical eye. These programs and organizations are crucial to engaging the next generations in this movement of solidarity economy, building in principles of co-operation that center around the things that matter to youth such as relationship building, technology, and ways to understand and build

finance that are relevant and have value to them. Being together at the CMC Congress and building this coalition across provincial borders is essential to the beginnings of this movement we are building. This approach to co-operativism is central to the future of co-operation and solidarity, constructing our collective freedom dreams in a wider and more inclusive scope than I could have imagined when embarking upon this work.

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