A Poetic Tribute to the Spirit of Canada-Nicaragua Solidarity: Tools for Peace

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Abstract Tools for Peace (T4P) was a grassroots campaign in the 1980s that mobilized Canadians in every province and territory from diverse walks of life and extended large quantities of material support to Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution. Despite having been recognized by the Nicaraguan state as one of the most important international solidarity efforts of the Sandinista era, T4P has received strikingly little scholarly attention. The paper analyzes 27 interviews with Tools for Peace participants that were conducted in the mid-1980s for an anthology that was never published, the transcripts of which are now found in the public archives at McMaster University. The interviewees' words evoke the moods, sentiments, and dispositions that animated T4P. Weaving scholar-activism with arts-informed inquiry, this paper presents those sentiments in a series of found poems that seek to both engage and inspire their readers. Through these poems, the paper evokes the experiential and affective dimensions of international solidarity as it was enacted through this novel historical experience. We suggest that T4P was exemplary of the spirit of solidarity in the global movement in support of the Sandinista revolution, but also unique in its Canadian-ness, leading us to advocate a definition of international solidarity that emphasizes its situatedness, together with its experiential and affective dimensions.

KeyWords International solidarity, Nicaraguan revolution, poetic transcription, Canadian social movements

> *"Solidarity is not something you have, it is something you do — a set of actions taken toward a common goal. Inasmuch as it is something experienced, it is not a given but must be generated: it must be made, not found. Solidarity both produces community and is rooted in it and is thus simultaneously a means and an end. Solidarity is the practice of helping people realize they — that is to say, we — are all in this together."*
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> Astra Taylor and Leah Hunt-Hendrix, "One for all"
> *The New Republic*,
> Aug 26, 2019

At once arising from and producing community, the concept of solidarity has long conditioned and inspired the work of engaged and activist scholars (Hanson, forthcoming).[1] A flexible and capacious concept, solidarity was considered in the late 19th century by sociologist Durkheim as underpinning social cohesion, regarded by anarchist Kropotkin as fundamental to mutual aid, exemplified for socialist internationalists by the collective organization of workers across national boundaries, and more recently resurrected as an ethical ideal by community health and social movement scholars. As activist scholars within communities and social movements, solidarity "guides the consideration of our mutual entanglements" (CCGHR, 2015). Yet solidarity remains an ontologically slippery concept. Functioning to express the abstract ideal of common struggle with those who are understood to be oppressed, solidarity nonetheless appears in highly situational and specific forms, and often serves simultaneously as an organizing principle, an aspirational horizon, a set of practices, a template for geopolitical alignment, and a core value motivating a set of actions through emotion (Power & Charlip, 2009; Taylor and Hunt-Hendrix, 2019). So how do we capture and portray its power and potential? How do we inspire solidarity?

This article links the disposition of activist scholarship and the methods of arts-informed inquiry to reflect on such questions. In it we explore international solidarity as expressed in Tools for Peace (T4P), a large, decade-long, pan-Canadian political and material aid campaign in support of Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution in the 1980s.[2] As well as recovering and recording this important historical Canadian instantiation of international solidarity, our purpose in this article is to evoke the experience of solidarity as expressed in T4P through particular attention to its experiential and affective dimensions, with the hope of inspiring by example. To do so, we draw on our own solidarity experience as activist-scholars to offer an arts-informed portrayal of the spirit of solidarity as it played out in that campaign through "found poems" (Pendergrast, 2009). We derive these found poems from personal stories of solidarity recovered in 27 hitherto unpublished interviews with T4P and solidarity movement participants, the transcripts of which are now stored in the public archives of McMaster University.

1 Somewhat distinct from other forms of engaged scholarship, activist scholarship (AS) is more overtly political and is borne from a positionality in which researcher and activist identities fuse in the service of social movements' political aims. Rather than engaging *with* community, scholars are activists in and *of* the community; agendas are shared and enacted together. Through this kind of scholarly participation from within, knowledge useful for political struggle becomes more readily discernible, as do the contradictions and tensions within movements. Activist-scholars in this sense might be said to embody solidarity. In this paper we position ourselves as both solidarity activists and activist-scholars and use the terms interchangeably (See also Cox, 2015; Hale, 2008; Hanson, forthcoming; Sanford & Angel-Anjani, 2008).

2 Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution arose through the armed overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979. Over eleven years, the revolutionary government led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) undertook extensive reforms to health, education, and land tenure systems. Thousands of volunteer internationalists supported the left-leaning regime, as did most Western countries. A notable exception was the United States government, which instead armed a counter-revolutionary force, prompting a protracted civil war. In 1990 the Sandinistas lost a national election, effectively ending the revolutionary experiment. U.S. political pressure continued in the post-revolutionary era and contradictions within the FSLN intensified, fomenting the current anti-democratic spiral into tyranny within the party. The Sandinista government today, under the leadership of President Daniel Ortega, bears little resemblance to the earlier regime. (See also Gonzalez, 1990; La Botz, 2018; Ramirez, 2012; Robinson, 2021)

We follow this introduction by situating ourselves vis-à-vis Nicaraguan solidarity. Next we briefly situate Tools for Peace in the wider history of Canadian and global solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution. After an explanation of our methods, we turn to the material that is at the heart of the paper: we present the results of our analysis in the form of found poetry derived from the words of the transcribed interviews. We conclude with our reflections on international solidarity in the context of Nicaragua today.

Who We Are

Lori (LH): I am a white settler woman from the Canadian prairies. I have been a professor and an activist-scholar for 23 years. I have been a Nicaragua solidarity activist and community organizer in both Canada and Nicaragua for more than 40 years. I entered solidarity work not as an academic, but as a revolutionary internationalist (*internacionalista)* volunteering in the promising social struggles of Central America in the 1980s. Living in war-torn Nicaragua for six years in the 1980s, my solidarity involved witnessing and accompanying, community organizing and strategizing, and occasionally, taking part in unloading the shipping containers sent by Canadians through Tools for Peace. After moving back to Canada in the 1990s, I continued to visit Nicaragua for several months every year working within Fairtrade, feminist, and anti-mining movements, until the uprising of 2018 and the deepening of the ongoing political crisis in Nicaragua. Currently I focus on supporting exiled student activists in their organizational and scholarly work.

As an activist scholar I take cues for my scholarship from within social movements, using those cues to guide action research projects and transformative education-inspired courses in both Canada and Nicaragua. Working outside of strict academic confines and conventions, I've come to appreciate that being true to a solidarity ethos also means experimentation — with form and content as well as with audience and method. Arts-informed research, and poetry in particular, is a promising recent addition to my toolkit as part of that commitment.

Jonah (JW): I am a white settler U.S.-American man in my late 20s. I came to international solidarity work not as part of the wave of revolutionary internationalists Lori describes, but rather in the uneven and often contradictory aftermath of that collective historical experience. I traveled to Nicaragua for the first time with my mother, who had in the 1980s been actively involved in the U.S-based solidarity movement. We made the trip in 2008, when I was a high school student, as members of a biannual delegation organized by the university faculty where she was employed. I returned to Nicaragua in 2010 to work for an anti-poverty NGO that sustained itself, in large part, through the labor of affluent, but downwardly mobile, volunteers from Spain and North America. Simultaneously driven and disoriented by this experience, I returned to the United States the next year, where I became involved in new social movements that tended to be conspicuously domestic in their orientations and demands, especially in comparison with recent precursors like the Central America solidarity movement and the alter-globalization movement of the 1990s. A few years later, I returned to Nicaragua as a doctoral student. Perhaps predictably, then, my personal engagement with Nicaraguan politics remains

tightly associated with academic routines that are largely external, and sometimes detrimental, to the formation of durable political solidarity.

Both of our experiences were shaped by the withdrawal of social movement-based solidarity activities and organizations in North America during the 1990s and the Nicaraguan regime changes since then. Furthermore, both of our experiences eventually involved roles within academic institutions. To different extents and from the vantage points of two different generations and countries, we each continue to seek ways to define and portray international solidarity that might function to revive its inspirational and political appeal. This project is part of that effort.

Tools for Peace and the Canada-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement

The Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua was supported by one of the most dynamic and socially influential international solidarity movements of the twentieth century. Historians and participants have taken significant strides towards documenting various instantiations of this movement in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, not only providing details of the global movement's internal dynamics but also uncovering the personal stories of participants who were often transformed by their experiences as solidarity activists (Agreda Portero & Helm, 2016; Bretlinger, 1995; Christiaens, 2014; Fernández, 2015; Gosse, 1995; Helm, 2014; Lovato, 2020; Miller, 2008; Perla, 2013; Rich, 1986; Walters, 2021).

However, there has been very little scholarly attention paid to the Nicaragua solidarity movement as it unfolded in Canada. This omission is striking considering the fact that Canadians mobilized in the thousands in every province and territory to express their support for the Nicaraguan revolution, maintaining their mobilization for more than a decade. The historical archive attests that these Canadians did so in historically and geographically situated ways that diverged from the solidarity movements of other countries. Engaged scholars must therefore endeavor to understand the Canadian solidarity movement on its own terms, through analytical approaches that are sensitive to the particularities of place and time.

Tools for Peace, as a large and sustained campaign within the broader Nicaraguan solidarity movement, provides an especially rich opportunity to perform this kind of historically situated and locally sensitive analysis. Extensive archival materials consulted for this project suggest that by scope, T4P was the largest and longest people-to-people international solidarity campaign of the twentieth century in Canada. Newspaper clippings, meeting minutes, and hundreds of reports describe how over the course of a decade, T4P established 126 committees across Canada, with thousands of volunteers from diverse sectors including church, school, union, farming, fishing, healthcare, and leftist political organizations. While participating in an array of political lobbying, educational, and organizing activities, T4P volunteers also annually collected, stored, packed, and shipped approximately $1M of material aid to Nicaragua. Given Canada's geography, coordinating donations shipped by truck, train, rail, and air from both small communities and huge warehouses in urban centres across Canada to Vancouver's port was a gargantuan task, and eventually a small staff and national office with requisite non-

profit incorporation were assembled to facilitate it. T4P was so successful that it was publicly recognized by the Sandinista government at the revolution's tenth anniversary celebration. But with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, T4P and the entire edifice of the Central American solidarity movement began to disintegrate (Van Gosse, 2020). In 1996 the last known T4P committee folded, leaving a largely unpublished legacy of Canadian solidarity (Tools for Peace, c. 1982-1990; Tools for Peace National Office, 1982-1991).

As activist-scholars engaged in international solidarity, we have each found ourselves repeatedly drawn to a similar set of political and theoretical questions: what remains of the solidarity that expressed itself so strongly from within the Nicaragua solidarity movement in general, and campaigns like Tools for Peace in particular? What lessons might we still learn from the era of the Nicaragua solidarity movement about how similar feats of solidarity might be generated, sustained, or reproduced? And, most importantly, how might any such lessons be usefully communicated to those engaged in political and social struggles today?

Methods

Diverse and multi-disciplinary sources converge on several ideas about arts-informed research: that it acts as a "complementary methodology" to traditional forms of qualitative inquiry; that its use of artistic forms and expressions help explore, understand, represent, and even challenge human experiences (Searle and Shulha, 2016) potentiating research for social justice purposes (Faulkner, 2019; Hanson, 2007; Keifer-Boyd, 2001); that it allows for different types of analyses and sense-making; and that it expands the repertoire of representational forms in reporting results (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Searle and Shulha, 2016). Knowles and Coles's 2008 textbook on arts-informed research identifies several key elements of arts-informed inquiry: adhering to a particular art form, which serves to frame and define the inquiry and "text" produced; employing methodological integrity; and openly acknowledging autobiographical influence, or reflexivity, and intended audience.

These tenets of arts-informed research resonated with our research aims, with poetic inquiry seeming the most apt approach, given the affective and emotive nature of our data (Pendergrast, 2009), and having some experience with the use of poetry (Hanson, 2007; Hanson, 2020). From among the more than forty forms of poetic inquiry utilized in academic literature, we chose poetic transcription or "found poems," (Pendergrast, 2009) a form that, through "the creation of poem-like compositions from the words of interviewees" (Glesne, 1997, p. 203), construes data in poetic as opposed to prosaic ways (Pendergrast & Belliveau, 2011).

Data Capture and Analysis

LH carried out archival research between 2018 and 2023, examining more than eight metres of Tools for Peace fonds in public archives at the City of Vancouver, McMaster University, York University, The University of Calgary, and the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, as well as additional materials stored by T4P volunteers in Saskatoon, Regina, Ottawa, Toronto, and Halifax. The fonds included meeting minutes, educational and lobbying materials,

media clippings, personal correspondence, office correspondence, photos, posters, advertising materials, shipping materials, financial materials, many local annual and regional reports, including evaluations, and one box containing interview transcripts.

The transcripts and a 1-page summary describe a planned anthology project led by University of Regina professor and activist Lorne Brown in collaboration with Janice Acton, the education and outreach coordinator for T4P, and Maia Kagis, a Nicaragua activist and cooperant. The anthology was to include poignant articles and interviews with community leaders of Central American solidarity efforts. It is unclear whether the project was undertaken as a research project, as no funding sources or ethics certificates are mentioned. The transcripts suggest that the interviewees understood and agreed to the project's goals, which were to make Canadians "more aware of Tools for Peace, Salvaide, the Farmers' brigades, [and] trade union brigades… with emphasis on genuine international solidarity with the idea that the struggles for more democracy, justice and self-determination in Central America are related to those same struggles, however different the specific circumstances, in our own country" (Brown, L., ca. 1989). The anthology was never completed, and the interview transcripts were submitted to the McMaster University archives some years later. In total, the archives hold 800 pages of transcripts of 52 interviews with 59 key informants from trade unions, NGOs, churches, solidarity organizations, and other groups active in solidarity efforts.

We commenced our analysis by filtering out French language transcripts[3] and those that did not mention Tools for Peace specifically. We analyzed 27 transcripts of interviews with 30 people remained; 17 identified as women, 13 as men. Five were from Ontario, nine from B.C., 10 from the Maritimes, five from the prairies, and one from Quebec. Each of us separately read and manually open-coded the transcripts, identifying and highlighting quotes and stories that relayed the moods, sentiments, and dispositions—key affective and experiential dimensions —that animated T4P solidarity. We met by videoconference regularly throughout this phase, sharing our separate lists of emerging themes, which were highly convergent. After agreeing to five themes (described in the results section) that we considered most salient to present for the purposes of the paper, we then each worked to extract quotes and stories that best represented those themes, entering those in a document in preparation for the poetic transcription. We then created poems using exact words, phrases or sentences from the interview transcripts that had been extracted. We chose to make the poems composite, with the words and stanzas belonging to many vs. one individual interviewee. Some words and phrases from every interviewee are present in the poems.

Using secondary data in publicly available archives is considered ethics exempt under the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS-2, 2022) Chapter 2, and it is unclear whether the original project by Lorne Brown (now deceased) had obtained an ethics certificate or was even conceived of as a research project. We nonetheless consulted with the archivists at McMaster University, and in an abundance of caution, have used pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants when names appear in the poetry.

3 Due to language limitations, three transcripts were not included.

Tools for Peace in Poetry: The Results of Our Study

In this section, we present the found poems, derived from the words of the interviewees using the process described above. The poems evoke what we see as the key affective and experiential dimensions of solidarity as they were enacted through Tools for Peace and recorded in the interview transcripts — namely: inspiration, commitment, Canadian-ness, the practice and politics of community-building, and the transformative power of solidarity — but no one poem is instrumentally dedicated to any one theme. Instead, we have divided the poems in three sections which roughly correspond to initial, mid- and later phases of T4P solidarity. We offer brief introductions to each section to offer insights into our decision-making and selection. Despite these preludes, however, nothing prevents one from reading the poems in any way they wish or from deriving meaning connected to their own experience and affect; this is the nature and purpose of poetry.

Part One

The first two poems are from the words and phrases of informants that were among the dozens of Canadians who traveled to Nicaragua on organized political tours in the early years of the Sandinista revolution. While some of those quoted were seasoned development workers or politically aligned socialists, for others, it was their first trip to a "Third World" country.

We begin with a short poem, "Anything Was Possible," that takes as its inspiration the exhilaration and anxiety of that initial encounter. In "Grounding," we proceed to explore the common experience of traveling from Canada to Nicaragua as a member of a solidarity tour — a potent induction experience shared by a great number of Tools for Peace participants, (and for many, the circumstances in which the ecstatic encounter evoked in "Anything Was Possible" took place).

Anything was possible

They were wonderful schools.
A way of being with people
We came back moved by the revolution
The feeling it was unstoppable
It was euphoric
Bursts of culture and song
Women organizing
A new dawn
We were so moved.
They had lost so much
But people weren't burnt out yet
And you felt that energy. I don't know what else to call that.

Why Nicaragua?: Because it's working.

Grounding
We wanted to know what had happened.
We wanted to know!

There had just been the triumph.
The peasants were getting land.
The future looked hopeful.
Everybody was up.

Devoting my energy in Canada working for socialist revolution,
I wanted to know what had happened
In a country that was two years in.
I wanted to know.

We were so welcomed there
We were so moved
We were one of the first large delegations (I mean from Canada)
We got swept up.

What power in those tours of the early years!
They were a rallying point,
A very intense encounter with the Third World,
A springboard for organizing back home.

Back home, I got right into a union convention
and they asked me to speak
So I did.
In about 18 communities and 28 public meetings!

Nicaragua was the catalyst and the context.

Part Two

In the first poem of this section, "Canadian Flavours," we offer three glimpses into what we interpret as the particularly Canadian character of Tools for Peace. In these stanzas we hear stories of the practical nature of the work of organizing that illustrate the local manifestations and regional pride that both informed and were informed by the growing national organization. These words come from the grassroots organizers, popular educators, and members of myriad formal and informal community networks who were the backbone of T4P.

The poems are not without tensions — some playful, some deeply political — borne of uniquely Canadian regional expressions and collective experiences, in particular Quebec's fight for sovereignty. We chose informants' words that capture the creative, eccentric, touching,

hard and detailed organizing work of putting together annual campaigns, and we included phrases that relay the chaos, and sometimes the burnout, of doing so over and over. To reveal something of the powerful T4P sectoral organizing strategy, we include words by Canadians engaged in fishing and farming (who were living through the economic recession of the 1980s) that relay powerful sentiments of solidarity borne from experiences of shared oppression and a sense of connecting to a larger picture of global injustice.

Canadian flavours

1.

After that tour, Shorty and friends had gone around and collected some fishing goods
And then they found out that the Monimbo was heading back to Nicaragua
With room for it!

And when we saw that possibility,
(that a ship would go back and forth)
We said: We could fill it up every time.

And then other people heard about it. People in Saskatchewan. In Cape Breton.

No one really sat down and said: OK this is how we are going to start Tools for Peace
Quite the opposite
It has grown from the bottom up

We started with a flea market booth in a town of 50 people

Here we ended up with an eclectic assortment of people:
Catholic priests and a nurse
And old left wing trade unionists
(They had a real advantage because they had already a world view that explains why this is happening.)
And that bunch of fishermen with nets to donate
(so they showed up with a pick-up truck full of nets and buoys).
People kind of came out of the woodwork with old tools and all kinds of things
And every year a few more people would get involved.

It was just something we could do
A Canadian-kind of tie-in
It was the most interesting campaign you could imagine.

No want to be like European countries where there's one national umbrella committee
That wasn't the way in Canada.

No top-down management
We were a campaign, not an NGO

And were we organized!!

126 committees

Regional reps, national meetings, tours, brigades
Warehouses, transportation
Letter-writing, lobbying,
Elementary school curriculum, even.
Some 100,000 people contacted each year.

And we never give ourselves credit for what that means, to become organized.
to make consensus decisions
to work with one another
to celebrate; so much fun is built into this!
and yes conflict, but tolerance, too

Like we found ways to talk with people.
Excellent respectful discussions: Christianity versus Marxism
Someone from the United Nations (his perspective was quite different).
Another a journalist.
Another from the Communist Party
Another was an independent leftist.
I was the only Christian!

And you'd find out what is going on across the country.

In Quebec some were rightfully contrary to English Canada.
And they're thinking if we join, we're gonna get stuck with the same contradictions as any other Anglo coalition.
But then others said we *could* be linked to the national — and be autonomous at the provincial level. And so it was. Eventually.

It all took a while in practice.

Maybe that's just the nature of solidarity…

Maybe truth is, we needed solidarity among ourselves as much as among countries.

2.

It’s different organizing in a small community,
It’s not the big city.
More organic, it seems to me.
It happens by word of mouth, or by the grapevine.

Take Cape Breton: like a Third World country.
De-industrialized
Sure, we have unemployment insurance
we have transfer payments,
we have some income support.

But we feel for people who are in a situation like ours

Garth: A steelworker and a stalwart
Saw Nicaraguan miners sharing their gumboots to go down the mine.
He never forgot it.
Poverty way beyond anything he’d seen
yet they’d had struggle

He never forgot it.

John: comes up with the idea
Miners’ boots from the DEVCO mines!
The coal miners get boots from their employer,
one of them gets a hole in it
and they both get thrown out
Well, John (he’s in his 70s, retired from the pit)
he collected them all,
took them out in his backyard,
scrubbed them off,
tested them all personally to make sure that they didn’t leak,
then sized them
and paired them.
And that very first year,
he brought in 16 pairs of them,
The second year, a couple of hundred pairs of them.

And so it went.

People here understand depending on one or two main exports,

Understand what that economy's like
Decisions made somewhere else
Co-ops and the trade union movement, trying to take some kind of control.
In that way Tools for Peace wasn't a charity thing ... we could understand

I'm not sure that people in other places get that as clearly.

In Cape Breton we feel solidarity.

3.

We were Alberta farmers
Left of the mainstream, (well, some got political by being involved)
We were a farmers brigade — not tourists
We built a farm equipment repair shop,
We lived with Nicaraguan farmers

Back home we showed slides, saying:
that they want support in their cause
they want self-determination
they don't want charity
And we started Farmers for Peace

In Brandon it was the NFU
Well, some were National Farmers Union
Some political activists
Some NDP[4]
Some church-people
Some of the farm people were both or at least two of the above
And Farmers for Peace and Tools for Peace and NFU and Development and Peace, too…

New Brunswick farmers sent potato seeds
Not to oversimplify
There was so much learning!!
About struggle,
about the system,
about the politics,
about organizing.

4 The social-democratic 'New Democratic Party'

It would lead us to say: what is happening in the world?

Here a lot of families gone under and lost their land
and still don't know what happened.
But there you saw that resolve.

And we saw a tremendous amount of connections
And saw how in Nicaragua farmers are getting more organized
And they were getting their land back!
They were 50 years ahead of the Canadians because they were getting their land back.

Part Three

Our final poems are more retrospective. In both "What We Remember" and "Transformation," participants draw on the benefit of hindsight to reflect on the ups and downs of solidarity organizing in words and stories that evoke growing pains, burnout, and transformation. These up-and-down words reflect the uncanny sensations of recollecting visceral experiences of international solidarity and finding them simultaneously wondrous and disorienting.

What We Remember

First of all we were new at warehousing.
We were new at packing.
We probably did just about everything the hard way that first year.
A group of carpenters to build the crates.
We had one, a beautiful, beautiful crate
Well, it housed 5 or 6 guitars that were going down.
(And some medical equipment.)
They were handcrafted.
They were gorgeous.
They weighed a hell of a lot.
And we never did that again!

Once, I was crossing Harbord on my bicycle
and all of a sudden everything lets loose
from my backpack and there's thousands
of Tools for Peace leaflets all over Harbord Street.

That first time I witnessed an unloading,
my feelings of elation (look what WE'VE done)
turned to embarrassment.
Nicaraguan friends opened crates and boxes
to find outdated medicine,

a box of broken toys,
a pair of used runners.
We knew we had to make a major shift
in helping people understand the difference between charity and solidarity.

There have always been ups and downs, and that's true for any group.

We had all kinds of people working together on this thing
Just a real flurry of activity.
People sawing and making crates and lugging all this stuff around.
It was great.
We had real community building.
A real payoff.

That's one of the joys of solidarity work.
It's a school.
But you don't have to sit down and study.
You can learn while you are stapling and folding.

But sometimes the meetings would go very long.
And people do get tired
And they leave.

There have always been ups and downs

Or they just have to.

Nobody seems to be able to afford to be unemployed.
The lack of jobs if there are any
you've got to grab one and hold. It's not just us
more and more preoccupied with survival — getting
to work
getting home
getting the dishes done,
It just takes that much more time and energy when there is no money for day-care.

And people involved in the trade union movement got swamped.
They said the best solidarity we can make with the Latin Americans peoples with future aspirations is to build a better and stronger labour movement here.

There has always been ups and downs and that's true for any group.

Transformation

1.

It seems overwhelming - the power of the United States
if you only look at it like that.

But when you look at the support internationally,
You look at the networks that are building over time.
You look at that community that's building.
And you look at the impact of words in action
And you start to see that we can make a difference.

We in the trade unions,
we in solidarity groups,
we in the churches,
We actually can make a difference.

I think Nicaragua made quite an impact on the Canadian consciousness.

2.

Sometime revolutions are needed to turn over
and turn upside down
or whatever.

Nicaragua just shook up his life.
There was a point
when he would just not consider any other work.
He has written poetry
to Nicaragua, Nicaragua. No work but Nicaragua.
Nothing would defuse it.
His whole heart was in it.

He cut his hair off in Nicaragua.
His hair was practically down to his knees.
And one night I remember (the first night he got there)
and he realized that a revolution had happened
and he handed a pair of scissors to one of the women
and he said okay,
and asked her to cut off his hair.

Discussion/Reflections

Poetry is hardly a conventional medium for conveying research results, much less on topics such as international solidarity and social movement history. But poetry distinguishes itself from other genres of writing through its capacity for evoking affective experiences that elude rational analysis. Poems are also uniquely economic in their use of language; successful poems accomplish feats of distillation and compression, capturing in miniature the kinds of affective experiences that might take hours or pages to describe in conversation or prose. We contend that the construction of poetry through anonymized interview transcripts represents an overlooked technique through which ethnographers, oral historians, and especially activist-scholars might seek to understand and communicate observations gleaned from interview data. This is particularly true in cases such as ours, when the embodied, relational work of conducting the interviews is severed by circumstance from the later work of secondary review and analysis.

Furthermore, poetic transcription is a method well suited to understanding and communicating a phenomenon as varied and difficult to grasp as international solidarity. Solidarity is not dissimilar to humor: it is an undeniable and often profound subjective phenomenon that is nonetheless maddeningly difficult, even impossible, to define. Just to perceive it requires a learned sensitivity that is always temporally and spatially situated, yet never perfectly shared, even across apparently superficial lexical or cultural differences. Because of its ontological slipperiness, there is limited utility to attempting to crystallize a single working definition of solidarity, much less *international* solidarity, as it might exist as a pure concept untethered from any specific struggle or moment in time. Indeed, it is our contention that a phenomenon like international solidarity is only accessible to activist-scholars in specific manifestations, and never as a general or transhistorical essence. For this reason, it is critical that activist-scholars generate rich descriptive accounts of specific instantiations of international solidarity as it has been enacted by intentional communities of political actors at particular moments in time.

The found poems above capture something of the emotional vernacular generated and sustained by Tools for Peace, imbued as it was with a particular set of moods, dispositions, and sentiments, each of which was irreducibly tethered to the specific historical and cultural contexts in which T4P was enacted. The Canadian solidarity movement was historically and geographically situated: its protagonists stood upon, and indeed collectively established, a lexical ground of their own — a Canadian-ness — that is worthy of study on its own terms. Although T4P was but one component of that movement, it was the largest international people-to-people solidarity campaign of the 20th century in Canada. The interpretative work undertaken in this paper is therefore valuable not only in that it provides a unique model for arts-informed and activist scholarship, but also because it provides insight into an understudied, yet undeniably significant, instantiation of international solidarity.

This act of preservation is especially vital in the present context, as contemporary Nicaragua presents a fraught puzzle for those of us committed to the practice of international solidarity. The Sandinista revolution continues to inspire nostalgia among international activists who

recall its totemic status as a rare radical success story, arriving during the demoralizing and disorienting twilight of the Cold War. But today, the Sandinista political party, in power under the leadership of the corrupt and authoritarian president Daniel Ortega, advances a program diametrically opposed in many ways to the ideals many international solidarity activists have long associated with the Nicaraguan revolution (Hanson, forthcoming; La Botz, 2018; Robinson, 2021). Indeed under 'foreign agent' laws that were created in the wake of a popular anti-government uprising in 2018 (Ley de Regulación de Agentes Extranjeros, 2020), acts of material or political solidarity across national boundaries — or, for that matter, works of activist-scholarship involving any critique of the regime — can result in arrest or deportation. Many activist scholars have posed the question of what went wrong in Nicaragua (Gonzalez, 1990; Hale, 2008; La Botz, 2018). That question can only be answered by the true protagonists of the struggle, the Nicaraguans themselves. Perhaps we, as North American solidarity activists, might ask ourselves if there is some truth to the Karl Marx quote: "In history, as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life" (Marx, 1965).

Recognizing that poetry lends itself more to reflection than conclusion, we end by offering brief personal reflections on how our work on this paper has affected how we think about our own trajectories as scholars and activists, as well as our thinking about the larger questions identified earlier.

Lori

A sense of betrayal, despair, or failure can dishearten solidarity, whether with Nicaragua or elsewhere. Histories of transformative and hopeful solidarity need to be not only documented, but also re-enlivened in ways that make them politically useful and affectively engaging, in hopes of renewing the promise of solidarity in new ways and in new movements. Finding these interview transcripts in the McMaster archives was thus a watershed moment in my research on Tools for Peace. For these were not merely data; these were the animated voices of friends connected through an especially inspirational campaign in a historically unique moment in a country that is, as author Giaconda Belli puts it in the title of her memoir, "under my skin." Converting those words and sentiments into an emotive art form as a political act was a small contribution to countering despair in these times.

As someone in this for the long haul, though, I understand each such contribution as but the enduring, persistent, ant-like work of political solidarity. Knowing much more is urgently needed, how else might we, as engaged activist-scholars working today — while an imperialist war is being waged against Ukraine, while the state of Iran has begun executing protesters, while Nicaragua is once again a police state governed by a dictatorial regime — find a way to transform the demise of one solidarity movement into the nourishment of another? How else, but to seek to engage in doing something, doing something differently, doing what we can?

Jonah

It is undeniable that in Canada T4P succeeded in mobilizing the spirit of solidarity to generate a community-in-struggle that proved remarkably durable. This community sustained itself across

swathes of time and space and became fused to a diverse set of aspirations and affectations that were, in almost every instance, rooted in social and spatial imaginaries particular to Canada and its varied regions. What lessons might my generation take from Tools for Peace? Perhaps lessons is the wrong word. Perhaps "take" is, too. T4P constitutes a part of a hemispheric radical tradition, a tradition expansive in its diversity and irreducible to any one of its many local instantiations, in which the spirit of solidarity may periodically find, like a match-flame behind a cupped hand, the safety and protection it needs to develop, to survive, to spread.

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