

From education crisis to organisation: Reflections on the National Education Co-ordinating/Crisis Committee (NECC) (1985-1995)

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The book is largely centred on the role of the National Education Co-ordinating Crisis Committee (NECC) in the national resistance against apartheid from 1985 to 1995. The systemic inequalities and disparities informed its activities on South Africa's education front. It has had several objectives since its inception. These included stability around the schooling system through back-to-school campaigns, a vision shared by other political organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). Despite its significant role in fighting the injustices of the education system under the apartheid government, the NECC was largely excluded from the mainstream accounts of the country's liberation struggle. Several scholars, therefore, initiated the book project against the backdrop of such negated historical narrative. There were challenges during the initial phases of this project. Chief among these was the lack of funds; as the project was not sufficiently funded, the work had to be paused at certain points and carried out only when funds became available and time allowed. Another challenge was the timing. The project commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed serious limitations. Interviews were conducted online, and most sampled participants could not be reached for various reasons. Data generators had to make do with what they could access. They eventually interviewed people who were available and willing to participate in this project

only as witnesses, not as directly involved political activists. On the positive side, most interviewees were foregrounded, comprising educationists, former learners, faith-based activists, union leaders and teachers, who were able to provide incisive accounts on the subject under discussion.

Although the book's title sounds thought-provoking and magnetic to a reader, the use of the acronym NECC in the title was confusing. One does not understand what it means; it ought to have been written in full for better understanding on the part of the readers, and subsequently followed by an acronym. The design and cover are quite intriguing and beautifully complemented by relevant images. The inclusion of the years 1985-1995 in the title sparked interest among South Africans and others who want to keep tabs on the country's liberation struggle. It was during this period that South Africa reached its peak in the struggle for political transformation. Any reader would be led on by the title to delve deeper into different layers of the country's transition from apartheid to democratic rule. Such a strategy is commendable and enhances the book's marketability. The book's division into two parts is acceptable, as it makes it easier for the reader to keep track of the narrative. The first focuses on insights into the NECC's role from individual authors, while the other pays close attention to interviews with relevant people. One notices a link between the writers' intellectual debates, arguments, and discussions and the versions of individual participants, which is quite interesting. Part one examines the NECC's position within the ANC, one of the anti-apartheid movements. It provides a comprehensive historical background that sheds some light on the genesis of the broader liberation struggle. Terri Maggott, one of the authors, dwells at length on the literature consulted on the formation and functions of the NECC. Key arguments by various scholars take centre stage. Maggott clearly demonstrates the blending of scholarly debates and arguments around the key roles of the NECC. However, one notes a contestation of the period within which the narrative is confined, namely, 1985-1995. It is evident that the education system in South Africa continues to be riddled with challenges of diverse magnitudes in a post-apartheid dispensation. The book seems primarily to address the issues the freedom fighters confronted during the apartheid years, rather than systemic challenges beyond liberation. It is interesting how the authors address controversial issues throughout the book.

One distinguished feature of this book is the chapters on interviews. These individual accounts enhance the credibility of the histories that this project sought to probe. The oral history dynamic added to the narrative is premised on the notion that oral histories are considered credible accounts. One may safely conclude that this marks an interesting

combination of primary and secondary data. Such a combination sets this book apart from other literary works produced by various scholars over time on the history of South Africa's liberation struggle. The literature examined by Terri Maggott clearly indicates a substantial number of scholarly works on the subject, rather than primary sources. The authors are, therefore, commended for such a strategically crafted piece of academic writing. They explain the triggers of their research undertaking on the history of the NECC and its role in transforming the country's political systems in all spheres. Another aspect of the book that one may find intriguing is the continuum of liberation politics. The book extensively covered events in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. 'Fees Must Fall', for example, is one of the triggers of scholarly works beyond the country's liberation. Maggott and Shay-Sithole echoed these sentiments in their chapters.

In light of the critical analysis of this book, one may safely conclude that, despite its visually striking features and reflective text, the book languished in obscurity. It did not gain much traction as one would have anticipated, given the most significant histories of South Africa's liberation struggle, which it extensively covered. That is regrettable; hopefully, it will not dilute the authors' efforts. One of the contributing factors, as the authors alluded to in the beginning chapters, was the lack of funding. The project's initiators struggled to get it off the ground; at some point, work was paused for a period and resumed once funding had been secured. It was the authors' unrelenting resilience that enabled them to carry the project through to completion. One remaining challenge, however, is to market the book to the global community as a viable means of educating people about the ideals of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy.