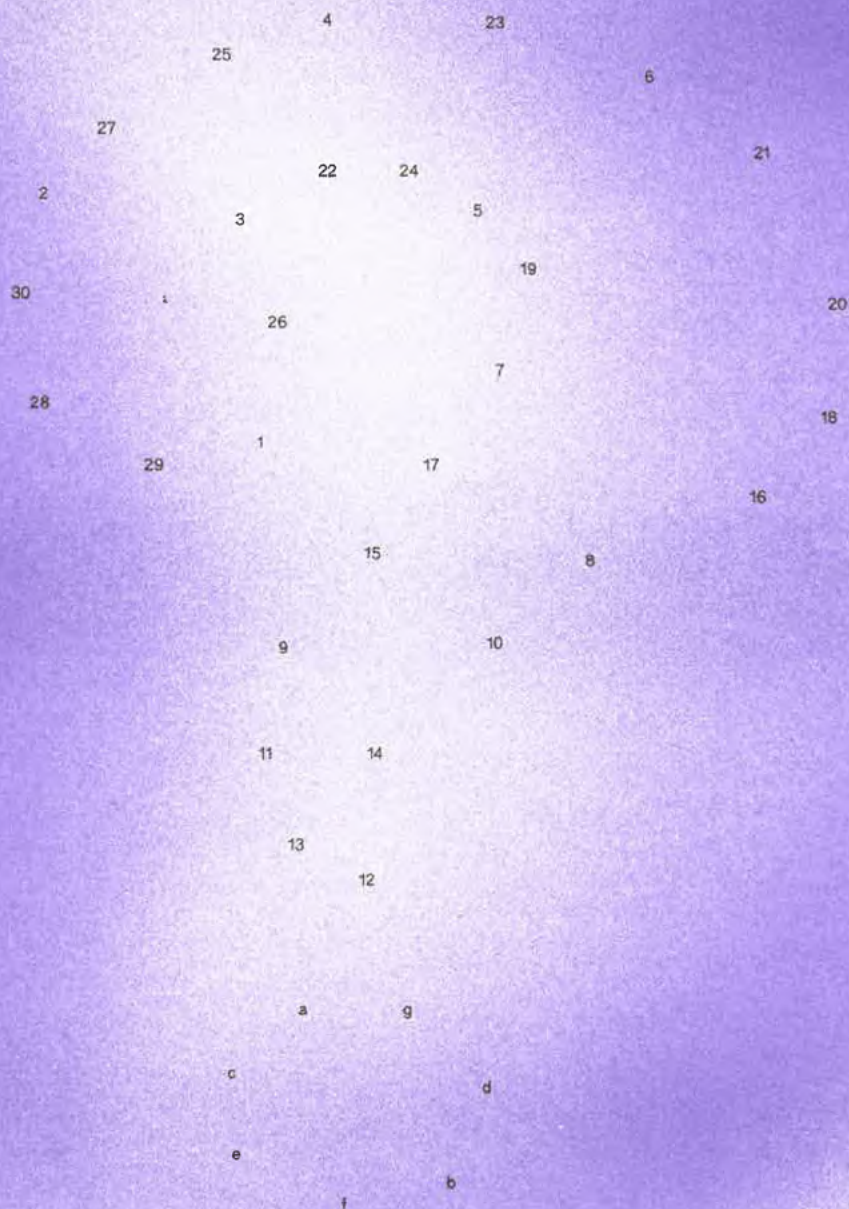


The Young Questions



Union

The Young Questions is a series of independent publications
by creative brand development agency The Young.
In this edition, The Young Questions Union.

www.theyoung.agency

Union

At The Young, unanswered questions, educating ourselves, and nurturing our creative minds are what brings us to research. From the often whispered '**Vulva**' to the universally celebrated '**Denim**', our journey has taken us through realms of both taboos and trademarks, peeling away the layers of assumptions to find something new entirely - for us and maybe for you.

This curiosity is culminating in our latest inquiry: 'Union' — a word that feels like harmony, togetherness and has equally politically charged weight.

As we dive into our third edition of The Young Questions, we reflect on the meaning of union. Once, the phrase 'Union Made' on a pair of jeans stood as a proud hallmark of quality and fair labour practices. Today, however, this label is more often a nostalgic echo in vintage reproductions, a symbol perhaps more than a reality.

So here we stand and wonder: What does union really mean to us today? Is it just a memory, or does it still play a crucial role in our lives as the world changes around us?

As we investigate union, we invite you to unravel with us the complexities of how communities connect, fragment, and transform in an age where technology, migration, and economic change continually reshape our social togetherness. It's not just about understanding union as a concept (which we'll gladly do too) but engaging with it as an ongoing process, a living thing, that plays a role in our identities and interactions at both local and global scales. In this ever-changing world, the pursuit of true union remains a powerful and necessary endeavour.

Welcome to
The Young Questions
Union.

Is there more or less unity in the world today?

What are the challenges in achieving union?

Which union(s) do you feel you belong to?

Can union exist without compromise?

What do you associate with union?

Is union only a political concept?

Is there a recipe or formula for achieving union?

Is union necessary for societies?

What role does communication play in union?

How does union affect individual freedom?

How does culture influence union? And vice versa?

When is union powerful?

When does union not work?

What is the relationship between unions and social justice?

Can unions be temporary?

Methodology

At The Young, each new publication begins not just with curiosity, but with a commitment to weave a richer pluralism of understanding, especially on something as profound as 'Union'. Acknowledging our dual role as seekers of insight and as a brand development agency, we set out to ensure our exploration was anchored in genuine, lived experiences and sensitive to the nuances of how people truly connect and unite.

Our approach to exploring 'union' involved casting as many hues of experience as possible. We extended invitations to an eclectic mix of individuals. Who has insights about the true essence of union, its hurdles, and the beauty of coming together?

Together as a team, we came up with a list of 35 profiles: from a youth sports coach, to a professional e-gamer, football player, historian, choir director, retired music teacher, music producer, art teacher, comedian, bookbinder, theatre director, photographer, curator collective, visual artist, dean of an interdisciplinary bachelor's program, insect expert, forest manager, CEO of a green company, fusion cook, baker, union leader, mayor of a second city, social workers, bridge builder, divorce lawyer, mediator, relationship counsellor, fan club leader, strategist, twins, casteller, social study teacher, therapist, and astronomer.

Returning to our roots for this project, we chose WhatsApp as our primary outreach tool, a tool of yesterday (we used it for our first project in 2013) that also works today and tomorrow. Our choice was to create an intimate, personal space for conversation. WhatsApp's informal setting helped lower barriers, making it easier for participants to express themselves in their first languages—Dutch, English, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, and German.

This approach not only ensured comfort but also lent authenticity to the voices we aimed to amplify.

Our goal was never to compile a conventional pool of expert opinions. Instead, we brought diverse perspectives together to form a sort of collective intelligence. The insights we collected were enlightening, though not without their challenges. Some people hesitated to join the conversation, wary of commercialism — a valid concern we've all felt. They reflect a broader discomfort with how community and connectivity are commodified in our increasingly digital world. And in turn it's brands reflecting on this and asking: what does togetherness really mean to us?

This exploration served as a reflective mirror for us. As a brand development agency, we cannot deny that our work carries commercial implications. We are deeply engaged in how brands grapple with the notion of community. This project was also an opportunity for us to reflect on our own standpoint regarding community and commercialism. What does genuine togetherness mean in a commercial context? How can we, as creators and influencers of brands, foster authentic community experiences without succumbing to superficiality?

35
people
reached

11
people
participated

Sports:
youth sports coach,
pro e-gamer,
football player

Arts & humanities:
historian, choir director,
retired music teacher,
music producer,
art teacher,
comedian,
book binder,
theatre director,
photographer,
curator collective,
visual artist,
bachelor programme dean

Nature:
insect expert,
forest manager,
CEO of green company,
fusion cook, baker

Politics:
union leader,
mayor of Rotterdam,
social workers

Engineering:
bridge builder

Legal:
divorce lawyer,
mediator,
relationship
counsellor

Others:
fan club leader,
strategist,
twins,
casteller,
social study teacher,
therapist,
astronomer



The Language of Union.

When we first used the term 'union', many people struggled with it. The word felt politically charged and is associated with labour movements, political alliances, or bureaucratic institutions—topics that can seem divisive or daunting. But what happens when we take a closer look at what 'union' really means? Once we broke it down, the discussions began to flow. Although initially hesitant, many found that the core values of unity and collective strength deeply resonated with them and their experiences. The word union might be a turn off, but what it means attracts. Could it be that we need new ways to talk about these humanly inherent ideas?

The Need for New Language

Why consider new language at all? Stuart Hall, [1] a prominent cultural theorist, emphasised the critical role language plays in shaping our understanding of the world and the opportunities available to us. He argued, "People have to have a language to speak about where they are and what other possible futures are available to them. These futures may not be real; if you try to concretise them immediately, you may find there is nothing there. But what is real, is the possibility of being someone else, of being in some other social space from the one in which you have already been placed". Hall's work often explored how cultural identity and social structures are interwoven, and he believed

that having the right language is crucial for envisioning and striving towards different possibilities.

This perspective resonates with Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

Wittgenstein, renowned philosopher of language, argued that language shapes our reality. In his view, the ability to conceptualise and discuss the world around us is fundamentally tied to the language we use. If our language lacks the words or constructs to describe certain experiences or ideas, those experiences or ideas effectively remain beyond our understanding and perception. Therefore, expanding our language also expands our cognitive and experiential horizons.

Simply put, what does this mean for us? If our language lacks the words to describe certain experiences or ideas, those experiences or ideas effectively remain out of our reach. Therefore, could expanding our language also expand our worldview?



[1] Stuart Hall (2000), photograph by Eamonn McCabe / Camera Press / Redux.

Incorporating Ubuntu and Amandla Awethu

How can specific terms broaden our understanding of union? During one of our conversations, a participant introduced us to two powerful terms: 'Ubuntu' and 'Amandla Awethu', expanding the limits of our understanding of union. How so?

Understanding Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term from Southern Africa, translating broadly to "I am because we are" or "humanity towards others." What does this mean in practice? Ubuntu is more than a word; it's a rich philosophical concept that underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of all people. It suggests that one becomes truly human through our relationships and community. Going beyond a mere definition, Ubuntu advocates a worldview that values communal bonds and collective well-being over individual pursuits.

Why does this matter? As a philosophy, Ubuntu promotes community, connection, and shared values, challenging the prevalent focus on individualism and competition. It offers an alternative vision rooted in collaboration and mutual care. By embracing Ubuntu, societies can work towards more holistic and sustainable forms of development, where the well-being of the individual is inherently linked to the well-being of the community.

By recognising our global interconnectedness, Ubuntu encourages a collective responsibility to care for our planet and each other. It invites us to consider how our actions, no matter how small, contribute to the larger fabric of humanity. [2]



[2] Ndebele Abstract (2018), by South African artist Esther Mahlangu.

In essence, Ubuntu provides a powerful framework for rethinking our relationships with each other and the world. It reminds us that our collective strength lies in our ability to work together, support one another, and build communities where everyone can thrive.

Exploring

Moving
to Amandla Awethu.

Amandla Awethu is a rallying cry meaning "Power to the People" in Zulu and Xhosa. This phrase was a powerful slogan during the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. It not only encapsulated the collective struggle against oppression but also conveyed a unifying vision for empowerment and social change. How does this slogan continue to teach us valuable lessons?

Amandla Awethu is a call followed by a response. The leader of a group would call out "Amandla!" (power) and the crowd would respond with "Awethu!" (to us).

Amandla

It is
a dynamic
of engagement and
solidarity, reinforcing the
importance of unity in driving
social change.

Its effective strategic messaging is crucial; clear and resonant calls to action inspire people to engage and participate in meaningful movements for change. This slogan's power lies not just in its historical significance but in its ongoing potential to energise movements for social justice today. The call and response nature of

"Amandla Awethu" itself fosters engagement and solidarity, embodying a communal spirit where the call for power is met with a resounding response of unity. This dynamic interaction not only

Awethu

amplifies the message of collective strength but also reinforces a sense of togetherness and shared purpose among participants. In other words, a potent tool for mobilising and energising movements for social justice today.

The Power of Words

So, how might our conversations change if we incorporated these ideas? By enriching our language with terms that capture our shared human experiences and aspirations, we not only deepen our understanding but emphasise the importance of shared humanity and collective power. We can imagine new social realities, new understandings, new unions.

Here are some 'new terms', or new usage of words, that came up during this research:

- A group grows
- Finding togetherness
- Binding element
- Groups cultivate rituals/language/ideas
- Initiating groups
- A sense of belonging
- (un)natural belonging
- Open structure
- Serving leadership
- Belonging = Exclusion
- Union, a necessary skill
- The group trusts back
- Shared ambition
- A myriad of tribes
- Solidarity and union are actions
- Forming a whole
- A place within union
- Common ground

Which union(s) do you feel you belong to?



Which union(s) do you feel you belong to?

"Professionally, I identify with those who work with people "on the margins of society" because we do not judge the value of an individual based on how they look/smell/speak/etc., nor on what they have done."

"I belong to **many groups** but at work I see myself as belonging to my school community. That community encompasses both students and staff. We have a common purpose: to create an open, safe, stimulating, respectful environment where students bring out the best in themselves and others."

"In my role as a social worker and municipal youth officer, I feel primarily affiliated with the group of "full-time professionals." **This group consists of full-time city and community youth officers from the county where I work, who meet about once a month to exchange ideas.** This contact is significant because it is an opportunity to learn that colleagues face similar challenges and difficulties. Together, we develop solution strategies, create networks and working groups, and navigate collaborations."

"I belong to the following groups: My classmates from elementary school to university; Parents group in the community; Work colleagues; Orchestra."

"I belong to the **Savage family**, a small group of genetic relatives and the boys' wives. They are all individuals and are different but share a family culture and genetics."

"I don't feel connected to a specific group in terms of ethnicity, if that is what is meant. **However, I do feel connected based on age.** Specifically, to children or young people who are still growing and in the prime of their lives. They have a certain mindset but are also in the process of being shaped and developed. I feel connected to them primarily through empathy. Why do I feel connected to these young people? Because they often start from something pure and then develop, particularly influenced by society. Contributing to this development is something I find very fulfilling. **So, I do feel connected to youth, in that sense.**"

"We are an artist collective for neurodiverse artists. We operate internationally and have exhibitions on all continents except Africa. We are also a member and founder of the EOAA (European Outsider-Art Association), and ambassadors for outsider-art and Art brut."

"We **all belong to myriads of tribes, don't we?** I am an Iranian because I grew up in this country with a very strong sense of culture and I am proud of it. I am a Persian-language speaker who loves my mother tongue. I am a writer because I have the ailment that affects all writers: we are unable not to write, we have to do something to these thoughts in our head, put them on paper. I feel for this especially because we seem to be moving into a different world, a distinct civilization in which the place of Word is threatened, put in crisis, destabilised. I like to identify with the world of Words before it's lost forever."

"It's nice to belong somewhere or to be part of something (**a kind of affirmation or safety**) but it's still **important to be seen as an individual.** You are still **your own person.**"

"Belonging often comes with **exclusion.** Especially young people often identify with a social group and thus differentiate themselves from other groups and their opinions, attitudes, habits, etc."

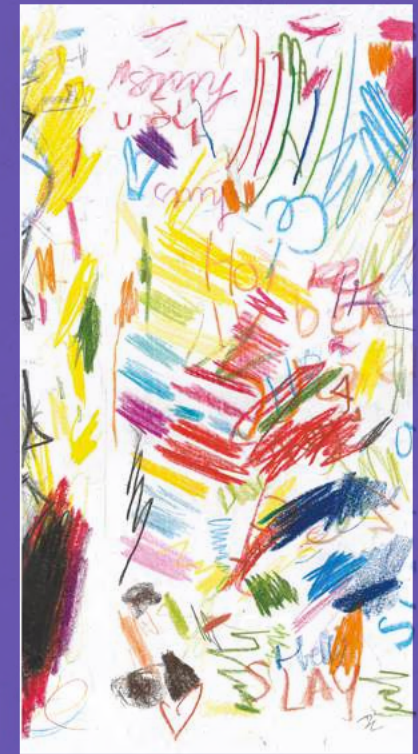
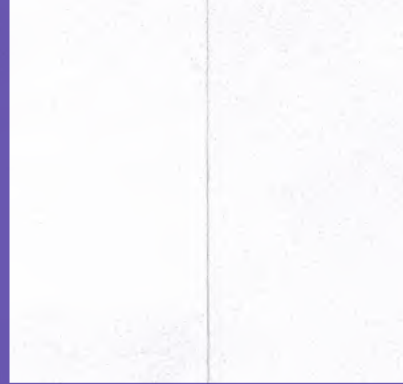
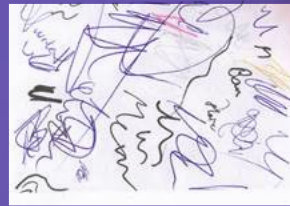
"As a social worker, the theme of belonging plays a significant role. **Feeling affiliated with a group is a basic human need,** and often it is those who feel rejected who behave in socially inadequate ways, for which they are in turn rejected by society."

"As a naturally and furiously curious thinker and multihyphenate, I've **never considered my identity in the context of belonging to a group.** The true sense of belonging I feel is to my family. There are other elements of community I feel, which could be as simple as a shared interest with friends and other online peers in a really obscure Swedish fashion brand, for example."

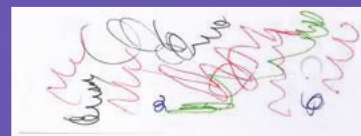
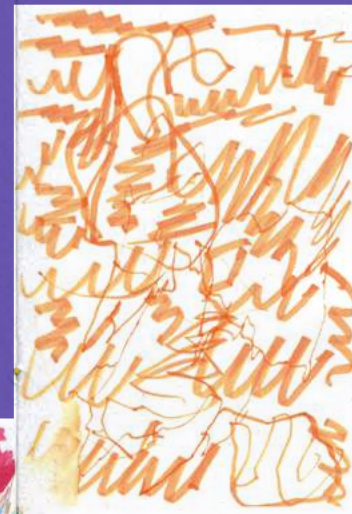
"I don't necessarily feel connected to a specific group, but if I had to name one, it would be **people of my generation.**"

"**Each group develops its own ideas, rules, and rituals, its language and symbols.** Each group typically pursues its goals, and each group member has their motivation. According to my observations, the dynamic is less influenced by the group's goal or theme and more by the personalities of the individual group members. Young people especially find it difficult, particularly spontaneously, to engage with a group and find their role within it. Over time, one develops sovereignty in this regard."

What do you
associate with union?



Accidental union



What do you associate with union?

“A bond, sharing, trust, safety,
friendship, equality, ...”

“Warmth, well-being, authenticity,
basic need, welcome, acceptance, us.”

“Like-mindedness, culture, peers.”

“There are unions like the co-op I used to be a member of,
but the teachers' labour union is easier to imagine.”

“The socialist in me has to say the fist —
fingers coming together to form a whole.
There is also that fabled picture of small fish
gathering together to eat the big fish.”

“A group can go where one cannot go alone.”

“Being genuine, cohesion, belonging
and differentiation, reliability, safety,
orientation, family, friendship, letting go.”

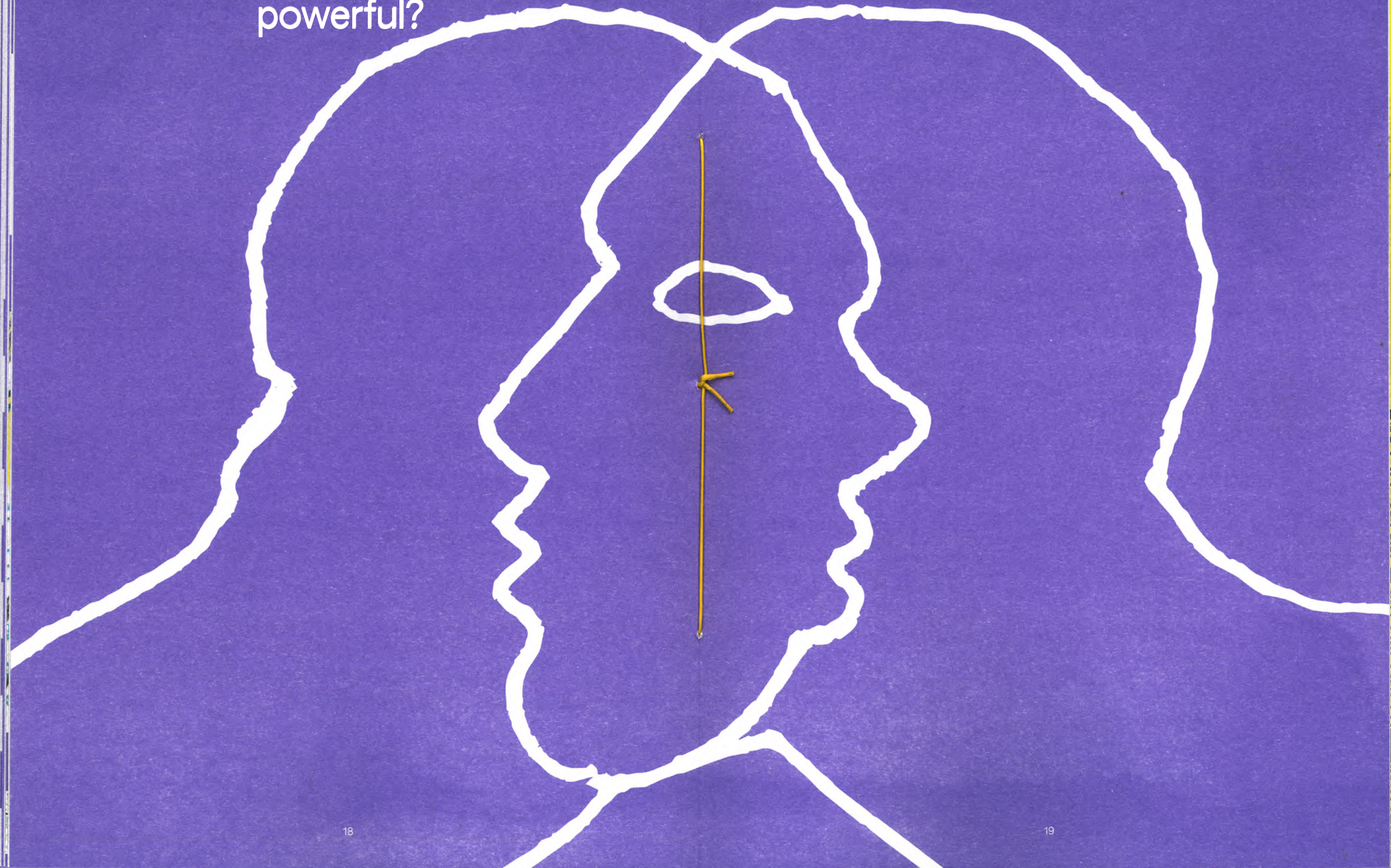
“Words have an undeniably incredible ability to bring
people together. There is power in the simplicity
of the message, in repetition, cadence, and alliteration.”

“Marriage and family,
respect and forgiveness.”

“Imagery that is close up. Intimate and in the
moment. Raw, ungraded and untouched.
Beautifully and naturally lit. In terms of ideas,
as a South African, Ubuntu comes to mind
strongly, and vividly.”

“To me, a union is really about togetherness. It means bringing
together different cultures, opinions, or behaviours and forming
a single unit. It's truly a team. The word 'team' already implies
'Together Everyone Achieves More.' When everyone contributes,
that's what makes it beautiful and unified.”

When is union
powerful?



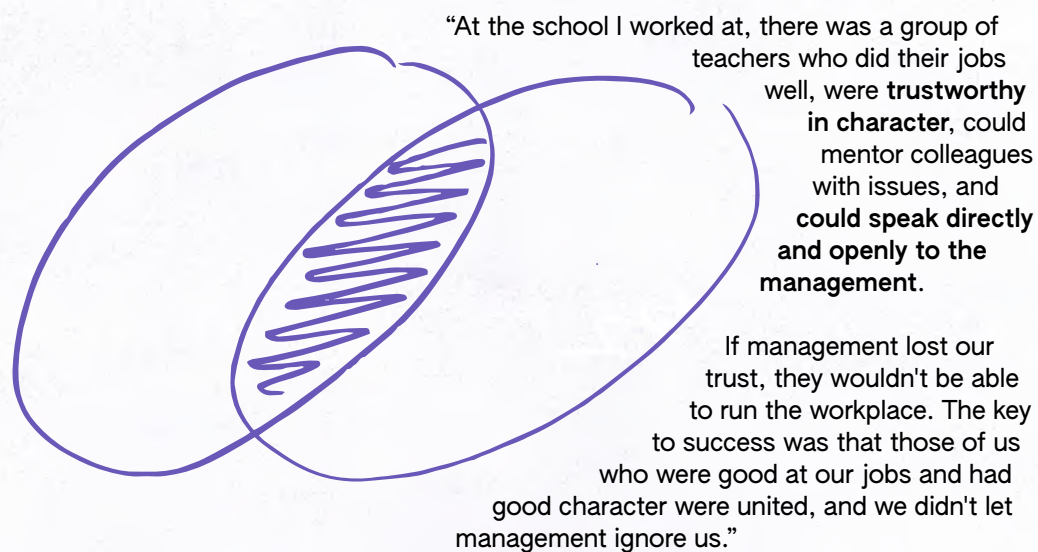
When is union powerful?

"When we trusted the group and the group trusted back 100%."

"When I was an undergrad in college, I studied the **ideal size of units in the Roman army**. The smaller the unit, the more efficient and cohesive they were. Larger units were made by combining smaller units."

"When there is a **shared ambition**.
When there is mutual trust and respect.
When there is shared incentive and financial gain."

"Our family pulled together recently during my wife's death. Everyone was strongly supportive of each other **during the time of their own loss**."



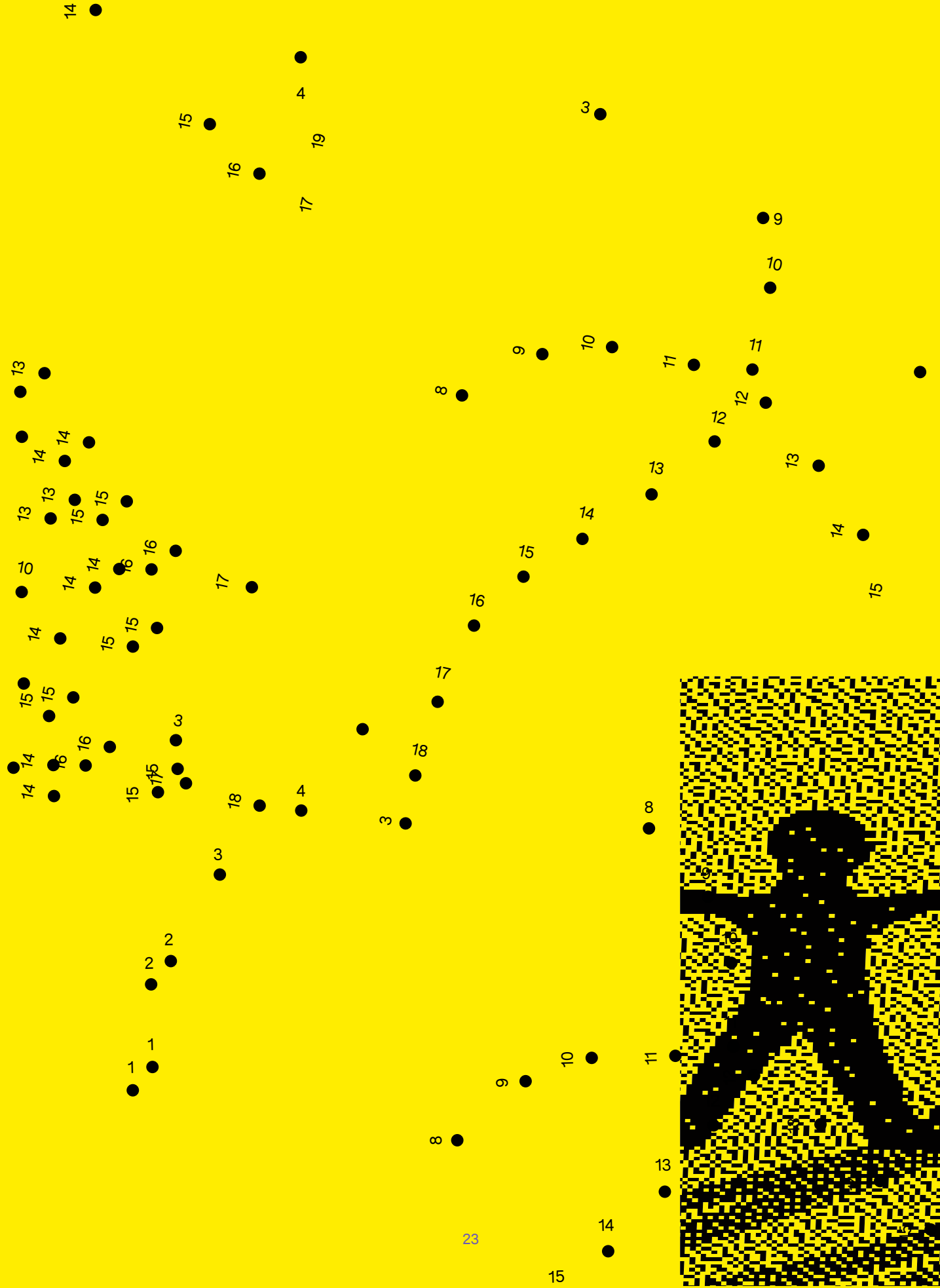
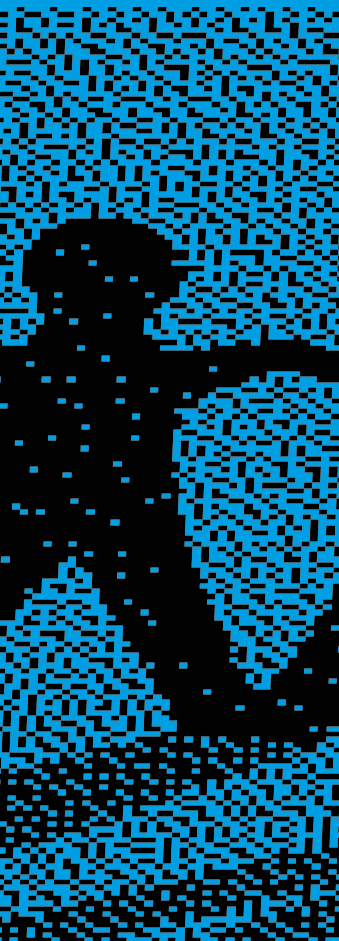
"It reminds me that humans have often come together in the past to achieve collective goals — and that without doing so, there is no way of bringing about change."

"It's often the small things. I find it difficult to pinpoint the absolute strongest moment because there have been so many good and beautiful moments. I also try to get the team I coach to think that it's **not just about one moment but often about a process and multiple moments**."

"Union has a special significance for young people, as the development of personality and individualization processes are not yet complete. Groups provide protection, security, cohesion, support, and the opportunity to become aware of one's identity."

"I often work with young people who do not initially know each other. I either initiate groups or occasionally add individuals to a group. It is fascinating to observe **how a group grows and finds togetherness—or not**. I experience groups as **most powerful at precisely this moment: as soon as the group operates without me—without leadership, guidance or coordination**."

When does
union not work?



“It has always worked so far.”

When does union not work?

“When someone cannot be themselves within the union it hasn't worked. What works is when someone can find a place within the union, can contribute, and has a role to play. If someone can do that, the union works. If they can't, it doesn't. If someone constantly operates outside the boundaries or only disrupts the process, it serves little purpose.”

“When your happiness or enjoyment of life is reliant on the opinions and perspectives of other people.”



“When my colleagues faced unreasonable situations, the union tried to negotiate collectively, but nothing significant was achieved. The unions were **too stiff**, and not many people joined, so it couldn't be a threat to management. There were those who were loyal to management and they got in the way.”



“When my twin sister and I attended the same course (we also had the same hair and clothing style at the time) and were **seen as ‘the twins’ instead of as individuals**. This also happened a lot when we were younger. We often had to share things while I would have preferred something for myself.”

“I am a historian of socialism, and the history of the movements on the left is full of instances of it not working. It's a tough conundrum: humans are social animals, and they need to come together both to make a modern capitalist economy work — and if they ever have any hope of challenging this economy.

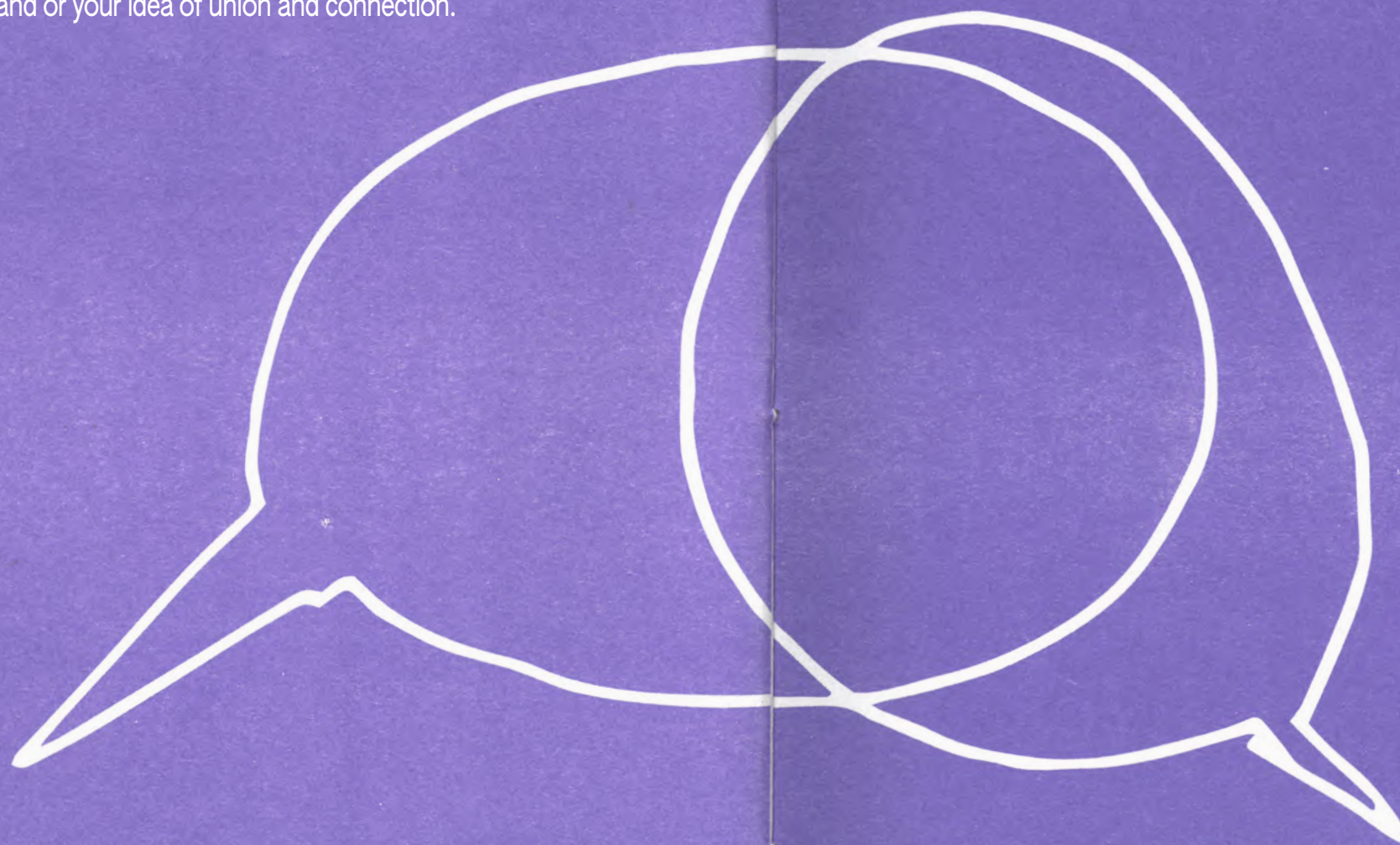
But **how can you come together with others without losing too much of yourself?** **It's been a tough challenge.** Often it doesn't get a very good answer. I fear that for so many people of my generation, the answer has been: ‘Don't worry! You don't need to give up anything. You can just be a full individual without bothering to attach yourself to collectivities.’ It's dangerous atomism, if you ask me....”

So... how do you make union work?

<p>“By asking ridiculously simple and furiously curious questions: The first question I ask is: “What else could we pair...X with?”. The second question: ‘What if we did...Y?’ Another thought process I am experimenting with in pairing is finding two completely different elements that shouldn’t naturally belong together and hunting for the binding element. For example: Pomegranate juice and gold pendant chains; Pomegranate seeds = jewels; Gold pendant chains = jewellery.”</p>	<p></p> <p>“How do you keep a team together? I think this is one of the most beautiful questions. Everyone does it in their own way. How I do it is primarily through observation in the first few weeks, especially when working with new people or children in this case. I observe their behaviours, how they react to certain things, who is introverted or extroverted, who pushes boundaries and who doesn’t, who makes contact easily and is social, and who doesn’t. I think it’s crucial for me as a coach to first understand these aspects. Once I have this understanding, I start having conversations with them and ask more questions.”</p>
<p>“I work with young people who do not come to me voluntarily. They must come because a court has ordered it. Initially, my task is to ensure that they fulfil their court-imposed obligations. However, my real work begins only when coercion gradually turns into voluntariness because people realise that they are welcome as they are, and I do not reject and dismiss them at the first sign of misconduct. Often, it is the first time the youth have had this experience. And only when people feel accepted one can discuss their misconduct with them and develop new, more socially appropriate behaviours.”</p>	<p></p> <p>“People come from different backgrounds, social and cultural environments, presenting a nuanced picture of society. Each of these groups cultivates unique individual or collective rituals, rules, patterns, etc.”</p>

<p>“We make certain agreements, team agreements, which everyone in the team adheres to, and it’s important to monitor these agreements closely. It’s crucial that the agreements feel like their own. I can suggest many things, but ultimately, it’s important that they support and feel involved in these agreements. This sense of ownership helps keep the team united.”</p>	<p></p> <p>“Facilities for open youth work offer the protected framework, situations and moments where people meet and develop a sense of belonging. The open structure, as well as initiated offers and measures, help young people train their social skills, develop interests and abilities, and join a group.”</p>
<p>“In a social group training session, a group of offenders spent an experiential education weekend together, and everyone stood together in the kitchen cooking. Each person took on a task and contributed. It did not matter who had committed what crime. It was a powerful moment as the joint activity united the youths.”</p>	<p></p> <p>“At the beginning of the Women, Life, Freedom movement in Iran, in 2022, even though I was away in the United States, this feeling that Iranians had risen up in large numbers and were trying to claim a collective cause for the salvation of our beloved homeland, against the regime that had beleaguered it for so long. I remember listening to a song by Ashkan Khatibi, then making rounds, whose chorus calls on us all to “give me your hands, we are a hundred souls in a single body”. It was a powerful moment that made many of us cry and feel we are part of something bigger.”</p>

Welcome to this journey of questioning and exploring what union and connection mean to you. In these exercises, we invite you to reflect on your personal experiences and understandings of connection in your life. You'll have the chance to question and uncover the layers of what connection means to you, how it shapes your relationships, and where you might foster a deeper sense of union in your daily interactions. You can also reframe these exercises to explore your brand or your idea of union and connection.



Re-Union

For one of us, this research took a deeply personal turn. During the project, Ao, in-house researcher at The Young, was invited by (A)WAKE to give a talk on union and solidarity in Tunisia.

Based in Rotterdam, (A)WAKE creates a platform for diverse voices from multiple cultural backgrounds. It develops cultural programs that reflect the complexity of contemporary socio-political contexts and amplify the perspectives of minorities often overlooked or tokenised by mainstream institutions. With a focus on the emancipatory potential of the digital world, (A)WAKE promotes equal access and cultural exchange between WANA (West Asia and North Africa) and Western Europe. By concentrating on these regions, (A)WAKE aims to challenge North-South power dynamics through creative and critical approaches in art and digital culture.

In 2024, (A)WAKE organised a workshop in Tunisia centred on union and solidarity, titled *Jossour*, meaning 'bridges' in Arabic. Around 30 people attended, some familiar with each other, others meeting for the first time. We shared a common thread: a connection to Tunisia and being creatively active.

Ao's Re-union - Fieldnotes

My talk was simply titled "Re-union." Most of my family roots are in Tunisia, but I had only visited once, in what felt like an eternity. At that time I didn't have the space or time to feel a connection. No union, just a distant place where I was supposed to feel a bond. In the 1960s, many Africans from former colonies, including my grandparents, immigrated to France, a colonial empire rebuilding its economy post-World War II, in need of labour for its growing industries. With their homelands freshly 'liberated' from colonial domination, many decided to leave and rebuild the country responsible for destroying theirs.

As part of a **diaspora**—the dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland—I know firsthand about the complexities of togetherness from multiple angles: with the host society, the original homeland, and across different family generations, the list goes on.

Therefore, I was beyond delighted by (A)WAKE's invitation to explore union in Tunisia. I felt ready. Ready to transform my experience of the-opposite-of-union into an understanding-of-union. It must be noted that without someone else's offer, I might not have gone there. Sometimes, union requires a little and sudden push.

At The Young, we were clear from the start not to romanticise the idea of union. We have grown tired, or rather, we have always been tired, of companies commodifying togetherness, oversimplifying it to the point where it seems effortless. **Union isn't just about standing together in one place. It requires effort, time, getting comfortable with discomfort, adjusting, accepting ambivalence and contradiction.**

My recent experience in Tunisia reinforced some fundamentals: despite tensions, past experiences, or failed attempts, bridges can be re-built, connections can be re-established, and re-unions are possible.

Usually, when it comes to research, I bring multiple references together, layering meanings and perspectives to create an in-depth understanding on a specific topic. Rational. But for *Jossour*, it was organic, not much cross-referencing. I was eager to explore and discover.

Recollection of My Talk 'Jossour - Reunion'

For this one, I choose to diverge from the traditional path of social sciences by not providing a comprehensive and precise documentation of what happened. I want this moment to exist in that given time (May 2024) and space (somewhere in Tunisia), with this group of people.

First, with the visual support of talented North African artists such as Dora Dalila Cheffi [3], Safia Farhat [4], and Zineb Sedira [5], I introduced myself, shared the journey of my family, and discussed my work as a researcher.

Then we turned our attention to a key figure in Afro liberation: Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). [6]

Born in Martinique, which remains a French colony to this day, Fanon was a psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary. His seminal works, "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) and "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) [7], delve into the psychological impacts of colonialism. Fanon's writings, translated into 12 languages, have cemented his status as a core figure in decolonisation whose legacy continues to shape current discussions on liberation.

His last book, "The Wretched of the Earth," written during the Algerian war, was banned in France due to its clear and inevitable call for liberation. Fanon argued that the struggle for liberation was a continuous effort, driven by collective consciousness and human agency, as exemplified by the Algerian revolution.

This leads us to **PANAF, 1969**.

The day before the first human on the moon, PANAF was Africa's own giant leap for humanity. It was the ultimate bridge, or "jossour," for the continent—a gathering of artists and intellectuals from across Africa and its diaspora. The Pan African Festival took place in 1969 in liberated Algeria. Fanon did not live to see the fruits of his struggle, as he died three months before Algeria's liberation in 1961.

The festival celebrated the rich cultural heritage and unity of African cultures through art, music, and performances. It was an unprecedented event, with 4,000 participants representing all African countries.



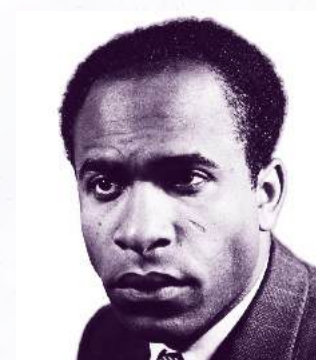
[3] Dora Dalila Cheffi, Hotel du Lac.



[4] Safia Farhat, Amitiés.



[5] Zineb Sedira, Me, myself and identity.



[6] Portrait of Frantz Fanon.



[7] The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon.

The program was diverse, including concerts, dance, theatre, and exhibitions. With notable guests such as Miriam Makeba (singer, activist from South Africa), Nina Simone (musician from the U.S), Albert Memmi (writer from Tunisia), Tayeb Saddiki (theatre writer from Morocco), Eldridge Cleaver (activist and leader of the black panther from the U.S), Archie Shepp (musician from the U.S), Ousmane Sembène (film director from Senegal), and Amilcar Cabral (anti-colonial leader and poet from Guinea-Bissau). They symbolised solidarity and the collective aspirations for liberation across Africa. This is well documented in William Klein's documentary film, "Festival panafricain d'Alger 1969." [8,9]

What's Pan-Africanism?

Pan-Africanism is a political and social movement aimed at unifying Africa and its worldwide diaspora to promote solidarity and shared cultural heritage. It seeks to address the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism and racism, advocating for economic, social, and political empowerment. Key figures in the movement include W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Kwame Nkrumah, who emphasised the importance of African unity and self-determination.

PANAF 1969 serves as a powerful reminder of the potential of collective action and cultural exchange in challenging historical and contemporary power dynamics. The event, though not widely remembered, symbolises the enduring spirit of Pan-Africanism and the continuous effort required to build and maintain bridges between communities.

The exploration of union and solidarity in Tunisia underscores the multifaceted nature of togetherness. The experiences shared and the connections made during Jossour highlight that union is not merely about physical proximity or superficial gestures of unity. It involves an intricate process of understanding, empathy, and mutual respect, often requiring us to step out of comfort zones and embrace discomfort.

Reflecting on these experiences, it becomes clear that union is a dynamic and ongoing journey. It involves acknowledging past struggles, celebrating cultural heritage, and fostering open dialogues.

Let us carry forward the lessons learned from Tunisia and PANAF, continuing to build bridges and strengthen solidarity across borders. In this ever-changing world, the pursuit of true union remains a powerful and necessary endeavour.

I want to thank, in writing, every person who participated in Jossour Tunis: Senda, Yasmine, Marouane, Wissal, Youssef, Emily, Karim, Yassine, Soumaya, Sabra, Nour, Souhad, Faracha, Sara, Hussein, Salim, Reda, Hilda, Wael, Khalil, Bochra, Hamza, Omar, Mammou, Badr, Yazan, Shirin, Taha & everyone around us.



[8] This event symbolises so much, yet isn't remembered. Its accessibility is limited, with information available only in two languages on Wikipedia: French and Arabic.



[9] 'Culture to the service of liberation & unity'. Screenshot from William Klein's "Festival panafricain d'Alger 1969."

IT WAS MOMENTARY,
IT WAS CELEBRATORY,
IT WAS PROUD,
IT WAS LOUD,
IT WAS REAL,
IT WAS UNITED.

Fostering Union through Dialogue

At The Young, we believe in initiating union through an approach called 'dialogue'. When we centre dialogue in conversations it's not just talking; it's about framing exchanges as seeking connection with others.

What Is Dialogue?

To understand the nature of dialogue, it helps to draw comparisons with 'debate' and 'discussion'. The word debate comes from the Latin roots "Dis-" (apart) and "battuere" (to beat), signifying a process to break apart through competitive exchange. Debate focuses on persuasion, often leading to an adversarial buildup where participants assert their standpoints. What comes to mind are televised political debates, like the famous 1965 Baldwin/Buckley debate. A debate so fierce and adversary one cannot find a picture of the two together. [10]

Discussion, on the other hand, stems from "Dis-" (apart) and "quarter" (to shake), implying an analytical approach to shake things up. Discussions involve multiple points of view and focus on counter-argumentation. It's the tennis match of conversations, a rapid fire back and forth, with the stronger defence and attack winning.

Dialogue, derived from "Dia-" (through) and "logos" (word), on the other hand represents a stream of words flowing through - a stream of ideas we can observe together for the time being. Dialogue is collaborative, with participants suspending their personal opinions to build understanding together. As David Bohm, one of the most significant theoretical physicists of the 20th century, said, "Dialogue is a place for people to come together to talk without having to solve any problems, simply to communicate, to share, to see if they can come to a common understanding."



[10] 1965 Baldwin and Buckley Debate.

Facing Ideas Together

In dialogue, we are not facing each other in opposition but facing ideas together. This subtle shift changes the dynamics of our interactions entirely. Instead of confronting each other, we collectively explore the landscape of our thoughts and beliefs. Real dialogue brings us closer together and allows for vulnerability. It provides a space where people can share what's lingering in the room and speak what's usually kept behind walls — laying the foundation for deeper connections.

Exploration, Not Persuasion

Dialogue encourages us to delve into each other's thoughts and experiences, shared exploration over persuasion. This shift in focus allows for a real exchange of ideas and allows a deeper understanding of differing perspectives. Respect is the cornerstone. Our differences become opportunities for shared learning rather than obstacles. When we suspend our judgements and assume best intentions we create a space for genuine understanding and the richness available to explore in others. It grows a safe space for experiences to be heard and welcomed.

Focus Listening, Not Responding

When we introduce dialogue to our clients, we emphasise the importance of intentional listening. We encourage to fully engage with the speaker, focusing on understanding where they're coming from rather than crafting a response while listening. When we allow ourselves to take the time to listen, understand, ponder, we take the speed out of conversations and allow once again for exploration. What if we responded with reflection rather than counterpoints?

Meaningful dialogue, especially on complex or divisive issues, rarely happens spontaneously. It requires planning, thought and consent to participate to create the right conditions for open and respectful exchange. But when it happens, dialogue leads to collective intelligence, forming the basis of union. By fostering genuine understanding and deep connections, dialogue allows us to build a more unified and collaborative community.

Union?

As we wrap up this edition of The Young Questions, we feel enriched by our journey of exploring 'union' in its many forms. From the nostalgic echoes of 'Union Made' to the profound concepts of Ubuntu ("I am because we are") and Amandla Awethu ("Power to the People"), we've discovered just how deeply we all crave togetherness in this ever-changing world.

Union isn't static; it's a dynamic, living process shaped by trust, shared ambition, and mutual respect. Throughout our exploration, we've seen its multifaceted nature—encompassing harmony, togetherness, and political significance. The authentic voices of our diverse participants, each bringing insights from their unique professions and backgrounds, have shown us how technology, migration, and economic change continually reshape our social bonds.

Learning from historical movements and the power of clear, resonant calls to action has highlighted the complexity and beauty of union. Whether it's the bonds formed in a sports team, the collective strength of a social movement, or the everyday connections we make in our communities, union remains a vital, living force. We've come to see how crucial language is in shaping our understanding and how much we need new ways to express our shared human experiences and aspirations.

Reflecting on belonging, exclusion, and group identity reminds us that union is an ongoing process that requires continuous effort and adaptation. The importance of observation, communication, and understanding in fostering union cannot be overstated.

Union is not just something we achieve; it's something we continuously nurture and grow. It's about finding new ways to connect and reconnect, new languages to express our shared human experiences, and creating frameworks that support our collective well-being.

To everyone who joined us on this journey, thank you.

The Young Questions
Union?



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