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Oscillating between populism and liberalism in the Philippines: participatory education's role in addressing stubborn inequalities

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to address the wider questions of populism and its seeming contemporary rise within the specific context of the Philippines, regarding education. Starting from the assumption that neither politics nor education sits above cultures or spaces autonomously acting upon them but instead emerges with/because/against particularities; after a brief overview of populism, I explore the conceptual characteristics in context. This is informed from my own experiences of living and researching in the Philippines, including experience of the Mindanao conflict but also the failure of liberalism in the Philippines more generally, the failure of western education to 'develop' the nation and the reactions that led to the populists rise of Duterte. The paper offers an understanding of the complexities of populism and offers some hope to how education can meet the challenge through a specific example of critical participatory community education.

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Introduction

If our media outlets and social media accounts are to be believed, it would not be unreasonable to wonder if we have entered an era of 'peak populism'. It is sobering to reflect on the rise of populist leaders from Brazil, to the US, to Europe, to India and beyond and the accompanying mourning of the 'break down of liberal democracy'. This paper seeks to explore this apparent phenomenon and its relation to education, including questioning the 'populist hype' (Glynos and Mondon 2016, 2) in an attempt to delimit the terms of the conversation. To do this, I offer a thumbnail sketch of some thinking around populism and democracy and explore definitions and types of populism. From here, I will turn to the context of the Philippines in the understanding that we need to understand populism and education in context – that neither politics nor education sits above cultures or spaces autonomously acting upon them, but instead emerges with/because/against particularities. I contend that it is impossible to discuss populism and education in any useful way universally. My aim here is to offer ideas and considerations to extend a conversation about populism, while primarily discussing the Philippines; however, I also aim to encourage thinking about how the issues covered here are similar and different to your own contexts. The intention is to open up a space of inquiry that is both contextualised and particular yet enables cross-context learning and sharing and solidarity in ways that do not erase particularities.

My choice of context for this musing starts with an introduction to Duterte's current 'populist' presidency of the Philippines. I then consider his time in office as Mayor of Davao to try to better

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understand the history and trajectory that took him to power. This thought experiment is tinged with ideas resonating from my ethnographic fieldwork exploring peacebuilding education in Mindanao during 2009 and my previous experience living in Davao between 2001 and 2003. During these periods, Duterte was the mayor of Davao, Mindanao. My fieldwork took the form of a multi-sited ethnography where I participated in and observed everyday life in general, and community organising work specifically, across Muslim communities in Davao, Zamboanga and West Mindanao. Where safety is permitted, it included living in the communities. In addition to participant observation, I used arts-based methods to elicit narratives around experiences and hopes and understandings of peace knowledge. One of the main themes that emerged and became its own chapter in my PhD thesis was governance. This research also built on my previous time living in Davao where I was a teacher for 2 years at an international school. At this time, Duterte's strong man reputation was well-known in all of these provinces, even though they predate his presidential endeavours. Through considering his time as mayor in Mindanao's context, I consider what circumstances and mechanisms led to his populist rise and the interaction between these with the political-cultural economy and education in the Philippines.

Populism and Western/liberal democracy

Despite populism having quite a nebulous meaning, contemporary warnings about a populist uprising threatening the collapse of (Western) democracy are gaining traction, while today, authors such as Arendt and Orwell see an increased readership (Weyn 2017) as we struggle to comprehend what the rise of Trump (US), Modi (India) and Erdogan (Turkey) mean, to name just a few.[1] However, while this supposed democracy versus populism competition is taken for granted, it might be worth pausing to consider the integral history of the two. Rather than populism being something outside of democracy that threatens it, could it be something integral to the very nature of democracy itself? If we consider the Greek ancient roots of Western democracy, even at its birth, political thinkers bemoaned similar issues that we face today. As Heydarian (2018) points out, for Plato and Aristotle, the demagogues, which consisted of opportunistic 'crackpot posing as a genius' politicians undermined Athens during their period with oligarchic corruption and cyclical decay. Plato and Aristotle did not share our contemporary confidence or reverence for democracy. In his book, Democratic Piety, Little (2008) considers how uncritical and under-theorised appeals to democracy can neglect problems such as majoritarianism. It is important within this debate to recognise that 'democracy' does not have a monopoly on human progress, or types of participation, and can be problematised. What is also important to note is many of the debates about democracy versus populism use 'democracy' as a shorthand for liberal (and Western) democracy, so here we have a liberal versus populist debate incorporated into this. I will return to this point later regarding liberalism.

While many commentators on the rise of populism speak to the 'democracy deficit', which describes how democratic cultures are declining as citizens perceive decreasing influence and ways of holding governments accountable and the increase of powerful international organisations such as the World Bank, that are not elected or democratically accountable, democracy itself is not a simple or uncontested concept, with multiple variations, values and practices. It is problematic to reduce 'democracy' to Western representational politics synonymous with electoral processes and institutions of governance. A broader understanding of democracy around participation is needed. Several typologies of participation have been developed (e.g. Arnstein 1969; Pretty 1995 and Wilcox 1994) which seek to position participation on a spectrum spanning: degrees of citizen control (Arnstein 1969); degrees of activity and passivity (Pretty 1995); and degrees of collaboration (Wilcox 1994). While these typologies can be critiqued for their dichotomising and normative positions, they do point towards the variety of ways of conceptualising participation. Through concepts of authority that rely on experience (see e.g. Dawney 2013 and Noorani 2013), disruption (see e.g. Kirwan 2013), experiment (see e.g. Millner 2013 and Noorani 2013) and aesthetics (see e.g. Brigstocke 2013), participation becomes a means not only of agency but also of authority. In their book

'Problems of Participation: Reflections on Authority, Democracy, and the Struggle for Common Life', Editors Noorani, Blencowe, and Brigstock undo the passive/active dichotomy of participation through explorations with contributors on 'questions, conundrums and challenges for participatory practice and thinking' (Noorani, Blencowe, and Brigstocke 2013, 13).

When considering the above, a simplistic democracy-populist dichotomy is problematised. Instead, it might be productive to consider populism as a rhetorical tool that can be weaponised for or against different movements. In much of the concern over the contemporary wave of populism, it is the 'far-right' that is being cast as the dangerous mob. However, there is no set political direction in definitions of populism, and historically in Latin America, populism was associated with progressive and leftist movements. In their discussion of populism in the Philippines, Webb and Curato (2019, 50) identify three possible ways of framing populism: as an ideology (Mudde 2004), a political logic (Laclau [2005] 2018) or a performative style (Moffitt 2016). While these definitions could be used to describe the far-right movements, we are witnessing across much of Europe, Brazil, Japan, India and the US, one or more of these frames could also be used to describe movements that are not seen as so worrisome (at least by those for whom rising right-wing populism is a threat). Take, for example Jeremy Corbyn and the Momentum movement in the UK, which has been characterised as a populist intra-party politics (Watts and Bale, 2018) and the subject of Grete Thornburg, a charismatic individual currently enjoying popular support, who has been described by using the controversial term 'post-political populism' coined by Swyngedouw (2010) (see e.g. Hammond 2020 and Sjögren 2020). That one movement may be labelled as participatory grass-roots politics, and another populist by the same group of people illustrates the discursive work performed by the signifier 'populist' or 'populism'. I am not suggesting that therefore all critiques of populism be discounted and that there is not the seed of maleficence in populist uprisings, instead, it is to warn against a growing tendency of erasure: The use of a rhetorical device to erase the 'other' and their experiences when they do not fit easily into the status quo. Populism and democracy, therefore, 'should not be understood as entirely autonomous from one another: they are, in fact, often found to be in a relation of over-determination with each other (Althusser [1962] 2005)' (Glynos and Mondon 2016, 3).

Part of this erasure is a cynical recasting of large groups of society as uneducated and dangerous. This contingent is also usually contrasted to educated and liberal democrats. Bovens and Wille (2018) posit that in the twenty-first century, the fading of traditional sources of political cleavage such as religion and class are now replaced by an educational cleavage. Citing Deegan-Krause (2007), they argue that educational cleavages (intersecting with gender and generation to lesser degrees) account for newly emerging political conflict lines. They describe this cleavage rather simplistically as 'Cosmopolitans versus Nationalists' (Bovens and Wille 2018, 48). While this narrative has some appeal as a simplistic dichotomy, it does not fully explain the diversity and heterogeneity within the populist umbrella, nor account for the educated supporters of populism (e.g. In the U.K., Brexit vote [see e.g. Dorling 2016 and Antonucci et al. 2017] and for Bolsonaro in Brazil [see e.g. Hunter and Power 2019]). It is also arguably ethnocentric in its assumptions of the fading of class or religion in the wake of secular development. Instead, I would argue that there is more nuance in populism than a simple educational cleavage, which may, rather than being a source of political lines of contestation, map the lines of wider inequalities. This is to agree with Sandel (2020) who argues that the inequality justified in liberal meritocracy no longer fulfils the rhetoric of opportunity it promises; with Robertson and Nestore (2021) who explore the black-box of higher education and marketisation to expose new social inequalities; and Streeck (2017) who details the role of the delayed crisis of capitalism in the form of inequality, rather than education, as a main cause of populism. These explanations of the role of the political economy/meritocracy/inequality in the crisis of liberal/western/democracy and ensuing populism will be revisited through this article.

This tendency to paint populist supporters as an uneducated mob is as apparent in the Philippines where Duterte's supporters have been labelled Duterards. For the 'liberal elite', as they are often referred to, it is convenient to label the populist's 'people' an uneducated mob and their counterpart as the educated middle, in which they see themselves. By denoting themselves in

opposition as knowledgeable, they are that part of humanity that upholds the 'truth'. This 'mob', on the other hand, is a riotous swell, a force of power but not principle. This tenacious and popular narrative persists despite the high level of educated and middle-class support Duterte enjoys to defy it (Rizvi 2021).

Here, we have a characterisation of knowledge (and by association education) as uninterested and self-validating, while power has nothing to do with knowledge, it is its opposite, it is the uneducated that are the threat (/have power) in this scenario. Foucault argues that one reason why truth and power have been posed as externals is to guarantee the authority of those who proclaim this separation, and we can see this working out across multiple contexts, and no less in our universities. While many academics scratch their heads and ask how populism has flourished, there is little recognition and acceptance that as knowledge producers they are part of the (perceived) failed liberal project. And, if as Laclau ([2005] 2018) posited, populism arrives out of the crisis, then the current global wave of populism could be seen as a response to the crisis of liberalism, for which 'democracy' is used as a synonym in many of the debates.

The fashioning of populist people as ignorant and liberals as educated is a simplistic falsehood that denies the complexities and nuanced contexts that give rise to populism, as I will demonstrate in my consideration of the Philippines below; however, it is also paradoxically illiberal. If, as Streeck (2017) suggests, populism is 'the return of the repressed' the cavalier dismissal and 'othering' of a wronged and long-forgotten contingent of the population is anti-democratic, is oppressive, what Laclau might term 'The Denigration of the Masses' ([2005] 2018). Furthermore, while recognition of this group is important, one should be guarded against making broad and homogenous assumptions about them and we need to be careful to not accept a direct and simplistic equivalence of the interests of a populist leader with 'their' people.

Laclau's work is influential on my thinking and a central theme of my argument, which agrees with his notion that liberal democracy is the problem, not populism per se. For Laclau, and many conflict theorists, the conflict itself is not necessarily an issue, but maybe the grit required to initiate the mechanics of change and upset the status quo. If the status quo is thin and anaemic participation protected by the veneer of respectability afforded by the label 'democracy' conflict, in this case populism, is challenging this thin democracy. For Laclau, the challenge to democracy in its liberal form is justified and a more radical and thick democracy is the solution.

Contemporary populism in the Philippines

Within the UK, the Philippines traditionally has not been well noticed, unlike in the United States. Regarding the Philippines, as elsewhere, the geopolitics of development, migration and recognition follow the historical traces of colonialism and imperialism – where the UK focus on news from their former colonies such as Pakistan and India and the US from their imperial aspirations during the American–Spanish war. The election of Duterte as President of the Philippines in 2016 changed this as the Philippines joined the well-rehearsed and growing list of countries used as examples of a growing trend towards populism outside of a given country's narrow attention. Duterte's infamous branding of the then US president Obama as 'the son of a whore' propelled him into the global consciousness, and this was not a one-off provocation, he has cursed the Pope and complained about the UN talking 'that kind of shit' (against Human Rights violations) (Curato and Ong 2018). However, his provocations are not just rhetorical, he has launched a deadly war on drugs, enforced weeks-long 'no press conferences' and has endorsed the red-tagging and intimidation of progressives and unions critical of his presidency (Webb and Curato 2019).

Knowing that I had lived in the Philippines when Duterte first emerged on the world stage, many colleagues and acquaintances in the UK would ask me about him and what I thought. My usual response of 'it's complicated' was often read as a defence of the indefensible (as I failed to instantly and non-equivocally condemn him) by some western liberal colleagues and joy by some Filipinos living in the UK who perceived this as support for their beloved president. What I actually meant

was: it is complicated. I am not a Duterte supporter and I never have been, and I do not support what I perceive to be his very dangerous and malevolent presidency; however, neither can I ignore the very real injustices that bought him to power and the experiences of the people who elected him on a myriad of different reasons, understandings and hopes. This sense of complexity and nuance is not only an academic one, it comes from my near-constant experience of cognitive dissonance while living in Davao for 2 years when he was mayor. In Davao, I enjoyed a level of freedom and safety not experienced in central and southwest Mindanao at that time, thanks to Duterte. While I critiqued his mayorship and alleged associations with the heavy-handed penal practices enforced paralegally through the Davao Death Squad, it was these very practices that singled out Davao as a haven for the likes of me as well as the choice of R&R for American Soldiers serving in Mindanao, a jumping-off base for Missionaries and NGOs working elsewhere and many Muslim Filipinos who had moved from more turbulent and conflict-affected parts of Mindanao. The cognitive dissonance I experienced for 2 years required that I learn to live with the complexities of the situation. My initial reactions of disbelief on encountering poor Filipino Duterte supporters quickly ebbed as my ethnocentric liberal sensibilities were challenged through exposure to the real-lived experiences of incredibly difficult situations.

Populism in the contemporary Philippines is a mixture of the political logic of populist nationalism and the performative style of spectacle and antagonism. These characteristics cannot be understood fully without a nuanced understanding of the history of the nation, on which they play. While I provide only a thumbnail sketch of some elements here, Webb and Curato's historicised, contextualised and critical take offers a fuller view (2019).

Before we consider populism directly, it can be helpful to consider its opposite, and in the Philippines Duterte's populism aims squarely at liberalism. When we consider the anti-liberal stance of Duterte, we must consider it in context. While classical definitions of liberalism would posit a public space of dialogue among rational individuals and respect for pluralism within this public space (Habermas 1989), Duterte's criticism is more aimed at 'liberalism' as an abbreviation for progressive politics. What Deuterte is aiming at is a limited set of liberal ideas. As Fraser (2017) argues about the US context, which arguably has refracted into a global discourse, the third-way politics of the 90s, overseen by the then US President Bill Clinton and then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, saw the replacement of traditional left-wing values such as egalitarianism and anti-hierarchical solidarity with a liberal-individualist meritocracy. For example, in feminism we see, instead of equality and sisterhood, the rise of adopting a corporate hierarchy where 'talented' women can rise in a winner takes all mentality. Feminism becomes about breaking the glass ceiling, i.e. succeeding in the hierarchy, instead of dismantling the patriarchal hierarchy altogether. The detaching of progressive politics from solidarity and embrace of the market and meritocracy in its place combined leftist ideals with liberalism, leading to a left-liberalism. This proliferation of uses of the terms from 'classical liberalism' to 'left-liberalism' to now just 'liberalism' makes this distinction of what Duterte is against important. When we look at Duterte's anti-liberal rhetoric, he targets the 'yellows', a reference to Aquino's Liberal Party[2], he targets bleeding-heart-liberals and complains when the UN talk 'that kind of shit' about human rights, displaying vitriol for signifiers of left-liberalism or the progressive and identity-politics aspects of liberalism. Furthermore, his actions against left-liberal institutions including the free press and human rights' violations in his war on drugs target the progressive liberal-left. What is left intact is equally as telling, Duterte remains committed to neoliberal reforms, which he believes will have a greater chance of success when unhindered by crime and supported with his brand of 'law and order'. Taking education as an example, marketisation and a strong audit culture are the mainstay of his government proposals (Rizvi 2021). Therefore, while Duterte may employ extreme rhetoric and violent 'solutions', despite his posturing against liberalism, the ideals of individual discipline and the role of the state in maintaining national cohesion and security for the effective and unhindered workings of the market are anything but radical. Instead 'Dutertenomics is that of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' or a neoliberal economy embedded in an authoritarian framework' (Juego 2017, 148).

However, while we can see from the above exploration that the anti-'liberal' movement in Philippine populism does not exactly map onto classical liberalism, classical liberalism is very much present in Filipino history and forms an important part of the back-story to the rise of Duterte as well as to the wider question of the failure of liberalism. In the Philippines liberalism, meaning both progressive-left and classical liberal ideas, negotiate and combine in a complex assemblage that arguably requires some dismantling. This is because a context is not just its present, it has a prologue: Influences and cultural norms that may be reshaped in the present, but nonetheless are still there.

From the time of conception of an independent Filipino nation, classic liberalism has been a foundational building block. The 'ilustrados', the name given to the educated Filipino class under Spanish colonialism, advocated for freedom from arbitrary arrest and a free press within the colony while upholding respect for individual property rights (Claudio 2019). By the time of the revolution, the writing of Jose Rizal, one of the most famous ilustados, had made a significant impact on the Katipunan, an anti-Spanish Filipino nationalist group founded in 1892. Today, as a national hero, Rizal's legacy is still strong (Claudio 2019). Arguably a nation founded on liberalism, the Philippines continued to embrace its values throughout the nation's development, with successive liberal leaders (occasionally though significantly punctuated with counter, populist presidents). One of Asia's oldest democracies, liberal aspirations in the Philippines are best characterised in the People's Power movements of the Philippines, the velvet revolutions known as EDSA and EDAS2. Named after Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue in Manila, where the majority of the demonstrations took place, the revolution saw the end of the 20-year Marcos regime, the most infamous of the country's populist presidents that punctuated an almost, though spiky, liberal trajectory. The People Power revolution ushered back in a renewed commitment to liberalism after a two-decade intermission with the installation of Corazon Aquino as president, the widow of a prominent critic of Marcos whose assassination became a rallying point for the opposition movement. Corazon was initially a reluctant politician, thrown into the political limelight after her husband, a popular critic of the Marcos regime, was allegedly assassinated after 11 years of unjust arrest under martial law. However, her victory in a snap election in 1986 and call to peaceful protest earned her the reputation as the woman who returned democracy to the Philippines. Her reputation today as a cult figure in the People Power Revolution is still that of the saviour of democracy. The results of EDSA were ambitious, with a newly ratified constitution in 1987 that established a representational democracy and the division of governmental power between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches. Article 2, in particular, paid tribute to the people of the people power movement, giving the state the obligation to 'accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development' (Article 2, Section 17).

However, the context of the Philippines also introduces yet another form of liberalism, the somewhat contradictory 'authoritarian liberalism' found in many South-East Asian states. Understood as a strong state coexisting with a free economy, the Philippines is arguably a very good example of this type of liberalism as we see 'the emergence of the new regulatory state, which is directed towards the production of economic and social order within a globalised economy' (Jayasuriya 2005, 384). Arguably, the Philippines has never attained the robust institutions and infrastructure needed for the delivery of the grand ambitions of the EDSA era and its predecessors, the Ilustrados. The EDSA era never successfully broke with the strong link between government and elite oligarchies and landowners, despite Duturte's rhetoric mocking their progressive left-liberalism, the era presided over a poor human rights record (Juego 2017, 161). Arguably, though there were at least glimpses and a layer of participatory citizenship.

The Macapagal-Arroyo presidency took the relationship with authoritarian liberalism to a more formal and recognised strategy when in August 2005 she signed Executive Order No. 453 proposing changes to Article 2 of the 1987 Constitution. Macapagal-Arroyo removed the state's role in the provision of social service, including education, and ushered in new market logic for their provision in line with a neoliberal world order (Juego 2008, 5). The formal abandonment of the, albeit failed,

promise of a government responsibility for 'total human liberation and development' symbolised the move towards authoritarian liberalism that has been captured by Duterte.

What starts to emerge under a closer look is not a serious anti-liberalism movement, but distrust and rejection of identity politics and Western interventionism without disrupting a continued commitment to markets and competition, now with the added rhetoric of an enabling environment through 'law and order'.

The failure of liberalism in the Philippines, in all its forms, negotiations and assemblages, is evident in the 25% poverty rate, 6% to 7% unemployment and an inequality rate that remains one of the highest in the region with a Gini coefficient at 0.46 (Webb and Curato 2019, 60). While this is an unimpressive scorecard for the region, discontent is amplified by the sheer height of the hope nurtured in the People Power movement and, therefore, the difference in expectations is much larger than these metrics suggest. The example of nonviolent regime change pulled the Philippines into the international spotlight and became an inspiration for a new generation of 'velvet revolutions', from East Germany to Czechoslovakia. A somewhat poster child for democratic regime changes its failure is more pertinent. Duterte's populist narrative chimes with a dormant ambivalence that he has successfully built into a visible scepticism of liberalism's potential to realise the promises of liberation and development. Of note, this scepticism is shared across the social classes and cannot be dismissed as the amplification of a few undereducated and disgruntled citizens – Duterte's popularity is related to political rhetoric that talks to the everyday realities of a failed liberal project for the majority.

While the Philippines set itself on a liberal trajectory from the outset, I have hinted here of its spiky trajectory and my intention is not to smooth over complex histories for the sake of brevity, but to acknowledge these complexities and multiple histories as much as a short article can. There is an equal and compelling history to be told of populism in the Philippines. Duterte is not a new type of character in Filipino political history, and the country has embraced populism before, most significantly under Marcos but also briefly in Estrada who was ousted in EDSA2. The Populist Nationalism of Duterte follows a pattern of populism in the Philippines which is nourished on a history of colonialism, imperialism and invasion where suffering and subjugation are replaced by a People Power narrative that positions the under-dog as free-thinking and sovereign. Webb and Curato (2019) trace the origins of such a narrative back to the Katipunan active in the revolution (1892–1897) against the Spanish, where anti-colonial messages were combined with nationalist ambitions. An interrupted trajectory to independence after the American–Spanish war saw the Philippines ceded to the US, and then the Japanese invasion in the Second World War has arguably helped to foster a national story of 'underdog', subject to the whims of colonisers, imperialists, invaders and a global liberal agenda and its counter-narrative: populist nationalism. Duterte's aforementioned antagonisms with the then-liberal president of the USA and the United Nations indicate this historical fostered division manifested today between a liberal global agenda and the national sovereignty of the Philippines.

The fostering and amplification of a nationalist outsider division are also achieved in a traditional populist style, where Duterte embraces a controversial politicking that ensures melodrama and spectacle and the media attention it brings. Also a common and well-practised populist style, however, his feisty bravado persona, complete with swearing, further works into the populist nationalism evoked where his 'bravery' is evident in his irreverence to foreigners and anyone peddling a global (left)liberal agenda reinforces a national identity of strength and autonomy.

Duterte's mixture of the political logic of populist nationalism and the populist style of spectacle and antagonism has resulted in a popular and powerful presidency, which is arguable of concern to those interested in the survival and thriving of democracy (in its various forms) and a progressive politics. With the caveat of my former critique of simplistic scapegoating of populist movements, it is nonetheless difficult to defend Duterte's bloody war on drugs, his extra-judicial killings, red-tagging of unions and periodic silencing of the media. These are on top of his broken promises to the marginalised populations that voted for him to improve their lives.

The cycling back and forth between liberalisms and populisms is a trend that cannot be broken by merely tinkering with liberalism, instead I argue something more radical needs to be found as a solution to the complex issues found in the Philippines, as neither liberalism nor the simplistic answers of a populist president appear to be working. While in this paper, I have recognised the different forms and types of liberalism, I am not interested in detangling the complex assemblage of liberalisms within the Philippines, if this is at all possible, but in looking for an alternative to populism that is not liberalism. This is because while some might defend classical liberalism, which arguably does not exist today beyond a philosophy, it convincingly passes as the forerunner and legitimiser of neoliberalism. However, the role of liberalism in neoliberalism is not the sole reason to reconsider an alternative. There are limits to liberalism, most noticeably the detriment of the common good as explored by Sandel ([1982] 1990, 2020). The emphasis on the individual, and the circling of that individual as rational and secular, has been to the detriment of collectivism and emotional, embodied and experiential knowledge, including indigenous knowledges and feminine knowledges. It has prevented religious people, who are the majority of the global population, from representation and created an atomised view of society – and if we are to consider social justice as a solution to the social injustices that have caused the repressed to leave liberalism – perhaps we need to rescue the idea of 'society'.

Breaking the populism–liberalism cycle

As an educationalist, my focus to counter-populism lies in education, and I will leave others to interrogate the role of their respective fields, professions and positions. Education is a significant factor in this conversation as 'the normative assumptions of Western liberalism, in which the production of democracy, the practice of education, and the constitution of the nation-state are naturally bound together' (Mitchell 2001, 52), makes (liberal) education a vital plank of liberalism. This is mirrored in its opposite, the increasing vitriol with which public education is debated by the anti-(left)liberal antagonists that call for a weakening of teachers' unions, increased surveillance and accountability in league tables and the policing of obstructions to free hate speech on University campuses. When discussing liberal education, I am referring therefore to education orientated around liberal values that emphasise a comprehensive education based on rationalism, secularism, meritocracy and individual freedoms. Furthermore, in referencing liberal education in its current neoliberal iteration, I am concerned with a contemporary liberal education, which 'seeks to suture the divisive, instrumentalising and individualising effects of modernity with a classical tradition of pedagogy that cultivates a virtuous intellect committed to the public good' (Carnochan 1993, 29).

As already argued in this paper, if liberalism is part of the problem, then we must also see liberal education as part of the problem. The experiment to incorporate neoliberal markets into education has arguably been at the expense of a 'virtuous intellect committed to the public good' rather than its accompaniment. These arguments are well-rehearsed elsewhere, so I will not repeat them in depth here, but Fournier's (1999) exploration of new professionalism saw the start of the trend to explore the ever-diminishing role of traditional professionalism and judgement and autonomy under neoliberal reform. Many scholars followed with similar documentation, Roberston's and colleagues' ongoing work of the encroachment of neoliberalism on higher education and its impacts (see e.g. Robertson 2010 and Robertson and Nestore 2021) are noteworthy in this debate. Together they paint a picture of an education sector that has been gutted of its Public Good and become the commodified self.

The impact of neoliberalism has not only influenced the governance of education and an accountability culture biased towards efficiency, but arguably the individual-centric model of liberal education itself has come at the cost of notions of community and reciprocity. Meritocracy, a central pillar of liberal education, can only really function in conjunction with individualism, as it is the individual who confers the merit, and, in this sense, is a co-hyponym of liberalism and part of its complex referential system. Yet meritocracy has, for the most part, escaped the same level of

critique as neoliberalism. However, it has not escaped it completely (e.g. Mijs 2016) and is drawing more attention today as Sandel shines a spotlight on it in his recent aptly titled publication: 'The Tyranny of Merit' (2020). Meritocracy is a deceptive mechanism that has gained such status as a 'regime of truth' that it almost seems unquestionable. A combination of the cult of the individual in a context of neoliberal competition sees economic status and the privileges it brings as the well-deserved results of their efforts. From this, it is only a short jump to accepting rising inequality. This is sometimes referred to as neoliberal meritocracy, where the intensification of liberalism and competition, alongside mobile rentier capitalism, has seen a failure of the post-war capitalist promise. Instead of the promise of rewards for hard work and ability, faith has been replaced by experiences of an inescapable inequality where education and income cannot compensate for capital (Piketty 2014). However, for Sandel (2020), the issues do not simply lie in neoliberal distortion of meritocracy, but as with his previous arguments against liberalism ([1982] 1990), there are inherent limits in the classical forms too: 'The problem with meritocracy is not only that the practice falls short of the ideal … But it is doubtful that even a perfect meritocracy would be satisfying, either morally or politically' (2020, 24). The questioning of outsized rewards and politics of humiliation leads to a reconsideration of the dignity of work and the common good.

Within the Philippines, we see the neoliberal characteristics within the education system alluded to above: an education market, a culture of accountability and competition, and an investment in the benefice of meritocracy. The Philippines, like many countries with limited public resources and growing educational demands, has embraced Educational public-private partnerships (EPPP) through the use of a voucher scheme initially designed to address the overcrowding of public schools. This means that school choice, while a driving principle in other contexts, is not as important and consequently there is not as much a sense of competition or pressure among public school principals, who instead are happy to use the Education Service Contracting (ESC) voucher scheme to elevate pressure on pupil numbers and transfer their more academically-able students into private schools (Termes, Edwards, and Verger 2019). While proposed to benefit both the public and private sectors, easing overcrowding in public schools and creating sustainable markets for private schools, the benefit has been more than one-sided. The notion of meritocracy in sending the most able students to private schools has had a somewhat ironic impact on the very notion itself, with the most academically able students concentrated in private schools, they have been able to attract paying students based on socioeconomic traits and reinforce their position. The creation of a two-tier school system where those who are more challenging to educate or with special educational needs are concentrated in the public system while private educators can cream-off the academically able and leave the less-profitable-to-educate in the state system (Termes, Edwards, and Verger 2019). What emerges is the opposite of a comprehensive system that would enable the 'talented' to rising regardless of their background, replaced by a tiered system where a lucky few might 'earn' their way to the top tier, while many others can buy it and turbo-charge their 'merit'.

Despite experience and evidence of the opposite (and a high level of cronyism more generally in society), the personal investment in education in the Philippines is arguably driven through a belief in meritocracy, taken in the form of credentialism. Notwithstanding Singapore, the Philippines has one of the highest percentages of students entering tertiary education in South East Asia (Toh and Floresca-Cawagas 2003, 205) and this, along with the varying quality of programmes, has resulted in a diploma disease scenario evolving out of a Western-based education market that provides qualifications without regard for the context's economic realities. When revisiting his thesis in the 1980s, Dore recognised the role of more general education (or we might say liberal education) in perpetuating the diploma disease, where vocational education and career-relevant qualifications were better matched to workplace relevancy (Dore 1980). This is reflected in the Task Force on Higher Education Report (1995) which recognised

> an oversupply of college graduates with an unemployment rate of 19.9 per cent among engineers, 16.5 per cent among natural sciences graduates, 11.1 per cent among social sciences graduates, and 9.4 per cent among

> teachers. The Report also claimed that a significant proportion of the college educated are employed in jobs for which they are overqualified. (as quoted in Toh and Floresca-Cawagas 2003, 215)

The Philippines is a classic example of the phenomenon that 'income inequality and belief in meritocracy go hand in hand' (Mijs 2019, title). A situation where the population are told, and believed, education is the route to success despite a culture of cronyism, patronage and high graduate unemployment that would suggest otherwise, is a pertinent case that the argument for meritocracy is a myth promoted by the elite to legitimise their position and in-turn keep the poor unquestioning of their position in society.

However, while a diploma disease may be one side of the Philippine liberal education system, the other side is high drop-out rates and inequality across provinces. The paradox of a high proportion of Filipino students entering tertiary education is found in the extent of educational opportunity poverty. A large inequality is between rural and urban populations, with most of the country's top schools situated in Metro Manila, while the countryside is under-resourced despite being home to more than 70% of the population (Toh and Floresca-Cawagas 2003). High dropout rates among a substantial poor population are also contributing to inequality of educational opportunities, as parents fail to meet the hidden costs of education.

Liberal education does also have its positives and it is not my intention to suggest there is no merit in it. I am a product of liberal education myself and an employee of a liberal university. However, the assumption that one type of education fits all and can be universalised, or that there is a perfect educational model, is problematic. When I hear Cornel West describe liberal education as a disrupter and multiplier of spaces of public contestation that interrupts injustice (George and West 2021), I am caught up in the praise and advocacy of liberal education. However, too often, this is not the liberal education disseminated through global discourses – at best what is left of classical liberalism is a myopic promotion of Western schooling that erodes a collectivist culture and promotes an elitist Western disciplinary approach to education and knowledge. If we consider that the classic liberal educational dream is rarely evident today but has instead been co-opted by neoliberalism, then even this meagre globally disseminated liberal approach to education has found itself at the imposition of neoliberal accountability, efficiency and market orientation. Here, not even the good bits survive and instead we arguably have a (neo) liberal education that not only is not 'a multiplier of public contestation' but actively contributes to its opposite – injustice and growing social inequality.

With this in mind, my gaze turns to education understood in its broadest sense as to do with the translation, creation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and values and not confined to schooling. Through a renewal of the participatory character of democracy and recognition of the 'voices' of those who have found a way to vent their anger at a status quo that is failing them, might we turn to a space of participatory translation? While different theoretical frames and practices may be cited, this is not an entirely novel idea and has been explored before, for example, Yogev and Michaeli (2011) explore teacher education through the lens of Gramsci's public intellectual; Brigstoke and Noorani (undated) explore the participatory potential and tensions in a democracy using Laclau and Mouffe's 'radical democracy' (1985) with its insight into and emphasis on 'articulation' which is interpreted as a practice that can build political alignments between diverse interests and identities, 'but only ever according to a contingent set of identifications that remain open to contestation' (as quoted in Brigstoke and Noorani, undated, 11); Petrie, McGregor, and Crowther (2019) specifically explore the potential the contemporary wave of populism might offer if framed as an opportunity to strengthen participation in a progressive-leftist tradition. Through drawing on Laclau and Mouffe and their theory of agonistic democracy, they ask how the problem of populism can be approached dialectically to build an

> intellectual, moral and cultural basis for a participatory politics … of informed and critical engagement has to work on and through people's experiences of the contradictions and conflicts of everyday life in a dialogical process of understanding people's affective and cognitive motivations. (Petrie et al. 2019, 490)

These are all important contributions to a conversation to encourage thinking about the issues across our own different contexts, where to open up a space of inquiry that enables cross-context learning without the erasure of particularities requires an ecology of knowledge (Sousa de Santos 2004).

It is at this junction I wish to return to my assertion in the introduction of this paper that in the 'democracy versus populism' debate the use of 'democracy' is shorthand for liberal democracy, which I promised to return to. This is important because in the above paragraph, I draw on a heritage of thought that shows a strong spectre of democracy used more as a critical tool, site of contestation or participatory engagement. This makes the work of deconstructing liberal democracy important so as to make apparent the false and unquestioned assumption that these two are co-hyponyms, that one always implies the other. While it is the case that liberalism requires democracy, 'democracy is more than liberalism in a social (and economic) sense; but it is not more than liberalism in the political sense' (Satori, 1993, 210). If we consider democracy therefore as principally the sphere of the social, it can be reimagined as more than just a representational voting system. Democracy taken as participation and civic engagement does not need to be equated to voter turnout, and as Satori (1993) argues it is this anaemic understanding of 'democracy' as representational democracy that results in political crisis – when citizens are disaffected and do not see themselves represented in the choices they have (voter options)

> and since the political sphere is predominantly organised by the liberal pillar, the result is that the political crises are of greater concern to the liberal pillar rather than to the democratic pillar. The reasons for the crisis relate to the liberal restriction of democratic access (participation) to state power. (290)

Participatory education to counter populism

In this final part of the paper, I aim to draw some of these different ideas together through exploring a type of community organising education I witnessed in Mindanao, the Philippines during my PhD fieldwork. The area I lived and participated in included Davao, where at the time Duterte was the strong man mayor, and communities in West Mindanao. All of the communities I worked in were Muslim communities and the Islamic notion of Umma, or community, informed a strong notion of participation and reciprocity which synergised with the idea of community organising. However, a similar sense of community can also be found across the Catholic Philippines, where the 'all embracing' roots of Catholicism imply a much less atomised or individualised notion of salvation than its protestant cousin, combine with a collectivist Asian culture. In this sense, what follows, I argue, is contextually relevant to much of the Philippine context, though the details may be different according to religions and regional variations. Further, as in previous work I have done on the Philippines I caution against homogenising the different communities there, while simultaneously recognising a shared, albeit fractured and varied, culture.

The participatory education I want to discuss I have described elsewhere as Networking or Community organising (Horner 2013). What I observed in Mindanao was communities coming together on a variety of different social projects for the development of their communities, including collaboration across friendly different communities. The terms and understandings of 'development' were devised and owned by the communities themselves, and with assistance in terms of physical resources or training from a group of networked partners including other Muslim communities (there are multiple factions of ethnic Islam in Mindanao) and a main Christian NGO and other development-assistance charities and NGOs via them. As I have described this organisational aspect elsewhere (see Horner 2013), I will only focus on their educational practice here.

The community groups worked around a number of projects where they organised, learned and produced capacity. As a practice of participatory education, the learning process and knowledge production were found in the dialogical and experimental processes of 'doing' from organising and thinking through values and principles to training to capacity building. I witnessed a number

of projects organised and implemented and maintained by the communities where I worked including a medical mission, community preschools and a water project to provide the whole village with clean and safe drinking water.

For closer inspection, let me illustrate the participatory education model I witnessed through the example of the community preschools which were apparent in three Muslim communities I visited and were the most common community organised projects across my research sites. As a point of clarification, the 'education' I am referring to here is that of the adult organisers who oversaw the preschool, not the formal schooling itself. The preschools were different in each location, but they shared motivation for the communities to see their children have a good preschool education, which was a 'felt need' as they saw their children being alienated in school. This is the first point to draw out that the need and direction of community 'development' were owned by the community, that the prelude for participation is engagement and critique. This echoes Bloch's work on Utopia that sees critique as the opening practice to alternative thinking and a willful attempt to build another world. From this starting position, the communities were able to acquire resources from a number of avenues via a main Christian NGO in order to construct a preschool building or repurpose a community member's home. The second point of note, therefore, is the inclusion of the community in the physical building of the space and therefore its ownership. While the eventual schools would be run by a small group of volunteers, all of the community skills were valued and needed at some point across the project. Once the building was completed, the community of volunteers would organise the values and ethos of the school and seek some basic skills training in how to run the preschool project. This part of the process was strongly permeated with a sense of Conscientisation (Freire [1970] 1996), and as each community was in control of their productivities, the schools look very different, though what they have in common is they fit their context. Two of the schools have their own building and are run by a team of community volunteers with a strong Islamic character and pride, while another school is a UNICEF Home School, run by a single villager from their front room who is supported by the main Christian NGO and her networks. Their front room has been extended by help and resources from this network and as well as the preschool offers space for several livelihood projects in the community.

This third part of the process took participatory practices deeply into ideas of knowledge production, identity and values. In one community, I was asked if I could run some 'training' for the preschool volunteers, and from this window I was privileged to witness the strength of this participatory ethics up close. More facilitating discussion than 'training', the women volunteers at the preschool talked about their own strengths and experiences they brought to the role, their religious and ethnic values and how they were absent from mainstream state education in the Philippines. Their critique of not just the school system itself, but wider structures that obstructed formal processes of recognition and 'success' for Muslim minorities fed back into their approach and values for the preschool. Their preschool celebrated Islamic culture, poems, dress and values and they cherished the children as explorers in stark contrast to the hierarchal and disciplinary school culture they had known. At a preschool recognition (similar to a US school graduation), the whole community attended, local officials gave long speeches and the Islamic community in that village were recognised and celebrated.

When I consider this example of participatory education, in light of my thoughts on populism in the Philippines explored above, I am drawn to four aspects which I think would be worth further exploration in rethinking education beyond liberal education that is robust enough to withstand populism: Solidarity, Critique, Conscientisation and transformation.

Starting with solidarity, the practice of participatory education I describe above replaces the emphasis of meritocracy with one of belonging and identity. Here, one's value is not contingent on one's abilities in a collection of specific attributes or skills deemed as most prized or specialist, but in one's relationships and one's humanity. The role of volunteerism, seen throughout all of the projects witnessed, advanced a communal and noncapitalist enterprise that replaced hierarchies with communities. Volunteers spanned from a student–teacher studying for their master's degree

in the evenings to 'unqualified' parents; from those experienced in construction and building to those 'unskilled' labourers wanting to learn how. And all were volunteers. The relationships became part of an identity of the community where they were all valued and belonged – as a Muslim, a Tasug, a Maguindanaon, a would-be water engineer, a would-be assistant at the pop-up pharmacy, a would-be carpenter/builder or a would-be school teacher, but most importantly a volunteer.

The collectivist endeavour witnessed here is not unique to the field I visited. Gibson-Graham (2008) explores similar notions of volunteerism and alternative economies in the Philippines to add to this conversation, and their example of overseas workers sending money home is also not unique to the Philippines; it is found in many cultures across the globe. This is interesting to me in relation to how it repositions the community as the focus and challenges the notion of meritocracy as winner-takes-all and 'equality for the deserving', which was co-opted into a third way leftism that became the liberal left. Through volunteering and community education, everyone in the community has something to offer, something to learn and something to teach. Even the somewhat impractical academic researcher is found a role – who on showing their complete incompetence in splitting bamboo with a machete is asked to document the process as a photographer. While my skill set may not make it onto a contrived list of valuable skills in that context, it was not by merit that I was valued, but by my membership of the community of volunteers. Through decentring meritocracy and promoting instead approaches focused around equality, community, agency and relationships, this form of participatory education challenges one of the problems of liberalism I explored above.

Critique or critical thinking, like collectivism, has an important heritage in Filipino society and is a contextual characteristic that is highlighted in this example of participatory education. As detailed in the previous thumbnail history of the islands and the thinking and contestations of the Ilistrados, Filipinos are no stranger to critical thinking and contestation politics, right through until contemporary times with calls for land reform and clean governance still chiming from the New People's Army consolidated in North Luzon through active across the country and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao. Critique is an important tool in countering populism, not just in terms of exposing the simplistic solutions found in populist rhetoric as frauds but also to address the social conditions that have led to the political crisis in the first place. Without critique, contestation becomes scapegoating, and the conditions of the disenfranchised remain unchecked, and rather than Streeck's 'return of the repressed', we have a continuation of the repressed.

While Duterte has been forthright in his attacks of (left)liberalism, the mechanisms of neoliberalism remain firmly intact and there is little actual improvement to be felt by the majority population. For transformation to occur, a critical engagement with the power structures and inequalities present is needed to understand them in their complexities and also to understand that there are no easy or simple solutions. Taking Duterte's war on drugs, for example, it is important to understand that petty small-time drug dealers are victims of systematic violence themselves, through a social and education system that at best offers them little opportunities and at worse alienates them from society. This results in an awareness that the problem is deeply ingrained in an unfair and unjust society where life choices are stratified and reduced, which will require a restructuring of society and improvements to education, social services, health and equal opportunity. Such critical explorations of the power and conditions behind the apparent surface view of petty crime allow both: (1) An approach to the causes, rather than the symptoms, which stand a chance to actually bring about change instead of suppressing the issue, and (2) A recognition of the complexity and difficulty of doing this and a realistic commitment to long-term answers instead of the short-termism of voter cycles.

In the example of the preschool, we see this type of complex critical thinking taking place. For example, the community volunteers were able to recognise the lack of representation of Muslim people in the formal education system and the lack of recognition of their culture and history in the curriculum, and they, therefore, incorporated Islamic tradition and values into the preschool education activities which were run by Muslim representatives from the community. They could

see how a project funded by an Australian NGO for their local elementary school had sought to address recognition without representation – the teaching of Filipino Islamic culture in an after-school club that failed to hire Muslim applicants to work at it – and were critical of half attempts and veneers of inclusion. They were also critical of the structural injustices in the access to pre-school education for Muslim children and this critique resulted in actions to try to address this absence.

Conscientisation builds on this act of critical thinking but extends it to critical consciousness. Developed by Freire, conscientisation ([1970] 1996) describes how critical reflection and action lead to the realisation of your social reality. Education becomes a pedagogical act where self-reflection leads to the search for alternatives to oppression. In keeping with a shift from liberal democracy to an emphasis on participation argued for in this paper, for Freire (an emancipatory) education 'of the oppressed' should seek reciprocal participation where students and teacher learn from each other through dialogue and action (praxis) for the means of self-determination. A process of problem-posing, decision-making and transformative moments built on the lived experiences and contexts of the learner prepare the way for collective action. In this approach, we see, instead of the individualism of meritocracy and liberalism, a practice where, instead 'Freire refers to the endeavour of education as a kind of mutual-humanization, where the social struggle for meaning and becoming involves the return to, and affirmation of, humanity' (Goodson and Gill 2014, 17). The role of critical dialogue underscores a collaborative and collective education where 'human beings in communion liberate each other' (Freire [1970] 1996, 114), emphasising the shared nature of the social struggle and open invitation.

I have already described the participatory and reflective way that the community activists work, and this combination of critical thinking and responsive action and community organising has led to an awakening of critical consciousness. Returning to the preschool, we can see this in their understanding reflected in a complex and modified approach to formal education. The volunteers, and many of my participants, would espouse the benefits of formal education for its necessity in gaining access into the formal job market and demanded equality in access to this enabling right. The creation of the preschool was around addressing a structural injustice and providing access to preschool education where previously there was none. However, they also held this in tension with the knowledge that as ethnic Muslims their entry into the formal labour market was barred through discriminatory attitudes and ID cards that stated their religion. As formal education is directly linked to formal employment, the value of formal education was equally valued for its potential and simultaneously recognised as having a limited value for a discriminated group. It was not a case of the community taking one-side-or-the-other in their attitudes towards formal education, but in holding this contradiction and complexity together in tension. They both pursued formal education as a means of elevating their position in society, while simultaneously recognising the equal importance of informal education as a means of addressing their more every-day livelihood concerns in their current context. Here, we had a situation where the formal education of the preschool was enabled by the informal education of the community workers who built, organised and managed it. And this is not lost on the volunteers at the preschool who have experienced the limit of the promises of formal education and therefore combine their motivations not just with school subject outcomes but also include the learning of identity, Islamic values and reciprocity as an important part of the preschool education.

In a Freirean approach of consciousness-raising of their situation through critical dialogue, the community were able to pull on their own sufficient knowledge and capacity to understand and address their disadvantage, with some material resource and support from a trusted network of wider support. The knowledge of their lived experiences, political context and needs of their community were translated into decision-making through an informal educational process that led to a transformation realised through collective action in their communities. The critical consciousness is glimpsed across all of the community volunteer projects, not just the preschool, as the reflexive and critical practice of community organising found in the working between the Muslim community

and a lead Christian NGO nurtures a sense of identity and awareness. I witnessed Ethnic Muslims share their stories confidently in a Catholic University Master's degree course on Peacebuilding in Mindanao through the invitation of the lead Christian NGO, and I am told how Kalib, one of the Muslim community leaders, wrote to a European Church Donor who was contributing to a water project in their village, to call out their colonising tendencies over tied conditions – with the result of an apology and continued partnership.

Importantly, these practices have led to transformation. There has been a material transformation in the lives of the communities where we see this type of community organising, which I have described as a type of participatory education, from clean water to increased access to formal schooling, to goat rearing livelihood projects and toilet blocks. These physical additions have improved the lives of the communities where they have been built. But also, there has been a transformation of capacity. The reciprocal and community-focused way these were built has brought new skills to the communities – villagers and volunteers have learned how to build preschools, how to devise a curriculum and teach, to be water engineers. There has been a transformation in critical consciousness and importantly a sense of pride. At the end of school-year preschool recognition, I witnessed local officials cry with thanks that the volunteers had inspired a sense of Islamic identity and pride in the village. At the Catholic University, I witnessed ethnic Muslims confidently tell their stories, believing they should be heard and addressing inequalities.

Conclusion

In recognition of the popular dissent of the status quo represented in populism in general, and Duterte's election specifically, I have explored how this can be read as the failure of liberalism in the Philippines. Drawing on work from Laclau ([2005] 2018), Streeck (2017), Fraser (2017) and Sandel ([1982] 1990, 2020) among others, I see Duterte's election as the legitimate vent against broken promises and real-life struggles. I sought to draw out the different assemblages of liberalism in the Philippines and their negotiations with education in order to demonstrate the implications of liberalism and question its hegemonic status for 'progress'. Through a referential system evoking individualism, rationalism, secularism, meritocracy and marketisation – amongst other signifiers – I explore how the mechanisms of liberalism in the Philippines have led to rising inequality and erosion of human liberation and development promised to them after EDSA.

While I argue that the cause of populism lies in the failure of liberalism, I do not see liberalism's solution in populism or Duterte, who I contend is continuing much of liberalism's practices in an authoritarian style. I do, however, see the analysis and exploration of the causes of populism, and the dissatisfaction it represents in the population, as an important injunction that provides a moment to consider alternatives to the cycling between populisms and liberalisms in the Philippine context. In the second half of this paper, I have offered the example of a community education project in Mindanao, which serves as an alternative to the liberal–populist dichotomy. Through focusing on participation, and drawing on the work of Freire, I sketch out some of the ways that the community organising deepens participation and its impact on strengthening notions of society, reciprocity and the common good. The community organising has a number of features that work together and nourish each other, mirroring the referential system of liberalism – replacing secularism, rationalism, meritocracy and individualism with religious recognition, critique, humanity, volunteerism and solidarity. This is achieved through a process of conscientisation that leads to the transformation of their lived experiences and communities.

While this is one small example that is context-specific, it connects with other conversations about participatory education, already mentioned. Some of these examples predate the current wave of populism yet nonetheless their participatory character is just as relevant, while others refer to contemporary populist movements. I hope that this paper contributes to a conversation about participatory alternatives to liberalism that addresses and challenges that which simplistic

populism is failing to do, echoing Bloch's work on Utopia that sees critique as the opening practice to alternative thinking and a willful attempt to build another world.

Notes

1. This is by no means a comprehensive list, and we see an increased focus on the western societies of Europe and the US in contemporary times (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012); however, I pull out these illustrations as a simple reminder that populism is not only a risk to (western) democracy in its places of origin but also where (western) democracy has been exported to non-western contexts. The arguably global rise of populism may speak to an accompaniment of democracy's discontents, which will be varied and nuanced in different contexts. In the Philippines, this will involve an exploration of 'western' democracy, as in liberal democracy, and its amendments and modifications to a different geography.
2. Benigno Aquino III was the incumbent president. The Aquino name has an illustrious heritage in Filipino political history with his father Benigno Aquino, Jr. allegedly assassinated on the command of the populist President Ferdinand Marcos, and whose widow Corazon was elected after the EDSA people power movement that ousted Marcos. The name, therefore, carries strong associations with this moment of liberation and renewed liberalism in the Philippines, as much and as paradoxically a political dynasty ironically subverts such associations. Benigno Aquino III signifies this potent association through adopting the same yellow colour as the yellow ribbon of 'Ninoy and Cory,' thus clearing identifying himself as their successor.

Disclosure statement

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