

Featured Article

Interrogating Neocolonial Education: Critical Pedagogy Contra Neoliberal Schooling

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Abstract: Education viewed as the traditional process of “educing” human potential for critical thinking derives its actual efficacy from historical contextualization. In a colonized formation like the Philippines, unlike industrialized bourgeois polities, schooling was organized to produce regimented subalterns for U.S. monopolies while reinforcing feudal norms. Private landed property limited any attempt at utilitarian, liberal reforms. Colonial education was designed as a modernizing agency serving U.S. imperial needs from 1899-1946. From 1946 to the present, schooling has functioned as a neocolonial instrument of Cold War politics and counterinsurgency schemes. With the worsening crisis of global capitalism in the new millennium, neoliberal ideology was imposed to undermine any radical challenge to the domination of the U.S.-controlled global market and the imperative of capital accumulation. The pandemic crisis has further exposed the hypocrisy of neoliberal claims to promoting democracy via consumerism and media spectacles. Neocolonial schooling serves chiefly to preserve the inequities of a class-divided society lacking any solid technological-industrial base and real sovereignty – the result of total subordination to U.S. hegemony. It is being challenged by a critical pedagogy of “conscientization” aimed at liberating subalterns from a commodifying, alienating system of values and structures of feeling inherited from over three hundred years of colonization.

Keywords: schooling, colonialism, education, class, neocolonialism, conscientization, capitalism

If truth is to be found in the synchronization of reason and experience, rectitude lies in the synchronization of theory and practice.

- Apolinario Mabini, *The Philippine Revolution*

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question... It is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself... The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising [sic] practice.

- Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*

I. Introduction

One might as well begin this essay with this provocative thesis to spark a conversation: education conceived as a practice of shaping rational humans with the principles and values of a distinct Filipino culture, remains a mirage or a seductive simulacrum. What operates today in the country is a machine for producing/reproducing commodified subjects for profitable manipulation. The supposed sovereign territory of these subjects has never truly freed itself from U.S. imperial supervision managed by trained local oligarchs. Everyday life in this administered region pivots around the “freedom” to sell one’s labor-power in a competitive market and to acquire commodities based on one’s class belonging. Education is primarily geared toward domesticating citizens to pursue their interests and satisfy their needs within the framework of a dependent, subordinated outpost of the empire. Its function is thus conservative, disciplinary, and instrumentally repressive.

On top of the menacing climate change, migration horrors, and imposed wars in various zones of the planet, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the Philippines harder than other countries (for the U.S. response, see McLaren 2022; Davis 2020). The Duterte regime enforced the longest lockdown in the whole world, compounding the systemic problems of mass poverty, extra-judicial killings, and ecological disasters. Phenomenal decline in enrollment and recorded learning loss in the sciences and mathematics translated into “productivity loss,” from the commercial entrepreneur’s standpoint (Marcelo 2023). According to the Asian Development Bank, despite State interventions such as the Philippine Learning Continuity Plan, traditional or hybrid online schooling, plus other gimmicks, have proved out of reach for poor families and entire communities of Lumads/ethnic groups (Yamakawa 2022).

The Oxford Business Group 2018 report diagnosed the deteriorating quality of education (long before the pandemic) as due to the “low government budget for education; poor quality of teachers; shoddy management of school facilities; discouraging learning

environment” all requiring substantial reforms. Meanwhile, teachers from various schools testified to how the pandemic affected the mental health of family, students, and teachers in a milieu of “inequality, poverty, reactionary politics” (Marquez et al. 2020). Since formal schooling is only one institution in stabilizing the social order, we cannot grasp the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic unless we situate it in the sociohistorical context of the Philippines as a seemingly durable colonized formation. By contextualizing it, we can discern its permanent crisis as a symptom of the inequities and injustice suffered by the mass of citizens plagued by a more lethal disease: biopolitical inertia, genocidal capital (Leech 2012).

II. Symptomatic Deciphering

The body politic has been historically constrained by a virus more toxic than the Covid-19: the control of substantial wealth and power by oligarchic dynasties. With the accession to the helm of the Department of Education, Sara Duterte, daughter of strongman Rodrigo Duterte, and second to Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Marcos (who uses the moniker BongBong), elected president last May 2022, it seems anticlimactic to predict any change for the better in fulfilling the task of inventing an autonomous Filipino identity. Once described as a “cacique” democracy (Anderson 1995), the country remains dominated by the U.S. and its instrumentalities, the IMF-World Bank-WTO. It is in permanent crisis as signaled by the Hukbalahap (Huk) rebellion against post-World War II U.S. reimpositions, the New People’s Army insurgency, the bloody Marcos dictatorship, and its successive mutations. Why and what can remedy this systematic rot which has persisted since the 1946 flag-independence?

As suggested earlier, education is a systemic process designed to fashion rational-ethical agents/subjects with duties and obligations. From a Western perspective, schools are tasked to form the character of responsible citizens cognizant of their roles in a class-divided polity. This world-outlook proceeds from the Renaissance/Enlightenment heritage – the grand metanarrative of progress now vitiated by postmodern incredulity. This incredulity, however, has morphed into an apologia for brutal exploitation and oppression of what Frantz Fanon calls the “wretched of the earth,” the unpropertied millions in the Global South.

Historically, the function of schooling evolved from charismatically sanctioned and/or traditionalist institutions of disciplining subjects to conform as workers/consumers in the bureaucratic order (Gerth and Mills 1953, 252; Aranguren 1967, 158-80). It serves to integrate atomized subjects to adapt to the ferocity of class warfare. Needless to say, we are a long way now from this Enlightenment and post-French revolution reform with its transcendent claim to legitimize bourgeois law-and-order. Secularized Puritanism extolled efficiency, competition, and worldly success in civil society.

Technocratic rationality achieved through the “banking” scheme of knowledge/skills transfer is currently the goal for modernizing nation-states in the Global South. While formal schooling in a market-centered setup has replaced the family as the prime ideological apparatus, as Althusser (1971, 137-40) claims, that is not true for dependent formations where landlord/comprador dynasties prevail. In neocolonized Philippines, for example, an entrenched patrimonial client-patron system still functions as normative standard, combining primitive and decaying versions of feudal relations (see Polanyi 1971, 141-47).

III. Toward Cognitive Mapping

Any inquiry into the prospect of actualizing a program of a liberating pedagogy in a neocolonial milieu seems a desideratum. But it requires historical contextualization whose rudiments can only be sketched here. Those emancipatory impulses can be apprehended more fully in the controversies and contestations raging in the public sphere.

Immediately after the 1986 “People Power” revolt that overthrew the Marcos dictatorship, the Philippines experienced the devastating effect of neoliberal policies: deregulation, privatization, transnational corporatization, etc. (see Ofreneo 1995). Modernizing marketization reconfigured the “free world” under U.S. suzerainty. U.S.-led multilateral capitalist institutions exacerbated the misery wrought by Cold War “low-intensity” warfare. Profit-centered agencies intensified their surveillance and control over everyday life, sharpening social inequality and environmental degradation (McChesney 1999; Hart-Landsberg 2006). Competitive individualism and fierce exploitation of working people burgeoned, resulting in the slow collapse of public health and education, resurgent child poverty, the epidemic of loneliness, the collapse of ecosystems, and the rise of Donald Trump” (Monbiot 2016). Neoliberalism was a recipe for universal disaster, anomic despair, fascist riots, and the barbarism of “gangster finance capital” (Giroux 2023; Falk 2022).

North American public intellectuals such as Henri Giroux (2004), Peter McLaren (2015), and others have warned about the consequences of corporate management of public education. Giroux bewailed the destruction of critical, civic-minded schooling as “the last frontier for truly democratic public spheres” in the Global North. Its impact was catastrophic in the peripheral regions, “the third world” of subjugated territories (Harvey 2005). We are referring to neocolonial, not postcolonial, societies (Woddis 1972). Old arguments about the end of ideology and demise of national sovereignties with the collapse of the Soviet Union gave way to a post-9/11 polarized world of the civilized West and the extremist rest, the latter designating the crime-prone immigrants and refugees fleeing from “humanitarian” troops of the U.S and NATO – hordes of displaced or deracinated victims shattering borders.

In a flat, borderless world, observers surmise that *laissez-faire* economics does not imply pluralism or negotiated compromise. It breeds the opposite: racist hatred and violence. Samir Amin (2003) has argued earlier that deregulated markets are not anarchic; they are managed by corporate monopolies guiding state mechanisms to manage the periodic crisis brought about by sociopolitical conflicts between center and periphery, and among sovereign nation-states. In the beleaguered zones of underdeveloped or developing nations, the imperialist metropolises used the schooling system as a powerful means of legitimizing the “myth of capitalist meritocracy” and the imperative of efficiency (Carnoy 1974). Schools served as the chief ideological state-apparatus to reproduce the hierarchical class structure and reinforce the differential social roles appropriate for profit/capital accumulation in the colonized formations (Barnard 1981).

IV. Mediating Imperialism

The Philippines is a privileged example of how the U.S. utilized the educational system as a weapon of white-supremacist domination. In the vicious pacification of the islands from 1899 to 1913 (when Moro resistance subsided), the U.S. deployed teachers (officers and enlisted soldiers; later, the “Thomasite” volunteers) to win “hearts and minds.” It was part of McKinley’s scheme of “Benevolent Assimilation” (Schirmer and Shalom 1987, 38-44). The historian Renato Constantino acutely traced the advent of the “mis-education of the Filipino” to General Arthur McArthur’s justification of funds for education “as an adjunct to military operations calculated to pacify the people” rounded up in quarantined hamlets (1966, 42). Instead of freeing minds, colonial education produced subaltern mentalities that up to today supply cheap labor for the global market despite the regime’s liberal rhetoric and resurgent, nationalist opposition.

We should not forget the play of contradictions in the force-field of cultural change. Our revolutionary tradition was rooted in the revolt against absolutist Spanish rule and the draconian theocratic State. It was inspired by the French and American revolutions. But the Enlightenment reform sought by the *ilustrados/Propagandistas* failed with the aborted 1896 revolution and the bloody conquest by the United States. We need to remind ourselves that the first American teachers were soldiers adept in shooting and torture; thus, textbooks and Krag rifles went hand in hand to civilize the intransigent natives.

Schooling was never an ambiguous or benevolent process of emancipating the masses and upholding individual “natural rights.” Its primary function was to legitimize and justify colonial conquest and maintain its function of serving the needs of Empire. The much-vaunted U.S. introduction of public schooling was the first counterinsurgency plan launched to extinguish the Filipino memory of its victory against Spain and its resistance against violent U.S. pacification (Bauzon 2019). The acclaimed institution was disciplinary and penalizing. Together with civic associations such as the Rotary, Lions, freemasonry,

youth and sports clubs, etc., the much-touted public education served as a methodical training of natives to instill loyalty and obedience to the colonial authorities. Public instruction produced mainly technicians and skilled factotums for lower positions in the government bureaucracy and commercial outfits, not a managerial elite. But its tactics of cooptation and meritocratic ideology changed over time with the adoption of new productive forces (technologies of transportation, communication, advertising) and streamlined economic platforms.

V. Legitimation Quagmire

We witness today a return of the oppressor and subversion by the oppressed. Consider the attempt to refunction the U.S. colonial project of “civilizing” recalcitrant natives in the current reforms of the old system. Foreign commentators assume that we have matured and become responsible citizens of the Republic. Proof of this is that we have acquired competence in American English, in the exercise of pragmatic common-sense, and perhaps even the virtue of competing in the “free marketplace” of goods and packaged ideas. Also, we know the value of learning the ABCs of exchanging thoughts and arguing in the public forum where freedoms of speech and assembly are actualized, notwithstanding government censorship, red-tagging, etc.

So, this is what, in general, U.S.-sponsored education has achieved since the pacification campaign of General McArthur, the Thomasites, canned goods, cars, radios, and Hollywood flicks, etc. While “Benevolent Assimilation” may not have been so gracious to the Moros and millenarian survivors of the 1896 revolution, at least it allowed the generation of Camilo Osias, Osmeña, Quezon, Roxas – the bureaucratic stratum-surrogates of U.S. administrators – to thrive. W. Cameron Forbes in fact boasts that U.S. colonialism is distinguished from the old European type because it produced laborers who are earning more than before, thus preparing Filipinos for “nationality” – not exactly the ideal of self-determination called for by the Colorum rebels, Sakdalistas, and Huk partisans who fought the Japanese and their landlord collaborators (1945, 196-97, 394).

Let us quote the historian Constantino again. He summed up the role of schooling in the Philippines under U.S. rule: “Thus, from an instrument of pacification, colonial education became an instrument of assimilation or Americanization” (1975, 309). His classic discourse on “The Miseducation of the Filipino” sums up the effect of the educational apparatus that produced several generations of thoroughly Americanized “serfs,” beholden to the U.S. as a generous benefactor training them for self-government. Colonial pedagogy suppressed Filipino nationalism embodied in its revolutionary tradition. This is so despite the claims of latter-day apologists that the compulsory system of public schooling would set up an “educated democracy” instead of a “literate oligarchy” (Taylor 1972, 72). As an “instrument for revolutionary change,” colonial education, according to

George Taylor, may be construed as the manipulation of “the values and loyalties of the ordinary Filipino” to preserve the established social hierarchy and promote U.S. Cold War aims (1972, 72).

VI. Dependency Forever

Colonialism U.S.-style thus never became postal or delinquent. Within this framework, schooling is one apparatus for sustaining a neocolonial, not postcolonial, regime governed by IMF-WB and WTO conditionalities – in effect, by U.S. hegemony. Overall, the Philippines remains a quasi-feudal, neocolonized country (Sison 2015, 81-91; San Juan 2007). With its agricultural base eroded, and its natural resources ravaged by corporate extraction, the framework of governance still draws its strength from the retooled institutions established by the United States upon annexing the territory in 1898. This has been modified by replacing domestic industries with offshore outsourcing, mineral extraction, assembly factories, and extensive labor export. Absent any real industrial base, relying for revenues from outsourced business services and remittances from exported labor, the Philippines remains an impoverished quasi-feudal, dependent formation. We are still living under U.S. domination, given the virtual return and expansion of U.S. military operations as Washington/Pentagon confronts China’s formidable challenge to its hegemony (CenPEG 2023).

From this perspective, it seems disingenuous to speak of education – often regarded as liberal-democratic in form, if not, in content – in the Philippines as similar or analogous to that in North America and Europe. Liberalism as *laissez-faire* utilitarian ideology remains formal or merely verbal, enshrined in ritual and protocols. This is the error of most commentaries on this topic. Let us review the assumptions behind the classic idea of education espoused by Western representative democracies. The sociologist Emile Durkheim, for example, sums up the notion of education as “a methodical socialization” of youthful generations as autonomous rational persons. The aim is to develop the faculties for assuming responsibility for personal acts and judgments, not simply to train youth in acquiring skills or knowledge in apprenticeship for jobs. In general, this concept of education follows the Greek idea of inculcating virtue. But this virtue is defined, in 19th century utilitarian milieu, as the humane culture of the bourgeois elite (Scruton 1982, 140; see also Whitehead 1949).

We have argued earlier that in class society, educational discipline functions to preserve and reproduce class hierarchy, the differential allocation of wealth and power. This liberal bias exposes its delimiting repressive intentionality. Clearly, the practice of socialization cannot escape its determination by class position, articulated with ethnic, gender, and other ideological factors. As a socializing force, education is thus always defined by varying historical contexts and specificities (for a critique of functionalist

thought and tendentious Cold War dogmatism, see Chasin and Chasin 1974; Bowles 1972; Bourdieu 1974).

VII. Globalized Salvaging

Modernity's metanarrative of progress has yielded to administered pluralism and niche "marketization" touted as universal principles (Raymundo 2007). We infer this counter-intuitive notion from the alleged "clash of civilizations" in the new millennium. Does this mean that education should subordinate or marginalize sociohistorical particularities for the sake of the universal ideal of humanist rationality and individual liberties?

At the turn of the millennium, with unrestrained market-supremacy engulfing the planet, we hear a touted pundit James Martin complain that education no longer functions as the powerful means for minimizing the clash of civilizations. Martin (2006, 336) exhorts us to separate good Western principles from bad Western behavior, at the same time urging that we study the writings of the Iranian Hafez instead of "hearing of its preaching that America is the great Satan" (2006, 336; for a critique of pluralist nostrums, see Ross and Queen 2010).

The imperial bourgeois self, however, cannot elude its ironies despite the call for equivocation and compromise. This property-owning psyche evades the issue of private property and class/national oppression. Pushing more for technocratic globalism and putative common principles to remedy terrorism, Martin and his ilk also celebrate the glory of cultural diversity. Shades of American exceptionalism, *e pluribus unum*? What we perceive here is a recrudescence of the old mind/body dualism, the disjunction of idealizing theory/material practice that bedeviled everyone since the decline of Christian universalism and its supersession by the paradigm of acquisitive/possessive individualism in massified secular society. Defined by alienated labor and self-reproducing inequality, capitalism and its globalizing project can only undermine its Enlightenment foundation and hasten its collapse.

What is evident in this market-centered view of the educational process is its ideological support for a class-divided society. The doctrine of private property remains sacrosanct. It sustains the division between mental and manual labor, a historical rupture that is reflected in the gap between productive work and teaching/learning process, between conception and execution in any activity. Given the lopsided division of social labor, the potentialities of persons are not allowed to develop, curtailing self-fulfilling creative work and participation in social reconstruction. Indeed, because the community is excluded from organizing the schooling process, science and production remain separated, thus promoting competition and deepening alienation. This view of education

is what guarantees the subaltern role of everyone engaged in the learning/teaching process, involving both students and teachers. Education is therefore instrumental in maintaining the unjust status quo and suppressing any truly radical, egalitarian, people-oriented revolutionary change.

VIII. Transmogrification of the Status Quo

We can sum up the function of U.S.-modeled schooling as the reproduction of the class-divided structure and its effort to legitimize it, as already argued earlier. It functions as the ideological armature of the market system. It performs this role via the production of subaltern subjects offering services for the U.S. military and the operations of foreign transnational corporations. We need to add that public and private educational institutions are not alone in producing/reproducing subaltern subjects. This function is also performed and reinforced by the patriarchal family and the gendered/sexual division of labor (see Eviota 1992; Aguilar 1998). This is not the occasion to explore the pedagogical function of the traditional family and its patriarchal norm. Suffice it to say that its authoritarian structure subverts any attempt of humanistic schooling to develop critical, analytic habits for problem-solving and testing hypotheses and beliefs. Its grounding in the kinship/*pater familia* scheme of interpersonal relations (*hiya, pakikipagkapwa*; see Enriquez 1992) somehow undergirds the charismatic, traditional orientation in personality-formation and social integration.

With the end of the Vietnam war, U.S. global hegemony had to streamline the mechanisms of capital accumulation due to technological advances. One mode of adjustment is through neoliberal policies of privatization and draconian cuts in welfare programs and social services. Systemic contradictions in the dynamics of profit-making persisted. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of China required an intensification of “free trade,” that is, the elimination of barriers to “foreign direct investment” and the opening of new markets and sources of raw materials. This implied recolonizing of newly liberated countries and overrunning sovereignties with the help of computer technologies of communication (money transfers, currency exchanges, etc.). In short, finance/monopoly capitalism demanded a return to its rapacious booty stage, overthrowing old national borders and newly liberated zones. The deceptive promise of uplifting the material lives of the masses seduced oligarchic politicians into agreeing to unfair agreements, just as the Filipino elite acquiesced to the promise of flag independence from their conquerors.

After three decades of neoliberalization, the aftermath contradicts WTO/IMF-WB predictions. We can cite the sharp rise in inequality of incomes, severe unemployment, continued pauperization of workers and peasants in developing countries, heightened instability, crime, desperate migration, sex trafficking (Hart-Landsberg 2006). In short, neoliberalism has proven to be globalized capitalism’s ideology for enhancing the

transnational corporate drive of profit-accumulation (especially, through debt servicing or financialization), supplemented with extra-economic “persuasion” through military threats and undercover terrorism (Bauzon 2019, 176-79).

In the “flat” world of global capitalism, uneven development and power asymmetry characterize the contested terrain. As Kenneth Bauzon reminds us, “through politics, institutional mechanisms and policies appropriate for their desires and interests have been put in place by the dominant forces, subverting the democratic institutions” in many indebted countries (2019, 177). Diplomatic negotiations backed by force follow the age-old manner of resolving political antagonisms, all in the name of sanctioning free-market/free-trade absolutism. In this situation, what mode of education is fostered by this new dispensation? Certainly not the old Enlightenment idea of the teacher-scholar acting as midwife assisting the individual mind “to deliver itself of ideas, knowledge” (Adler 1967, 116; see also Benjamin 1960), in a cooperative enterprise between people and nature.

IX. Genealogy of Bondage

Neocolonial education in the Philippines continues to produce domesticated subjects for the local and global market. Their training is designed chiefly for the service and extractive industries, and for the export-labor market as domestics, caregivers, or cheap manual work in tourist cruises, etc. Given all the government policies in reforming the curriculum and adjusting goals to personnel and logistics (del Rosario-Malonzo 2007), we can only conclude that schooling (both private and public) has failed to reach the goal of shaping the majority for civic competence or creative self-fulfillment with community members. Quality liberal education remains a privilege since privatization and deregulation have severely reduced funds for public schooling. Higher echelon managers and technocrats may emerge from wealthy entrepreneurs and landlord dynasties with inherited feudal-bureaucratic mentalities. This incestuous fraction of the elite ensconced in their gated communities remains scarcely touched by the emancipatory drive of the humanities and social sciences.

Danilo Arao reminds us that “education is used as an income-generating measure by the capitalist-owners and an instrument of subjugation by the powers-that-be” (2007, 49), as evidenced by the 2002 Basic Education Curriculum, as well as the ongoing commercialization of higher education by allowing foreign corporations such as IBM to partner with established universities. In the current program of instituting K-12 reform and virtual learning modules, for example, we witness the neoliberal project of equipping students with skills suited to the global labor market. Practically the last two years of high school will be devoted to non-academic technical-vocational-livelihood tracks geared to preparing graduates for low-paying contractual jobs. In effect, the K-12 adaptation to global standards is another attempt of the oligarchic ruling class to prolong the Marcos-era labor-

export policy and maintain the country's dependency as a supplier of cheap semi-skilled workers to the developed economies (D.M. San Juan 2016; IBON 2018). Not only is the banking-system of education and illusory meritocracy refurbished, but the unequal distribution of resources and power is maintained in the guise of providing livelihood for millions. Commercialization, not liberation, is what our bureaucrats prescribe in this zone of unrelenting class antagonisms.

We remarked earlier how the planetary space today has become more compressed and expansive. This is due to advances in the technology of communication and knowledge application. We live in an intensely conscious, reflexive, risky global environment where the knowledge-information economy defines the parameters of our daily routines. Although globalization implies connectivity, integration of nation-states, and rapid transactions that devalue the organic network of communal experience, Filipinos still behave as subalterns limited by kinship obligations, family symbolic rituals, and habits of conformity to received values and beliefs. Ethnic and gender affiliations, plus religious motivations, all together heighten class conflict to the point where they circumscribe the space of collective praxis, thought, and affective speech-performance (San Juan 2010, xi-xvii).

And so, the ordinary citizen remains at heart a peasant disguised as literate consumer, with her three Rs absorbed from media (TV, cellphone, Internet) and neighborhood contacts. Exchange-value (money) or its surrogate mediates the fabled *habitus* of "smooth interpersonal-relations" (Lynch 1979, 37). Cold-War modernizers persevere as NGO missionaries. While the thrust of market-oriented education is the creation of a mass of consumers obsessed with branded goods and lifestyles, given the limited means of millions of workers, women, and impoverished rural folk, the power of exchange-value – commodification of almost everything – has not yet fully occupied the unquantified interstices of quotidian life.

One can speculate that traces of a petty-bourgeois sensibility can be felt operating in everyday conduct. It is focused on subsistence problems within kinship networks and patron-client behavior patterns. We are still subsumed within basically feudal or tributary transactions in daily affairs. Ontological insecurity of the atomized consumer has not become generalized so that what Anthony Giddens calls the "sequestration of experience" (1991, 144-180) and the normalization of crisis in late-modern society affect only the urbanized sectors and the affluent elite. Religion, quasi-feudal norms of negotiating social relations, and ritualized routines provide some stability to the majority (out of 110 million) despite the risks of precarious work-environment in the Middle East and elsewhere with unfamiliar religious prohibitions and taboos. Alienation in both migrant and domestic situations has not reached a boiling point for collective resistance and sabotage, except as triggered by scandalous cruelty such as the circumstances surrounding the nation-wide

mourning for Flor Contemplacion, the female OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) who was quickly found guilty and hanged in Singapore in March 1995.

X. Countervailing Intervention

At this juncture, we can recapitulate our theme: colonialist pedagogy is alive and well in the neocolonial outpost. One can argue that it has been refurbished by the militarized approach to combating the pandemic by the Duterte regime. It dovetailed nicely with his demagogic alibi, the “war on drugs,” that had killed over 30,000 suspects. It worked in tandem with the relentless witch-hunt of dissidents pursued by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), a security unit tasked with stigmatizing as terrorists any progressive citizen and group critical of authoritarian rule. In this context, the educational system lent itself to the perpetuation of fascist violence by maintaining the disjunction between schooling and civic participation. This split justified the repression of students’/teachers’ rights to protest, to argue and articulate grievances, and to examine facts and verifiable hypotheses in textbooks, social media, and open forums.

In the years after World War II and the onset of the Cold War, structural-functional thinking imported from the U.S. academy prevailed. Social integration based on the patriarchal family and normative clientelism was highly prized. However, a minor current in adapting the elements of the American “progressive education” movement – learning by doing, problem-solving, rational criticism, experimental inquiry, etc. – inspired the community school movement of Juan Laya (1952), Jose Aguilar (1951), and others, coupled with the use of the mother-tongue in early schooling (for the politics of language instruction, see E. S. A. San Juan 1987). But Cold War dogmatism prohibited any more radical change. Eventually, the subservience of the oligarchic bloc to WB-IMF/Washington “structural conditionalities” led to the continued support for English-language training, STEM courses, and vocational-technical courses for future OFWs. Conformity to the status quo, commodity-fetishism, and the consumerist mimicry of cosmopolitan fashions/vogues, instead of critical civic engagement in a participatory democracy, remains the normative paradigm of formal schooling in the neocolony.

We are far from challenging this pedagogy of domestication during the ascendancy of the Marcos-Duterte cabal. We have elaborated briefly on how this is geared to preserving the Philippines as one reliable supplier of human resources to the Global North, the Middle East, and to its rich neighbors (Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea). As we’ve discussed earlier, the pandemic has only revealed more starkly the roots of the structural crisis of finance capitalism manifest in the periphery (Lim and Heng 2022).

XI. Prophetic Extrapolations

In my view, the most resourceful strategy to combat the persistence of a reactionary pedagogy may be found in Paulo Freire's program of education as reflective cultural action. Freire conceives it as a synthesizing platform for critical praxis, the collective practice of free citizens in everyday life, which can be adapted to diverse concrete situations. Freire's philosophy is enunciated in lucid, practicable discourses, such as those found in *The Politics of Education* (1985). They elaborate the earlier notion of dynamic interaction between teacher and student first outlined in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

Freire's well-known critique of "banking education" is not new. It has been registered earlier in John Dewey's (1963) idea of the experiential continuum, in Alfred North Whitehead's (1949) concept of the rhythm of education, and in the growth of the power of judgment and intelligent action via C.S. Peirce's logic of inquiry and pragmatic method of abduction (San Juan 2022). Those were all heuristic proposals never widely implemented. We note, however, how this reformist recommendation of progressive educators has been used to serve an ideological-political agenda already diagnosed by several thinkers (see Howe and Lauter 1972, Kelsh et al, 2010). Given the pervasive reification of life in bourgeois society, education as one of the central state apparatuses for producing and reproducing docile subjects deserves more thorough analysis equal to the substantial critique of the patriarchal family, the other powerful agency of neocolonial subjugation, that has been initiated by socialist feminists in the Philippines and the Global South (Aguilar 1998).

Freire's pedagogy may be deemed revolutionary to the core based on his literacy programs in Brazil, Guinea-Bissau, Chile, and the Global South (Freire 1970; Freire 1973; Sarup 1978). Freire's goal, however, is not simply palliative or compensatory. Rather, it calls for a radical reorganization of the totality of processes determining actual and possible life-experiences. He is addressing mainly the silenced masses, the victims of colonialism and monopoly-finance capitalism (Mackie 1981; for recent proposals, see Ford 2023). Antithetical to the notion of education as mere mechanical transfer of information from atomized individuals, Freire espouses the imperative of creative dialogue, reflective cognition, and communal participation. Contrary to the instrumentalist, business-directed policies of bureaucrats advising the Marcos-Duterte regime, Freire advocates the shaping of learners as historical subjects prepared to transform reality by a reasonable, ethical-critical program of action. As Enrique Dussel points out, this pedagogy is addressed to all peoples victimized by capitalist alienation and commodification, the damaging symptoms of predatory neoliberalism (Dussel 2013). Education is then reconceptualized as a "material ethical process" of transforming the conditions of life by free, caring, intelligent participants (Dussel 2013, 317).

Freire's key concept of conscientization and its dialectical impetus for mobilizing subalterns has proved useful for any national-democratic program of raising consciousness

and energizing collective efforts. Conscientization refers to the integrative, self-critical process by which humans as passionate historical subjects acquire profound awareness of the sociopolitical reality shaping their lives as well as of their capacity to transform that reality. In the culture of silence gripping workers, peasants, women and indigenous communities, literacy (conceived here as the praxis of reading/writing/creating new knowledge) problematizes the learner's existential situation to open up the world for collective action and purposive reconstruction (Freire 1970, 21-22; Freire 1985, 67-98; see also Matthews 1980, 88-97). The academic practice of fetishizing statistics – the positivist-empiricist research style which Bourdieu labeled “methodological monotheism” (1992, 226) – is rejected in favor of a plan nurturing dialogic or cooperative interaction among community members.

XII. Conscientization as Self-Determination

We join others in proposing to reorient our inherited philosophy of education toward people's development, for nationwide decolonization and popular mobilization (San Juan 2018). This is premised on the process of conscientization carried out by each participant belonging to the community of the oppressed and exploited. The intended goal is the germination of an “ethical-critical consciousness” that “originates in the victims themselves by virtue of their being the privileged historical subjects of their own liberation,” as Dussel (2013, 320) urges us. Liberation of the victimized multitude and their socialized lives is the aim and purpose of this subversive, popular-democratic pedagogy.

We concur with our progressive colleagues – the contributors to the volume *Mula Tore Patungong Palengke* (Lumbera et al. 2007) – in their envisaging a concept of education as a practice of political intervention, that derives from the actuality of the intensifying class struggle. In this conjuncture of pandemic crisis, we cannot detach schooling, its function as an ideological-political apparatus, from the concrete historical specificity of the Philippines as the U.S. major colonial “showcase of democracy” in Asia from the Cold War years up to the current renewal of U.S. military activity throughout the islands (San Juan 2007, 2021). Compiling fragments of data about the effects of the pandemic on schooling (for example, Marquez et al. 2020) will not help contextualize the role of the plague within the predominant calculus of capital accumulation (attempted by Lim and Heng 2022).

Civic-spirited teachers and students, all those concerned with social justice and equity, demand accountability for the plague of persistent immiseration. The unrelenting havoc of the war on terrorism in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, etc.; the emergence of Trump's “America First” crusade weaponizing libertarian-sounding slogans to confront the rise of China and the challenge of Venezuela, Cuba, Palestine, and others, as well as the accelerated ecological deterioration on top of the current immigration/refugee emergencies due to indebtedness, sanctions by U.S.-NATO on Russia,

Iran, North Korea, de-dollarization, etc. – all these crises are converging to a breaking point in the next decades (CenPEG 2023). They will surely compel everyone to question the role of schooling/education in this dangerous cusp of world-historical events. Reassessing the impact of the pandemic on the social process of learning-inquiring-testing as communal activities is a feasible way to begin participating in the resurgent project of national-democratic liberation.

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