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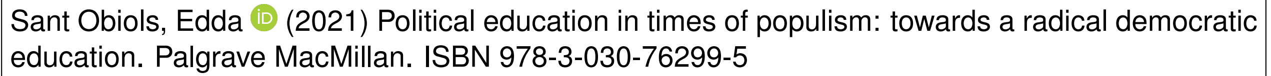
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POLITICAL EDUCATION IN TIMES OF POPULISM

Edda Sant

To Martin and Eli,

Only because you both exist, I still believe that *tot és possible, res és prohibit*

Preface

On October 1st 2017, international media presented images of police violence against members of the public in Barcelona and, more widely, across the region of Catalonia. One picture showed two people trying to prevent a police officer from removing a ballot box containing voting slips from a referendum for independence that had been declared illegal by the Spanish authorities. Nearby, two other voters were recording the scene with their phones, whilst many others raised their hands to emphasise the non-violent nature of their protest. The scene was framed by yellow, green and violet walls with green chairs placed upside down on top of green tables. The location was a school, a common venue for ballot stations as evident in other media images of the events. When classes resumed the next day, the signs of the struggle were still visible. Many students and teachers returned to find their schools with broken windows and smashed locks and doors following police action. Further disruption had been caused by those defending the ballot stations. Catalan TV showed teachers trying to restore normality to the school premises, an easy fix, but they were evidently more concerned about fractures to the students' morale. How would the disruption be explained to the students? What sense would they make of this very evident struggle?

Six months later, Spanish media announced that nine secondary teachers from the High School *El Palau* were to be investigated for their actions on that day. A specific allegation was that students whose parents were police officers were humiliated by a debate that had been organised about police violence [1,2]. This debate had entailed nine teachers initiating a minute's silence against police violence. Students were given the option of participating in the silence in the playground or to stay in class otherwise. The leader of the anti-independence *Ciudadanos* party later tweeted the pictures of those teachers and blamed

[1] https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/25/inenglish/1524663921_786957.html

[2] https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/baix-llobregat/20180423/442895036806/la-fiscalia-denuncia-9-professors-de-sant-andreu-de-la-barca-acusats-de-delictes-dodi-per-comentaris-a-laula-sobre-l1-o.html

them for ‘hate speech’. Graffiti on the school walls named the teachers calling them “Nazis rats” and “Nazis separatists” and demanded that they “stop indoctrination”. The pro-independence movement joined the teachers’ unions in a campaign to support the teachers. Their motto was, “we are all teachers from *El Palau*”. They held banners demanding academic freedom.

As the months went by, the Catalan ombudsman investigated sources accusing *El Palau* and other Catalan schools of separatist indoctrination[3]. The study reported a range of cases brought to court, including discussions around historical events, activities examining newspapers’ coverage of elections, debates about a potential Catalan independence, visits to the Catalan Parliament, disciplinary actions against students who had given fascist salutes, and teachers’ demonstrations of sorrow following disruption caused by the events of that day. The report found little evidence of unlawful partisanship, yet it bore witness to teachers’ fear of engaging with political debates. Such worries, it was said, were leading many practitioners to drop controversial content related to politics or other moral issues. Some teachers adjusted their regular practices to avoid topics such as human rights or political institutions to minimise disagreement concerning civil disobedience and police violence. The study illustrated the particular implications of this political climate for teachers of social sciences and politics who were charged with the responsibility of educating children and young people to act in their capacity as citizens. The curriculum for social science, the report explained, was inevitably politicised and teachers were explicitly required to discuss matters of controversy. The ombudsman expressed deep concerns about children’s rights of accessing plurality of views, if political issues were not addressed, but it also offered words of empathy for those teachers who had no other option but to touch upon these issues in such a climate of polarisation.

[3] http://www.sindic.cat/site/unitFiles/5449/Informe%20noadoctrinament_cat_def.pdf

About the book

Purpose and focus

This book is about the meaning, purpose and practice of democratic political education. It scrutinises the assumptions underpinning democratic and political education, the intentions behind teachers and policymakers who seek to consolidate democratic ways of living, and the procedures through which these intentions are enacted. Discussions in these are hardly new. Politics, or the processes underpinning the operation of power and the regulation of differences and group decision-making, are inevitable since we do not always share the same views as to what is desirable for us as individuals and as a society. Politics allow us to mediate across varied positions with distinctive viewpoints. Societies inevitably guide their members into some form of understanding of how differences are regulated and how decisions are made, and that makes political education part of any social arrangement. Politics and education as coexisting and intersecting practices are as old as humans themselves, and are likely to persist. Yet each generation invigorates new or abandoned concerns, and revisits alternatives guided by their immediate political circumstances and their historical memories. Political education questions do not improve through time, but they do evolve as they reflect and also tailor their context, and this gives them their contingent value and historical meaning. The posing and pursuit of new questions renews our historical substance. As time goes by, some practices developed in response to specific social assemblages become absorbed within everyday meanings. There is enough controversy in politics and in education, each individually in themselves and in combination, and conventions are necessary to validate and enable everyday teaching practice. Pedagogical answers are refined to better respond to the explanations we give ourselves about the world and about our reasons to be. Questions related to how we politically educate learners remain key, as do the reasons that explain our desire for such education. The path of assumptions

about meanings, once a consequence of immediate concerns, is enfolded in years of discussion as to the purpose and proposed pedagogical improvements.

For decades, democratic politics have provided a system for processing alternative points of view in ways that offer dignity to both individuals and communities. As in any other political regime, democratic politics have provided responses to numerous questions concerning the nature of humans and their relationships. Schooled political education, as democracy, has its foundations in ancient Greece where philosophers favoured modes of the good life in which human flourishing was associated with becoming more educated. These understandings were later intertwined with enlightened accounts of rational autonomy leading to the set of socio-cultural norms and practices that we often define as modernity. Modernity defined the good life in terms of self-cultivation, and human perfection was to be found in the inner life and in the pursuit of truth, confirming the mutuality of politics and education. Not only would education transmit particular modes of human flourishing to new generations, but also the modern mode of good life became intrinsically associated with being educated. When mass schooling was first introduced in Europe in the nineteenth century, it was established to socialise young citizens into desirable political values and to universalise a form of knowledge-based education that was seen as politically desirable. As any other political regime, democratic politics gave response to numerous questions concerning the nature of humans and their relationships. As democracy grew in popularity, democratic imaginaries on humanity, politics and education became the norm, and political educators took those modern assumptions as foundations from which to formulate questions of purpose and practice. Politics teachers became vital, they provided young citizens with inquiry tools to act and think independently and to mediate their differences peacefully, and they did so supported by reference to consensual truths about the nature of politics, education and students-teachers encounters. What greater responsibility could a teacher have?

Then, suddenly, a populist upsurge began. A new wave of populists has seemingly upended the political landscape of many liberal democracies, acquiring a reputation for disregarding political institutions and laws, and for putting at risk democratic institutions. Populists have nurtured discourses polarising society into two distinct groups, the elite and the people, where the people underpin the ultimate source of democratic legitimacy. Some populists leaders have blamed refugees and migrants for our many woes, whether they be poverty, inequality, pandemic lockdowns, fake news, or decolonization. Others have gone as far as questioning or inventing evidence, challenged academic knowledge and those who represent it. Teaching politics was never without challenge, yet the rise of populism has intensified the demands that are encountered through its inbuilt disruption to social cohesion and accepted conventions of values and meaning. A range of social spaces have been further politicised, and schools are not an exception. The scenes in the Catalan schools, earlier in this preamble, demonstrate the implications of this climate of polarisation. Unfortunately, during the writing of this book, similar situations have been lived and aggravated in other contexts. In a context of high confrontation, teachers who teach politics have no options other than continuing exposing themselves as scapegoats susceptible to critical challenge from all sides, or to retreat to silence and conflict avoidance. The problem is that there is no much hope neither for education nor for politics in this retreat. Teaching politics has become a risky if not an impossible activity within the emerging terrain.

If populism troubles political education practice so deeply it is because it disputes shared conventions of purpose, of practice, and more importantly, of meaning. Long held assumptions on political and educational matters have faded, with more issues becoming overtly politicised, including earlier consensual values and truths. It is not enough to appeal to Human Rights if the discussion has to do with prisoners of conscience or rights of migrants. It is not safe enough to appeal to democracy if the debate is around redefinition of

national or imperial boundaries. Politics teachers are questioned as to what they do, why they do it, as well as in what they know. Subtle pedagogical changes are unlikely to re-stabilise the threatened balance of political classrooms, because this balance has been disrupted at a foundational level. It is time to stop, take stock and consider whether the conventions that have successfully regulated political education practices for decades are still valid to meet current and forthcoming challenges.

This book comprises a ground-clearing exercise of the assumptions about politics and education underpinning dominant political education practices. Centred on themes of power, ideology and knowledge in the context of pedagogy and curricula, the book invokes eclectic debates in political, citizenship, moral and democratic education, civics and social studies against a backdrop of philosophy, educational and political theory, political sciences, and cultural studies. Core questions related to the nature of knowledge, democracy and subjectivity are revisited towards unsettling disciplinary boundaries to allow a more critical examination of dominant premises and a renewal of concrete pedagogies for the times to come. The book also seeks to cut across traditional academic conventions in political education that can restrict discussion to specific national cases and specific educational levels. Politics and pedagogy are here approach in a broad sense. Through successive chapters, readers will find discussion of school-based political education in the context of liberal democracies. The book draws on current or recent political and educational research, theory and policymaking from a range of settings including the UK, Spain (and more widely, the European Union), the USA, Chile and Brazil. Its settings primarily include formal primary, secondary, but also wider domains in both formal and informal education. There are obvious differences in the way in which political education operates across territories, in formal and non-formal, compulsory and further education environments. But there are also striking similarities; the focus of intervention has to do with pedagogy, teachers, learners and

their politico-educational relations. And whilst political education practices can certainly not be universalised, this book will cross-fertilise a range of experiences to highlight contextual assumptions and diversify alternatives.

Political education in times of populism approaches populism through the same inquisitive lens. Educational literature has often presented populism as a democratic problem. Some politicians, Donald Trump and Boris Johnson among others, have come to represent the face of populism. The apparent surge in populist rhetoric is seen as an educational failure, and political education is presented as a corrective measure to readdress the democratic challenge. The writing of this book is undoubtedly underpinned by concerns related to this political landscape and its impact on the lives of many. Nonetheless, the roots of populism run deeper than its manifestation in certain elected or deposed leaders, and demonisation narratives are at risk of hindering understanding more complex, nuanced, and context-dependent political assemblages. This book takes a different starting point; it seeks to scrutinise what populism is and what populism tells us about our current times to examine the efficacies of current and alternative political education pedagogies. There are many poignant discussions about populism emerging in academia, and analysis of these can be helpful in better understanding activities within political education classrooms. Rather than examining populism as a disease that needs curing, this book uses populism as a diagnostic tool to better comprehend our reality and how we are reacting and could react to it. *Political education in times of populism* seeks a more nuanced understanding of our current times so we are in a better position to decide what pedagogies are more suited to respond to this populist challenge.

This is ultimately a book about pedagogy and politics. The chapters that follow will lead readers into a theoretical journey to revisit questions of meaning and purpose in both politics and education; yet, the book returns to classroom practice. More abstract discussion

are then deployed to reframe, reanalyse and reconsider concrete examples of practice. The book addresses an audience interested in theoretically underpinned political education pedagogy, as well as teacher educators and practitioners. This book brings theory and practice altogether, towards unveiling the assumptions underpinning political education practice, and considering the starting points and potential destinations for more or less familiar pedagogical alternatives.

Process

Political education in times of populism began three years ago. Much has changed since then. We have all adjusted to new normality forced upon us by COVID-19. Some of the pages of this book were written pre-COVID, and others were written in the middle of the harshest times of the lockdown. This book is certainly not about COVID, but recognises the impact of the virus on its developments. I have had the opportunity to vote in three Spanish general elections, and the lack of opportunity to vote in two more United Kingdom general elections. The rise and fall of populist leaders has accompanied my writing. Personally, I became a mother in 2018. No words can adequately describe the changes that this provoked in my life, and also in my way of thinking. The book however has spanned a much longer process of reflection and unfolding. It draws on a variety of locations in my own research in the last eight years[4]. For example, I have examined how young people across the age

[4] The book draws primarily in six different empirical studies in political education. Between 2013 and 2014, together with some colleagues from the UAB, we conducted empirical research examining how Catalan students discursively constructed the 'Catalan nation'. We interviewed fourteen students and collected data via questionnaires from 340 Catalan secondary students. Results of that project had been published in Perspectiva Escolar (Sant, Boixader, Pagès, & Santisteban, 2015), Enseñanza de las Ciencias Sociales (Sant, Pages, Santisteban & Boixader, 2015), Educational Studies (Sant, 2017) and Pedagogy, Culture and Society (Sant, 2019b). In 2014/2015, together with five of my undergraduate students, we conducted a collaborative ethnography examining how the global citizen-subject was conceptualized in our HE setting and discussing the implications of these conceptualizations for democratic education. Results were published in *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* (Sant, 2018). In 2015/2016, together with Chris Hanley, we examined how a group of eleven England-based student teachers uphold the policy demand of promoting fundamental British Values in relation to their political understandings. Our project was published in *British Educational Research Journal* (Sant & Hanley, 2018). In 2015/2016, together with numerous colleagues, we brought a range of forty-four participants including national and international primary and university students, researchers and curriculum developers together. Following the work of Laclau and Mouffe, we designed pedagogical activities fostering disagreement and we examined the development and consequences of the activity. Results of the former project

spectrum, teachers, academics and policy-makers understand their political reality. I have also investigated and considered the possibilities and challenges of more democratically-orientated political education practices. Questions such as what are the assumptions that underpin current pedagogical activities, what are the implicit and explicit consequences of these activities, and what alternatives could we build have driven this overall programme of research. Findings from this varied research have been published elsewhere, but this book revisits this existing empirical data through distinctive conceptual lens concerning debates on populism.

Political education in times of populism also draws upon my political experiences over the last decade. Between 2000-2012, I lived in the Barcelona metropolitan area. During those years, the city convulsed. On one side, some were more actively supporting the independence of Catalonia. With some 1.5 million demonstrating in the streets of Barcelona under the banner, "We are a nation. We decide". Those demonstrations eventually led to the Catalan independence referendum that introduced this book. On the other side, the 15-M Movement began. Activists, homeless, the elderly, students, etc. occupied the central square of Barcelona, Catalonia square. They demanded "real democracy", claiming, "We are not from the right, we are not from the left, we are the ones from below, and we go against those above". These mobilizations prompted a small group of political scientists to create the left-wing populist party *Podemos* that would enter the Spanish Government in 2020. Manchester (UK) welcomed me in 2014. Manchester opened my eyes to alterity in a way I have never

were published in *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* (Sant, 2018) and results of the later published in *Learning and Teaching in Action* (Sant, Hanley, Henry, Chambers, Ariza, da Costa & Dutton, 2018) and in Education, Citizenship and Social Justice (Sant, McDonnell, Pashby & Menendez Alvarez-Hevia, 2020). In 2017/2018, I conducted a systematic review of the educational scholarship on the question of democratic education, analysing three hundred and seventy-seven articles. This review was published in *Review of Educational Research* (Sant, 2019a). More recently, in 2019, together with Tony Brown, we theoretically explored how education was discursively constructed by both populist and anti-populist discourses illustrating our arguments in relation to academics, politicians and journalists' arguments. This article was also was published in *British Educational Research Journal* (Sant & Brown, 2020).

experienced before. When, on the 23rd of June 2016, the majority of British people voted to leave the European Union, I felt that a complete political outsider for the first time.

Political education in times of populism is also the result of some personal experiences. I was born in the early 80s in a rural working-class family. As a daughter of the recently re-established Spanish democracy, I grew up listening to stories of how some family members had been executed or imprisoned during the war and the dictatorship. I occasionally visited our exiled relatives across the border in France. I witnessed the humiliation that my immediate family felt in only speaking Catalan. Political conversations were an everyday reality at the family table where all members would be identified as somewhere between moderate and extreme left, and between moderate and extreme Catalan nationalist. No one in this family had a college or university education, and this was cause of embarrassment. In the village I grew up, children of lawyers, economists, medicine doctors, engineers, etc. were granted social privileges, and for many of us, education was our only pathway to social mobility. My university studies first and me securing a permanent job as a social science teacher was highly celebrated in a context of job insecurity and economic constrains. As a secondary schoolteacher, I had an opportunity to teach and design a range of core and optional courses. As surprising as it sounds, I found myself teaching conventional chronological world history, physical geography, contemporary political debates, participatory approaches to local government, purpose and practice of social documentary, and even an entire course based on the Communist Manifesto to students aged 11-18. Eventually it became clear to me that my practice as a teacher was more important than my initial discipline and that I wanted to know more. I returned to university to begin a MA in Social Science Education and, after a conversation with Joan Pagès, I never left. My academic career, nevertheless, flowed alongside a growing distance between my parents' and my own political directions. Influenced, as I was, by orthodox Marxism and critical

pedagogy, I did not understand my family's activism in support of the independence movement. For me, there was an intrinsic incoherence between nationalism and leftist beliefs. It seemed to me that Catalan right-wing nationalists were exploiting their frustrations by directing their blame towards their Spanish counterparts. I used any academic text, any evidence, any fact I could find to convince them that they were wrong. At some point, my father claimed, "it is not a matter of facts provided by a well-intentioned academic in her ivory tower; it is a matter of dignity!"

It was 2015, and I was struggling to make sense of everything around me. My mentor at Manchester Met, Tony Brown, came along with a copy of Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason* and told me to read it. I could not stop reading Laclau, and when there was nothing left to read, I completed and re-interpreted my readings of Chantal Mouffe that I had begun during my PhD studies. Somehow, SYRIZA in 2015, Brexit in 2016, Trump in 2017, the Five Star Movement in 2018, Bolzonaro and Johnson in 2019, and *Podemos* in 2020, were not total surprises for me. The world was experiencing a similar populist shock to the one I had experienced just some months earlier.

Structure of this book

Political education in times of populism comprises three main sections. Following this introduction, the first section, which includes chapters one, two, and three, describes and critically analyses existing discussions on political education and populism. Chapter one examines the topic of political education as a general theme, considering the core content of school-based political education practices. Chapter two maps out how discourses on democracy have influenced existing political education pedagogies and possible alternatives. Chapter three focuses on the question of populism. It provides a brief account of historical and current manifestations of populism, as well as a discussion on what is populism, what causes populism and what is the relationship between populism and education.

The second section (chapters four, five, and six) revisits dominant political and educational assumptions; it uses current theory related to populism to shed some light on the challenges and possibilities of dominant political education policies and practices. Chapter four reengages with the question of what causes populism, and what is the relationship between populism and democracy, to provide a social diagnosis and assessment of the implications for democratic political education. Chapter five provides a theoretical account of subjectivity to revisit the way political education approach freedom and autonomy. Chapter six focuses on the question of emancipatory knowledge and examines how populists and non-populists accounts use knowledge in their narratives.

The third section (chapters seven, eight, nine, and ten) brings together a pedagogical project for political education in our times. Chapter seven discusses how, in the light of the previous analysis, political education could change. Chapters eight then illustrates this analysis with pedagogical proposals and examples of teachers promoting British Values in the UK. Global citizenship education in the context of higher education is discussed in chapter nine. Finally, chapter ten returns to social science education in the case of Catalonia.

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to my family, particularly to Judit, Ramon, and Carles, for everything I have learnt from you. Mainly because of my conversations and love for you, I opened myself to new ways of thinking. My deepest thanks go to Joan Pagès, who is genuinely remembered and missed. This book is dedicated to Martin and Eli.

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Chapter 1

Schooled Political Education

In September 2019, more than a million young people across 150 countries boycotted school to join climate strikes. Some teachers were instructed to give detentions to the students who had skipped schools and the teachers themselves were barred from attending the demonstrations. Children and young people were told that their decision to exercise politics must take place outside their school settings and be without their teachers' guidance or support. The ban, it seems, sought to separate climate change politics from teaching science[5].

Debates on climate change, politics and education are not new. There have been many instances where scientific questions have intersected with debate about political education. In 2006, the British Secretary of State for Education and Skills distributed to all state-funded secondary schools in the United Kingdom (UK) a copy of "An Inconvenient Truth" (AIT), a documentary about climate change written and presented by the former United States (US) Vice-President Al Gore. The film was included in a pack containing other short films and other educational resources to be used in science, geography and citizenship education, as part of the "Sustainable Schools Year of Action".

A group of parents in Hampshire (South England) opposed the distribution of the film, arguing that the broadcasting of the film breached the Education Act 1996, which prevents political indoctrination and, in particular, forbids "(a) the pursuit of partisan political activities by registered pupils at maintained schools who are junior pupils" and (b) "the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school". In May 2007, Stewart Dimmock, a father of two sons of school age and a school governor himself, brought the case to court. He explained to the British tabloid, the Daily Mail, "I wish my children to have the best education possible, free from bias and political spin, and Mr Gore's

[5] See, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/nyregion/youth-climate-strike-nyc.html.

film falls far short of the standard required”[6]. The court decided that the film could be broadcast in schools, but requested changes to the original guidance documentation to explicitly acknowledge its political nature and to guarantee that the controversy was approached in a ‘balanced’ matter. The judged specified, that

> “in the course of a school day and as part of the syllabus, presents to his pupils, no doubt with the appropriate setting and with proper tuition and debate, a film or document which itself promotes in a partisan way some political view, that cannot possibly in my judgment be the mischief against which the statute was intended to protect pupils. It would not only lead to bland education, but to education which did not give the opportunity to pupils to learn about views with which they might, vehemently or otherwise, either agree or disagree” [7].

The guidance for teachers was modified[8]; the later version explained that AIT promoted political viewpoints and that teachers should not themselves promote these views. Rather, they should help "pupils examine the scientific evidence critically" and offer them "a balanced presentation of opposing views and not to promote either the view expressed in the film or any other particular view." [Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007, p. 3]. The document also stated, however, that "the law does not require teaching staff to adopt a position of neutrality between views which accord with the great majority of scientific opinion and those which do not” (p. 3). In a subsequent section, teachers were advised to run science experiments, to organise Climate change fairs and, to foster debates on "realistic solutions" where students would examine evidence and arguments for and against recycling.

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[6] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-485336/Schools-warn-Gore-climate-film-bias.html.

[7] https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2007/2288.html.

[8] https://web.archive.org/web/20081001205323/http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools/upload/The%20climate%20change%20film%20pack%20-%20Guidance%20for%20teaching%20staff.pdf

The AIT guidance, the case Dimmock v Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and the broader debate on climate change in educational contexts illustrate key questions on the nature and purpose of political education. What is political education for? Does schooled political education welcome plurality of perspectives? What should be discussed within political classrooms? And how so? This chapter will examine these different questions in relation to the example presented above. It will begin considering what is schooled political education and the reasons sustaining critiques and support. It will then move to discuss the particularities of schooled political education, particularly its social uniqueness, the difficulties teachers can encounter, and the school curriculum. My chief purpose here is to make a case for school-based political education while evidencing some of the challenges.

Schooled Political education

There are many challenges faced by societies in guiding the political education of their members. What type of political education do we need? Who should be in charge? How should political education be regulated? Such questions have driven countless debates within and outside academia. Yet, the one thing that we know for sure is that political education, whether overt or covert, intended or not, is unavoidable. All communities invest in specific modes of the good life, to facilitate the flourishing of human life. Politics allow us to negotiate and regulate the varied positions across any given community which shares the same worldview, and to mediate across communities with separate understandings of what the good life is about. Accordingly, political education is tasked with distributing shared meanings, including those related to mediation mechanisms; political education is needed for the survival of any community in spite of external and internal threats. Political education is unavoidable; it happens whether it is planned or not.

Political education, as a term, more often conveys organised and schooled forms of political education that regulate the processes of learning and teaching about politics.

Statehood, the dominant form of political community, has regulated, amplified and professionalised political education to unprecedented levels. Sometimes referred to as citizenship education or civics, political education is an area of the school curricula that explicitly deals with politics, and that can assert itself as a discrete subject, or as part of another subject or as a cross-curricular theme that is addressed by all teachers regardless of their specialisms. In either or all of these forms, political education is a structural part of any school curricula. Like many other areas of the school curricula, political education is determined by an outcome-based logic in which educational experiences are selected insomuch as they contribute to specific goals. This logic is top-down, from politics to policy, from policy to practice, and from practice to learning. Policymakers define explicit political outcomes, curriculum developers transform these outcomes on educational objectives, teachers deploy pedagogies that benefit these objectives, and young people get 'equipped' with the knowledge and skills needed to secure the overall political outcomes and the ways of life associated with them.

As any other form of political education, school-based political education ambitions to motivate individuals to engage in the kinds of behaviour that make for community survival. Yet modern communities regulating schooling have a distinct nature from other forms of organization rooted in kindship ties. Within the context of the democratic nation-state, certain levels of disagreement are expected, tolerated and, to an extent, welcomed. Community survival is as much associated with social reproduction as with the regulation of irreconcilable differences. Schooled political education aims to keep a fine balance between educating children and young people so they comply with shared conventions, whilst making room for competing perspectives and supervised dissent.

Unsurprisingly, political education is disputed between communities who have different understandings of what these shared conventions are, or could be. Stewart Dimmock

and the parents in Hampshire who supported his claim were concerned that political education was there to 'brainwash' children with propaganda. Putting the accent on the family as the prime community[9], he argued that parents had a natural right to pass their beliefs and values on their children, and he claimed that other forms of political education were intrusive and contrary to their private interests. At the core of his concerns, there was an assumption that schooled political education would socialise children into political values he did not share. As was the case for other objectors, he assumed that teachers, and particularly teachers of politics, would hold left-wing viewpoints concealing hidden agendas. Interestingly, state-regulated political education also troubles some of those on the left who see state regulation as instrumental in inculcating capitalist and neoliberal ideologies into the minds of children and young people. For example, libertarians, influenced by the work of Ivan Illich (1975), favour non-formalised spaces such as unions, youth centres, galleries, virtual spaces, etc., where education takes the shape of self or peer-directed learning. Their argument is that political education should target adult learners not children and young people. Partisan organisations[10] should have control over its regulation as those who have similar political standpoints are better positioned to educate others without ideological interference. Whilst both the right and the left arguments against political education emerge from accusations of indoctrination, their implicit worry is that state-regulated political education is not primarily targeted at promoting the good life but rather more concerned with producing a competing aspiration. Indeed, to the question of, who should be in charge of political education, the answer appears to be always, me!

Indeed, despite claims of partisanship, political classrooms are relatively plural if compared with other forms of political education. School-based political education is

[9] For an academic defence of this, see Tooley (2000)
[10] For this see Cooper (2007)

ordinarily designed to enable students to access a range of viewpoints, and it is frequently said that schools are one of the few spaces where young people are given the opportunity to “learn about views with which they might, vehemently or otherwise, either agree or disagree”. The composition of the student body combined with the professionalisation of the teaching workforce, and the nature of the political education curricula offer unique opportunities to recognise and enable plurality of perspectives.

Students

Schools are socially complex spaces that enable particular sets of interactions. On the one hand, in schools, as everywhere else, children and young people are likely to find peers in similar socioeconomic circumstances. Capitalism has restricted our modes of relationality such, that only social relations “which facilitate capita accumulation can occur” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 129). We are typically surrounded by those who enjoy similar consumption patterns, and we tend to spend most of our time with those whose lifestyles and beliefs are similar to our own. Additionally, in schools, patterns of relationality are often also determined by age and, on some occasions, gender, religion, and academic ability. Such social restrictions condition the diversity of the student body within each political classroom. On the other hand, schools are key venues for political debate. Whilst contemporary political forums including social media, media or parliament are constituted according to specific ideological groupings, schools remain spaces where almost all youth gather, regardless of their own or their families' knowledges, beliefs and practices. Schools do not separate political perspectives in the same way that other social spaces do, and relationality is not determined by political stances.

Within the same political classroom, there might be young people with a range of viewpoints who are variously responsive to different political behaviours. A single teacher can have opportunities to reach young people who participate in climate change strikes as well as children who may be suspicious of such mobilisations. What is more, both groups of

young people might be sitting next to each other in the same classroom. Political classrooms, as Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy (2014) explain in their influential book "The Political Classroom", are very unusual spaces. In a political classroom, a range of students with very different political views might coexist for an entire academic year and are somehow forced to participate in discussions that they have not selected with people they have not chosen. Children and young people are more likely to find a plurality of political worldviews in schools than elsewhere, and this makes political classrooms singular and valuable spaces for political education. Such socialisation is clearly an inevitable dimension of the schooling process, where children are exposed to views not necessarily held by their parents. Mediating between alternative perspectives is an important skill to acquire, whatever school subject is in question.

Teachers

School-based political education is also uniquely professionalised. Teachers of politics usually have an academic background in the social sciences or humanities that equips them with specialist knowledge. Teachers are guardians of a tradition that considers knowing and human flourishing as two sides of the same coin; their authority is justified based on epistemological or knowledge-based credentials. Teaching politics, nevertheless, is a demanding profession and teachers often need to negotiate contradictory demands. Alongside academic commitments, teachers have an educational responsibility to safeguard students' wellbeing and to guarantee a quality education for all. At the core of educational practice, there is an expectation that teachers should facilitate student learning and that students' interest should be the centre of any educational experience. Notwithstanding, teachers have a professional bond to regulative structures that shape their practices. Very often, more than anything else, the syllabus and wider educational policies put in place to guarantee that young people are educated into the dominant modes of the good life (e.g. capitalism, nationalism,

etc.) determine everyday pedagogies. Teachers represent the community that regulates schooling practice no matter their own personal political commitments and understandings of what the good life is about. In political education, perhaps more than in other disciplines, academic knowledge interacts with teachers' own beliefs. Indeed, many practitioners enter the profession as a way for them to honour these commitments[11] but, once within the political classroom, they are prevented from displaying their personal viewpoints. Policies and legislations worldwide have had a tendency to discourage teachers from disclosing their own political perspectives.

Professionals thus often encounter paradoxical situations as a result of these competing demands. Take as example politics teachers who, following the syllabus, address the question of climate change. It is very possible that many of these teachers joined the profession to make a difference, helping to prevent the most devastating effects of global warming. The law demands of these practitioners to maintain academic standards by not having to "to adopt a position of neutrality between views which accord with the great majority of scientific opinion and those which do not" (p. 3), but the same law prevents them from promoting their political viewpoints. According to the court who judged the case Dimmock v Secretary of State for Education and Skills, "[i]f a teacher uses the platform of a classroom to promote partisan political views in the teaching of any subject, then that would offend against the statute [political indoctrination]." [(2007) EWHC 2288 (Admin)]. Accordingly, teachers of politics can teach the science of climate change but not the politics of it when that is their specialism, interest and reason to be.

The coexistence of multiple and often competing demands enhances the possibilities of plural and diverse political classrooms. As professionals, practitioners are obliged to scrutinise alternative pathways, whilst reacting to the specific classroom conditions in which

[11] See, Pacievich (2012)

they may arise. There are countless possibilities for each situation, and this magnifies the chances of political multiplicity and heterogeneity. The more diverse is the teaching workforce, the more inclusive political classrooms tend to be[12]. The more teachers are encouraged to exercise their professional judgement, the more plural political classrooms can be. The diversity of teachers and of contradictory demands is an asset to facilitate more inclusive forms of political education.

School curricula

Current regulative structures, however, rarely encourage teachers' professionalism and school curricula often take priority over other demands. Given the rich diversity of alternative modes of good lives available, present-day political education curricula are surprisingly similar. Curricula for political education typically embrace three modes of the good life: one associated with the values of the community (values and practices), one with pursuing truth (knowledge and skills), and one with political freedom[13].

Political freedom

Political education curricula tend to give educators the responsibility of helping learners to find their singular perspectives and to ways of enacting such perspectives[14]. Political education, in this respect, favours students' autonomy, singularity and power. This emphasis on autonomy is, nevertheless, subject to common notions of the good life embedded within schooling practices. The desire of creating educational experiences that allow children and young people to manifest their singularity is grounded in understandings that uniqueness is preferable and that self-transformation, education and political freedom are connected. Most children and young people not only learn how to gain independent judgement but also that the ability to autonomously exercise our will, is, at least at some

[12] See, for instance, Kohli et al. (2019)

[13] See, e.g. Callan, 1997; Crick, 2002; Lund and Carr, 2008; Maitles, 2001; McCowan, 2009

[14] This refers to subjectification forms of education that aim to the "promotion of a kind of citizenship that is not merely about the reproduction of a predefined template" (Biesta, 2009, p. 42)

extent, desirable. Further, political freedom is not disconnected from other moral considerations. How freedom is educationally enacted is highly intertwined by the other two forms of the good life: community values and the pursuit of truth.

Community values

Young people often learn that gaining an independent judgement is correlated with adherence to community principles. Political education in many of its forms aims to preserve communitarian notions of the good life, socialising young people into particular ethical frameworks and facilitating their development so youth can better participate in their communities[15]. The particular values that are considered desirable are highly dependent on context[16] but political education curricula always acknowledge some ethos that underpin their social organisation. On some occasions, these beliefs are deemed to be depoliticised psychological traits, like attitudes and dispositions that influence political activity and are beyond moral constructions[17]. On other occasions, these values are primarily seen as politically-constructed criteria that enable us to examine whether something is right, good or desirable[18]. Most frameworks for political education also have an active component, and young people are usually expected to learn how they can politically participate. These values and practices determine the boundaries of what is tolerated. There is often an understanding that acting and thinking independently will reflect the foundational values of the community, and that, political freedom will lead young citizens to act in appropriate ways. When such assumptions are not made, community values still define what is acceptable. As in the example of climate change, teachers and students are recommended to work together to organise climate change fairs, yet, they are banned from participating in strikes.

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[15] See, for instance, Andrew Peterson's work (2011; 2013; 2019)

[16] The subsequent chapter will further examine the specific forms of the common good life distributed by political education within liberal democratic contexts

[17]. For a discussion on attitudes, see Schugurnesky (2000). For a discussion on dispositions, see Berkowitz, Althof and Jones (2008).

[18] For a distinction between values and morality see Halstead and Pike (2006) and Peterson (2011).

The pursuit of truth

Political freedom is often connected to the pursuit of truth, with an expectation that those who are more knowledgeable are also more autonomous. Political education is ordinarily designed to enable students to access this truth, facilitating the development of political literacy[19]. Influenced by Cartesian rationality, schooled political education presupposes the existence of two different realities, the material world and the thinking mind, where the later can only access the former via reasoning. Truth is defined as the accuracy with which material reality is apprehended or the sophistication in which we reach the knowledge that is just 'out there'. This distinction between the object of study and the subject of study, allows us to differentiate political literacy from everything else. Political literacy privileges cognition and directly mirrors the objective world (knowledge) or the processes through which this objective world is accessed (critical thinking). Political literacy signals the objective reality which is not aligned with any particular morality.

Political literacy often appears in the use of an epistemic criterion that strategises the discussion of political controversies (Hand, 2008). According to AIT guidance, teachers should teach questions that only have one reasonable response (e.g. science experiments) as comprising facts, but in tackling questions that have multiple reasonable responses (e.g. climate change policymaking) it would be more a case of raising questions for debate. In this latter case, the teachers, so the view goes, should not present their perspective on controversies but rather should be,

> "acquainting students with the arguments for and against a moral position, helping them to evaluate those arguments, and encouraging them to accept or reject the position if, and because, the arguments on one side are decisive" (DCSF, 2007, p. 224).

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[19] See Hand (2008) and also Abowitz and Harnish (2006).

By following these procedures in addressing controversial issues, students would seemingly learn critical thinking skills or processes through which the objective world can be accurately assessed.

Despite claims of objectivity, the epistemic criterion and, more broadly, the pursuit of truth, are constrained within a particular worldview. Through political education curricula, young people not only learn how to access truth but also how to be knowledgeable and skilled in adopting neutrality in connection to alternative ideological stances. The modern understanding of good life is part of the political education of schoolchildren regardless of the community to which they belong, becoming a shared language across communities. If, as discussed earlier, political education is simultaneously tasked with preserving modes of being and regulating across different modes of being, then knowledge and rationality function as rules to be followed. Let me come back to the example of the AIT resources to illustrate this point. The guidance recommended that teachers should foster debates about "realistic solutions" by encouraging students to "[f]ind out about the arguments concerning recycling versus consumption" (p. 44) and to evaluate the accuracy of those positions. In doing so, the guidance privileges a way of knowing – the accuracy of the arguments – over a particular understanding of what good life constitutes – sustainable livelihoods are desirable. Even if both perspectives lead to the same conclusion that recycling is preferable, students are not taught that recycling is 'good' but rather, that recycling is accurate, and accuracy is 'good'. Hinting independence from one conception of good life seemingly leads us to obligations towards another conception. In the negotiations taking place between those advocating different modes of the good life, the way of knowing better underpinned by supposed rationality and accuracy can often win the day.

Summary

This chapter has defined politics as processes of power involving differences and group decision-making about the good life, and political education as experiences of teaching and learning about politics. In spite some critiques, states have regulated political education to unprecedented levels via schooling, and political classrooms offer the best prospects for political plurality. There is more plurality in mainstream schools than in any other settings. Children with very different political beliefs and behaviours coexist in the same class together with specialist teachers who are expected to balance competing political and educational demands. Further, the interactions between students and teachers are regulated by a curricula that is ordinarily justified with an appeal to students' political freedom. Yet, this plurality is still limited, as students' freedom is confined within community values or accurate argumentation.

Chapter 2

Democracy and political education

Abstract

This chapter is centred on examining assumptions underpinning political education practices in democratic countries. Particularly, the chapter maps out prevalent discourses of democracy (i.e. neoliberalism, liberalism, deliberativist democracy, critical theory, participatory democracy, radical democracy, and decolonial theory) and the influence these discourses have had on political education. The chapter classifies these discursive alternatives within three distinctive understandings of democracy and education (i.e. pragmatic democracy and narrow education; aspirational democracy and strong education; and open democracy and weak education). It is argued that modern accounts of democracy dominate political educational practice through "strong" forms of education. These accounts assume that the pursuit of knowledge, democratic values and freedom are mutually dependent.

Key words

Democratic education; modernity; liberalism; neoliberalism; radical democracy; deliberative democracy

Interest in political education often correlates with a commitment to democracy and a pledge to consider how democracy can be facilitated through educational practices. As explored in chapter one, teachers are unavoidably bonded to the interests of the political community regulating schooling practices and, in the context of this book, this political community defines itself as a democracy. Actually, democracy and schooled political education function as two realities historically intertwined. If earlier we had tracked the history of schooled education and political education to ancient Greece and we followed it through the Enlightenment period until our current days, the history of democracy goes in

parallel and shares significant periods. The foundations of democracy, as it is well known, can be found in the ancient city-state of Athens and the roots of modern democracy are in the liberal revolutions that were nurtured by Enlightenment thought. Unsurprisingly, the links between democracy and political education are implicit in most historical and philosophical accounts of democracy.

Concerns about the health of democracy often trigger additional support for political education. When on September 11, 2001, the twin towers collapsed, it became apparent that ideological rivalry remained and democracy was not as secure as had been imagined[20]. The attack immediately energised policy and academic discussion about political education in the USA and elsewhere. For example, in 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union defined the Framework for Social and Civic competences for lifelong learning[21] that would underpin educational practice in Europe. With regards to the Civic competence, they recommended,

> "Civic competence is based on knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights, including how they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international declarations and how they are applied by various institutions at the local, regional, national, European and international levels. (…).
>
> Skills for civic competence relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain, and to display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. This involves critical and creative reflection and

[20] See Fukuyama (1992)

[21] The 'Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning' (Official Journal of the European Union, 2006) identified eight competencies in total: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression.

constructive participation in community or neighbourhood activities as well as decision-making at all levels, from local to national and European level, in particular through voting.

Full respect for human rights including equality as a basis for democracy, appreciation and understanding of differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups lay the foundations for a positive attitude. (…) It also includes demonstrating a sense of responsibility, as well as showing understanding of and respect for the shared values that are necessary to ensure community cohesion, such as respect for democratic principles."

The politics of austerity that followed the 2008 financial crisis further fuelled increasing economic inequalities contributing to perceived a "crisis of democratic faith" (Asmonti, 2013, p. 143). Established institutions such as the House of Commons in London, the USA Presidency or the European Union were seen to be in crisis and it has become commonplace to begin conversations about political education within wider discussions about democratic decline and, in particular, the role populism plays in this crisis. The perception that many people, including youth and marginalised groups, see democratic politics with cynicism, has exponentially increased investment in political education. In many countries, teachers are expected to promote democratic values to revitalise a democracy that is threatened by apoliticism and populism. The Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2018[22]), for instance, has developed a model of the twenty competencies required for democratic culture to facilitate citizens in being able and willing to engage in democratic values and principles.

[22] https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/context-concepts-and-model

This chapter takes as starting point the understanding that whilst politics teachers are frequently encouraged to promote a democratic ethos, what democracy actually is, and how it can be promoted are not easy questions to answer. Drawing upon a systematic review of recent literature in democratic education (Sant, 2019a), the chapter takes as starting point the assumption that whilst there is an apparent consensus that democracy is desirable and worth saving, what makes it desirable is less clear. Democracy is a way of regulating differences and group decision-making in which power is supposedly distributed equally among people. Hence, the democratic understanding of the good life initially favours equality and general will over other political modes. Beyond this point of agreement, democratic traditions move in many different directions.

This chapter will discuss some familiar approaches to the question of democracy that underpin political education theory and practice: neoliberalism, liberal democracy, deliberative democracy, critical theory, participatory democracy, radical democracy and decolonial theory[23]. The chapter will further examine three approximations to the nature of democracy that underpin these approaches: pragmatic democracy, aspirational democracy and open democracy. The chapter is centred on describing the political and educational assumptions in which different political education practices rest. It is my intention to provide here an overview of potential relations between democracy and political education that will inform later discussions.

Democratic approaches to political education

Neoliberalism

[23] The original review (Sant, 2019a) identifies eight different discourses: elitism, neoliberalism, liberal democracy, deliberative democracy, critical theory, multiculturalism (within which there were a liberal-pluralism and a decolonial theory), participatory democracy, and agonistic democracy. For my purposes here, I have decided to modify these categories partially. The elitist discourse is not discussed as its current existence in liberal democracies is relatively minimal. The multicultural discourse has been replaced by decolonial theory as their arguments are very relevant for some of the points that will be later argued. I have also decided to name the 'agonistic' discourse as 'radical' as this later concept more clearly encompasses all authors within this perspective.

Neoliberalism, in the context of this book, is a political doctrine that prioritises individualism, competition, and the social role of the market economy. This is, the economic system in which means of production are in private hands and prices are regulated according to the levels of production/consumption or supply/demand. Drawing upon the logic of classic economic liberalism, individualism is seen as a virtue that favours the overall society. In a market economy, self-interested individuals compete with each other leading to the overall betterment of living standards and a situation of permanent economic growth. In economic liberalism, competition and productivity function as standards of social flourishing. Neoliberalism adapts these market rules for social purposes. Following Friedrich Hayek (1952), whilst objective truth exists and can be accessed through reason[24], it is often difficult for individuals to do this by themselves. This challenge, nevertheless, can be addressed by aggregating different perspectives. If all individuals pursue their self-interest, the total sum of 'rational choices' will result in a better approximation to these objective truths[25]. This is how societies must be organised and why democracy is seen as preferable. Neoliberals do not support democracy because of its ethos but more since they believe it to be a more effective approach to accommodating the desires expressed by the people.

Following this line of thought, neoliberals claim that education should be neutral or denuded from moral aspirations and common conceptions of the good life. The purpose of education is to satisfy practical needs: prepare young people for their future work so they can pursue their interests. As in the case of Mr Dimmock in chapter one, neoliberals privilege forms of education that can be objectively assessed and evaluated through the principles of rational choice theory and that can contribute towards economic growth. The conjunction of these factors explains why neoliberals *a priori* fervently oppose political education.

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[24] For a discussion on neoliberal ontology and epistemology see Pennington (2014)

[25] See Sung (2010) for a more elaborated discussion on this.

According to James Tooley (2000), democratic states should not regulate how young members of our society are politically educated. From this perspective, political education should not take place in the public sphere but rather it should be in the hands of parents and private self-selected institutions. Schooled political education interferes with individual private interests and can be detrimental to individuals' will. Besides, this political education is difficult to quantify and measure and its possibilities to contribute towards economic growth are relatively scattered. As political education is difficult to assess and does not lead to an immediate outcome, it is often marginalised from the curriculum for pragmatic reasons[26]. As a result, the role of political education is minimal in most curricula.

Despite this, traces of neoliberalism can be found in current political education policies and practices. In some contexts, political education includes financial aspects so students can learn how to manage their money and plan for their future needs[27]. Financial literacy becomes part of the set of desirable traits for all citizens to acquire. In many other contexts, young people learn how to become entrepreneurial citizens. This is the case of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018) where students are expected to gain self-efficacy attitudes and flexibility and adaptability skills.

Liberal democracy

The liberal discourse that has for a long time driven political education practices is heavily influenced by Kantian understandings of reason, freedom and morality. In Kant's account, there is a truth or objective reality which is only accessible through reason. Freedom is the capability of being ruled by one's own rationality and education is instrumental in

[26] See Menashy (2007) for a more developed discussion on the implicit marginalization of non-quantifiable outcomes

[27] See, for instance, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-3-and-4

facilitating that all humans are capable of rational inquiry. Education, then, is inherently emancipatory as it allows individuals to take control of their own lives. Meanwhile, morality, or in Kant's terms 'the universal law', has objective validity and it can be accessed through the dictates of reason. Moral autonomy can be summarised as "the capacity to conform one's behaviour to universal moral law, which one discovers for oneself through strict, unswerving adherence to the dictates of reason" (Corngold, 2011, p. 73). Education not only leads to a more accurate understanding of reality but also a more ethical engagement with such reality. There is an expectation that rational humans will behave according to universal morality, leading to overall betterment of the social life.

Political education[28], within a liberal framework, is shaped primarily in relation to political literacy (knowledge and reason). Liberals argue that students should better understand institutions and individual rights. Following the epistemic criteria[29], liberals believe that the main task for teachers of politics is to educate students in the pursuit of truth. Liberal pedagogies often request students to weigh evidence, evaluate views and truths, detect contradictions and form an independent judgement. These practices are likely to sound familiar to readers as they are a fundamental part of any form of schooled political education. The 2018 Competence framework, for instance, specifies students learn different forms of knowledge including "knowledge and critical understanding of the self" and skills such as "autonomous learning" and "analytical and critical thinking skills". Liberals recommend that any form of ethos should be approached using similar forms of inquiry. The ethical and the knowledge element of political education merge, with young people expected to rationally scrutinise ethical frameworks. There is an expectation that if students learn political knowledge and use it to evaluate viewpoints, they will surely gain the right democratic values

[28] For a discussion of political education from a liberal perspective see Nussbaum (2006) and Duarte (2016)

[29] See chapter one or Hand (2008)

and behave accordingly. Such principles can be illustrated with the 2006 Competencies framework. If young people learn about rights and institutions, they will develop an ability to critically and creatively reflect, constructively participate and display solidarity. Liberals also tend to favour cosmopolitan and/or multiculturalist principles. In her account of education for global citizenship, Martha Nussbaum (2002) advocates for forms of political education that focus their attention on three abilities:

> "the Socratic ability to criticize one's traditions and to carry on an argument on terms of mutual respect for reason; (2) the ability to think as a citizen of the whole world, not just some local region or group; and (3) the "narrative imagination," the ability to imagine what it would be like to be in the position of someone very different from oneself." (p. 289)

Teachers, in the liberal multiculturalist framework, should facilitate that young people can learn about their own culture and that of others so they are in a position of critically examining stereotypes and misjudgments[30].

Deliberative democracy

Deliberative scholars rely on the actualisation of Kant's work conducted by Jürgen Habermas (1979). In contrast with Kantian philosophy, deliberative scholars argue that there is not such a thing as a universal law or a better way to regulate our social relations. Different communities have different notions of the good life and these notions are not predetermined by any objective reality but rather, they are socially constructed in our interactions with others. Deliberative scholars, nevertheless, believe that there is a better way to regulate interactions between those who feel attached to different conceptions of human flourishing. Deliberative communication can guarantee the fairness and inclusivity of decisions for all, if participants, regardless of their worldviews, commit themselves to the principles of the ideal

[30] See, for instance, Banks et al., (2001)

speech situation. These principals are: rationality and impartiality in seeking the best collective reasons, and respect for open, symmetrical and free communication standards[31].

Proposals for political education, in the deliberative framework, can be classified into two different groups. The first set of proposals aims to facilitate that students learn communication abilities that shall facilitate deliberation processes[32]. Communication and rhetorical skills such as the ones named in the 2018 Competencies Framework (i.e. listening, observing, linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills) are key features. In specifying "knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication" as one of the three dimensions of knowledge, the 2018 Competencies Framework clearly illustrates the impact of deliberative frameworks on recent educational policy. Indeed, as these frameworks illustrate, the current policy for political education is often underpinned by a mix of neoliberal, liberal and deliberative principles. The second set of proposals directly focuses on deliberative pedagogies with students expected to practice deliberation and consensus-reaching. Amy Gutmann (1996) recommends that students should participate in processes of decision-making by examining problems arising within their schools and reaching consensual solutions. In the context of the political classroom, deliberative or controversial issues pedagogies are often recommended. Deliberative communication, as explained by Thomas Englund (2016),

> "implies communication in which (a) different views are confronted with one another and arguments (…), (b) there is tolerance and respect for the concrete other (…), (c) elements of collective will formation are present (…), (d) authorities or traditional views (…) can be questioned (…) and (e)

[31] For a more elaborated discussion on deliberation see Lefrançois and Ethier (2010)
[32] For this, see Carleheden (2006)

there is scope for students to communicate and deliberate without teacher control" (p. 62)

Deliberative pedagogies often take the shape of controversial issues[33] where students are assigned to discuss one side of an unresolved social dispute by examining the evidence available. This is followed by a debate in which students examine distinctive arguments presented by different sides and come together to reach a consensual decision on the controversy. In recent years, controversial issues have been generalised and become 'best practices' recommended by policymakers and teacher educators alike. For instance, both the 2006 and the 2018 Competence frameworks explicitly name problem-solving, co-operation and conflict-resolution skills as contents of study and later documentation of these frameworks presents controversial issues as the best way to enact these learnings.

Critical theory

Critical scholars take the lessons learnt from Kant together with Marxist analysis[34]. Underpinned by modern principles, they understand that material (economic) relations structure the social fabric but that these structures are hidden by dominant ideologies that undermine our capacity to form judgement. Empowered by knowledge, people can realise that the most rational option is the collective struggle for a more equal distribution of resources. General will or popular sovereignty is here conceived as the process through which, by taking action in solidary with others, more equal arrangements are secured. This is a process of double emancipation: individuals first free themselves from ideology and communities then eliminate power relations.

[33] For controversial issues, see Hess and McAvoy (2014), Hess (2008), Parker (2010) and Lo (2017). Similar proposals have been developed by those working in French-speaking, Spanish-speaking and German-speaking countries under respective names of *questions socialement vives* (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2011), *problemas sociales relevantes* (Pagès, 2011) and *Beutelsbacher Konsens* (Jahr, Hempel and Heinz, 2016).

[34] For a more extended discussion around critical theory's ontology and epistemology, read Stevenson (2010) and Hantzopoulos (2015)

Political education plays an essential role in challenging dominant ideologies. Following Paulo Freire (2000), critical theorists advocate for an education *for* a counter-hegemonic or reconstructive democracy[35] whose goal is to facilitate that young people uncover existing structures of domination so they can challenge dominant ideologies. This is often conceptualised as critical literacy, or the ability to explore "below the surface of texts and reading beyond the lines, in order to be aware of how identities and ideologies are formed" (Tosar, 2018, p. 50). Inheritor of the liberal tradition of critical thinking, critical literacy pays particular interest on students examining the hidden capitalist, colonial and patriarchal agendas behind political discourses. For instance, whilst critical scholars are very suspicious about competences frameworks such as the ones above, they might recommend teachers to scrutinise these frameworks so they can evidence how the recommended attitudes, knowledge and values do indeed benefit capitalist powers.

Critical scholars see political education as an arena for political activity. Committed to defending their political stances, Michael Apple (2011) advocates for pedagogies of interruption whose purpose is to politically reposition students so they support a progressive counter-hegemony. Underlying these pedagogies lies an assumption that those supporting conservative and neoliberal stances can change their line of thought if presented with more convincing arguments and more appealing proposals. Teachers whose students support capitalist, colonial and patriarchal powers are recommended to listen carefully the reasons these students provide as there might be there some lessons to learn on how progressive ideology can better show its appeal. Critical scholars also defend a political education in which teachers and students engage in solidarity with their communities to transform their social reality. In contrast with previous approaches where political action is mainly framed as

[35] For a more detailed account of critical political education, see Brent Edwards (2010) and Veugelers (2007).

voting (i.e. 2006 Framework), critical scholars prefer activism. E. Wayne Ross (2018), for instance, has developed a framework for "dangerous citizenship" where teachers and students are encouraged to take on actions of civil disobedience against existing hierarchical structures of power.

Participatory democracy

Participatory scholars draw upon the work of John Dewey or Hannah Arendt to emphasise the value of public engagement. According to Dewey, democracy is a general way of "associate living" (1916/1985, p. 94) which escapes encapsulation and it is not thought but practised. Participation in the public space is in itself considered to be the main feature of human flourishing and there is an expectation that by participating, we are not only changing who we are but also our social environment. Importantly for us, participation is conceived as a learning and political experience leading to self-transformation and social change. This is explained through Arendt's concept of *natality* or the possibility of renewal that comes with each new social contribution and each new generation. In this perspective, there is nothing fixed about democracy besides an inherent drive towards participation in the public space.

Participatory democracy is somehow embedded within political education policy and practice through references to public engagement that exceed voting. For instance, the 2006 Framework for Civic competences expects young citizens to participate in their communities and, when possible, in elections. However, participatory scholars are very rarely content with the way participation is presented as a competence or outcome and they rather see it as an ethos regulating educational experiences. In this line of thought, Gert Biesta and Robert Lawy (2006; 2011) have reclaimed a citizenship-as-practice in which political education does not compartmentalise formal and non-formal settings of education but rather, follows young people as they politically interact with others. Teachers, in this sense, should not have

specific pre-determined goals but rather should support young people as they participate and help them to learn from their engagement.

Radical democracy

The term 'radical democracy' has been claimed by very different traditions within education[36] but, in the context of this chapter, radical democracy refers to the particular approach to political education underpinned by the philosophical work of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe. Following Derrida, modes of life and the good life are historically built in such a way that we are only able to recognise the very limited possibilities available to us. Whilst it is impossible to escape the tradition that gave us cultural birth, we can scrutinise this tradition to bear witness to invisible possibilities. Democracy, in this approach, is about opening social practices to dispute and facilitating different ways of being. It is helpful to look at the etymological construction of 'radical' to further understand this argument. Radical comes from the Latin *radix*, 'root', and it is the purpose of radical scholars to examine the roots of our beliefs and to take detours.

Drawing upon the work of Rancière and Mouffe, radical scholars make two distinctive assumptions about our political reality. Firstly, our reality is inherently conflictive. It is neither possible nor desirable to regulate differences and group-decision making in such a way that everybody is truly satisfied. Consensual agreements are the deceiving ways to refer to situations where the rule of the stronger is applied and the weaker is silenced. Secondly, whilst all human beings are equal in the sense that they are all of the same political value, societies create political structures that make some humans more 'politically valued' than others. These political arrangements separate those who have the right and the ability to

[36] For example, Henry Giroux (2003) has argued about the confluence in his work of critical pedagogy and radical democracy. Michael Fielding and Peter Moss (2010) positioned their work – aligned with the principles of participatory discourse – as radical. 'Radical' is the umbrella term that, very often, groups those who bring the work of Jacques Rancière to the educational terrain.

speak and to be visible from those who not have these privileges. Equality is here conceived as an axiom or presupposition rather than a goal or an empirical claim.

Radical democratic political educators are also critical with competences frameworks as they understand they aim to socialise young people into specific forms of being that stop them from manifesting their singularity. They are not keen on defining the knowledge, skills and values needed for students to operate in a democratic society, preferring practices that allow students to get to know themselves and others better so they can decide what political course of direction to take. Radical democratic scholars advocate for practices that privilege political freedom over the other two forms of good life. As Claudia Ruitenberg explains, political education, in this approach, ought to create opportunities so students can "enact and practice their equal capacity as speaking beings" (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 8) [37]. Instead, radical democratic political educators favour deconstructive pedagogies. The purpose of deconstructing is to examine the meaning given to ideas and experiences, consider potential explanations of why those meanings were attributed in the first place, and inquiry about possible alternatives that were initially invisible to us. Deconstructive practices are often used for students to explore their understandings and emotions. For instance, across his multiple texts, Michalinos Zembylas (2009; 2015; 2019) has developed an educational repertoire of reconstructive pedagogies explaining how teachers can facilitate that students draw upon their life stories and that of others to better understand actions and feelings, and the power and political processes that might have influenced such beliefs[38].

Decolonial theory

Decolonial scholars draw upon a range of perspectives including Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo to revisit the question of modern democracy. Partially aligned with the line

[37] See also Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele (2010).
[38] See also, Ruitenberg (2015)

of thought developed by scholars within the radical and critical traditions, decolonial scholars scrutinise what is modernity and what is left outside modern ways of being. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) defines this in terms of the abyssal line, or the barrier separating what for a long time has been assumed to be 'human' from what was not 'fully human'. On the colonial side of the abyssal line, there are modes of being derived from Descartes and Kant's conceptions of good life in which rationality, autonomy and even democracy are seen as preferable. Colonial, capitalist and patriarchal powers were able to present these conceptions as universal aspirations for humanity but there is nothing universal to them. Those who have grown up in the modern tradition might well see democracy as a form of social flourishing, but other traditions have other conceptions of what is desirable. Indeed, considerations of a democratic good life are very much anthropocentric, individualistic and environmentally unsustainable when compared to other traditions such as that of the *buen vivir* held by many indigenous people in Latin America.

Decolonial scholars are concerned about how schools and universities have reproduced modern power relations. What we often define as academic or disciplinary knowledge is seen, from this approach, as a way to preserve patterns of cognitive domination in which rational ways of knowing as seen as superior. The same 'Human Rights' emphasised in both competences frameworks above are seen as a way to distribute a particular understanding of what is to be human. This leads some decolonial scholars to discard educational institutions overall and to think of the educational possibilities that accompany other modes of life. Others, instead, look for pedagogies that allow learners to scrutinise the modern assumptions grounding their beliefs. Underpinned by understanding that being and knowing are two sides of the same coin, decolonial scholars advocate for unlearning pedagogies where young people have opportunities to experience how the borders

between what they know, who they are, and how they act blur. Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti (2010), for instance, defines learning to unlearn as,

> "learning to perceive that what we consider 'good and ideal' is only one perspective and this perspective is related to where we come from socially, historically and culturally. It also involves perceiving that we carry a 'cultural baggage' filled with ideas and concepts produced in our contexts and that this affects who we are and what we see and that although we are different from others in our own contexts, we share much in common with them." (p. 242).

In this perspective, political education should offer opportunities for students to engage with indigenous knowledge systems so Eurocentric assumptions about the nature of our world are exposed.

Different forms of political education for different forms of democracy

Despite these seven approaches to political education being distinctive in their traditions and recommendations, there is common ground in the way in which some of these approaches conceptualise the nature of democracy and the role of political education in democratic societies. These approaches fall into three distinctive groups: *aspirational democracy*, *pragmatic democracy*, and *open democracy*, each of them with a particular understanding of political education, respectively strong, narrow, and open-weak political education.

Aspirational democracy and strong political education

Political education policy and practice are highly influenced by an understanding of democracy as an aspiration shared across most accounts of liberal, deliberative and critical democracy. The appeal of democracy, David Runciman (2018) explains, is twofold. Democracy is expected to offer dignity to each of us, making us feel that regardless of who we are, our views matter. In its call for dignity, democracy merges individual and collective

will. Political participation is a way to be part of something bigger than ourselves whilst demonstrating our own agency. At the same time, democracy is seen as an instrument to deliver long-term benefits, notably: stability, prosperity and peace. There is a relatively well-evidenced assumption that democratic societies, for one reason or another, have improved some life standards such as life expectancy. Within the borders of democratic systems, there is more to divide, and there is a desire for diving more equally. The combination of these two appeals transforms democracy into a unique interface for both human and social flourishing. In democracy, what is good for the individual, is also good for the community.

These aspirational approaches to democracy are very much underpinned by the socio-cultural norms and practices that we often define as modernity. Modernity is framed by six principles that define what good life is about: individualism, reason, productivity, universality, hierarchies and a linear way of thinking[39]. The logic is that the history of humanity is linear and progressive: we are gradually moving towards a better and more democratic system that is also more prosperous. This better system manifests in the conjunction of egalitarian and libertarian principles. There is an assumption that there will be a time in the future where all individuals will be more productive as they will be able to exercise their own will and this will lead us to a society where the needs of every single member of the human community will be satisfied. Dignity and prosperity both together, indeed. Simultaneously, modernity presupposes humans are individualists by nature and communities were constituted only because individuals tacitly accepted a social contract to regulate social relations[40]. In this perspective, individual rights have priority over any conception of common good and human flourishing is conceived in individualist terms. The modern good life is underpinned by an understanding that transformation and individuals'

[39] See, Santos (2014)
[40] See, for instance, Parry (1999)

autonomy are inherently good. Self-cultivation is always projected in an aspirational future in which humans become sovereign of their own life. In their acceptance of Kantian assumptions, aspirational democrats find a way to reconcile prosperity and individual and collective will: reason. If individuals gain access to knowledge, they will recognise the dignity that comes with democratic arrangements and will express their political freedom in ways that facilitate that our societies run smoothly and deliver the promised long-time benefits. Reason is seen as a bridge that allows us to move from our flawed system to our desired aspiration.

Aspirational democrats offer numerous and valuable reasons why political education is valuable. Political education is a way to guarantee that young citizens gain access to rational ways of inquiry, ascribe themselves to democratic principles and become independent in their thinking and acting. Indeed, aspirational democrats offer a justification and an explanation of why political education simultaneously delivers three forms of the good life: the pursuit of knowledge, democratic values and political freedom. Not only do these forms not contradict each other, but they are mutually dependent. Via political education, learners can be emancipated from their ideological and social constraints, and communities can be emancipated from conflict and scarcity. This symbiotic emancipation allows aspirational democrats to design *strong forms of political education*, defined by Gert Biesta (2009b) as the approach that,

> "depicts education as something that is, or has the potential to be, secure and effective — for example, where the aim is to establish a strong and secure connection between educational "inputs" and educational "outcomes." (p. 354)

These aspirational perspectives are transparent in defining political commitments and offer clear templates through which we can assess and regulate political education practice: our aspired society is one in which everybody is dignified and capable of behaving ethically. The

pursuit of truth functions as both an input and an outcome: we expect that by educating children and young people in truth-seeking we will make them more knowledgeable and secure our aspired society. Whilst we cannot guarantee the results of any pedagogical intervention, this strong perspective offers practitioners a compass so they can negotiate their contradictory commitments. Such are the principles underpinning both European frameworks for democratic/civic competences. Arguably, this makes aspirational accounts of democracy very appealing to many teachers of politics.

Pragmatic democracy: narrow political education

Pragmatic democracy refers to the regulated system or the rule of the law that structures the processes of power involving regulation of differences and group-decision making. Given that pragmatic democracy represents the current governmental arrangements, not all pragmatic democracies are the same. In the 1960s welfare democracies were pragmatic, but currently, for many of us, pragmatic democracy takes the shape of representative democracy regulated by the market economy. Neoliberals are fervent advocates of pragmatic versions of democracy that, as we shall see, provide them with the perfect framework for action. Pragmatic democracy focuses on solving everyday disputes by embracing institutions and practices that create precedents on how to answer conflicts. There is no moral aspiration in pragmatic democracy *per se* but rather a desire to give immediate and effective responses to current problems. Neoliberals subscribe entirely to this view and offer a clear and straightforward recipe on how to proceed. Democracy functions by the same rules of the market place: it is a competition between parties/candidates with electors behaving as selfish consumers whose only role is to vote. If democracy contributes to the good life, it is not because it is in itself ‘good’, but because it enables self-interest, competition and, ultimately, economic prosperity.

Education, similarly to democracy, is not considered valuable in itself but an instrument for pursuing these goals. Under our current neoliberal pragmatic democracy, education is primarily valuable for economic purposes. This explains why the vocational knowledge and skills are considered preferable under the market economy, giving little scope for humanities and social sciences (including politics) in the school curriculum. Political education is narrowed and the little space left is often dedicated to promoting, as seen earlier, financial and entrepreneurial skills or to safeguard the laws that regulate the status quo. References to the rule of the law (see, e.g. Council of Europe, 2018) are very common in most pragmatic forms of democracy including the neoliberal one. *Narrow forms of political education*, whilst not always explicit, do perpetuate particular understandings of good life associated with neoliberal interests. What is favoured, via these conceptions, is the education of children and young people into the principles of individualism, competition and productivity.

Open democracy: open-weak political education

The dissatisfaction with aspirational accounts of democracy has lead participatory, radical and some critical and some decolonial scholars to reconsider democracy as a possibility or as an open project. Whilst there are certainly differences in these approaches, they all share a pledge to what Sarah Amsler defines as a,

> "political commitment to liberate possibilities from the imposition of all 'false necessity'; to maintain an anarchic scepticism towards both truth and power, and to facilitate the practical work that these commitments require" (2016, p. 73).

Those who advocate for *open democracy* firmly believe that democracy is always open. No system could foreclose itself to an extreme of supressing all other ways of being. We will always have an opportunity, even if this is risky, to raise our voice and question the status quo. Open democrats also question the possibilities of reconciling prosperity and individual

and collective dignity in the way aspirational democrats do. If individual and collective could map to each other, and peace and stability could be guaranteed, we would find ourselves in a totalitarian form of politics. Total institutionalisation would close the possibilities for new futures to an extreme that, the modern aspiration of future ideal democracy is, from this perspective, seen as dystopian and anti-democratic. Assuming we would ever reach a final destination, what would be left for us to decide?

The unfolding of the aspirational combination of truth, community and freedom forces open democrats to prioritise their educational commitments. Facing the choice between democratic values, the pursuit of truth and political freedom, open democrats select this later form of the good life. This leads open democrats to advocate for *open-weak forms of political education* or approaches where the role of teachers is to consider what educational practices that do not "preclude any encounters or experiences that have the potential for singularisation" (Biesta, 2009b, p. 361). Political freedom here becomes the ultimate purpose of political education with teachers expected to find ways to facilitating that students encounter and manifest their uniqueness. It goes without saying that these approaches are rarely easy to practice. Consider the frameworks above, the only aspects that open democrats would subscribe to are "critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in community or neighbourhood activities", "understanding of differences between value systems" (2006 Framework), "valuing human dignity", "openness to cultural otherness" and "knowledge and critical understanding of the self" (Council of Europe, 2018). Indeed, if 'weak' forms of education are 'open', it is precisely because they leave educators "empty-handed" (Biesta, 2009b, p. 361). If earlier in this book, we discussed how hinting independence from one conception of good life frequently leads us to obligation towards another, open-weak forms of education leave teachers without anchors to secure their steps.

Summary

Democracy is as a common but disputed aspiration for those working in political education. Seven pedagogical approaches underpinning political education (neoliberalism, liberalism, deliberative democracy, critical theory, participatory and radical democracy and decolonial theory) fall into three distinctive approximations to democracy and political education. Firstly, aspirational democracy relies on modern understandings in which democracy is conceived as a promise of individual and collective dignity, and economic and political prosperity. Aspirational democrats favour strong forms of political education where the three modes of good life (the pursuit of knowledge, democratic values and individual freedom) interact in symbiosis under the umbrella of emancipatory education. Secondly, pragmatic democracy is the regulatory system which, in current liberal democracies, is determined by the neoliberal principles of individualism, competition and productivity. Pragmatic-neoliberal approaches to democracy lead to narrow forms of political education: the explicit political education of young people is minimalised in a curriculum that only benefits neoliberal conceptions of human flourishing. Thirdly, open democrats argue that democracy is valuable because it is permeable to other ways of being. Open democrats advocate for open-weak forms of political education where political freedom is privileged over other forms of good life but, in their attempt to benefit young people's uniqueness, open-weak forms of political education leave practitioners in permanent uncertainty.

Chapter 3.

Populism

Abstract

This chapter focuses on discussing the question of populism. The chapter begins providing a brief genealogy of populism as well as a review of current manifestations of populism across continents. The chapter then considers what is populism and how it can be defined. The chapter also considers the causes of contemporary populism and revisits whether changes in media, globalisation patterns, and educational failure are behind the success of populist leaders. The chapter concludes by examining the relationship between populism and democracy. It is argued that populism is a consequence of internal democratic contradictions.

Keywords

populism; educational failure; democratic crisis; losers of globalisation; post-truth; social media

In late 2016, Donald Trump was elected US President. His election triggered a boom in the media centred on the term populism. Indeed, in 2017, populism was announced as the Cambridge Dictionary "Word of the Year" to designate its status as a term that suddenly mattered[41]. Journalists have alerted us to a rise[42] of so-called 'populists' worldwide with politicians such as Jair Bolsonaro (President of Brazil), Boris Johnson (Prime Minister of Britain), Pablo Iglesias (Second Deputy Minister of Spain), Viktor Orbán (Prime Minister of Hungary), Narendra Modi (Prime Minister of India) or Nicolás Maduro (President of

[41]s. In 2016, different events defined by the press as populist took place. This also included the Brexit Referendum. See, e.g., https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/12/19/the-global-wave-of-populism-that-turned-2016-upside-down/

[42] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36130006; https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/29/populism-tinder-politics-swipe-left-or-right-unthinkingly

Venezuela) obtaining or consolidating governmental power. With some exceptions, populism has been presented as a 'dirty' word[43] used by politicians themselves, journalists and the overall citizenry to discredit others. Populist leaders are accused of being "buffoons", "liars", "demagogues", "manipulators" and "hypocrites" and those supporting populism are defined as "ignorant" [44]. Populism is seen as a problem or a social illness that needs to be addressed. In an extreme example, a columnist in the conservative Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* asked, "can a populist be cured?"[45].

In the 2016 US Presidential elections, two candidates often considered populist mobilised a huge majority of American voters. On the right, Donald Trump appealed to the 'common' American, against Muslims, women, Latin American immigrants and his political opponents overall. On the left, Bernie Sanders mobilised the political mass of Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter and other left-orientated movements against big banks and big corporations. Donald Trump was seen to illustrate several 'dirty' features often attributed to populists: lies, authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, polarisation and political incorrectness. Those voting for Trump were often described as "uneducated"[46]. Sanders, in contrast, did not wholly represent the media image of populism. He had the support of well-recognised academics and few would accuse him of being a buffoon, nationalist, racist or hypocrite. Sanders had repeatedly claimed he is there to unify common American people. The ideological differences were so important that an article in the New York Times explicitly questioned, "How can Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders both be populists?".[47]

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[43] For a more systematic analysis of this, see Bale, Van Kessel & Taggart (2011)

[44] See, for instance, https://www.ft.com/content/bfb5f3d4-379d-11e6-a780-b48ed7b6126f , https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2018/09/how-the-eu-is-fighting-back-against-populism/

[45] Bustos (2018)

[46] https://www.ft.com/content/bfb5f3d4-379d-11e6-a780-b48ed7b6126f

[47] https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/magazine/how-can-donald-trump-and-bernie-sanders-both-be-populist.html

But this question does not appear to have a clear answer. By the time of the 2016 election, Kirk Hawkins, Professor of Politics, an expert in populism, and his team[48], compared the rhetorical practices of different politicians including Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Pablo Iglesias and Bernie Sanders. They concluded that Sanders was the second major 'user' of populist rhetoric (after Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela) and that his discourses were far more populist than those of Trump. Four years later, another professor of politics expert in populism, Jan-Werner Müller appealed to American readers, "Please Stop Calling Bernie Sanders a Populist. The socialist from Vermont is not a threat to American democracy. The president is."[49] How is that possible? How can political scientists 'measure' populism in such distinctive ways? How can the public image of populist be so different from Hawkins' analysis? How did Hawkins define 'populism' so Trump did not come first on that list? What definition did Müller use to claim that Sanders is not populist? Is populism, as Müller suggested, a democratic threat?

This chapter will consider the meaning and causes of contemporary populism. It is my purpose here to refine our understanding of contemporary populism so we can approach it appropriately. The chapter firsts examine the roots of populism and review a range of populist movements across continents. Subsequently, it analyses how political scholarship has conceptualised populism. The chapter concludes considering potential causes of contemporary populism, including education. My main argument in this chapter is that populism is thin and vague in nature, yet it might tell us something about our current democratic systems.

Populism in different times and places

Brief genealogy of populism

[48] Hawkins, Dudley and Tan (2016)
[49] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/opinion/bernie-sanders-trump-populism.html

Despite being a matter of sudden interest, populism is not a new phenomenon[50]. The word populism derives from the Latin *populi* used in ancient Rome to simultaneously refer to the sovereign people and the 'common people'[51]. In the Roman Republic, the term was used to differentiate the government of the sovereign people (the plebeian councils) from the government of magistrates[52]. The history of populism begins in the medieval European appropriation of Roman Law.

The first manifestations of populism as a political phenomenon can be tracked to the second part of the 19th century in the USA and Russia. In Russia, the *narodniki* was a group of young urban students who, around the 1860s and 1870s, idealised Russian countryside and attempted to mobiliseits peasants to overthrow the Tsar's regime and his industrialisation reforms. *Narod* in Russian is often translated as 'people', 'folk' or 'nation'[53] and *narodniki* understood that only the common people could challenge the political elite (Tsarist autocracy) and regenerate Russian politics. Thus, it is not strange that *narodniki* are often considered pioneers in the question of populism. Similarly, the People's Party (US) of the 1890s is often described as the first populist party. The party explicitly denounced the corruption of politics, the manipulation of the press and the economic disparities between paupers and millionaires. The People's Party challenged the Democratic-Republican bipartite system and, with an overall 8.5% of the votes, became relatively successful in the agrarian Southern and Western states where people perceived the urban elites, particularly, the Washington politicians[54] with hostility.

In his genealogy of the concept 'populism', Yannis Stavrakakis (2017) tracks back the current pejorative use of populism to a particular historiographic controversy centred on the

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[50] For a history of populism, see Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017)
[51] For a more in-depth discussion on the meaning of populism, see Canovan (2004)
[52] See Grattan (2014) for more detail.
[53] See more on the *narodniki* in Allock (1971)
[54] For a discussion on US People's Party, see Martinelli (2016)

US People's Party[55]. Until the 1950s, progressive historians had traditionally depicted American populism as a progressive democratic mass movement of those suffering aggressive capitalist modernisation. But in 1955, Richard Hofstadter wrote 'Age of Reform', a book that gave him a Pulitzer prize and in which he described populists as racist and anti-Semitic. Hofstadter (1955)[56] defended that populists were indeed against the Hebrew community of the American East coast, for representing the "international gold ring" (Hofstadter, 1955, p. 78). Hofstadter (1955) further argued,

> "The utopia of the Populists was in the past, not the future. (…) The Populists looked backward with longing to the lost agrarian Eden, to the republican America of the early years of the nineteenth century in which there were few millionaires and, as they say it, no beggars, when the labourer had excellent prospects and the farmer had abundance, when statesmen still responded to the mood of the people and there was no such thing as the money power. What they – though they did not express themselves in such terms – was that they would like to restore the conditions prevailing before the development of industrialism and the commercialisation of agriculture" (Hofstadter, 1955, p. 62).

Historiography began to conceptualise the People's Party and populism overall not in relation to their demands for equality but rather, in relation to their concerns on the capitalist/industrial modernisation and a set of xenophobic and anti-Semitic attitudes. After Hofstadter, populists were no longer defined as radical democrats. Instead, their cause was portrayed as an irrational response of those who felt left behind by modern times and who canalised these irrational feelings in the shape of xenophobic attitudes. For Stavrakakis

[55] To examine this historiographic controversy, read Collins (1989) and Pollack (1960).

[56] According to Pollack (1960), relying on "very few items, some misinterpreted, and on an extremely weak master's thesis" (p. 493),

(2017), the modernist stance of Hofstadter and other academics of that time helps us to explain the begging of the present 'dirty' use of the term populism.

Manifestations of populism across continents

The academic debate on populism has exponentially grown in the last years. Not without controversy[57], political scientists have documented 'populist activity' across all continents. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is often considered Asia's most prominent populist leader[58]. Making extensive use of social media and other technologies, Modi defines Hindu people in cultural opposition to the establishment of English-speaking, Westernised and secular elites. In Thailand, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is a rare example of populism in East Asia. Thaksin Shinawatra gained the support of the rural poor, styling himself as a man 'of the people', wearing non-formal clothes and talking about his sex life in local slang[59].

In Australia, Pauline Hanson, the leader of the extreme right Australian One Nation Party, used different media platforms, including reality shows, to oppose to Asian immigration, multiculturalism and aboriginal rights[60]. In New Zealand, echoing Hanson, Winston Peters obtained electoral support to hold several governmental positions.

In Africa, Resnik (2017) defines two generations of populism. The first generation of African populism is connected to the coups in the 1980s where different military figures such as Captain Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, and Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in Ghana, orchestrated popular revolutions against civilian governments defined as corrupt elites. The second generation has grown as a result of the urbanisation and increased inequality experienced by African youth. In Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade obtained the Presidency and was

[57] See outlines of this controversy in Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) and Muller (2016)
[58] About populist tendencies on Modi's discourse and government, see Rao (2018)
[59] For a discussion on Thailand, see Moffit and Tormey (2014)
[60] To know more about Pauline Hanson, see Grant, Moore and Lynch (2018) and Moffit and Tormey (2014).

proclaimed *Président de la rue* (President of the street) through campaign rallies in which he aligned himself with the poor in opposition to the political elite. Raila Odinga in Kenya and Michael Sata in Zambia mobilised the population through a rhetoric comprising ethnic and economic demands.

North America has seen numerous cases of populism. In Canada, the former leader of the Reform Party of Canada, Preston Manning, emphasised the value of the common people's sense above the 'alienated' knowledge of the elites[61]. The United States has been considered the natural home of populism, with Hofstadter (1955) himself describing populism as a "popular impulse that is endemic in American political culture" (p. 4). Political leaders such as Charles Coughlin, George Wallace, Ronald Reagan, Ross Perot, Jesse Jackson and Sarah Palin exist in all decades of the USA's recent history[62]. In contrast with the original People's Party demands, US populism from the 1960s onward has been primarily right-wing, with populists from Reagan to the Tea Party appealing to the mobilisation of the 'common man' against the corrupt elites in Washington. The 2016 Presidential elections, nevertheless, represented a turning point in US populism. For the first time two populist figures, one to the right (Donald Trump) and one to the left (Bernie Sanders), challenged non-populist candidates. Sanders mobilised different left-orientated movements and was close to being nominated as the Democratic candidate. Trump won; partially drawing upon the tradition of US agrarian and right-wing populism, he auspiciously appealed to the 'common' American. Nancy Fraser explains how for Trump voters,

> "the injury of deindustrialisation is compounded by the insult of progressive moralism, which routinely portrays them as culturally backward. Rejecting

[61] Moffit & Tormey (2014). See also, epistemological populism as "the knowledge of "the common people," which they possess by virtue of their proximity to everyday life, as distinguished from the rarefied knowledge of elites which reflects their alienation from everyday life and the common sense it produces" (Saurette & Gunster, 2011, p. 199)

[62] For this, see Hawkins, Dudley and Tan (2016); Kazin (1998); Lowndes (2017)

globalisation, Trump voters also repudiated the liberal cosmopolitanism identified with it. For some (though by no means all), it was a short step to blaming their worsening conditions on political correctness, people of colour, immigrants and Muslims. In their eyes, feminism and Wall Street are birds of a feather, perfectly united in the person of Hillary Clinton". (2017, n.d.)

Latin America[63] has seen numerous populist movements, parties and leaders from the 1930s onwards. During the 1930s and 1940s, populist leaders such as Joan Perón and Getulio Vargas successfully obtained electoral power after mass rallies in Argentina and Brazil respectively. In their discourses, they blamed corrupt political elites and agrarian oligarchies, favouring free and open elections and more democratic politics. In contrast, the second wave of Latin American populism in the early 1990s is often considered more right-wing orientated. 'Neoliberal' populists[64] such as Carlos Menem in Argentina and Alberto Fujimori in Peru accused traditional politicians of bad economic administration and, once in power, they took a personalist and authoritarian form of leadership to impose neoliberal reforms based on the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). From the 2000s, Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa have been seen as key representatives of the third wave of Latin American populism[65]. Although there are major differences between their discourses and practices, all these leaders introduced several reforms in their systems aimed to protect the economically excluded from the intrusion of the IMF, the World Bank, and the US government into Latin American politics. More recently, and on the other extreme, Jair Bolsonaro has capitalised upon the situation of political uncertainty in Brazil, winning the 2018 elections with a racist, homophobic, sexist and authoritarian discourse[66].

[63] For a discussion of Populism in Latin America, look at De La Torre (2017), Panizza (2008) and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012)

[64] See neoliberal populists in Gratius (2007)

[65] See Panizza (2008) and De La Torre (2017) to know more about these radical leaders

[66] For a discussion on Bolsonaro, see Gredhill (2019)

In Europe, the historiographic debate helps us to illuminate the two different understandings of populism identified earlier in the introduction to this chapter. The negative connotations attributed to populism in Europe are a consequence of parallelisms drawn between fascism and populism[67]. Müller (2017) argues that Nazism and Fascism should be conceptualised as populist movements with particular additional features: racism, a glorification of violence and authoritarian leadership[68]. From this perspective, the current rise of European populism is seen with extreme concern as it signals one of the darkest ages in Europe's history. However, this conceptualisation is challenged by most academics of populism; the general convention appears to be that, whilst fascists utilised some aspects of populist rhetoric, and fascism and populism have coexisted in the same discourse on multiple occasions, their ideological foundations differ notably[69]. Populism, from this second perspective, is not necessarily anti-democratic but it is an unexpected phenomenon in Europe. In contrast with Latin American and USA, the European subcontinent has experienced relatively few cases of populism until recently.

Indeed, European populists had not gained success until the 1990s[70] when a range of parties emerged in Central and Eastern Europe as a result of the liberal politics introduced during the post-communist transition. Parties such as *Partidul România Mare (PRM*) (Greater Romania Party) and the *Slovenská národná strana, (SNS*) (Slovak National Party) emphasised a discourse of the people against different non-majoritarian ethnic groups, international financial organisations and domestic elites. These parties, nevertheless, were less successful than their later 2000s counterparts. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) (Law and Justice), the largest party in the Polish parliament from 2015-2020, has profit from the

[67] For a brief discussion of this, see Gidron and Bonikowski (2013)

[68] For a discussion on similarities and differences between Fascism and populism see also Eatwell (2017)

[69] For similar arguments, see also Eatwell (2017); Laclau (1977); Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) and Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014)

[70] For populism in Europe, see Taggart (2017)

frustration of those experiencing the grievances of economic crisis, liberal policies, political corruption and Russian intrusion[71]. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party has been in power since 2010. According to Brubaker (2017), Orbán's populist discourse is underpinned by

> "nationalist semantics of self and other externalize liberalism, construing it as a non-national and even anti-national project that subordinates the interests of the nation to foreign capital, on the one hand, and to foreign models of multiculturalism, Roma rights, LGBT rights, and refugee protection, on the other hand" (Brubaker, 2017a, p. 18).

Completely different is the case of Greece. Golden Dawn, the right-wing party sometimes described as populist, plays a secondary role[72] in the Hellenic Parliament. In contrast, SYRIZA, often used as an example to illustrate left populism, gained power in 2015 after a campaign against corrupted elites and the politics of austerity fostered by the *troika* (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF)[73].

At the turn of the 21st century, Western Europe has seen a surge of left- and right-wing populism[74]. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders is probably one of the most famous European populists[75]. Emphasising his opposition to Muslim migration, his Party for Freedom (PVV) has been in the Dutch Parliament since 2010[76]. In Italy, populism has been more successful. Whilst there is a question of whether the former Minister Silvio Berlusconi was a populist[77], there is no doubt that two populist parties govern now in coalition. Beppe Grillo's *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (Five Star Movement) has successfully used social media

[71] See a discussion on Polish populism in Sztompka (2016)

[72] Whether or not Golden Dawn is a populist party is controversial. See Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014)

[73] For a discussion of populism in Greece, see Kriesi (2014) and Stavrakakis & Katsambekis (2014)

[74] Taggart (2017) provides an up-to-date discussion on populism in Western Europe

[75] For populism in the Netherlands, see Otjes and Louwerse (2015)

[76] His discourse is similar to that of Sweden Democrats and the Austrian Freedom Party

[77] For a discussion on populism in Italy, see Segatti and Capuzzi (2016) and Verbeek and Zaslove (2016)

to criticisepolitical corruption and multinationals' interference in politics. The *Lega Nord* (Northern League) presents the hardworking North in opposition to the 'lazy' South, the corrupt elites and refugee immigration. The League represents a case of confluence between regionalism and populism which sometimes drive European politics. Another well-known case of European populism is Jean Marie and Marine Le Pen's National Rally (formerly *Front National*). Le Pen(s) have reached the second round in French Presidential elections twice (2002 and 2017). After gaining the leadership of the party, Marine Le Pen expanded the National Front's primary narrative from its unique focus on anti-immigration to demand greater sovereignty for the French people against international economic and political powers. As she put it,

> "In many countries, there is this current [trend] of being attached to the nation and rejecting untamed globalisation, which is seen as a form of totalitarianism. It's being imposed at all costs, a war against everybody for the benefit of a few." (Le Pen, 2016).

In Le Pen's program, the two extremes of populist traditions intersect. On one hand, her proposals are inherently xenophobic; on the other, she advocates a rise in pensions and incomes and expresses opposition to international organisations[78]. In this latter recommendation, her proposals align with Jean-Luc Mélenchon, another well-known French (left) populist whose narrative is more like that of Bernie Sanders in the USA[79].

Podemos (We Can) in Spain is another major example of left-populist activity[80]. The intellectual foundation of the party can be traced to a group of young academics including Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón who, after had studied Latin American populism, decided to take populist lessons on board. *Podemos* was able to galvanise the *indignados*' social

[78] For a deeper discussion on Le Pen's programme, see Goodwin (2016).
[79] For a brief discussion on Mélenchon see, Mouffe (2018a)
[80] See, for instance, Betz (2016), Gamper Sachse (2018), Ramiro and Gomez (2017)

mobilisation under a discourse against the political, economic and judicial elites who they accused of corruption and of keeping Franco's dictatorship alive.

Together with the election of Donald Trump as US President, the event that has more deeply contributed to popular imagination on populism is Brexit[81]. Populist parties themselves have not been particularly successful in the UK, where the best populist performer in general elections was the 2015 UK Independence Party, who won a single seat in the House of Commons[82]. However, when in 2016, 51.89% of the voters in the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum voted to Leave, Brexit was seen as a populist success. The leave campaign appeared to unite left and right populism, with some people voting leave as they perceived European integration as a cultural threat whilst others voting leave as they were against the power of international organisations of governance (i.e. the *troika*) and the rising inequalities associated with neoliberal globalisation. Ever since, populist discourses have more clearly infiltrated UK mainstream parties. Famous Leave 'populist' campaigners included Michael Gove and Boris Johnson, both within the Conservative party. Also in the Labour party, many considered Jeremy Corbyn a 'user' of populist rhetoric. As quoted by Flinders (2018, p. 233), the opening lines of Corbyn's first speech of the 2017 campaign were,

> "The dividing lines in this election could not be clearer from the outset … It is the establishment versus the people and it is our historic duty to make sure that the people prevail … We don't fit in their cosy club. We're not obsessed with the tittle-tattle of Westminster or Brussels. We don't accept that it is natural for Britain to be governed by a ruling elite, the City and the tax-dodgers, and we don't accept that the British people just have to take what they're given, that they don't deserve better."

[81] For a discussion on Brexit and populism, see Goodwin (2016) and Goodwin and Heath (2016).

[82] UKIP, however, has been more successful in local and European elections. UKIP won 24 MEPs in the 2014 European Parliament elections becoming the most voted party. In the 2019 European elections, the Brexit party of Nigel Farage gained 29 MEPs out of 73.

Despite this quote, whether or not Corbyn used populist rhetoric has been a matter of intense academic debate[83]. Similarly to Sanders, Corbyn's support for a multicultural Britain is seen to share little ground with other famous manifestations of populism such as Bolzonaro or Trump. However, what this brief and limited review of populist activity illustrates is the diversity of the populist phenomenon. For my purpose here, the key question is then, how do we define populism in a way that allows productive analysis?

Defining populism

There is a general agreement that populism is a 'vague' term[84] referring to political practices that polarise society into two distinct groups, the elite and the people, where 'the people' underpin the ultimate source of the general will. Beyond this starting point of agreement, political sciences disagree in practically everything else. Populism has been conceptualised, among others, as an ideology, a discourse, a style, a strategy, a performance and a logic, with a definition such as[85],

> "an appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society" (Canovan, 1999, p. 3).
>
> "as a political strategy through which a personalist leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers." (Weyland, 2001, p. 14).
>
> "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2007, p. 23).

[83] For a discussion of Corbyn and populism, see March (2017), Mouffe (2018a)

[84] See Canovan (1999), Gridon and Bonikowski (2013), Martinelli (2016) and Mudde (2017)

[85] For a discussion on the different definitions of populism, see for these see, Gridon and Bonikowski (2013), Moffit and Tormey (2013), De La Torre (2019) and Rovira Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo and Ostiguy (2017)

> "a Manichaean discourse that sees politics as a struggle between a reified will of the people and a conspiring elite" (Hawkins, Dudley & Tan, 2016, p. 95)
>
> "a particular moralistic imagination of politics, a way of perceiving the political world which places in opposition a morally pure and fully unified people against small minorities, elites in particular, who are placed outside the authentic people. (Müller, 2015, p. 83).

Despite their many differences, definitions of populism can be placed on a spectrum from the most inclusive to the most exclusive ones. The most inclusive or minimal definitions look for general patterns shared by all cases defined as populist, considering what is at the 'core' of populism. My initial definition in this section is a minimal definition. The most exclusive or maximal definitions provide four additional criteria to refine the meaning of populism.

Maximal perspectives of populism

Some of those calling for a narrower conceptualisation of populism emphasise the role of the leader and their strategies to secure power (Weyland, 2017). From this perspective, populist movements always display authoritarian and charismatic leadership and the leader presents themselves as one who unites the people and represents their true nature. This conceptualisation of populism has triggered parallelism between populism and fascism and, more widely, contributed to the demonisation of populism. It is easy to see how, for instance, Donald Trump clearly illustrates authoritarian leadership. This focus on the role of the leader, nevertheless, fails to consider the etymological roots of populism where the focus is on 'the people' and not in its leaders[86]. More importantly, if we take this perspective on board, too many cases from the People's Party, the Tea Party or Brexit without clear

[86] For a discussion on the problematics of leadership-focused conceptualizations of populism, see Moffit and Tormey (2013) and Mudde (2017)

leadership should be excluded from discussions on populism. Indeed, this perspective signals authoritarian movements but not necessarily populism.

A second group has argued that, to better define populism, we need to refine the way we conceptualise the people. According to Müller (2017), populism is *per se* anti-pluralist: it always considers the people to be a homogenous group that aims to destroy its enemies. This perspective on populism, whilst more widely accepted than that one focusing on leadership, is also questionable. Although certain populists (e.g. Donald Trump) are anti-pluralists, anti-pluralism is more widely embedded within democratic politics and not all manifestations of populisms are anti-pluralists. There are numerous cases in history where non-populist movements have aimed to 'destroy' their enemies, prohibiting, for instance, political parties and movements. The pro-independence Basque *Herri Batasuna* and Northern Irish *Sinn Féin* have been proscribed more than once under the authority of non-populist leaders[87]. Further, many examples of populist activity have shown that populism can be heterogeneous and plural. SYRIZA, for instance illustrates, "a common democratic struggle that is supposed to hold the various subjects together, orienting their action towards a common cause: the overthrowing of two-partyism and austerity policies" (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 132). Again, if we take this perspective on board, well-recognised cases such as SYRIZA and Brexit should be excluded from being called 'populist'. Even *Podemos*, led by political scientists who self-define themselves as populists and who studied populism to design a political strategy to gain power, should be crossed from the populist list. Anti-pluralism underpins many populist discourses, but it does not define them all.

A similar analysis can be made about those narrowing the definition of populism with nativist principles (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). There are certainly examples of extreme-right populism that advocate and/or enact xenophobic attitudes and

[87] See Bourne (2012)

policies. Such is the case, for instance, of Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands or Donald Trump. But, if we define populism with these principles, we probably will end up defining extreme-right ideologies rather than populism in itself. Whilst the association between populism and xenophobia can be tracked to Hofstead's text in the 1950s and the parallelisms drawn between fascism and populism, such associations are highly debatable. Barak Obama himself, likely referring to Donald Trump, once argued,

> "Somebody else who has never shown any regard for workers, has never fought on behalf of social justice issues or making sure that poor kids are getting a decent shot at life or have healthcare – in fact, has worked against economic opportunity for workers and ordinary people, they don't suddenly become a populist because they say something controversial in order to win votes. That's not the measure of populism. That's nativism or xenophobia or worse"[88].

What is more, there are numerous cases worldwide where populists, some of which self-defined, challenge xenophobia and racism (e.g. Pablo Iglesias; Evo Morales; Bernie Sanders).

The fourth group of academics have attempted to sharpen the etymology of populism by considering the performative style portrayed by populists (Moffit & Tormey, 2014; Ostiguy, 2017). According to this latter perspective, populists present themselves as outsiders, challenging political, social and even epistemological conventions, performing in opposition to political correctness. Against traditional politics, where politicians often present themselves through rationalistic or ethically orientated discourses, populists use slang and metaphors, and engage with 'raw' practices to offer simple and direct solutions. This conceptualisation of populism helps us to better understand why the media has characterised populist as buffoons[89], but the question here is, is this performative style what defines

[88] See, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/30/remarks-president-obama-prime-minister-trudeau-canada-and-president-pe%C3%B1a

[89] https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2018/09/how-the-eu-is-fighting-back-against-populism/

populism? Or, instead, is this performative style a consequence of the populist emphasis on the people, their practices and knowledges? There are certainly numerous cases where populists have utilised this performative style; clear examples include, for instance, Donald Trump in the USA, Pauline Hanson in Australia and Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal. But this is not always the case: Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA leader), Preston Manning in Canada and Alberto Fujimori in Peru engaged with more conventional political attributes. It seems more likely that populists respond to the image they associate with the people: if they see the people as 'raw', they perform 'raw' manners; if they see them as 'traditional', they perform 'traditional' manners.

The challenge of maximal perspectives of populism

Underpinning these maximal perspectives of populism lie attempts by political scientists to find a detailed definition that, whilst inclusive enough, is operational enough to pursue empirical analysis. The problem of minimal definitions, such as the one presented in this book, is that they are too general to allow quantification and or a meaningful comparison. However, in narrowing down their definitions, political scientists attribute additional content to populism (i.e. authoritarianism, xenophobia, anti-pluralism and performative style), challenging the agreed principle; that is: populism is vague and thin [90]. It is precisely because populism is thin that it is often combined with more thick ideologies such as totalitarianism, fascism and socialism. Only the thin nature of populism helps us to understand why the populist activity is divergent across time and space. Canovan (2004) argues that populists "take on the colour of their surroundings" (p. 242). Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has little to do with Spanish Deputy Pablo Iglesias.

[90]For a discussion on this, see Canovan (2004), Mudde (2007), Laclau (2007) and Mudde (2017).

Maximal definitions of populism, nevertheless, are very appealing to mainstream media as they offer a clearer and neater image that can be easily distributed[91]. It is easier to say, Trump is populist - he is racist, authoritarian and a liar - and Sanders is not, than to say they both are populists in their own way but they appeal to different configurations of the people. Or, similarly, it is easier to explain that both Evo Morales and Viktor Orbán are populists because they challenge democracy[92] rather than question the meaning of democracy. Often, these issues result in populism being demonised[93]. On occasions, populists are portrayed as buffoons, demagogues, racists and, they are seen as a democratic risk[94]. This line of thought deriving from Hofstadter's 1955 analysis goes unchallenged, with all those opposed to status quo politics being perceived as threats. On other occasions, debatable parallelisms drawn between fascism and populism are privileged and only populists that perfectly match the public image – such as Donald Trump - are considered. As a consequence of this, populism is confused with fascist or racist ideologies triggering the inadequate responses of those concern about such ethically problematic stances. As Stavrakakis et al. (2017) explain,

> "in the anti-populist discourse, 'populism' functions like such an empty signifier, but this time a negatively charged one: as a discursive vessel capable of comprising an excess of heterogeneous meanings, operating as the synecdoche of an omnipresent evil and associated with irresponsibility, demagogy, immorality, corruption, destruction, and irrationalism" (Stavrakakis et al.. ... et al, 2017, p. 30).

[91] There are very good exceptions to this. For instance, see https://www.theguardian.com/world/series/the-new-populism

[92] https://institute.global/policy/populist-harm-democracy-empirical-assessment

[93] For a discussion on this demonization, see Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014) and Stavrakakis (2017)

[94] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/12/labour-antisemitism-populist-left-jews-bankers-rothschild

If we were to agree that contemporary populism requires an adequate educational response, we would need to avoid the *a priori* demonisation of populism and approach populist activity in all its vagueness and complexity. Thus, the earlier definition of populism as a thin term referring to political practices that polarise society into two distinct groups, the elite and the people, where the people underpin the ultimate source of the general will. This minimal definition underpins conceptualisations such as Hawkins' in which a wide range of politicians and political parties, including Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, are included. This minimal definition, however, also alerts us to the contextual thick ideological stances attached to populism. Populism adapts to its surroundings and manifests itself in different ways in different times and places. Thus, when considering contexts of populism, the context needs to be examined in all its complexity taking into account both populism and the thick political content that accompanies it.

Causes of contemporary populism

Changes in media

Political scientists have also paid attention to the roots of contemporary populism[95]. Very often it has been argued that changes in media production, distribution and consumption have favoured the rise of populist leaders. More than ever, politics are mediatised[96]; they are constantly shaped by mass media in a way that benefits those politicians whose political style is 'atypical'. In contrast with conventional politics, where compromise, reason and neutrality are perceived as positive political attitudes, mass media favours confrontation, emotionalisation and dramatisation. As such, intentionally or not, populist leaders with dramatised and emotionalised messages secure more media attention than politicians with a

[95] In political science, researchers often differentiate between supply-side discussions (i.e. what makes a politician, a party or a discourse populist?) and demand-side discussions (i.e. what makes a society responsive to the populist appeals) (i.e. Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Sztompka, 2016; Reznik, 2016). Whilst the previous section focused mainly on the supply-side, this section examine the demand-side.

[96] Kresi (2014)

more neutral style[97]. It is widely accepted that social media has facilitated the spread of populist discourses[98]. Populists often use social media as an independent channel to directly communicate with the people. For instance, Donald Trump campaign against 'Fake News' with tweets such as "The FAKE NEWS media (…) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!"[99] is quite well known. Besides, social media also facilitates a direct and simple language that very often is used by populist leaders to differentiate themselves from the elites' rationalistic or ethically orientated discourses. Twitter, one of the favourite social networking sites of Trump and Corbyn alike, has a limit of 280 characters per tweet, which facilitates the direct and simple style of politics that many populists embrace.

These changes in patterns of communication are often offered as explanations of the current success of some populisms but we should be cautious in supposing they explain contemporary populist activity overall. The explanations implicitly rely on maximal definitions of populism in which populism is defined in relation to a particular performative style. Whilst such style is often a consequence of how populist leaders represent the people, other populists have very different political manners that do not necessarily benefit from post-truth communication contexts or the mediatisation of politics. Further, while many populist movements use social media as a channel to distribute their messages, the same could be said of many others that are not populist. For instance, movements such as Occupy Wall Street or Indignados have successfully used social media to organise and communicate with activists and the wider public[100]. Similarly, in the 2016 US elections campaign, not only Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders but also Hillary Clinton used twitter to distribute their

[97] For a good discussion on the mediatization of politics, see Esser and Matthes (2013) and Manucci (2017).

[98] For a discussion on populism and social media, see Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel (2017), Manucci (2017), and Verbeek and Zaslove (2016)

[99] @realDonaldTrump, tweet 27 February 2017

[100] See, for instance, Gerbaudo (2017) Gerbaudo, P. (2017). Social media teams as digital vanguards: the question of leadership in the management of key Facebook and Twitter accounts of Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and UK Uncut. Information, Communication & Society, 20(2), 185-202.

messages[101]. Thus, whilst we can probably argue that in many places patterns of communication have had political consequences, these consequences are not limited to populist practices nor do they have the same impact across all manifestations of populism.

Globalisation

Populism has also been linked to rapid social changes associated with globalisation trends[102]. Until now, liberal democratic states have unavoidably been connected to nation-state structures. However, the acceleration of the globalisation process has separated sovereignty from the states and, whilst most states do not dominate worldwide politics, they need to react to global phenomena including global capital, climate change and transnational terrorist networks[103]. Economic globalisation has eroded nation-state sovereignty, and oligarchic capital is more powerful than political sovereigns ever were. The 2008 financial crisis and the politics of austerity that followed fostered economic recession, growing unemployment and social inequalities that seriously damaged welfare- state structures where these structures existed. The rise of immigration and cultural diversity has simultaneously generated new complexities for the everyday operation of nation-states. The dubious practices of Western governments towards other populations have played a part in the spread of anti-Western sentiments seemingly connected to some terrorist activity[104]. On occasions, these trends and associated economic disparities have driven the resurgence of racist and xenophobic attitudes further damaging the lives of those in more precarious situations. According to Hanspeter Kriesi (2014), these global dynamics of economic and cultural globalisation have engendered 'losers of globalisation' who become susceptible to populist discourses. Losers of globalisation include those whose cultural values are challenged by growing multiculturalism; those who, after decades of delocalisation, feel that their

[101] For different patterns of twitter use between Trump and Clinton, see Enli (2017).
[102] See, also Inglehart and Norris (2016), Kalb (2009), Kriesi and Pappas (2015) and Martinelli (2016).
[103] For an analysis of this, see Wendy Brown (2010)
[104] A nuanced discussion around this topic can be found in Appadurai (2006)

knowledge and skills are no longer economically valuable; and, those who feel that citizens' political sovereignty is being eroded by international political and economic agenda. Populism unites those left behind in their grievances.

Whilst there is much value to analysis depicting the losers of globalisation, this analysis has two main flaws. Firstly, this theory is not helpful in understanding all instances of populist activity. Such analysis conceives populism in maximal terms with the people being defined as economically and culturally nationalist. Certainly, well-recognised populists such as Donald Trump or even Bernie Sanders oppose some form of globalisation, but they do so whilst defending a different form of it. Trump is against cultural globalisation and defends economic protectionism but yet he is very supportive of some US imperialist practices. Sanders critiques economic globalisation but he values the diversity that has followed cultural globalisation. Further, different populist leaders have openly advocated for some forms of globalisation. India's Prime Minister Modi and former Argentinian President Carlos Menem both welcomed and favoured integration into the global economy. The theory might be valuable in understanding some manifestations of populism in which the 'thin' populism is attached to 'thick' nationalism but this hypothesis is not universal and applicable to all circumstances. Secondly, the losers of globalisation thesis appears to signal unidimensional understandings of winners/losers when we know that structural conditions and power relations are multi-faceted. If we imagine the stereotypical voter of Trump –male, white, working to low middle class, middle-aged, with low educational qualifications[105] -, we could argue that the delocalisation of industry might have taken away his job and exaggerated his economic conditions. Yet, we still could see how this voter 'benefits' from low-cost products produced elsewhere and from his status as white male in a globalised world where

[105] See, for instance, Inglehart and Norris (2016)

patriarchal and racism are often institutionalised. This voter can effectively be both, winner and loser.

Educational failure

Together with changes in media and globalisation patterns, educational failure is also seen as a cause of populism. Empirical research has suggested that educational attainment is a prime predictor of populism; those graduated from colleges and universities rarely vote populist leaders, and those with lower or no educational qualifications are far more likely to support populist alternatives[106]. This relationship has been found in several contexts including, for instance, the United Kingdom and the United States[107]. In the Brexit referendum, three out of four of those with postgraduate qualifications voted 'remain' and the twenty 'most educated' areas were all 'remainers'. In Cambridge City Council district, home of the University of Cambridge, three-quarters of electors voted 'remain'. Similarly, in the 2016 USA Presidential elections, Donald Trump obtained a wide advantage of 40 points over Hillary Clinton among white non-college-educated electors and a very narrow advantage of 4 points among white college-educated. Even when considering several potential mediators including gender, race, class, age, region, education often stands out as one of the more important explanations of support for populism[108].

This relation, nevertheless, is not evident in all instances of populism. The links between populism and education are more complex in cases defined as left-wing populism. A number of left-wing populist European parties have the support of a highly educated population[109]. For instance, university-educated young professionals in situations of

[106] For the relation between populism and education, see Goodwin & Heath, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Ramiro & Gomez, 2017. Ramiro and Gomez (2017) provide a discussion of support for left populism

[107] Godwin, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Ramiro & Gomez, 2017; Segatti & Capuzzi, 2016; Spiering & Zaslove, 2017; Stanley, 2011

[108] See, for instance, Goodwin and Heath (2016), Hobolt (2016) and Runciman (2018)

[109] See, Ramiro (2016)

economic insecurity favour *Podemos* in Spain[110]. In 2017 United Kingdom general election, the Labour party experienced a surge of young university-educated voters who were attracted to the populist flavour of Corbyn's discourse[111]. In the United States, there is not a clear educational difference between those who supported Bernie Sanders and those who supported other, non-populist, Democratic candidates and demographic patterns have been found in numerous Latin American countries[112]. If we take our minimal definition of populism on board, the educational hypothesis is tenuous and highly dependent on contextual factors. Yet, this theory has implicitly nurtured both popular and academic imaginaries on populism as we shall see in chapter six.

Democratic mismatch

Much debate has taken place on the relationship between populism and democracy. Populism has been described as both a democratic threat and a democratic corrective. At one extreme, some see populism as a threat to our democratic institutions and principles. In his article, Müller argued that the difference between Trump and Sanders – populist and non-populist – was that the former was a threat to American democracy and the later was not. In the other extreme, others defend that populism might help to fix the democratic deficit of current institutions and values. That is the case of academic-politicians such as with Pablo Iglesias in Spain.

To better examine these contradictory statements, we first need to focus our attention, not on the relation between populism and democracy, but on the relation between populism and liberal democracy. Populism often questions the convenient marriage between democracy and liberalism that has dominated Western countries in the form of liberal or representative democracy[113]. Pure liberalism focuses on the principle of individual will;

[110] Ramiro and Gomez, 2017
[111] For an analysis of this, see Sloam and Henn, 2017
[112] Dyck, Pearson-Merkowitz & Coates, 2018 for US and Remmer (2012) for Latin America.
[113] For a discussion on anti-liberal populism, see Martinelli (2016) and Rummens (2017)

institutions are needed to guarantee these individual rights. Pure democracy focuses on collective equality and the general will of the people: "the *volonté générale*, which provides the ultimate source of political legitimacy." (Rummens, 2017, pp. 557-558). Anti-pluralist populist leaders like Donald Trump emphasise the democratic strand through discourses on the will of the people to challenge the liberal strand: they assume "that once 'the people' have spoken, nothing should constrain the implementation of its will" (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 195). We saw Trump making such arguments constantly during and after his impeachment. Populism is not anti-democratic but rather, anti-liberalist. What Müller means when he argues that Trump is a threat to American democracy and Sanders is not is that Trump is a threat to American *liberal* democracy and Sanders is not.

However, the populist challenge exceeds liberal institutions and particular anti-pluralist leaders[114]. Democratic systems, at least in situations in which these systems are large and complex, require a balance between aspirational and pragmatic politics. Aspirational democracy, as seen in chapter two, can be considered a utopian situation of total emancipation; one in which there is no gap between public and power, individual and collective will are one and the same, and society peacefully delivers prosperity and dignity to all. Pragmatic politics, in contrast, concentrates in solving everyday disputes by forming institutions – the rule of the law - that create precedents on how to answer such disputes. Unavoidably, in contexts of complexity, these pragmatic politics are often perceived as elitist and irresponsive. Populism utilises this internal mismatch between aspirational and pragmatic democracy; it appeals to the ideal face of democracy and questions the irresponsive elitism of its pragmatic mechanisms. Populism is not *per se* anti-democratic but it signals the impossibility of total democracy, 'a shadow of democracy' (Canovan, 1999).

[114] For a discussion on the internal contradiction of democracy, see Canovan (1999) and Arditi (2004).

Summary

Populism is a vague term referring to political practices that polarise society into two distinct groups, the elite and the people, where the people underpin the ultimate source of the general will. Manifestations of populist activity, spanning ancient Rome, to the 1900s and 2000s, can be found accross al continents, and cases are diverse in both ideological stances and modus Operandi. Thus, definitions of populism linked to authoritarianism, anti-pluralism, nativism and political incorrectness are not comprehensive and they weaken the principle that populism is thin in content, a vagueness that enables its success across local idiosyncrasies. If contemporary populism requires an adequate response, it needs to be approached in all its complexity; circumstances need to be examined locally without a priori judgements.

Global dynamics have also been linked to contemporary populism, along with changes in media production, distribution and consumption, cultural and economic globalisation and education failure. Yet caution is needed on drawing conclusions about the practical and moral consequences that might follow if these theories are simplified and universalised. Some populist leaders have benefitted from these very dynamics, whether these dynamics are causes of populism or an expression of deeper political changes. Populism, then, is not 'alien' to democracy but rather it provides evidence of an internal mismatch between aspirational and pragmatic democracy.

Chapter 4

The shadow of democracy

Abstract

Chapter four revisits the relationship between politics, democracy and populism through the lens of the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Using the example of 2019 Chilean protests as illustration, the chapter examines different periods of political cycles and, it suggests that populism more clearly manifests on times preceding organic social change. The chapter provide a social diagnosis and concludes that current manifestations of populism are a symptom of a deep crisis that affects democracy and its modern grounds. The chapter concludes outlining the implications of this crisis for political education, particularly as educators might need to readjust to a situation of uncertainty and polarization.

Key words

populism; democratic crisis; Laclau; Mouffe; protests

In recent years, it has become commonplace to begin conversations about politics and political education with a certain dismay with an apparent democratic decline where the emergence of populism has been an underlying concern. Other radical mobilisations, some violent, have also signalled imminent social catastrophe, in numerous locations, including Hong Kong, Barcelona and Lebanon.

One of the places where this has happened is Chile. In November 2019, the National Congress of Chile signed an agreement for a national plebiscite introducing a new constitution. The announcement of the plebiscite followed a month of intensive protests, in which protesters had demanded structural changes including the dismantling of the country's constitution. The question of the Constitution is particularly relevant in Chile as it symbolises

and enacts democratic deficits. The current Constitution of Chile was approved in 1980 under the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Pinochet's regime was responsible for numerous human rights breaches, including torture, murder, sexual abuse and disappearances, and of deep social and economic changes. Under Pinochet's regime, free market structured social reality to an extreme that Chile is often defined as the most neoliberal country in the world. The 1980s Constitution sealed the neoliberal foundations of the country; healthcare, pensions and education (among other social services) were left to market regulations and private interests.

A group of secondary students from three prestigious schools were at the forefront of the 2019 protests. When on the 1st of October of that year, the Chilean government announced that Greater Santiago's peak transport tickets prices would increase, the students started a campaign of fare-dodging and requested other commuters to "*¡Evade!*" (evade!). Protests rapidly grew and escalated, with police intervention and violence against protesters triggering a deeper social mobilisation. Riots coincided with peaceful demonstrations and the Government called a state of emergency in several regions. By late October, after 19 deaths, 2,300 injured, more than 2,500 arrested and 1,170 tortured or sexually abused by police officers[115], over a million people demonstrated in the streets of Santiago and numerous other cities. They demanded President Piñera's resignation and structural reforms in education, health, land rights, public transport, pensions and workers' rights and, an overall break away from Pinochet's neoliberal constitution. Eight ministries of the government cabinet resigned and on November, the National Congress announced the creation of a constitutional assembly and a new constitution plebiscite[116].

[115] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/chile-responsable-politica-deliberada-para-danar-manifestantes/

[116] The announcement of the new plebiscite did not satisfy everybody and some (reduced) protests continued until February 2020. The situation in Chile like in most places then became paralysed as a result of COVID-19, but Chileans voted to develop a new constitutions in October 2020.

How did this happen? How did a group of secondary students become the catalyst of constitutional change? What do protests, like the ones in Chile, tell us about our current system? Why is there a confluence with populism? This chapter engages with the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to revisit the relationships between politics, democracy and populism. The intention is to reconsider these political questions and their links in order to shed light on the challenges and possibilities of political education might open in our current times. The chapter begins by returning to discuss the relationship between politics and democracy. It then considers different periods of political cycles. In the subsequent section, links between populism and democracy are examined. It concludes by discussing the implications of the analysis for political education[117].

Politics and democracy

The wider meaning of politics

At the beginning of this book, politics was defined as power processes regulating differences between groups and group decision-making. Most activities we usually consider as politics respond to this definition. The 2019 Chile protests mirrored this definition; what was at stake was how to make a group decision that would consider differences between protesters and the government. More widely, discussions in governmental cabinets, in parliaments, in workspaces, even discussions at home respond to this definition as well. However, this definition also encompasses wider meanings that usually escape our every-day talk. For instance, how do we define national borders? How do we decide who is entitled to citizenship? How do we decide how many genders we recognize? How do we decide what is academic knowledge and what is not?

[117] I wish to thank my colleague and friend Jesus Marolla for his support and advise whilst writing this chapter.

If politics is always present, it is because power is foundational. According to Laclau and Mouffe, power is unavoidable, in one form or another, it circulates in all social realities. When I am at home with my partner, there are gendered and economic power relations are evident. When I am in class with my students, gender, ethnic, class, national power relations coexist in our various activities. In the Chilean case, when people were demonstrating and the police were violently reacting, many processes of power were operating simultaneously. The list could go on. In short, few (if any!) social examples exclude power. Laclau and Mouffe assume the unavoidability of power relations as a starting point. Consequently, everything in our life is political. At occasions, politics refers to regulations of group differences and decision-making through administrative processes that do not involve major social changes. In other instances, politics are power processes that regulate group differences and decision-making in which social practices or forms of the good life are instituted, contested, and defended[118]. Everything involved or resulting from these processes of deep or organic change is political. In their book, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that no social practice or form of good life has objective or natural predetermination. All social practices and all forms of human flourishing are, therefore, political. In the examples above, the old constitution was political, the challenges and defences of that constitution were also political, questions such as what is a nation, what is a citizen, what is gender or what is academic knowledge, are also political. The meaning attributed to each of these terms is political, as it is the result of a political struggle among those with different views.

Democracy as sedimented reality

Many political entities are, nevertheless, historically sedimented in such a way that we struggle to see their arbitrariness – we struggle to see that they are political and that they could be otherwise. Social practices become instituted through processes of hegemonisation

[118] See how Glynos and Howarth (2007) define "political logic" in p. 134

in which one meaning gains ideological dominance. A key example is the school. Schools, as spaces where children are educated, where teachers, exams, forms, pencils, and stones coexist, are well sedimented in our contemporary societies. The hegemonic meaning of school, as the dictionary illustrates, is “a place where children go to be educated”. But schools as mainstream venues could have been otherwise. Historically they are a relatively recent phenomena and might not exist in the future. We know of numerous societies where schools only arrived with European settlers. We know of present-day schools that are very different from what most of us usually have in mind: forest schools, schools in the Global South, for instance. Currently, my son’s school is not operating because of the coronavirus related lockdown. The school, like many other educational institutions, however, offers its 'virtual version' of online teaching. These new unexpected circumstances open the doors to politicise 'schools'. It is yet for us to see if the worldwide school lockdown might have political consequences on the way we might define schools in the future. Schools are sedimented in politics but they can be politicised again.

Democracy is both, a sedimented social practice and a sedimented form of the good life. Pragmatic democracy operates as a structure that regulates our pragmatic politics, and aspirational democracy functions as a form of good life that guide our practices. But both forms of democracy are political. They were instituted through processes regulating group differences and decision-making and they could be contested and defended. As Mouffe (2018b) explains, all practices “could always have been otherwise (…) [politics] lacks an ultimate rational ground. What appears as the natural order is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity” (p. 88). Whilst many of us might see ourselves committed advocates of democracy as a political system, it does not have any objective or natural predetermination. Democracy started at some point in our history, and one day will end.

The Political cycle

Political life operates in cycles: forms of the good life are first instituted. After some time, these forms might be challenged and, if the challenge is great enough, deposed. A new form is then invested to regulate social practices. In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau (2007a) follows the work of Antonio Gramsci to differentiate three periods of each political cycle as stability, crisis and change.

Stability

In any political situation, there is someone with power over something and someone else. This regime is often the political actor that institutes or defends a social practice (Laclau, 2007a). In contrast, the 'people' are initially unpowered in relation to the regime. Any political cycle begins with the people having a demand concerning this regime: the people challenge an existing social practice but they do not hold the power to bring the change themselves. Consequently, the people pose their demand to the regime. If their demand is satisfied, the demand is institutionalised and becomes an inherent part of the system. Conflict is here avoided, and sedimented social reality is very rarely altered.

This is what happens during times of political stability. Politics function through administrative processes. In 2019, secondary students in the Santiago metropolitan area began a campaign to refuse payment for public transport tickets. Their demand appeared to be clear and relatively 'easy'. They complained about the rise in ticket prices. Imagine for a moment that, the government would have listened to students' demand. Imagine that they would have returned to the previous prices immediately. Here, a potential conflict would perhaps have been avoided and politicisation might have not begun. The 2019 further mobilisations would perhaps never happened, at least in the shape and time they did.

Crisis

The government, nevertheless, did not respond to students' demand and this triggered a situation of crisis. Society enters crisis when some political actors feel that the system is irresponsive to their demands. We need here a multiplicity of actors who are unsatisfied with something and who want to change their existing reality. In 2019 Chile, several demands that had not received an appropriate response coexisted. Among them, students had for years demanded a new Education Act that would enable a more equitable education system. Some pensioners had stepped up their demands for a change in the Chilean pensions system: a privatised system in which 80% of pensioners received less than the minimum wage. Victims and families of those tortured or killed by the Pinochet regime were still looking for restorative justice. Indigenous communities, such as the Mapuche, demanded land rights and autonomy. Some feminist activists had further denounced institutional and domestic gender violence within the police and academia. Also the wider population more generally had suffered through an unequal social system as in health and public transport provision. They argued, "it is not $30 [the ticket's price increase], it is 30 years!". These demands were different from each other and responded to what Laclau (2007a) defines as a logic of *difference*.

Whilst different, all the demands had something in common: they perceived the existing system to be irresponsive. In Laclau and Mouffe's work, political entities are always antagonistic. They need to be built against someone or something. It is not surprising that, in 2019, police violence against young people triggered a social response of the Chilean people. In Chile, many social groups had directly suffered the consequences of Pinochet regime and his neoliberal legacy: students, pensioners, families of those tortured or imprisoned during the dictatorship, indigenous groups, feminist activists, etc. For many of them, the Chilean police (*los Carabineros*) symbolised both the former totalitarian state and its neoliberal legacy. When the *Carabineros* violently acted against young people, Chilean society mobilised. The

existence and visibility of a common antagonist – the *Carabineros* – lowered the differences among groups. The public felt solidarity with students against the police force. When the government justified *Carabineros'* response, the government itself became the common enemy to be defeated. Whilst all these groups complained about different things, they all complained to the same regime, the Chilean government and the police institutions. Differences between collectives and individual members of the collective were initially overlooked not because they shared wider aims but because they were all in solidarity *against* the same regime. This is what Laclau defines as the *equivalential* logic.

The regime struck back. The Government's reaction to protesters' demands was to start a war of position. The government claimed to be working on a new constitution and acknowledged some individual demands – pensions, transport, health, etc. However, they targeted violent activists as the real enemy of Chilean society. Sebastián Piñera, President of Chile, explicitly argued,

> "We are at war against a powerful enemy, who is willing to use violence without any limits (…) who is willing to burn hospitals, our subway stations, our supermarkets, which single aim is to damage as much as possible Chilean people. They are against all Chileans (…) who wish to live in democracy, freedom and peace".

In his account, Piñera symbolically referred to health and transport demands whilst signalling a different powerful enemy: violent protesters. In late October, he announced a New Social Agenda that had to give a response to health, pensions, salaries and violence. The challenge for this New Social Agenda was the violent protesters who had to be defeated. We can see here two political programmes: protesters who see themselves as the people and the government as the regime, and Piñera who positions pacific protesters and the government on the same side, opposed to violent activists.

Piñera's proposal of a New Social Agenda did not convince many Chileans who saw their president's proposals as an attempt to maintain existing structures of power. Piñera's comments triggered further mobilisation of more than one million people who held banners such as "we are not at war, we are united!". An overarching demand, Laclau explains, is successful "not so much to the extent that it [is] able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of the society but to the extent that it [can] articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized" (Laclau, 2011, p. 160). In the case of Chile, the New Social Agenda did not manage to unite Chileans against protesters' violence, because many protesters felt that their opposition towards Government was more important than their potential rejection of violent activities. Promises on health and/or pensions were ignored as the government was perceived to be untrustworthy. Chilean society became utterly politicised – with social mobilisation becoming the norm. Chileans experienced what Gramsci defines as an organic crisis: unstable social relations, proliferation of signifiers, antagonisms, turbulence and (on some occasions) violence resulting in many being injured and some losing their lives. The system in itself thrived, and, as Laclau (1990) puts it, "the crisis [could have been] resolved in the most varied of directions. It [was] strict possibility" (p. 50).

Change

The New Social Agenda did not convince most Chileans, but a powerful parallel demand began to gather more extensive supports. Protesters had managed to challenge existing social practices, but social practices after an organic crisis always need to be restored, one way or another. As Laclau (2005a) argues,

> "forces challenging it [the system] have to do more than engage themselves in the ambiguous position of subverting the system and, at the same time, being integrated

into it: they have to reconstruct the nation around a new popular core. Here, the reconstructive task prevails over that of subversion" (p. 178).

This is what happened in Chile. Some Chileans began demanding a new constitution. Unsatisfied demands only lead to political change when these demands are unified within a chain of equivalencies. A *chain of equivalencies* (an equivalential or discursive chain) is a theoretical tool used by Mouffe and Laclau to explain how different views are aggregated together under a common slogan or signifier. The new constitution became the signifier that could accommodate many existing demands and grouped with students, pensioners, indigenous groups, feminist activists, etc. Images from those days in Chile include, among others, a banner with two schoolchildren reading a book requesting a "new constitution" and a picture of a man – presumably a pensioner – holding a banner which reads "new constitution. No AFP[119]".

For slogans to be mobilised in support of collective action there is a need for many people to see the slogan representing at least one of their immediate concerns. What happens here is three different things. First, differences between groups were provisionally put aside in support of the achievement of the wider aim. Pensioners, indigenous communities, feminists, students, and others had different aims and would likely disagree about how the new constitution should look like. And, yet, they all overlooked their differences in support of the common cause. In theoretical terms, the logic of equivalence prevailed over the logic of difference. Second, the new demand became the common slogan – the *empty signifie*r that "assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality" (Laclau, 2007a, p. 70). In Chile, the new constitution was seen as potentially accommodating all concerns including education, pension, land rights. And the identity of the Constitution itself was split, "on the one hand, it maintains its own "literal" sense; on the other, it symbolizes the contextual

[119] AFP stands for Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones, Chilean Pension System

position for which it is a substitutable element” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 63). Whilst people demanded a new constitution, that constitution represented far more than a written document: it represented structural social change. And, more importantly third, by accepting the empty signifier – the new constitution –, all groups became powerful enough to construct an alternative social order. It was precisely because there was an alternative that social change became possible.

The New Social Agenda was Piñera’s attempt to counteract the new Constitution demand. The Constitution, in that sense, became what Laclau’s calls a “floating signifier”: a demand shared by two different political perspectives, each with its own political frontier. In the Chilean case, Piñera offered a New Social Agenda positioned against violent protesters. Protesters, instead, argued for a new Constitution that was seen as a way of defeating existing governmental arrangements. Banners responding to Piñera’s offer claimed, “we ask for a new constitution, and you offer us more repression" or "we are not in war! New constitution". If Laclau is right, whoever would win the struggle for the floating signifier would have the power to define the new system.

On November the 7th, another unexpected actor entered the ‘war’. Local authorities across the country organised a plebiscite that, among other questions, would ask the people of Chile about the possibility of having a new constitution. The government was forced to react and on the 10th, they announced a new constitution would be drafted. Many protesters did not approve the new constitution as a solution as they saw in it a ‘made-up’ version of Piñera’s New Social Agenda that would not challenge the structural democratic deficits of the system. However, enough protesters were convinced and the country returned to a certain normality. Indeed, the new constitution was the only alternative available that could somehow respond to the range of unsatisfied demands. The persistent protesters were not offering anything better.

Democracy and populism

The populist symptom

Laclau (2007a) argues that populism is an intrinsic part of any process of social change and that all organic politics begin with populist movements. Populism is always latent but manifests differently in different moments of political cycles. In stable periods, where administrative politics prevail and politics are institutionalised, demands are often directly absorbed by the system. If a large population complains about ticket prices, a negotiation committee is organised and a consensual solution agreed. Or otherwise, if complaints are important enough, a new or energised political party incorporates these complains and replaces the former government. In both cases, the number of coexisting demands is not large enough and the perception of the regime being an antagonistic force is not strong enough. What separates political movements is more important than what unites them and no major social change takes place.

Populism more clearly manifests in processes of social change. In turbulent times, numerous demands that have not been absorbed by the pragmatic system coexist. The system is, therefore, seen as irresponsive and with suspicion by numerous and heterogeneous groups. The logic of equivalence prevails over that of differences and the society becomes polarised "in rupturist discourses which tend to divide the social into two camps" (Laclau, 2007a, p. 154). People are too angry against the regime to discuss their inner differences. This is when we see society divided into two distinct groups and where 'the people', without making any specific claim, see themselves as democratically legitimate.

This is, to some extent, what happened in 2019 Chile. Calling the 2019 Chilean mobilisations populists might be surprising to many. Indeed, none of the maximal definitions outlined in chapter three is helpful to explain the protest. Their demands were certainly not nativist, and if anything, they would probably be on the left side of the political spectrum.

Protesters did not have a leader – no one could embody the authoritarian/totalitarian principles that some associate to populism. Protesters were a heterogonous group. However, the society did become polarised between the Chilean people who were demonstrating and requesting deep social changes and the Government and police who opposed them. The people felt, that regardless of who had been elected, they held democratic legitimacy to an extent that parallel plebiscites were organised. It was a demonstration of the people against the elite. This is exactly my definition of populism: a vague or thin term referring to political practices that polarise society into two distinct groups, the elite and the people, where the people underpin the ultimate source of democratic legitimacy. Some might here argue that if a horizontal, egalitarian-orientated and plural movement like the 2019 Chilean protests is populist, then that must be the case for everything which escapes conventional politics. They are right, indeed. Minimal definitions of populism are not helpful to compare political movements but are better positioned to diagnose our reality. Populism is an intrinsic part of politics and more clearly manifests in times of organic crisis. This is what populism is: an alert to a crisis, and an anticipation of times of change.

Current manifestations of populism are symptoms of a very deep crisis. According to Gramsci, when we transition from one social order to another, a variety of morbid symptoms appear. Babic (2020) explains,

> "The morbidity of the 'symptoms' stems from their identification as outgrowths of the 'dying' order. The symptoms that Gramsci observed during his lifetime were, for example, open political violence; outbreaks and manifestations of mass discontent; the rise and acceptance of extreme political positions and their respective leaders; shifts in international relations of unprecedented dimensions; and the sudden depletion of once strong institutions. Those symptoms are morbid because they show that the existing order suffers from existential problems that are unlikely to be solved within the limits

of the old framework. At the same time, a new, hegemonically stable order does not seem to be on the rise, ready to supplant the old one. This crisis period is thus shaped by morbidities that cannot be managed but at the same time do not represent a viable alternative for the future". (p. 7).

Does this sound familiar? Let me examine this description in relation to Chilean protests. We saw politicisation including political violence, manifestations of mass discontent, extreme political positions, etc. We also saw how society became 'populistic': polarised between 'the people' and 'the elite' represented by the existing government and their police force. We saw all this before the new common demand – the promise of a new social order – became apparent. All this happened before the alternative emerged and change was announced.

The same could be said to be happening on a larger scale. We are living in turbulent times where existing institutions appear to be in decline (the House of Commons in London was suspended!). We have seen different societies becoming politicised, violence from protesters and/or police in places we did not expect (Hong Kong, Santiago, Barcelona); shifts in international relations (Brexit, Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership). Many demands coexist and many seem discontented with the way things are done. For every issue, whether it be climate change, lockdown strategies, gender equality, indigenous rights, statues, etc., some people want more while others want less. And in these tumultuous times we have seen the rise and fall of populist leaders and movements. Populists are more a symptom that accompanies these changes, not a trigger. The deposition of these leaders will not change the society that made them. We are living an organic crisis and we are moving from one social order to another: we are in an interregnum (in-between both realms), and many appear to believe that this will be accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A broken democratic equilibrium

Thus populism might be seen as an expression of a deep democratic crisis. Democracy itself is at stake in this organic crisis. As examined in chapter three, populism is not an exception or something 'alien' to our societies[120]: history tells us that, in some countries like the USA, Argentina or Italy, populism has existed intermittently for decades. But the recent success of populist leaders perhaps tells us something about our current reality. Following Arditi's[121] metaphor, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) write,

> "Populism acts like a drunken guest at a dinner party: While usually it does not respect the rules of public contestation, it spells out painful but real problems of the existing political order (p. 209)".

If we take this analysis on board, we need to understand populism as a latent or manifest consequence of the tension between ideal and pragmatic democracy. Mouffe and Laclau argue that the relationship between aspirational democracy and pragmatic democracy is contingent but necessary. Aspirational democracy signal principles of the good life and pragmatic democracy attempts to give responses to everyday problems that mirror these principles. Democracy is always fragile as it is sustained by an unstable balance between aspirations and everyday particulars. We are always trying to reach our destination, but as we never arrive there, there is always the possibility for new inputs.

Populism is always ready to manifest itself when an unstable equilibrium is broken. Perhaps this is what is happening to our democracies: the mismatch between ideal and pragmatic politics is too apparent. Aspirational democracy has continued to promise prosperity, individual and collective dignity and equal distribution of power. This is very distinct from the pragmatic systems many of us encounter where the only preserved principles are individualism, competition and productivity. Chileans were told for thirty years

[120] For a good discussion on this, see Mudde (2010).
[121] See, Arditi (2005, p. 90-91).

that they were a democratic country, but there was little in their regime that signalled an equal distribution of powers and many felt that their dignity had never been restored. In Chile, as in many other countries, the 'neoliberal good life' was so institutionalised that there is not much scope for debate and none for equality. Populism is here signalling that we have stretched too far in the separation between aspiration and pragmatic democratic politics. Our existing social order does not appear to satisfy anybody. As David Runciman (2018) explains, people are angry with institutions because they are "tired".

What comes next?

For change to happen, populism needs to lose part of its intrinsic vagueness and become something different. In other words, it needs to do something other than subverting and antagonising the regime: it needs to provide an alternative. Chilean protesters needed to do more than opposing the existing government and demanding their resignation – the populist stage -; they needed to build a new constitution – the restorative stage. The restorative stage is the moment in which a new social order is instituted.

Whilst many believe that deep structural changes are happening or are about to happen and that we are living an organic crisis, nobody knows where we are going. Current manifestations of populism might provisionally dissipate or eventually disintegrate themselves into more defined alternatives but these alternatives have yet to be unfolded. Mouffe (2018) has recently written that we are witnessing how a "variety of anti-establishment movements, both from the right and from the left" (p. 5) call into question the neoliberal hegemonic formation. She believes that left forms of populism will take control as it happened in several places in Latin America. Michael O'Sullivan (2019) suggests that we are moving from a globalised world to a multi-polar one, in which each pole will clearly manifest its true nature, either this is totalitarianism or some form of restored Keynesian democracy. More pessimistically, David Runciman (2018) anticipates a slow death of

democratic systems whose authoritarian, elitist and technocratic alternatives do not offer much scope for hope. We are yet to see the level, extent and 'victims' of our current organic crisis and even more so to see what alternative demands will emerge. But there appears to be very little doubt that something is broken in our democracy. As to what comes next, we don't yet know.

Political education in democratic crisis

Political educators driven by the need of doing something against 'nasty' forms of populism might be tempted by discourses that position populism as the enemy to be beaten. But the answer to this concern is not to demonise populism or 'the people' as there is no sharp divide between politics and populism – they both are forms of politics that signal different points on political cycles. Less populist politics signal times of pragmatic politics when social practices are only defended and slowly become sedimented. Populist politics signal times of turbulence and change, when social realities are simultaneously instituted, contested, and defended. Struggling against populism is struggling against the symptom but will do nothing against its cause. As Babic (2020) explains above, our existing order is unlikely to be saved within the limits of our old frameworks. Indeed, we are probably at a point of no return.

The situation is particularly challenging for political educators. Many existing political education practices are built under the assumption that democracy is desirable and will stay. They are strong forms of education underpinned by robust democratic beliefs and sedimented understandings of the world. But democracy does not have any objective or natural predetermination, it is a political project regulating differences and group decision-making. A political project that was once instituted and now appears to be in crisis. What is the desirable future we look to decide what we do in the present? My argument is that, given the current circumstances of crisis, political education needs to readjust to a situation of

politicisation and uncertainty. We are all living, and might live for a while, what Chileans experienced in October 2019: our societies might be polarised, young people might lead political mobilisation and political action might escape control of any form of pragmatic politics. In this interregnum between what we were and what we are to be, conflict and dispute will likely prevail and the politicisation of schools and other social spaces will be unavoidable. Uncertainty might become the norm, without any of us able to determine what is going on with present politics and what is the future we should prepare our students for. While this is certainly a frightening challenge for many of us, we need to try to help young people be prepared for these times of uncertainty and conflict.

Under these circumstances, the role of political educators is to be active members of the reconstructive task. I am not assuming here that we are moving to a new social system, as some claim, or that we are moving towards no social system at all, as others do. My argument is that, in times of uncertainty, political educators might need to consider how they can help young people to defend or institute new social practices. How do we help them to read and reinterpret our confusing present? How do we help them to imagine new futures? And how do we do all this, when we do not know where we are going (if we are going anywhere!) and when we suspect that everything we know might be in crisis?

Summary

This chapter has expanded the definition of politics: politics are the way through which social practices are instituted, contested, and defended. All social practices are political, including the more sedimented ones, as they all were instituted at some point, and they can be politicised – contested and defended.

Following the work of Laclau and Mouffe, societies become politicised when there are several existing demands to which existing powers do not give a response. This often leads to a moment of turbulence – an organic crisis that provisionally breaks society in two

groups opposed to each other. This is when populism – the political practice that polarises society into two distinct groups – is more apparent. For the crisis to be resolved, these heterogeneous demands need to find some common ground: a common demand, slogan, leader, etc. that signals an alternative to the existing power. To become powerful enough to trigger change, however, this common demand needs to be 'empty' and yet still offer a promise for a better future.

Current manifestations of populism might be a sign that pragmatic democracy is dying and that we are living in times of deep structural change; we are living times of turbulence, politicisation and uncertainty. Many populists, such as discussed in chapter four, challenge existing social practices without suggesting alternatives, anti-populists defend those practices and wish to return to stability. In these conditions, political education needs to reinvent itself.

Chapter 5

Agents navigating fantasies

Abstract

Chapter five provides a theoretical account of subjectivity to revisit the way political education approach freedom and autonomy. Illustrated by the case of Brexit, the chapter begins conceptualising subjectivity in its open, relational, and affective dimensions. The chapter then explores the conceptual tool of fantasies and it examines how populist and non-populist discourses are trapped within the fantasmatic structure of modernity. The chapter then considers how we can learn to live more sustainable and ethical lives and the implications of this for political education.

Keywords

subjectivity; affect; fantasies; Berlant; Brexit

When Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016, many European academics working in British universities felt the mix of shock and terror that is associated with traumatic experiences. For example, Lorena Georgiadou (2018) published some of her thoughts both preceding and following the Brexit vote:

> "June 23, 2016, 2 p.m.
>
> I am quite excited about today. I've come to terms with not having a right to vote in this referendum. You see, it's not the first time I'm not participating in important political decision-making processes. In the 10 years I've lived abroad, I have missed out on six general elections and one referendum in my home country (Greece) and three general elections in my country of residence (United Kingdom). I accept this submissively – it was my choice to leave home after all – but with an undiminished

interest in the process and the result. Today I'm eager to see the percentage with which the Remain side will win. Because I'm sure people are voting 'in'

(…)

June 24, 3:30 a. m.

I open my eyes, (…). It takes me a few seconds to realise that 'Brexit' is happening. I am wide awake in a second. I feel paralysed. Images and sounds reach me but don't register. Then the journalist utters: 'We are absolutely clear now that there is no way that the remain side can win'. 'The British people have spoken, and the answer is: we're out'. We. Are. Out. The words feel like a slap in the face. What does this mean for us? What does it mean for me?" (pp. 27-28).

Paradoxically, similar feelings are described by those who supported the Leave vote. The tabloid *The Independent* interviewed inhabitants from Salford, a city of Greater Manchester (North-West England) considered Labour heartland, where more than 56% voted Leave. Among them, a woman described as a sales assistant reported,

> "I would like to say on behalf of Leave we all know that there may be tough times ahead (…) In my 53 years I've had my fair share of them and they are not nice. Tough times make you unable to sleep, cry yourself to sleep, panic about everything – horrible. (…) "But tough times also mean coming out on the other side – which we will – feeling stronger and able to deal with whatever life throws at us. We are a nation of strong hardworking and proud people. Do not call us morons or idiots. As a person who has nearly hit rock bottom but pulled myself up again I'm prepared to do it again for a better society."

As a European academic working in a British institution, my reaction was similar to Georgiadou above. It felt to me that my love story with the island had reached its end. I had never felt Britain was perfect, some academic and political institutions embraced elitism in a

way that troubled me, but I did feel that the country enjoyed higher levels of prosperity than in my country of birth. As someone who grew up in a region that by then had little evidence and value for ethnic, linguistic, religious and basically any form of diversity, I always felt welcome by an inclusive society that did not appear to judge you for who you are but for what you did. Indeed, in the North, in Manchester, no one noticed or cared that my accent and manners revealed traces of my working-class provincial background.

Brexit was followed by some emails of caring colleagues apologising for their country's vote. There was no one within my circle of academic friends who would even consider defending Brexit. However, I became worried when the tabloid The Daily Mail began a campaign to encourage Brexiter students to denounce their lecturers if they were displaying remain-oriented beliefs. I had some students from Salford and other Brexiter fiefdoms of whom I became a little suspicious. Whilst most of my students did not respond to what many thought to be the profile of Leave supporters, my teaching changed. I no longer felt the position of power I had experienced before; instead, I began monitoring myself, worrying that one of my students would question my right to say something or even my right to be here.

It never happened. Instead, some of my white students showed embarrassment about Brexit and willingness to revoke the vote. I noticed that, when talking about Brexit, some of them did not look at me, suddenly deviating their eyes into their notebooks and phones as if Brexit was more painful for them than for me. They blamed older generations for their 'bigotry'. Simultaneously, some of my 'Black, Asian, and minority ethnic' (BAME)[122] students demonstrated their solidarity. They nodded their heads signalling approval if I mentioned I was afraid of not being welcome. A mixed group of students just evidenced symptoms of tiredness about the debate.

[122] BAME is the acronym often used in British universities

This chapter uses the example of Brexit to illustrate a discussion on the questions of political subjectivity and freedom. It begins by conceptualising subjectivity and examining some of its central features. It then moves to discuss the ideological mechanisms named 'fantasies', and to examine how populist and aspirational democracy fantasies regulate affects. The possibilities of traversing the fantasy are then considered both by themselves and in relation to political education. The overall aim is to interrogate why people feel attached to political discourses, the challenges and possibilities these attachments can bring and the consequences of this for political education.

Conceptualising subjectivity

Subjectivity is what makes us unique and distinctive from everybody else. The subject is what sociologists define as an agent, the person who, whilst dependent on their environment, acts; and subjectivity is what enables the agent to act and think independently and differently from others. Understanding subjectivity can give us crucial information to revisit how we conceptualise freedom and how we approach the education of political agents. Three discussions are central for this analysis: openness, relationality, and affect.

Political subjectivity is open.

Agents tend to favour practices that enable their enhancement in togetherness with others. Our subjectivity is open to alterity, and we feel a need for belonging. A way by which we gain this sense of belonging is by sharing stories, dreams, and rituals. Unsurprisingly, we find value in collective forms of the good life, as these investments bring us closer to others. By experiencing similar practices and desires, we are participants in each other's lives. Moreover, as most forms of the good life describe desirable sociability, our shared beliefs also give us the rules to govern our interactions. We are open to accepting tales that tell us what the good life is about because, in this openness, we become closer to others, we share something with them, and we find a way to regulate our differences.

Paradoxically, within the individualist parameters of modernity, our sociability becomes a liability. Our openness is transformed in incompleteness, and it is experienced with discomfort. Ernesto Laclau, drawing upon the work of Lacan, defines this as a "lack" that needs feeling with "concrete contents" (Laclau & Zac, 1994, p. 15)[123]. Our need for others feels like a failed wholeness to which we are continually trying to respond. In these circumstances, we accept particular lines of political argument "not because it is considered as valuable in terms of the criteria of goodness or rationality which operate at its bases, but because it brings about the possibility of an order, of a certain regularity" (Laclau, 1994, p. 3). Whilst we are constantly trying to answer the question "who am I", we are 'pushed' towards others to answer this question for us.

As seen, Georgiadou (2018) demonstrates how vital this push can be. Convinced that remain would win, she still felt excited the day of the referendum. It did not matter to her that she has missed or been excluded from several elections. She accepted her role 'submissively' but still participated in the election rituals as one more member of the community. There was something precious in 'joining in', even if only as an observer. Her need of belonging was stronger that her practical reasons for ignoring the event. She valued collectivity despite not being clear whether she was part of it.

Political subjectivity is relational.

According to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, political subjectivity is also relational. Agents are not by nature tied to any particular form of the good life that arises from any of their specific circumstances. Two people can share economic status, race, nationality, gender, and yet, they might see the world in very different ways. Students from Salford are not only students from Salford, but many other things: climate change activists,

[123] Laclau never discussed this incompleteness in relation to modernity, rather he conceptualised as human nature. However, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, only in the specific historical conditions of capitalism, the gap is experienced as a lack. See Gilbert (2014) for a discussion on this.

single mothers, refugees, etc., and the way each of them sees the world is unique because of their unique set of life experiences. Our particular circumstances condition us, but at the same time, our unique position provides us with a unique perspective.

Agents do not “possess any kind of fixed identity” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 7). When the environment changes, subjectivities evolve with their surroundings. One day, as for Georgiadou, the subject wakes up and feels she is no longer the same. She was part of a community yesterday, and now she is 'out'. Indeed, the day after the referendum, nothing had changed, but the way in which she saw others and how others saw her. Whilst she suddenly felt excluded, others, perhaps those living in Salford, felt vindicated. The subject, Laclau explains, “is nothing but the unstable articulation of constantly changing positionalities” (Laclau, 2000, p. 92). Our subjectivity more clearly manifests when our different positions demand different things from us. Just after Brexit, some Labour supporters manifested having had doubts about their choice and having made up their mind the morning of the referendum. On the one hand, similarly to left-populist SYRIZA in Greece, they felt it was time to strike back against the lack of political sovereignty caused by international capital and show discontent with the politics of austerity embraced by the European Union. On the other hand, by voting Leave, they would side with those who favoured immigration control and who believed in a mystical “nation of strong hardworking and proud people”. What would they do? For Laclau (2000), the subject is “the distance between the undecidability of the structure and the decision itself” (p. 79). Subjectivity appears when, often without thinking about it, the agent responds to contradictory demands and takes action. Georgiadou could not vote, but she was pushed to follow Brexit. The Labour supporter was pushed to vote and to vote Leave. Our unique circumstances and commitments condition our agency, and yet, we are not entirely predetermined. There is some space for manoeuvre, which allows the subject to make a choice- an assertion of that very subjectivity.

Political subjectivity is affective.

The 'push' we experience is affect[124]. When our subjectivity manifests, we are not driven by any rational calculation of the possibilities and consequences of our acts, but rather, we just 'feel' like acting in one way or another. There is nothing strange about Georgiadou's feelings or those similarly affected: excitement, submission, eager, 'slap in the face', panic, horrible, etc. What pushes us to act or not to act is affective. Our body moves, reacts, acts: affects, and it is affected by others. Affects tie us to others in ways that we are unable to rationalize. They are part of our unconscious self, that part that escapes control and full explanation. Nigel Farage, former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and passionate advocate of Brexit, once claimed,

> "I've felt from day one that being part of the European Union was a very, very, VERY BAD thing for this country. I can't explain it, but I just KNOW I'm right. And I've dedicated myself to it in a way I don't suppose has been wholly rational."[125]

What the quote suggests, besides Farage's enthusiasm for Brexit, is how political commitments are very often felt like an impulse, which cannot be explained. The affective bond is strong enough to force the subject to act in one way or another: "I'm right. And I've dedicated myself to it". It does not matter whether or not this impulse is "wholly rational". What matters is that it "feels" very clear.

Affects can be orientated towards anything: they have the power of bringing people together, binding people to things, making them react to events, or making them feel enamoured with political ideas. This last point is essential. Affects also help us to explain why some political commitments are so dear to us that we might find ourselves voting for a specific party or supporting a particular cause even when we no longer feel they represent us.

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[124] For a discussion of affects and political education, consider the extensive writing of Zembylas (2006, 2009, 2015, 2019).

[125] cited by Kelsey, 2016, p. 978

Indeed, according to Mouffe (2018), it is precisely when affects and ideas link together that politics become powerful. The affective attachment with ideas helps us to explain our political commitments. Affects are distinctive to each other as they can vary with direction and intensity. The subject can be attracted to or repulsed from something or someone, and this attraction/repulsion can be of different intensities. Michalinos Zembylas (2006) conceptualises affects as forces "that continuously make unpredictable connections with other bodies in a constant process of becoming. ''Love'' and ''hate,'' for instance, as intensities and forces exceed the confinement of a body" (p. 310). Whilst 'love' drives the subject towards one direction, 'hate' drives the subject towards another. Very often, we might love and hate the same thing or person. If love is more intense than hate, we will be affectively bond with the 'object' of our love; otherwise, we might be pushed to walk in the other direction.

The same can be said about politics. Agents only change their political commitments if they find new stronger perspectives that pull them in. When, against all odds, some Salford voters decided to vote to Leave contrary to the recommendation of the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, there was something more forceful that pulled them in the opposite direction than their bond with the Labour party and its values. For some, as for the sales assistant above, it was the promise of a "better society". For others, it was a matter of passion. A catering worker, reported in the same article, justified her Leave vote as Corbyn "wasn't passionate" enough compared to the Brexiter troop that accompanied Farage.

Fantasies

Conceptualising fantasies

Affects are malleable and can be politically domesticated through fantasies or ideological mechanisms that tell us what and how to feel. A fantasy, Laurent Berlant writes, is a "collectively invested form of life, the good life" (2011, p. 11) which has become

particularly prominent in modern times. As modern mechanisms, fantasies favour ways of thinking in which human flourishing is always constructed as a future and all-encompassing aspiration. The good life is consistently experienced as something 'to come', or to recover, rather than a situated experience in the present or a celebration of the past. A fantasy signals the promise, it takes "the subject beyond his or her nothingness, his or her mere existence as a marker at the level of alienation, and supplies a sense of being" (Fink, 1995, p. 60). The promise becomes the object of our desires, driving our affects towards a particular direction, making us act in a concrete way. There is a feeling that what will come will make us feel entirely complete in such a way that we will experience the ultimate status of inner and social harmony.

Fantasies cover over their deficits and imperfections. Fantasmatic narratives create a justification of why this promise of a good life is not yet achieved. Fantasies need to drive affects in two different ways: the promise and the obstacle (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008). The obstacles, antagonists or enemies are the challenges that need to be 'eliminated' for our dream to become a reality. Fantasies need antagonists to exist because the Us-versus-Them narrative sustains the ideological mechanism that enables us to keep going. Audre Lorde wrote,

> "We all have been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate" (2017, p. 17).

That is the burden of the modern fantasy. Regardless of who we are and how powerful we are, we are condemned to 'defeat' alterity. The centrality of the enemy in this fantasy is such that "we are precisely this drive to abolish, to annihilate our adversary" (Žižek, 1998, p. 91).

The populist fantasy

Populism is a modern fantasy of democracy. In populism, the people represent the promise that will make us feel at comfort or in line with the "fullness-to- come once a named or implied object is overcome" (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 147). The elites play the role of the obstacle or 'implied object' whose existence threatens social closure. Only because the elite exists, there is a disjuncture between individual and collective will, and between what democracy offers and what democracy delivers. In far-right forms of populism, where populism is articulated with nativism or xenophobia, the elites conspire with immigrant or racialised others who are portrayed as the cause of all social problems including lack of prosperity, high unemployment, violence, etc. In populism,

> "the enemy is externalized or reified into a positive ontological entity (even if this entity is spectral) whose annihilation would restore balance and justice; symmetrically, our own—the populist political agent's—identity is also perceived as pre-existing the enemy's onslaught" (Žižek, 2006, p. 555).

There are traces of this fantasmatic structure on the quote from the Sales assistance above. The promise to come is the "better society" which she expects to find somewhere in the aspirational future. She does not specify how this promise will be reached, but yet, she recognises that there will be obstacles: "horrible" "tough times" that make you "cry yourself to sleep" and "panic about everything". In the same piece of news, other Brexiters mentioned immigration and the Conservative political establishment as the country's problems. In Farage's quote, the "very, very, VERY BAD" European Union is the definite enemy. What matters to us here, nevertheless, is not who the other is but instead that this other is always in our way as we walk towards a better society.

The aspirational fantasy

Aspirational democracy is itself a fantasy that promises universal truth, prosperity, peace, collective and individual dignity. When, in 1992, Francis Fukuyama wrote 'The end of

history and the last man', his implicit argument was that the promise had almost been realised and that we had reached the end of our journey. Roughly twenty years later, he now claims he was wrong as he never anticipated that democracies could go 'backwards'[126] and never predicted

> "a new age of populist nationalism, in which the dominant liberal order that has been constructed since the 1950s has come under attack from angry and energised democratic majorities.". (2016, p. 6)

The current obstacle in the modern democratic fantasy sought by Fukuyama is populism itself. Populist "democratic majorities" have come to threaten the democratic aspiration and challenged "the ideas of a universal project to advance freedom, equality, and human rights" (Reimers, 2017, p. 20). Populism represents a threat to many promises made by aspirational democrats.

The fantasmatic nature of aspirational democracy can be illustrated with my own experiences above. Prior to Brexit, my feeling was that Britain was a model of a prosperous and inclusive society if not for a minority group of elitists who would rather return to the times of the British Empire. For many, obstacles were limited and distant. What Brexit demonstrated was the limitations of our analysis. The sales assistant likely thought there was something very wrong in the way things were going. Black and Asian students nodding their heads to my fears evidenced how Britain was not such an inclusive society after all and how the British Empire never fully went away. Many like me were living in a fantasy of colour blindness, harmony and inclusivity that certainly did not resonate with the experiences of everybody else.

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[126] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/09/the-man-who-declared-the-end-of-history-fears-for-democracys-future/

Social harmony never existed and how assumptions of its existence have hidden and nurtured institutional racism[127]. The aspirational democracy operated in a fantasmatic mode long before the current ascendance of populism. In the 1950s USA, Hofstadter (1955) made a case for populists being the obstacle of the modern project as populists aspired to a past rather than a future utopia[128]. A decade ago, after the 2001 terrorist attacks, it became apparent that the obstacle or the "intruder who corrupts" (Žižek, 2006, p. 555) was the immigrant Other who was not able to integrate in mimesis with the modern fantasy. In the same way that right-wing populists struggle against a suspicious alliance between elites and racialised others, aspirational democrats contend against a group of 'radicals' who encapsulate all explanations of our social deficits. Regardless of whether they are immigrant, racialised others or populists, radicals are not willing to comply with the modern fantasy of progress, consensus and transparency.

The fantasmatic structure

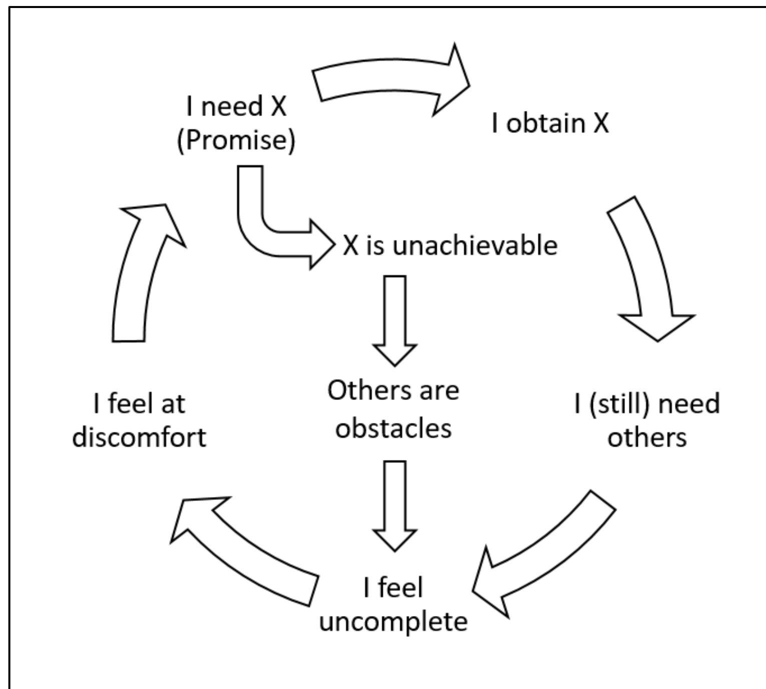
Whilst there are many differences between populist and aspirational fantasies, they both function within the limits of the fantasmatic structure. Both fantasies keep the subject at just the "right distance" (Fink, 1995, xii) between the promise of democratic wholeness and the obstacle. Indeed, the rise of populism has somehow energised the fantasmatic structure in ways that limit the possibilities for our political subjectivities. Populists are conceived as villains or as victims. In the former case, populism is a pathology[129] and support for populism is presented as an individual deficit. As for some of my white students above, the feeling was that Britain was an inclusive society and the bigot Brexiters had spoilt it all. In the latter case, those supporting populism are presented as victims of our societies, and populism is then considered a consequence of a social deficit. The stereotypical Brexit voter might be

[127] For a great analysis of this, see Ahmed (2014)
[128] Revisit discussion on chapter three and also, see Stavrakakis (2017)
[129] For a critique of this, see Mudde (2010)

seen as someone whose anger and anxiety has been driven to believe in enemies on the other side of the border, or as someone who is suffering the negative consequences of economic globalisation. Probably neither are true. When we present populists as victims or as villains, we do not consider the nuances and the complexities of moral character and the relationship between individuals and their circumstances. We are just trapped on one or another side of the fantasy condemned to loving or hating populists.

This would not be such a problem if everybody were actually happy about it. But this is not the case. Laurent Berlant (2011) argues that modern fantasies operate within a meta-fantasmatic affective structure of "cruel optimism". Fantasies make us optimistic: they direct our desires towards objects that shall make us flourish. However, this optimism is never experienced positively because the good life is always projected in the future and continuously challenged by something else. Fantasies are cruel, because even in the unlikely event of us obtaining our object of desire, somehow the meta-fantasmatic affective structure prevails directing our affects towards new inaccessible promises. We are bound not only to our hopes but also to a particular construction of the desirable good life that makes us feel permanent discomfort.

Figure 1. The meta-fantasmatic structure of cruel optimism (inspired by Berlant, 2011)



The meta-fantasmatic structure seemly underpins all political discourses that emerged from modernity. Whilst the structure at work is evident in open racist, misogynist, and capitalist accounts that present otherness as a problem, the meta-fantasmatic structure also operates at a deeper level. We might no longer be able/willing to specify this cruel construction of otherness, and yet, histories of domination and othering are so ingrained that drive our affects towards and against others (Ahmed 2014). Led by affective forces, we unconsciously reproduce the dark, oppressive side of modernity.

The meta-fantasmatic structure also grounds more 'benevolent' modern accounts. Both aspirational democrats and populists are enamoured with the promise of democracy, but this promise drives them into repetitive cycles of dissatisfaction. Do not forget here that, the aim of democracy was once centred on how to live a good life in harmony with others, and democracy was supposed to be a way for us to share whilst regulating our differences. Instead, both democratic fantasies direct some of us against others, and they do it in such a

pragmatic way that we hardly get to share much at all. There is little pleasure in filling a voting ballot compared to the pleasure of participating in a forum.

The meta-fantasy, as it stands, controls our subjectivities in three different ways. In some cases, it hinders what is visible to us. The populist side can only see migrants who stole their jobs, elites who stole their dignity and remainers who call them "morons or idiots". The aspirational side is confined to struggle against migrants who fail to integrate, terrorists who threaten their security and bigots who challenged their harmony. In other cases, the meta-structure pushes us to close our political subjectivities to others. No wonder some of my students were tired of a debate that felt very little like a team game and more like a tennis match with many just being observers of tedious ball exchanges whose results had terrifying impacts on all our lives. In both cases, by limiting the possibilities of interaction, the meta-fantasy reduces our chances of becoming something different. The meta-fantasmatic structure narrows down the relations available to us and, as our subjectivity is relational, our freedom itself.

Traversing the fantasy?

Given these limitations, some might wonder how we can escape or help others to escape fantasies. Maybe we cannot fully liberate ourselves from fantasmatic structures. Even if there are forms of the good life that do not operate in fantasmatic mode, our possibilities as subjects are constrained by our historical conditions. Outside of our fantasies, there is only a nihilism comprising social fragmentation, isolation, and violence (Critchley, 2012). Yet, while it may not be possible to escape fantasies, it may be possible to expand the horizon of options with more comforting, sustainable, and ethical alternatives. How might we do this?

Accepting the lack

Psychoanalytical work relies on the concept of the traversal of fantasies to explain how, whilst they cannot be overcome, it is possible to scrutinise the ideological mechanisms

that maintain the fantasy. One approach to traversing the fantasy is by getting to know the source of our discomfort and accepting the feeling of incompleteness. In her book '*An Ethics of Dissensus*', Ewa Ziarek (2001) argues for a twofold process that should enable the traversal of the fantasmatic structure. The first part of the process concurs with existing work directly aligned with what has come to be known as analysis. Tony Brown summarises this as,

> "Analysis is directed at disrupting or resisting master discourses enacted in the service of oppressive regimes: 'this master's discourse has only one counterpoint, the analytic discourse' (2007, p. 87). One goes into analysis with the intention of discovering the unconscious forces that interfere with conscious actions, or the gap between them. For example, alternative systems of knowledge may conflict with each other and cause disturbance to the subject." (forthcoming, p. X).

The agent can begin to question fantasies by interrogating their own position. This interrogation demands denaturalisation of beliefs and a critical examination of affects or, putting this in Brown's terms, the "unconscious forces that interfere with conscious actions". The analysis is expected to demonstrate the way in which we conceive our world as only one possibility among many.

The second part of the traversal process consists of reconsidering how we approach our need for others. As discussed earlier, the modern system of representation encourages us to translate our appeal to others into a deficit. Still, sociability can also be seen more positively as an opportunity for enhancement. Indeed, many have argued that ethics emerges from a "constitutive powerlessness in the face of the other" (Critchley, 2012, p. 120) or, in other words, ethics comprise relationships of dependency and respect for others in all their alterity. Ironically, accepting our dependence on others can have liberating effects, by freeing us from the quest to fill the lack with substitutes. If agents can experientially learn to position

the feeling of political discomfort in their historical conditions of modernity, they might not be compelled to attach themselves to fantasies only because these fantasies are available.

This twofold process can be illustrated with the example of my pedagogical activity. Before Brexit, if I was feeling a position of power, it was because I complied with a fantasy in which academic knowledge felt self-indulgent and independent from everything else. As a result of Brexit, that fantasy was replaced by a new fiction where power could suddenly be stolen from me by Brexiter students willing to question my right to be here. After interrogation, perhaps I would have been able to recognise how power was already multi-dimensional, not only derived from my lecturership or nationality, but also for the multitude of traits that conditioned my existence and that of my students. Further consideration could perhaps lead me to contemplate the possibility that sharing power was not such a bad thing: maybe vulnerability is somehow reassuring, and it would open the doors to a more ethical relation with my students[130]. As Sharon Todd (2014) explains, respect for alterity can foster a movement from a teacher-student relationship based on assimilation and domination to a more ethical relation based on mediation and exchange.

Experiencing trauma

Without professing having escaped the meta-fantasmatic structure, the traumatic event of Brexit shed some light on a different way to traverse the fantasy. Trauma occurs when something questions the smooth running of the fantasmatic narrative. As mentioned earlier, fantasies need antagonism as a pre-condition to their existence, but fantasmatic binaries are not truly oppositional, as some would expect. Laclau (2007a) uses the example of classic Marxian theory to illustrate how there is always something excluded from any system of representation. The Marxian fantasy relies on an antagonistic relation between those who buy (the bourgeoisie) and those who sell labour-power (the working class). Yet, this dependency

[130] See Butler (2012)

is possible because there is a higher positivity that defines the system of representation itself. There is an assumption that people wish to or can sell (or buy) labour-power. What happens with those we are not willing to do so? These outsiders constitute what Laclau defines as 'social heterogeneity': the difference that exceeds the existing fantasy and demonstrates its finiteness.

We very rarely encounter this heterogeneous other, as they need to be excluded from our political analysis and our affective investments in order to the fantasy to continue. On some occasions, the others' full existence is opaque to us, as happened with the indigenous people of the Americas, Africa and Oceania who were made invisible by Eurocentric political thinkers who claimed that democracy was absolute. In other cases, others are only partially visible because we assume a common identity behind faces, so the fantasy is sustained. As in the example above, it was easier for me to believe in colour blindness than to question upon which side of the 'inclusive divide' I fall. Sometimes, agents do that to themselves: the other is inside us, and we do not know. However, when, on rare occasions, we encounter this unexpected other, our full existence thrives and the fantasy is called into question. The agent suddenly realises that wholeness is impossible, the promise will not make the discomfort go away, the obstacle was not that ugly, and she was a challenge to their own comfort. This encounter with the other invokes a moment that bell hooks defines as "radical openness" (1989) or a "new location from which to articulate our sense of the world." (p. 23). As terrifying as it is, the traumatic experience pushes the subject out of their comfort zone and allows them to manifest their subjectivity in ways that escape the control of the initial fantasy.

The traumatic event has the potential of bringing us closer with the other who somehow "lives on as imprint in the subject to which it responds but which it cannot

comprehend" (Critchley, 2012, p. 62). According to Hannah Arendt (1998), what happens is that the encounter triggers a recognition of human commonality. As she puts it,

> "only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear" (1998, p. 57).

The encounter with heterogeneous alterity can foster an inner form of commonality because it evidences that sameness can be found in utter diversity. We recognise that, if there is an underpinning human condition, is plurality.

For European academics upset by Brexit, we were living in a fantasy of inclusivity, 'in' the society that surrounded us. The obstacles of our shared fantasy were a seemingly a small troop of elitists or extreme right radicals who felt the nostalgia of a past that we all had left behind. But as Georgiadou (2018) suggests,

> "the moment I heard that the British people voted to leave the European Union, I immediately passed – or, maybe, pushed myself – to the other side. I identified with 'them' – Europeans. I became an immigrant, one of those people who 'come and steal jobs' and whom the Leave supporters complain about Perhaps my way of finding a new place to belong was by internalising such 'common fallacious arguments for migrants' (Wodak, 2008, p. 64) and by becoming one of 'them'.
>
> Indeed, the vote to leave evoked feelings of solidarity with other fellow Europeans (and non-Europeans) who may be in a worse position than me" (pp. 29-30)

It became apparent that somehow we were the 'them' for many of those who have voted Brexit. When you suddenly realise that the other is you, this realisation forces you to articulate yourself through a new narrative that gives new meaning to your past, present and future life. This realisation triggered new feelings of solidarity with others. The traumatic

encounter opens the door to new, unexpected subjectivities that somehow free the agent from earlier constraints. Perhaps free to choose another fantasy that was not apparent before.

Educating political agents within fantasies

Teachers of politics, as discussed in chapter one, are responsible for helping young people to learn how to think and act independently. Given the analysis above, however, pure autonomy is neither desirable nor possible. Thinking and acting independently might only be possible within the margins of the fantasmatic structure, and political education might be confined to helping children and young people to navigate within and across fantasies. In theory, aspirational democrats claim to pursue strong pedagogical approaches that shall free students from their fantasies. In practice, aspirational pedagogies do not attempt to free students but to replace one fantasy (e.g. populism), with another (e.g. liberal democracy). Rather than attempting to escape the meta-fantasmatic structure, we might need to learn how to mitigate its effects. If the meta-fantasy control what is visible to us, pushes us to close ourselves to others, and narrows down our possible relations, how can political education help to expose alterity and open subjectivities? At the same time, we might wonder whether there is something positive in our intrinsic need for others. Political freedom is often conceptualized in relation to autonomy and individual power because the 'agent' of this freedom is seen to be a rational individualistic being. Yet, if we reframe subjectivity in terms of openness, relationality, and affect, we are forced to revisit what political freedom is. Power is no longer seen to be in the individual agent but on the relationships between beings, and autonomy is replaced by an openness to different forms of being and possibilities of becoming. Dependency and vulnerability are no longer seen as deficits or problems to be overcome but as grounds for more ethical encounters with alterity.

The consequences of this for political education are multiple. Ziarek (2001) argues that the task of ethics is to recreate the conditions so new subjectivities can be revealed and

be experienced. This is, in my understanding, very similar to the task of political education. Educating political agents is about finding ways to help students to disengage from harmful fantasies that can only deliver suffering for both those who are seen as antagonists and for the students themselves. It is also about finding appealing promises, so neither teachers nor students end up retracting into their singularity and nihilism, alienated by fantasies which only offer discomfort or fatigue. Recreating the conditions for new subjectivities means also, and foremost, expanding the horizon of options so learners can find more comforting, sustainable, and ethical ways of sharing with others.

Summary

Political subjectivity is unique, open, relational and affective. Subjectivity tends to be open to others but, in the historical conditions of modernity, this openness is perceived as a liability. Subjectivity is conditioned by the unique set of relationships available to us. Yet, our subjectivity is not predetermined as we are forced to choose when our different commitments contradict. Our subjectivity is regulated by our affects rather than by any cognitive calculation of cost and benefit.

Fantasies are ideological mechanisms that domesticate our affects by directing us towards unachievable promises and against others whom we see as antagonists. Both populism and aspirational democracy function within fantasmatic parameters. Populists promise that, once the elites have been defeated, the people will find a democratic climax in which the collective and individual will map out and prosperity will be guaranteed for all. Aspirational democrats promise a future of prosperity and inclusivity where populists and other radicals have been defeated. Both fantasies are generate discomfort and do not deliver the expected promises.

Given our historical limitations, it is unlikely that we can escape all fantasies, yet there are ways of traversing fantasies, such as, getting to know the fantasy and its appeal

whilst controlling its power over us. Firstly, the acceptance that we are incomplete and the consideration that perhaps needing others is something positive. Secondly, traumatic experiences that result from encounters with unexpected others whose presence challenge the fantasmatic structure. Aligned with this, political education can facilitate that children and young people learn how to navigate fantasies, how to find alternatives and enjoy the sociability of our affects whilst containing their dangers.

Chapter 6

The trap of emancipatory knowledge

Abstract

Chapter six focuses on the question of emancipatory knowledge and examines how populists and non-populists accounts use knowledge in their narratives. The chapter begins examining the way emancipation and knowledge are conceptualised within political education. It is argued that, in their appeal to emancipatory knowledge as a promise of dignity and prosperity, populists and aspirational democrats reinforce existing divisions and exclusions. The chapter makes a case for more plural and inclusive epistemologies and for more open understandings of emancipatory political education.

Keywords

emancipation; knowledge; rationality; consensus; pluriversality

In 2016, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported on an interview with Tony Blair, former British (Labour) Prime Minister, at the Global Education and Skills Forum. The report explained:

> "Tony Blair […] warned of a culture of political 'populism' which was tapping into a mood of resentment. 'There's much anger about.' He said this was playing out in the debate around migration, which he said tapped into people's concerns that 'incomes are stagnating and they aren't really getting anywhere in life'. He said the answer was not to 'blame migrants' but to 'get the education and skills' that could lead to better jobs and opportunities".[131]

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[131] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35779235

Like many others, Tony Blair signalled the relevance of education to debates on the theme of populism[132]. As discussed earlier in this book, populism is often seen as a consequence of a lack of knowledge, and populists are defined as uneducated or, if the worst comes to the worst, as ignorant[133]. Such assumptions prompt strong rationales for education. If a lack of knowledge has driven people to align themselves with populist discourses, increasing knowledge will solve the 'problem'. Education is presented as an instrument to fight and defeat populism[134]. In other words, education is a way to emancipate ourselves from populist discourses.

On the other side of the populist spectrum, some politicians have also exploited the educational debate. Donald Trump claimed that he loves "the poorly educated" and Michael Gove explained that "people in this country have had enough of experts". A headline on the British tabloid Daily Mail[135] reported that the BBC was using the term populism to "sneer at the 'uneducated' 17 million who voted for Brexit"[136] and subsequently concluded,

> "To liberals, the word populist indicates these voters are vulgar, ill-informed and under-educated. It suggests a lumpen mass of people — quite different, of course, from the well-informed and well-heeled commentators and political leaders who feel something has to be done about unsavoury views of the general public."

The ironic tone of the piece did not mask the implicit message, i.e. education (or its lack) was used to discredit a democratic vote. Experts and well-heeled commentators were not seen as political assets, but rather, as allies of competing political leaders. In this perspective, there is nothing emancipatory about education and knowledge are presented

[132] For instance, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova argued in the same forum, "Populist leaders like to have ignorant people", and [this is why] "they are not investing in education systems" (Global Education and Skills Forum, 2017)

[133] https://www.ft.com/content/bfb5f3d4-379d-11e6-a780-b48ed7b6126f

[134] https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-02-12/educate-liberate

[135] Daily Mail supported the Brexit campaign

[136] British Broadcasting Corporation

Given the primacy of knowledge and education in the public debate on populism, it is not surprising that academia has also mobilised around this theme. Between 2017 and 2020, at least five calls for special issues appealed to academics to interrogate the relationship between education and populism[137]. In these calls, populism was primarily been seen as a challenge to which education should react. Aligned with this perspective, Tom Boland, former chief of the Higher Education Authority in Ireland wrote in 2016,

> "We need the capacity for critical thought and analysis, and we need academics committed to questioning and testing received wisdom, putting forward new ideas and stating controversial and unpopular opinions, and we need government and the institutions to work constructively, mutually to support our democratic society. Populism contains a special threat to all of that. But 'isms' that would destroy the values, rights and freedoms of Western democracy have been defeated before. Higher education must be at the forefront of the struggle."[138]

Although apparently dominant, Boland's perspective on the emancipatory nature of higher education has its detractors. It is said that the links between education and populism are less 'neat', and populism is perhaps not the problem for education to address. For instance, the description of the theme for the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) advocated for a new era in which evidence would be democratised. The theme appealed to academics to pitch their work so that "our evidence-based narratives can empower a *populist movement* of a new kind—one that demands a caring, supportive, and challenging education from early childhood through adulthood as a basic human right."

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[137] http://www.cicea.eu/pdfs/CiCe_Conference_Programme_BRUGES_2017.pdf; https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14693518/homepage/berj_special_issues.htm; https://www.aera.net/Events-Meetings/Annual-Meeting/2019-Annual-Meeting-Theme; https://eera-ecer.de/networks/28-sociologies-of-education/ecer-2020-nw-28-special-call/nw-28-sociologies-of-education-return-of-the-nation-sociologies-of-education-in-an-era-of-rising-nationalism-and-populism/; http://www.ethnographyandeducation.org/?page_id=411

[138] http://www.universitytimes.ie/2016/12/the-threat-of-populism-to-higher-education/

This chapter interrogates the relationship between populism and education to provide some insights into the question of political education in our current times. The chapter begins by conceptualising emancipatory education through the theoretical lens of Ernesto Laclau. It then moves to examine how populist fantasies conceive knowledge and education. This is followed by a critical discussion of how aspirational fantasies present knowledge and education as economic, epistemological and political emancipatory. The chapter concludes examining the implications of these competing fantasies for political education.

Conceptualising emancipation as a fantasy

Emancipation

Curricula for political education in the context of liberal democracy aim to deliver three different forms of the good life: democratic values, political freedom and knowledge-seeking. An understanding that political education ought to emancipate students from their constraints underpins these three forms. In Latin, the word *emancipare* refers to the process by which young people and wives were freed from the legal authority of the father/husband; later appropriations of the word were also used in reference to the freeing of slaves. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (1972) positioned emancipation at the core of any valuable form of education.

Curricula for political education promise three types of emancipation that correspond to the three forms of the distributed good life. Emancipation refers to the transparency or the accuracy by which we depict objective reality. Through seeking to expose the truth, political education can emancipate learners from ideological deception. Emancipation also refers to collective emancipation or the elimination of power relations and the establishment of a more egalitarian society. In this sense, political education emancipates communities from their social deficits by eliminating, extracting or assimilating the elements that make our system

less desirable. Finally, emancipation implies political freedom: the possibilities each learner have to become autonomous from their community.

The problem with this narrative is that these different conceptions of emancipation are incompatible with each other (Laclau, 2007b). As subjects, we are a constitutive part of the sedimented social practices that regulate our activities and limit the possibilities available to us. "If limited and finite beings try to know, to make the world transparent to themselves", Laclau wrote, "it is impossible that this limitation and finitude is not transmitted to the products of their intellectual activity" (2007b, p. 16). These limitations are transmitted to any form of knowledge and any 'reality' grasped is constructed under the historical parameters that constituted the knowledgeable subject herself. Knowledge is always historically situated and incapable of freeing us from our historical condition.

Likewise, when we are educated in particular ways of knowing, our autonomy is constrained. As knowledge is contingent on a particular way of understanding the world, gaining knowledge and strategies to reach knowledge necessarily tie the agent closer to those understandings. By obtaining knowledge, we acquire a map to better navigate our reality, but maps are finite and inevitably make invisible things that others would see with a different map. Knowledge is intrinsically connected to power and that rationality always presupposes some definition of what is and what is not rationale which is built from above. As seen earlier in this book, decolonial scholars have clearly shown that knowledge is often used to create cognitive hierarchies in which rational ways of knowing are seen as superior and that these hierarchies have reproduced rather than diminished power relations. The history of modern civilisation is full of examples in which ‘civilised’ thinkers have relied upon epistemological claims to depict others as less rational, less autonomous and, ultimately, lesser beings. If we understand emancipation as freeing ourselves from social constraints, knowledge is simultaneously emancipatory and constraining.

The eradication of power relations is also incompatible with the promise of individual emancipation. As discussed in chapter four, Laclau did not believe that power can be eliminated. However, he did hypothesise about this possibility to conclude:

> "A world in which reforms take place without violence is not a world in which I would like to live. It could be either an absolutely unidimensional society, in which 100 per cent of the population would agree with any single reform, or one in which the decisions would be made by an army of social engineers with the backing of the rest of the population (2007b, p. 114)"

The paradox of Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" illustrates Laclau's dystopian future: a world of social harmony is a world in which no room is left for individual uniqueness. It is precisely because power is inherent to any community that individuals can attempt to emancipate themselves from such a community. But also, because there is power, knowledge will never be transparent and social harmony will never be achieved. Emancipation is impossible.

The fantasy of emancipation

Notwithstanding, emancipation operates as an illusion in numerous fantasmatic narratives. Emancipation is conceived as something that will happen in the future and something that will make us whole. In democratic fantasies, such as those of populism and aspirational democracy considered in the previous chapter, the democratic promise is in itself a promise of absolute emancipation. A day will arrive in which individuals will be liberated from any power constraints: transparency and prosperity will be the norm, and individual and collective beliefs will evolve together. Democratic emancipation responds to what Laurent Berlant (2011) describes as "an aspirational position of personal and institutional self-legitimating performativity and an affective sense of control in relation to the fantasy of that position's offer of security and efficacy" (p. 97). The problem, as with all fantasies, is that

social wholeness is an impossibility, the promise is unreachable, and emancipation never happens.

Despite this impossibility, emancipation very much drives justification and analysis of educational practices and the emancipatory nature of knowledge constitutes a storyline in itself within some populist and many aspirational fantasies. Emancipatory knowledge supposedly leads to the climactic moment in which all power relations have been eradicated. There is an expectation that knowledge equals truth, and truth can liberate us from ideological traps and also from other forms of power that limit their possibilities. Without professing that all manifestations of populism and aspirational democracy appeal to the question of knowledge and education in the same way, the following sections will interrogate how some populists have considered (emancipatory) knowledge and education and what has been the response from the aspirational side.

The populist fantasy of emancipation

Knowledge

Knowledge and education play an essential role in numerous populist fantasies to the extent that many populists have become the *avant-garde* of discourse relating to fake news and alternative facts[139], seemingly disregarding both reasonableness and evidence. In building up their discourses, these populists do not select facts because they respond to a criterion of accuracy but because they are coherent with the fantasy, and they allow the fantasmatic machinery to continue rolling. These populists[140] seem to overlook evidence that demonstrates the fantasmatic nature of their own viewpoints. Anything goes, but only if it fuels the fantasy.

[139] See, for instance, Bosio (2018), Giesinger (2018) and Leiviskä (2018).

[140] From now on in this chapter, I will here discuss "populists", but this should not be understood as a generalisation of populism. A range of populists from both the left and the right understand and refer to knowledge in very different ways. The use of "populists" rather than "some populists" is only stylistic.

Populists have the perfect excuse for neglecting facts: evidence is constructed by academics who are on the side of the elite. They doubt that any facts are, or could ultimately be, supreme[141] and they see academics as elitists who are driven by political motives. Academic knowledge is not about truth-seeking, but about maintaining the ivory towers in which academics reside. Populists question the sincerity that fuels academic knowledge and the intentions of researchers:

> "The important issue is not the truth or falsity of the mere fact (facts belong to experts, and we know what we think about them); the important point is the truthfulness of the speaker to resonate with populist truth. Bernard Williams (2002) defined truthfulness as entailing a balance of sincerity and accuracy; populism sacrifices accuracy for sincerity – but, then, sincerity is more important because it is that which registers one's closeness to the people. The populist leader has the courage of truth (he always tells I how it is) to such an extent that it doesn't even matter if as part of the truth he happens to tell lies in a narrow sense." (Osborne, 2017)

Williams' distinction between sincerity and accuracy is here particularly important. Since the times of the Enlightenment, modernity has defined and assessed knowledge in relation to accuracy. But this relationship is not universal – it does not apply to everybody, everywhere and always. For populists as for many others[142], accuracy does not have primacy, sincerity does. Knowledge is a matter of trust. And if academics are not to be trusted, neither is the knowledge they produce.

Education and political education

Those sustaining this populist fantasy are particularly concerned about the dangers of humanities and social science. They worry about the content of these subjects and about who

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[141] For a discussion on knowledge as seen by populists, see William (2002), Saurette and Gunster (2011), Waisbord (2018) and Ylä-Anttila (2018).

[142] See Duncan (2018)

decides what is taught. A study of a Finnish populist online forum reported the following contribution:

> "gender studies' favourite argument is that outsiders cannot have the expertise to comment on the quality of their research. Only those patting the backs of gender studies scholars do." (…) many 'humanities' have, after being politicised, become totally indefensible" (Ylä-Anttila, 2018, p. 14).

The participant used the example of gender studies to make his point. Implicitly, he argued that whilst everybody should be entitled to discuss humanities-related topics (e.g. gender), academics use their power and status to disregard views that do not match their own. In his perspective, the academic community relies on criteria such as that of research quality to justify unequal recognition between their own views (and "those patting their backs") and that of others. According to this participant, this means that humanities are 'politicised' towards the side of the academics.

Populists often conceive educational institutions to be at the service of the elites. These elites create, enact and control settings such as schools and universities in such a way that these institutions function as ideological apparatus distributing academic-elite knowledge to children and young people. As elites cannot be trusted, neither can these institutions. Schools and universities are intrinsically suspicious, and populists are cautious about relying on them for truth-seeking. Instead, populists argue that those who have been longer in education are more likely to be socialised into elitist beliefs. Educational qualifications are seen as markers of control, and academic socialisation is understood as a form of indoctrination, stopping people thinking by themselves. In the populist fantasy, education is the obstacle that hinders independent thinking. As described by a Dutch participant in a study in conspiracy theories,

> “[scientists] had a certain education, they have already received certain information, they are formed in a particular way. Their vision excludes therefore all others.” (Harambam & Aupers, 2015, p. 472).

For populists, regulated education inserts students and academics into a particular way of understanding the world that blinkers alternative perspectives. This is particularly dangerous when we think about political education. If successful, politics educators would contribute to a political arena in which only the views of the elites would be acceptable. The British tabloid Daily Mail’s campaign on Anti-Brexit Bias mentioned in earlier chapters is a good example of this. From this perspective, academics used their position of power to indoctrinate young people into supporting the European cause. Education, according to populists, does not emancipate us. On the contrary! It alienates us, so we can only see what others similar to us see.

This populist fantasy, nevertheless, does not challenge the pursuit of truth and the value of knowledge and education overall. These populists value the “poorly educated” as they are less likely to be alienated by academic knowledge. Pauline Hanson, leader of the Australian One Nation Party, once argued,

> “Anyone with business sense knows that you do not sell off your assets especially when they are making money. I may be only ‘a fish and chip shop lady’, but some of these economists need to get their heads out of the textbooks and get a job in the real world. I would not even let one of them handle my grocery shopping.” (Hanson, cited in Rapley, 1998, p. 333).

For Hanson, as for many other populists, we gain common-sense through our everyday practices and experiences. Textbooks are alienating as they stop us from getting "our heads out" and seeing anything else. This exaltation of common-sense can be read with sympathy. A satirical comic shows a weather researcher looking at his computer simulation and saying,

"it will start raining soon". In the window behind him, we see it is already raining. We need to admit that many (including some within academia) would find the vignette amusing. However, this exaltation can also be read as a romanticisation of common-sense reproducing the myth of the noble savage. In the fantasy, raw knowledge is considered preferable and more authentic, and educational institutions are seen as corrupting the savage's inherent goodness and practical wisdom.

The populist trap

The populist fantasy, as the drunken guest telling painful truths, highlights some of the impossibilities of strong political education. We cannot pursue knowledge assuming this will liberate us from all constraints. Learning something new will always open some doors but close others. Access to one form of knowledge will determine the way we think and act and the possibilities of thinking and acting available to us. Populists are right in claiming that academic knowledge is also ideological not only in its use but also in its origin. Even the most uncontroversial piece of research one could imagine is driven by a thorough understanding of the good life. Indeed, not even the COVID-19 vaccine is universally desirable; the vaccine is beneficial only to those who value human life and our sociability. Populists are also right in claiming that educational institutions are somehow at service of existing powers. As discussed in the first chapter, any form of political education aims to deliver three forms of the good life – knowledge-seeking, community values and freedom – of which, at least two, are regulated by those in power.

The populist fantasy, however, is also a victim of its own deceptions. Beyond the dangers of extreme right forms of populism, some populists appear to signal that academics and teachers are the obstacles that need to be removed. This does not suggest a desirable future for many teachers or academics. This claim has implications in many professional activities and personal lives, and also on teaching professionalism itself. Teachers might well

mediate between numerous demands but they are expected to tolerate (if not to promote) plurality of perspectives. There is not such a thing as 'real political knowledge' than can be accessed if academics and teachers of politics are out of the way. Populists are victims of the same fantasy of emancipatory knowledge that they challenge. Leaving political education in the hands of families or political organisations would more likely evolve in the socialisation of young people into single perspectives, and it would not solve the problems populists say to address. Families, political organizations, and social media users are also driven by their own beliefs and interests. Populist views fail to acknowledge the inescapability of ideological constraints whether or not learners are sitting in a classroom. Knowledge simultaneously captures and emancipates us, it offers, and it retains power.

The aspirational fantasy of emancipation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, advocates of aspirational democracy also operate within a modern fantasy in which populists are seen as obstacles. Aspirational democrats draw upon the educational explanation of populism and argue that if what separates populists from non-populists is education, the response to the populist challenge should be educational. Aspirational democrats signal to education as a way to overcome the populist challenge. For instance, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova argued that education should offer a way of ensuring that young people are better protected against populism[143]. Aspirational democrats see in education an emancipatory tool that functions in three different ways.

Economic emancipation: prosperity

Aspirational democrats sometimes rely on the "losers of globalisation" theory to justify how education might emancipate us from the populist challenge. As earlier discussed,

[143] https://www.educationandskillsforum.org/news-blogs/is-the-rise-of-populism-the-result-of-a-failure-of-education/

the current populist peak is sometimes attributed to the losers of globalisation whose knowledge and skills are no longer economically valuable (Kriesi, 2014). Aspirational democrats often see economic emancipation as a way to tackle populism. The assumption is that populism is related to a knowledge deficit that stops individuals from being economically prosperous and that, if populism has grown, it is because some people have not been able to keep up to date with the skills and knowledge that modern society demands. As seen, Tony Blair suggested that the cause of populism had to be found in people's concerns that 'incomes are stagnating and they aren't really getting anywhere in life'. Education is here expected to bridge the economic gap – to facilitate a situation in which nobody is left behind and everybody can stay up-to-date with the knowledge and skills required to participate in a modern economy. The solution to populism is to "get the education and skills" that could lead to better jobs and opportunities". This resonates with those proposals for political education that, as examined in chapter two, favour entrepreneurial skills and other similar competences. Here, education provides emancipation from economic constraints.

There are three essential flaws in the fantasmatic logic underlying this narrative. This possibility is unrealistic as education cannot reduce the economic gap between losers and winners. Education is not a panacea; education is inscribed in a capitalist society in which wealth is always created for some at the expense of others. One does not need to agree with Marx to recognise this. The capitalist system is grounded in the principle of having winners and losers, those kept up-to-date and those left behind. Regardless of what we do in education, there must be someone who will lose, someone who will be left behind. This narrative is also simplistic as education does not challenge the economic divide, but rather, it sustains it ideologically. Education systems embedded within capitalism provide an ideological rationale for the system to be as it is. The capitalist system is presented as a meritocratic one, one in which educational attainment is a tool by which economic disparities

are justified. Education underpins processes of selection[144]. Even if we increase educational levels overall, there always will be an educational gap between those with higher diplomas from more prestigious institutions and the others, so the economic divide could be justified. In other words, even if the "lower educated" could gain further "education and skills", they would still remain "lower" educated than their counterparts and thus be "losers" in this process. Education does not itself emancipate us from economic disparities because education is a key factor in justifying such disparities. Finally, this narrative also underplays the relational nature of subjectivity where economic position is just one factor. Those whose "incomes are stagnating" might already have the "education and skills" and yet not "have better jobs and opportunities" and/or might be migrants themselves and therefore not "blame migrants". Whilst criticising the nativism embedded within far-right populist discourses - "the answer is not to 'blame migrants'" - the aspirational discourse draws upon a racialisation of the working class[145] that in itself challenges the promise of emancipation from power relations.

These three flaws demonstrate how the overall promise that connects knowledge with a prosperous, egalitarian society is a fallacy. Aspirational democrats suggest that the lack of knowledge and education are the obstacles that need to be overcome to assure economic prosperity. However, the populist example illustrates the fantasmatic nature of this claim. Of course, education might facilitate that some particular individuals climb the social ladder, but even if a more educated population generated economic growth, there would be no assurance an equitable distribution.

Epistemological emancipation: rationality

[144] For a good analysis of this, see Brown, Lauder & Ashton, (2012) and Bovens & Wille (2017)
[145] See Bhambra (2017) for a discussion of this

Aspirational democrats consider that populists benefit from a context of post-truth communication that encourages lack of rationality, conspiracy theories and emotionalisation[146] of the public space. They argue that those supporting populism let their emotions prevail over their knowledge and populist leaders can exploit these emotions using an "emotional rather than rational rhetoric, opportunistic policies, aided in recent years by social media, and a demagogic charismatic leadership style" (Samier, 2018, p. 45). Education is expected to bridge the knowledge gap and emancipate us from irrationality. The assumption is that, if people gain the right form of knowledge, they will not support populist alternatives. From this perspective, education emancipate us from our emotional tendencies, as it helps us to,

> "learn to "master the beast." (…) the ability to spot when the media, politicians, or any other groups with their own agenda try to take advantage of our primordial emotions and tendencies to divide and conquer" (Vinokur, 2016, p. 145)

Education, it is argued, can steer our emotional tendencies (the beast). If people are able to control these emotions, they will gain the independent judgement needed to refuse populist alternatives.

The problem that aspirational democrats apparently ignore is that political education cannot reduce the epistemological divide as aspirational democrats and populists do not share the same epistemological assumptions. Underpinning aspirational accounts lie rationalist assumptions that knowledge can be absolute, either via accuracy with objective reality, or by consensus. Aspirational democrats believe that knowledge can be accessed through empirical evidence or can be agreed through consensual mechanisms. This is in opposition to the populist principles outlined above. Whilst aspirational democrats expect to convince populists via knowledge; populists are concerned that aspirational democrats will indoctrinate

[146] See, for example, Mudde (2010)

others (e.g. The Daily Mail is concerned about university bias on Brexit). Accurate and systematic knowledge is not very helpful to resist populism. Whilst aspirational democrats support accuracy, populists advocate for sincerity. Ideas are only convincing to populists if they feel that these ideas and those expressing them are coherent with their own fantasy. Similarly, deliberative perspectives and populists are also epistemologically incompatible. Aspirational democrats privilege consensus, but populists privilege conflict. They create "a model of a public sphere in which communication is viewed primarily as the individualised right to express oneself rather than a collective opportunity to deliberate that involves both listening and speaking" (Saurette & Gunster, 2011, p. 214). Aspirational democrats fail to recognise that populists often see proposals for political education based on consensus-reaching as coercive measures designed to stop free expression.

These incompatibilities allow us to revisit two assumptions sustaining the aspirational fantasy. Firstly, the assumption that there are only two forms of knowing: accuracy and consensus. In their appeal to sincerity and conflict, populists challenge the modern assumption not from the margins of modernity as decolonial scholars have done but from within modernity itself. Secondly, and related to this, the understanding that knowledge can be separated from power, and transparent and absolute knowledge can free us from all constraints. Rational inquiry and consensual mechanisms limit the possibilities of what can be said but also of how this can be said. Rationality and consensus do not purely emancipate us, but they constrain us into particular forms of knowing. Learners are limited in their political freedom by the same pedagogies that claim to free them.

Political emancipation: social harmony

Aspirational democrats understand that populists are obstacles to our social emancipation as they have brought division, turbulence and polarisation into the political

arena. For instance, consider the two declarations below from two distant European policymakers,

> "Politics have become much more turbulent than it used to be, which makes it more difficult to reach political decisions. Finland used to always have two major parties which could agree on which direction to head in. It meant stable governments, and this is no longer the case"[147] (former Finnish Prime Minister, Mari Kiviniemi[148])
>
> "There are three serious challenges facing our nations: terrorism; populism; and nationalism. These could fracture Europe if we fail to invest in education and in the fundamental values of social harmony and democracy" (former Spanish Secretary of Education, Iñigo Méndez de Vigo[149]).

Aspirational democrats argue that populists have broken the political game: they are a challenge to stability and to our current democratic institutions. The logic here is that, for good functioning of politics, consensus needs to be gained and, this "can only mean compromise, the 'middle' between two more clear-cut alternatives" (Giddens, 1998, p. 46). Arguably, many populists have broken these harmonic rules, and aspirational democrats see the political terrain as having been unnecessarily polarised. A self-explanatory example of this: Tony Blair wrote an article in the New York Times titled, "Against Populism, the Center Must Hold"[150].

Political education is considered the philosopher's stone to re-establish the rules of the game. By investing in the education of values such as "social harmony" and "democracy", Méndez de Vigo sought to challenge the extremism and the "rupture" that populists have 'brought' to politics. Aspirational democrats conceive political education as the glue that

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[147] (http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org/artikler/portrett/portrait-2018/article.2018-06-19.5972086007)
[148] (http://www.nordiclabourjournal.org/artikler/portrett/portrait-2018/article.2018-06-19.5972086007)
[149] http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/news/Paginas/2017/20171121_educationvalues.aspx
[150] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/03/opinion/tony-blair-against-populism-the-center-must-hold.html

binds us together. There is an expectation that by participating in deliberation processes, learners will gain an understanding of how conflicts are resolved and decisions are made. Political education is expected to teach new generations the art of compromise and empower them, so that they feel part of the common society.

Aspirational democrats also blame populists for our social woes. Populists have contributed to destabilising social cohesion nurturing the more nasty attitudes associated with extreme right populism. Xenophobia and racism are here attributed to a lack of knowledge and reasonableness[151]. Aspirational democrats see extreme right attitudes as consequences of a "mood of resentment" that can be addressed via a political education that facilitates that young people increase their knowledge. Quite explicitly,

> "When people, for instance, do not understand the dangers of group discrimination or far-right populism, they will ignore the dangers of supporting these political options. When they understand the power of civil resistance, the courage of those that return to the place where they were hurt, the greatness of those that find justice in public acts of forgiveness instead of vengeance, then, students gain a higher sense of political agency and responsibility regarding their actions in times of trouble" (Corredor, Wills-Obregon & Asensio-Brouard, 2018, p. 182)

The assumption is that, if young people learn about historical events, they will be less likely to support populist principles. The same is said about critical thinking and critical literacy. Anti-populists expect that, if students acquire critical thinking, they will learn how to assess evidence and uncover the irrationality of populist discourses[152] and the mechanisms of persuasion and propaganda embedded within populist rhetoric will unravel[153]. Anti-populists recommend the theoretical investigation of values opposed to those on the far-right, with

[151] See, for instance, Banks, (2017); Leiviskä, 2018; Tibbitts & Katz, 2017
[152] See, for instance, Giesingier (2018)
[153] See, for instance, Artz (2017), Demirbolat, 2019; Heggart & Flowers, 2019; Samier, 2018

students, for instance, conducting inquiries into questions such as 'what is solidarity?' and 'what is equality?'[154].

Whilst there are good intentions behind these recommendations, aspirational democrats' views of political education suffer from multiple flaws that illustrate the failure of the emancipatory project. Rationalist proposals will not work to counteract extreme right attitudes[155]. Rational inquiry about solidarity will not necessarily make learners more empathetic. Further, the problem underlying these recommendations runs deeper. The assumption that rationality leads itself to morality is tremendously problematic. As decolonial scholars have largely shown, racism and xenophobia are the dark side of modern rationality. Only by undermining other ways of knowing and being, modern science was able to position itself as universal truth-bearer. Schools, as modern institutions, reproduce the understanding that rationalistic forms of knowledge are preferable over everything else. Education, in its modern conception, will unlikely emancipate us from nasty colonialism because education, in its modern conception, has mostly contributed to reproducing that colonial legacy. Our society will certainly not be more harmonious by narrowing down what is allowed; on the contrary, this might trigger further exclusions. It is unlikely that to counteract racism and xenophobia, the answer will be more modernity. If we wish to thrive against the nasty side of populism, we might need to do something different.

The aspirational trap

The role of education in the aspirational fantasy is inherently emancipatory. Education and political education ought to signal the route to the ideal democracy which will deliver dignity and prosperity to all. Through education, children and young people will learn the knowledge and skills that will help them become politically and economically autonomous. It

[154] See, for instance, Leiviskä (2018), Pausch (2016) and Bosio (2018)
[155] See, for instance, Miller-Idriss and Pilkington (2017)

is said that knowledge will also free them from ideological traps and economic deprivation which nurtures populist discourses. The problem of these aspirational accounts is that they generate similar obstacles to those that they wish to eliminate. We can only decide who knows more or who knows enough by using a criterion underpinned by power relations that challenge the egalitarian principle. Furthermore, by deciding who know more or knows better, education reproduces these disparities. Knowledge does not guarantee prosperity to all. Education does not necessarily benefit the other democratic appeal: dignity. Whilst favouring a political system because of its egalitarian arrangements, aspirational democrats create unequal rules of the political game. David Runciman (2018) writes,

> "The educated are a tribe. They stick together. They may tell themselves that they do this because they have a better understanding of how the world works. But that's what makes them so alienating to the other side: they appear to mistake their tribalism for superior wisdom" (pp. 163-164).

There is not much dignity in being called ignorant, uneducated or being told that your political views do not count because you do not have the necessary expertise. In their appeal to reason, aspirational democrats use the epistemic criterion as a measuring bar to decide how forms of the good life are hierarchised. Were we not supposed to be equal?

This paradox is particularly problematic for political educators. As examined in the first chapter, curricula for political education simultaneously attempts to deliver three forms of the good life: political freedom, democratic values and truth-seeking. Rational and accurate knowledge is seen as the shared undisputable language across communities that ought to regulate the negotiations between those advocating for different modes of life. However, knowledge is not a neutral judge to which one can consult to regulate our differences. Knowledge, as we have seen, is finite and is conditioned by historical parameters. In an attempt to neutralise the more nasty attitudes associated with some forms of

populism, aspirational democrats might be taking away part of the freedom and the equality that they seek to represent. Whilst arguing for openness, critical thinking and consensus, aspirational democrats pursue a strong form of education that does not allow other forms of thinking, experiencing or conceptualising the nature of human beings. Children and young people learn that those who know ‘more’ are in a better position to make moral judgements. Political freedom here is forgotten at the expense of democratic values: anything goes if the purpose is to maintain the aspirational fantasy. There is not much difference in the way populist and aspirational fantasies function, indeed.

In this book, I am not suggesting that political education should overlook knowledge, on the contrary, but political educators do need to acknowledge its limitations and possibilities and there is a need of embracing plurality of knowledges. Political literacy cannot be used as an absolute criterion to regulate across different conceptions of the good life. Simultaneously, “the abandonment of the aspiration to ‘absolute’ knowledge”, as Laclau (2007) wrote,

> “has exhilarating effects: on the one hand, human beings can recognise themselves as the true creators and no longer as the passive recipients of a predetermined structure; on the other hand, all social agents have to recognise their concrete finitude, nobody can aspire to be the true consciousness of the world" (p. 16).

The acceptance of the contingency and finitude of political knowledge might be detrimental for the preservation of dominant modes of being, but it may also increase the possibilities that young people have to find and express their uniqueness. Indeed, what my analysis suggests is not that political education is too knowledge-based, but rather, that it is too limited in the types of knowledge that it distributes. The AERA call for democratisation of evidence via a “populist movement of a new kind” already recognises that, if we want to provide a

democratic response to our current times, we might need to consider how we approach knowledge.

Summary

Emancipation promises the end of power relations and the end of ideology when these two ends are incompatible. Emancipation is a promise of democratic fantasies and education as a pathway towards this unreachable end. Some populists have explicitly declared their perspectives on knowledge and education. Populists often see academic knowledge as ideological. They privilege sincerity over accuracy, and they accuse academics of being insincere as they favour the elites. Their concerns about education and political education are similar; they understand educational institutions are ideological apparatuses aiming to socialise young people into the elites' values. Populists favour common-sense knowledge and alternative spaces of education but fail to recognise that all forms of education are ideological to some extent.

Aspirational democrats see populism as a problem and education as a potential solution. According to anti-populists, education can help to emancipate our societies from the populist challenge by ensuring that nobody is economically left behind, and that if everybody gains access to certain forms of knowledge and criticality that might stop the emotional tendencies that drive support for populism. Anti-populists recommend strong political education pedagogies based on civic knowledge, systematic inquiry, deliberation processes, and the investigation of values might help to overcome the political, cross-country and cultural polarisation that populists have brought to the political arena. Aspirational recommendations, however, are unlikely to deliver the expected outcomes. These recommendations rely on rationalistic and/or deliberative assumptions that are incompatible with the principles sustained by many populists. Further, these recommendations assume education is *per se* emancipatory and necessarily fosters democracy without considering how

education is often embedded within a modern project entirely intertwined with capital and colonial power. Contrasted with populist accounts, aspirational recommendations can shed some light on political education. Strong practices based on consensus-reaching and on epistemic criteria are likely to exaggerate some of the inequalities they seek to eliminate.

Chapter 7

A point of no return in political education

Abstract

Chapter seven revisits current political education. It is argued that, given the current democratic crisis, political education practices need to be revisited. The chapter recommends changing the focus from desired futures to uncertain presents, from purposes and outcomes to situated practices, and from strong forms of political education to weak and open experiences. The chapter identify three group of pedagogies suited for these current times: pedagogies of difference, pedagogies of articulation, and pedagogies of equivalence. In the conclusions, the limitations and risks of these pedagogies are explored.

Keywords

uncertainty; polarization; open pedagogies; situated practices; citizenship pedagogies

This book began by discussing how political education curricula are grounded in three forms of the good life, the pursuit of knowledge, political freedom, and community values. In liberal democracies, this final form is embodied by democracy. Modernity was able to reconcile these distinctive modes, giving centrality to knowledge. It was assumed that those who were more knowledgeable would be freer to exercise their will, and this would lead them to contribute to more egalitarian arrangements and a more prosperous society. The analysis in the subsequent chapters suggests that populism is a symptom of a crisis that affects the core of this symbiotic combination. Democracy promises (dignity, prosperity, and the convergence between individual and collective will) and it offers (competition, individualism, and unsustainable productivity). An increasing imbalance between this promise and this offer has evolved into a crisis of democratic faith from which democracies, as we know them, might not survive. There is extensive evidence that knowledge has been repeatedly used to

justify none egalitarian discourses, populists are only the last collateral victims in a long saga of ‘irrationalisms’ that ought to be defeated. If many have not been able to detect and denounce the magnitude of the epistemicide before, it was because the same knowledge that was supposed to free us prevented us from seeing outside our fantasmatic parameters. Assumptions that freedom translates into autonomy have also been challenged after seeing that we are inherently dependent on others and what makes us unique are our relationships with others. This analysis leaves us with the question of what is left of political education. Indeed, none of this has happened overnight, and it will not have an immediate impact on the fact that there is a curriculum that demands practitioners teach politics. The three forms of the good life are socially challenged, but they will not automatically fade.

Consider an example. In the Spanish region of Murcia, the extreme right party VOX introduced in 2020 the ‘parental pin’ – an initiative to allow parents to stop their children attending activities related to “socially controversial moral issues or to sexuality” that went against the ethical principles of families. The party justified their actions, arguing against the “obvious indoctrination in gender ideology that minors suffer in educational institutions”,[156] which was exemplified with a set of particular teaching materials aimed to prevent violence against woman and to foster gender equality. According to Abascal, political lobbies, whilst openly appealing to the ‘fact’ that men and women are equal, sneakily introduced non-appropriate content[157]. In introducing the parental pin, VOX were not pioneers; they followed existing examples in the USA and Brazil. Since 2004, Brazilian lawyer Miguel Nagib together with different catholic and evangelist movements have been campaigning for an "*Escola Sem Partido*” (non-partisan school). Supported by current President Jair Bolsonaro,

[156] Translation is mine from https://www.voxespana.es/noticias/pin-parental-y-libertad-de-educacion-20180904

[157] https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/abascal-a-los-nios-no-se-les-tiene-que-ensenar-juegos-eroticos_202001205e259cab0cf2658ed09d6acc.html.

the organisation offers a platform for parents to report, "activists masked as teachers"[158]. In 2020 USA, Ben Baker, a Republican lawmaker from Missouri also filed a 'Parental Oversight of Libraries bill' to stop young people accessing library events and readings described as "inappropriate for minors and disregarding dissent" introduced to children as part of "an agenda by certain groups". The trigger was the organisation of "drag queen story hours" in some libraries. In the case of Spain, it was not the first time VOX paid attention to schools. Santiago Abascal, leader of the party, had repeatedly complained about 'lefty' teachers to the extreme of encouraging his young followers to openly "challenge" those "lefty teachers who fail students for having VOX bracelets"[159].

The question that frames this chapter goes back to the overall aim of this book: how can political education provide an appropriate response to our current climate? The chapter first revisits the logic underlying existing political education practices. The subsequent sections make specific pedagogical recommendations and consider the limitations and risks teachers might face if bringing these recommendations to life.

Revisiting political education

From future to present

Current political education, like many other forms of education, has been built to preserve communitarian investments of the good life and facilitate the development of young people within their communities. Utilising knowledge and wisdom accumulated by generations, adults were educating young members so they would contribute to the future social betterment. As political education had its eyes on the time-to-come, the present was seen as a space for diagnosis of potential future wrongs and prevention/enhancement interventions. The analysis in previous chapters calls into question this future-orientated

[158] https://www.escolasempartido.org/.
[159] https://www.elplural.com/politica/pintadas-vox-profesores-valencia_228249102.

approach. Dominant forms of democratic good life appear to be in crisis, and it does look like society is progressively moving to an interregnum between what we were and what we are to be. Many in the margins, but also within modernity, question knowledge and wisdom accumulated by generations. Our current existential problems are unlikely to be solved within the parameters of the morbid system and knowledge from our immediate past no longer provides the energy to build any future. The present reality is politicised and polarised, our social relations are unstable, and there are multitude of open conflicts. We struggle to keep up-to-date on the changing landscape of political questions that demand our constant repositioning. In modern times it was easy to see how progressive commitments directed people to react to events such as workers' strikes, civil rights movement, women's and LGBT rights. But, how do the same people react today to Brexit, pandemic recommendations, regional separatism, or environmental claims? Uncertainty is the norm and the new catchall word from which this analysis cannot escape.

As we are submerging ourselves into the crisis, young people will continue to feel the signs of the interregnum. Some young people will pursue defending their alternatives for the times-to-come around questions such as climate change, indigenous rights, regional independence, racialised and patriarchal institutions, housing and, educational inequality. Isolation, loneliness and mental health issues will persist among the same or other young members of our societies. In their struggle to respond to our current conditions of social disparities and uncertainty, they might sometimes fall into nihilist disarray. Likewise, schools cannot be islands of assurance and stability for these young people. Knowledge will likely keep its centrality in the school curricula but not with the authority that it once had. Too many might question the issue of 'whose knowledge?' and everybody would be able to draw on evidence to support their own particular views. As we have already begun to see, schools will become arenas for any single political dispute. Unsurprisingly, those with different

proposals for the future will believe schools are terrains for their war of positions. Modes of school sociability will be altered, and the uniqueness of school relationality will be exaggerated. Students, parents and teachers have their own political subjectivities and will bring their disagreements with them. Some will no longer respect teachers' knowledge because they will question their sincerity, and the consequences of this, for teachers, students and the schooling institution can be severe. The example of the 'parental pin' indicates the magnitude of the 'tragedy'. Parents can boycott classrooms if they do not agree with what the teacher says or who the teacher is. Teachers' attempts to prevent violence against women can be read as "gender ideology" as if those holding those claims were beyond good and evil. VOX strategy as for schools appears to be one of fight or flight, demanding students to openly challenge their teachers or taking students out of classrooms where there is a dispute. It is easy to see how teachers might feel their authority is challenged and how schools do not escape the present climate of polarisation and uncertainty.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) argues we can no longer rely on the light at the end of the tunnel. The only option available is to carry a portable shaky lantern hoping that it will provide enough light to recognise our path and prevent fatal disasters. This metaphor is particularly relevant here. Political education needs to acclimatise to the current circumstances of conflict and uncertainty rather than pretending that it is business as usual. Political educators need to acknowledge that they are in a tunnel with shaky lanterns with no light at the end. It is crucial to think how children and young people can be prepared to navigate in these present conditions and how they can be assisted. It is not about telling students that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Going back to the example, nothing guarantees that gender equality and violence will be entirely defeated in the future if young people are politically educated now. It is about thinking about how we respond to our present

needs. There are many cases of violence against women now and teachers and students can do something about it.

From 'ethical' purpose to situated ethics

This change of focus demands that we revisit the rationale underpinning the curriculum. School curricula for political education are determined by an outcome-based logic in which educational experiences are selected because of their contribution towards specific goals. In the context of liberal democracies, these goals can be encapsulated in the three different forms of the good life that this book has repeatedly examined. The purpose of political education is to educate children and young people so they can acquire democratic values, including individual autonomy. Knowledge operates as an input and an outcome: a more knowledgeable society is desirable per se and predicted to be more democratic.

Political education functions in 'education for democracy' mode. Aspirational democracy is the goal that drives educational policy and practice. Adults, including policymakers, teachers and parents, envision desirable futures and think of political education practices that might better contribute towards this ideal. Young people are citizens in process, getting prepared with the knowledge and skills they need to bring this idea to reality. The logic is that education can contribute to the betterment of the future society, either via the reinforcement of existing political structures or the challenge of these structures and creation of new ones[160]. In both cases, adults conceive this ideal future and select the pedagogies that might more productively contribute to these goals. In this mode of functioning, aspirational democrats see political education as an instrument to pursue ethical endeavours. Ethics are the final fantasmatic non-negotiable promise. This explains why strong pedagogies that rely too much on aspirational accounts position democratic principles as destinations. The ethical

[160] For a discussion of the differences between constructive and reconstructive political education, see Parry (1999)

promise works as an external template and has primacy over everything else. Pedagogies are evaluated insofar as they are successful in distributing these predetermined ethics.

Given that our focus of attention needs to move from the future to the present, we must change this logic. The new context demands a "radical shift away from a supposedly meritocratic view of education that sorts and grades people into status hierarchies" to a new rationale in which we imagine education and politics both together (Stevenson, 2015, p. 545). Education *through* democracy[161] takes as starting point the understanding that students are already acting members of our society and schools are one of the arenas where social practices are instituted, contested and defended. The role of political education is to open to possibilities; what matters is not the goal but the politico-pedagogical experience. Consequently, the relationship between ethics and political education is also troubled. In education for democracy, political educators aim to educate young people into particular forms of the good life and ethics function as purposes and content. In education through democracy, ethics are the starting point and there is an assumption that ethics are situated within each relationship where participants respect each other in their alterity. This has two consequences. Firstly, no mode of the good life, beside this openness to becoming and alterity, is privileged. Politics teachers must not educate young people into particular forms of good life, but rather are to favour practices that do not stop students' opportunities of being and becoming. Secondly, as ethics are contingent to each education encounter, only teachers and students involved in each encounter are in a position to evaluate whether there is opportunities for them to manifest and express their subjectivities. As Todd (2014) puts it,

> "it should not be left solely to policy makers and curriculum developers to decide what kind of adults we want children to be in the future (or what kind of professionals we want adult students to become), but to find ways in our teaching to allow the

[161] For a more detailed discussion on the differences, see Sant (2019) and Biesta and Lawy (2006)

future to be open-ended. This requires an engagement in the present moment—in all its subtlety—that resists its co-optation in an already defined future. (p. 242)

Situated ethics are contingent on student-teacher encounters, and thus, they are continuously negotiated in such a way that escapes the possibilities of what can be anticipated. Teaching politics becomes a practice of mediation and exchange that cannot be predicted.

From strong and narrow to weak and open

These questions bring us back to the discussion about aspirational and open democracy and their corresponding strong and weak-open forms of political education. Political education was strong because it defined specific goals: to secure present stability and contribute towards the desired aspiration of a prosperous and productive society populated by knowledgeable and autonomous citizens. It was also strong in indicating the pertinent inputs: accurate knowledge, and rational and/or consensual epistemologies to negotiate across different forms of the good life. As examined earlier, the strengths of this perspective for political educators were evident. It offered well-defined ways of proceeding, that evaluated pedagogies and students' progress, through transparent values that everybody could audit. Moreover, strong political education was reassuring for practitioners who had to negotiate between different political, academic and professional demands. In many occasions, strong education synergised these commitments, and there was an epistemic criterion available otherwise. The problem is that the glue that binds together strong education is now melting. Teachers of politics can no longer use academic authority to regulate differences because academic authority is questioned. "Challenge those lefty teachers who fail you for having VOX bracelets!", Abascal claims. Then, he points at the "indisputable equality between men and women", and questions the commitments of teachers who attempt to bring political agendas to schools. Nothing can be publicly audited if there is no consensual

criterion for scrutiny. And practitioners are left alone, negotiating their dilemmas without a compass and, what it is worse, being the public face of the dispute.

As strong forms of education are adrift, we are forced to revisit the possibilities that weak education can offer. Indeed, the shaky lantern is arguably not that bad when there is no light coming from outside the tunnel or when there are so many lights that our sight is blinded. As a reminder, advocates of open-weak education only subscribe to political freedom as the ultimate purpose. Freedom is here not tied to knowledge or values other than the possibility of all students expressing their singularity and contributing towards a social renewal. This, of course, Biesta (2009) argued, raises the question of "so what do we do?" which he answered,

> "remind ourselves that the question of doing — the question of intervening, steering, and changing — is actually a question that belongs to the domain (or "paradigm") of strong education. That, after all, is the domain where there are actions and consequences, where there is influence and impact. In the domain of weak education, there is, therefore, in this specific sense, nothing to do, as the singularity of the subject cannot be "forced" or "produced." (…) But this does not mean that we, as educators, should just sit back and do nothing. The question we should ask about our educational arrangements — our curricula, our pedagogies, our activity plans, and the ways in which we run, design, and build schools — is whether they would preclude any encounters or experiences that have the potential for singularisation. The question, in other words, is whether, in our educational actions, we can at least make it not impossible for experiences to happen — without knowing, without being able to know, and, in a sense, without even wanting to know what the impact of such experiences might be" (2009, p. 361)

It is clear that practitioners make their living of "doing", but in my reading of this abstract, Biesta does not suggest that teachers should do nothing. Instead, he argued that educators should stop trying to predict the results of any pedagogical activity and selecting pedagogies only insofar certain outcomes were expected. Weak education is very much open education; it does offer neither securities nor guarantees, with no templates or best practices. However, in the current climate, who can? The logical question that follows is then, how do we practice it? As seen earlier in this book, open democrats are intentionally not very specific in defining what politic teachers can do or how open-weak pedagogies could be. The reasons for this are various and complex. Among them, there is a question of subdisciplinary boundaries. Until recently, open democrats were essentially found in theoretically-framed areas such as philosophy of education or cultural studies. But more importantly, in their defence of situated practices, open democrats have been reticent to provide recommendations that could be seen as templates. Yet, some pedagogies that do not prevent "experiences that have the potential for singularization" (Biesta, 2009, p. 361) have been implicitly postulated. These pedagogies fall into three distinctive groups: pedagogies of difference, pedagogies of articulation, and pedagogies of equivalence.

Open pedagogies for an interregnum

Pedagogies of difference

Pedagogies of difference are strategies to denaturalise social reality and signal its exclusions. They focus on logic of *difference* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) or on the particularities that make each social practice distinct. Deconstructive and unlearning pedagogies[162] fall in this category as they pursue the same twofold experience. On the one hand, pedagogies of difference question and problematise current practices and beliefs,

[162] See chapter one and also Andreotti, 2012; Backer, 2017; Gholami, 2017; Lo, 2017; McCowan, 2009; Rizvi, 2019; Zembylas, 2009

evidencing their contingency. On the other hand, they scrutinise the social landscape to rediscover alternatives. If politics are processes of power regulating differences and group decision-making, these pedagogies aim to expose the different possibilities that could be regulated.

Pedagogies of difference are initiated by selecting an empty signifier or a symbol whose meaning is/could be politically contested. Luckily for us, political education curricula are replete with symbols of this kind, "key categories in curricula (…) like ‘‘culture’’, ‘‘nation’’, ‘‘democracy’’, ‘‘science’’," (Szkudlarek, 2011, p. 122; also, Mårdh & Tryggvason, 2017). A quick review of the Competences frameworks examined in chapter two indicates other examples such as justice, equality and participation. Events, social practices, artefacts or artwork are also signifiers, whose meaning is controversial. History, geography, and ethics, often source disciplines for political education, have almost infinite examples of disputed symbols. What is more, any social practice could be subject to interrogation as all social practices are political (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Pedagogies of difference unfold through mapping exercises in which teacher and students collaborate to open up meanings that could be attributed to the selected symbol. The pedagogical activity is one of exchange and mediation between students and teacher. Students can communicate what they and their communities know and feel about the investigated symbol[163]. Teachers can elicit the plurality of options by engaging with academic discussions, utopian and dystopian images[164] and practices outside the margins of modernity[165].

Take as an example a teacher wishing to respond to the VOX campaign on gender ideology. The classroom could organise a forum on gender ideology. Students could discuss what they know about gender, how they feel about it and how they have experienced it. The

[163] See, for instance, Camicia & Dobson, 2010; De Lissovoy, 2017

[164] Recommendations for utopian and dystopian imagination can be found in Amsler, 2015; Sypnowich, 2018; Terentowicz-Fotyga, 2019

[165] See, for instance, discussion on the sociology of emergences in Santos (2018)

teacher could bring different resources to class, for example, Pope Francis discussing the issue, academic accounts on gender such as those of Judith Butler, and artefacts displaying how gender/sex has been practised across different cultures and worldviews. Teacher and students could also read gender-related science fiction novels such as those of Joan Slonczewski's or Margaret Atwood's to expand their discussion.

It is worth emphasising that the aim of pedagogies of difference is not to change students' viewpoints, nor is it to judge how they feel or think. Pedagogies of difference acknowledge plurality of knowledges and take as starting point respect for alterity, for who the others are and whom they might become (Todd, 2014). The purpose is to sow a seed of healthy doubt and expand the repertoire of possibilities available to them. Underpinning these pedagogies lies an attempt to favour more comforting, ethical and sustainable ways of living in these times of extreme uncertainty. As examined earlier in this book, learners can keep their fantasies at stake if they engage in ongoing processes of self and social interrogation. If children and young people learn how to question, they might discover more reassuring mechanisms to negotiate uncertainty that prevent them from filling existential lacks through corrosive fantasies. Simultaneously, pedagogies of difference promote the exploration and appreciation of options that have been hidden or denied to us. Education is here understood,

> "in terms of displacing the young from their *milieux* (to *educe* means to draw out) and prepare them not only for the worlds that are, but for those that ought to be as well." (Szkudlarek, 2013, p. 67)

It is not only a matter of traversing current fantasies but also to find and value how others can be a source of more refreshing alternatives for the forthcoming social regime. Pedagogies of difference aim to maintain a delicate balance between questioning and offering, so learners do not embrace nihilist stances or fanatic fantasies.

Pedagogies of articulation

Articulation is here defined as the process through which a relation between beings results in the modification of these beings' identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Pedagogies of articulation do not aim to modify leaners' identity but to create relational opportunities for learners to find and express different subjectivities. In this purpose, these pedagogies unfold in three different experiences. First of all, these pedagogies normalise political disagreement, so children and young people learn that dispute is inherent in any form of politics. Secondly, these pedagogies replicate experiences of radical openness where encounters with heterogeneous others can provoke new articulations with the world (hooks, 1998). Thirdly, these pedagogies make visible the contingency of political alliances. If learners can see themselves as alterity, this might trigger experiences of solidarity with others that could prevent fatal disasters.

Similarly to existing work on controversial issues[166], pedagogies of articulation begin by selecting a dispute which can cause classroom polarisation. For example, concrete situations of injustice, such as acts of police brutality, discriminatory treatment of migrants and labour strikes, that are likely to trigger emotional responses (Ruitenberg, 2010). However, in contrast to controversial issues, pedagogies of articulation do not aim to favour rational inquiry or agreement of a course of action but to mobilise students' affects towards the political debate. Given that subjectivity more clearly manifests when making decisions, the selected dispute needs to demand learners communicate their approval or disapproval explicitly and immediately. The alignment with an alternative is a process of articulation or affective junction between the student and the idea. Pedagogies of articulation are better described as ongoing processes in which the role of the teacher is that of a scenographer who assemblages events for actors to improvise. After students have reacted, teachers need to find new situations that have the potential to invoke different experiences and alliances. This is

[166] See Hess and McAvoy (2015)

because the purpose here is not to foster students' values, even if we think these values are noble. The aim is to find inner forms of commonality that can only be found in diversity; to show that each student is more than their gender, ethnicity, class or religion. Pedagogies of articulation need to evidence that the way learners position themselves in relation to others is only one among infinite possibilities. In other words,

> "the question 'What does it mean to be me?' never gets a definitive answer and must be constantly asked, carrying on the practice of articulation. (…) [D]ifferences are not intended to strengthen or 'empower' them [learners] but to open them up for other discourses, allowing them to transform while connecting with each other (Snir, 2017, p. 9)

By presenting students with contradictory situations, pedagogies of articulation make visible the contingency of political alliances.

Returning to the example of the educational response to the VOX campaign, the teacher could resume the exploration of gender ideology by requesting students position themselves in relation to a dispute. For instance, should transgender students use school bathrooms that match their identity? After allowing exchanges of experiences, viewpoints and feelings, the teacher could conclude the activity and move to a second (not necessarily connected) dispute. For example, should young people under 18 be allowed to vote? And after discussion, should pharmaceutic companies be entitled to own vaccine rights? The purpose, as mentioned, is to facilitate the normalisation of disagreement and the possibility of encountering heterogeneous others who challenge the parameters of fantasmatic constructions. The common ground is a mutual understanding that political relationships are unforeseen, and those who are 'enemies' in one struggle might become friends in another.

Pedagogies of equivalence

Pedagogies of equivalence are educational activities that aim to facilitate young people's contribution to the reconstructive task. As Frantz Fanon puts it, "[t]he task of education is not only reactional but also actional" (1967, p. 173), and this is precisely why pedagogies of equivalence are vital. As seen in chapter four, social change is a consequence of particular perspectives overlooking their differences in support of the common cause (i.e. logic of *equivalence*). At some point, a new order will be instituted, and it is the role of practitioners teaching politics to equalise, as much as they can, who can contribute to deciding what type of regnum emerges.

Pedagogies of equivalence involve those educational practices designed to facilitate young people's political actions. In some occasions, this can mean following students as they participate and helping them to learn from their actions[167]. In other occasions, this can manifest as deliberative pedagogies whose "purpose is to decide which course of action to take in order to solve (or in some way address) a shared problem" (Parker, 2008, p. 71). Pedagogies of equivalence can also take the shape of an examination of institutional politics or rhetoric mechanisms[168] or an exploration of more radical frameworks for politics[169]. In all cases, what matters here is not whether children and young people learn how to do things, but rather, whether that learning benefits their political life.

In a political classroom centred on discussing gender ideology, some students will likely advocate for feminist stances, others will take more conservative perspectives, and others will not engage much in the conversation at all. The task of the politics teacher is to help all these students to build alliances within and outside of the classroom. Is there any chance of feminist and conservatives joining for a common cause? Could 'apolitical' students join another struggle? For instance, would two groups of students join a campaign to prevent

[167] See, for instance, McDonnell (2014)
[168] See, for instance, Carleheden, 2006; Lefrançois & Ethier, 2010
[169] For instance, Laclau and Mouffe's framework in chapter four. Also, see Ruitenberg (2010).

gender violence? Or otherwise, what political movements would better represent each of these students? Pedagogies of equivalence attempt to open possibilities for students to make more meaningful contributions. Laclau and Mouffe have suggested that political agents are more powerful when they work in solidarity with others despite differences (i.e. they create *equivalential* chains). Teachers are here mediators, between students and other political actors or chain links[170].

Pedagogies of equivalence take as starting point Antonio Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals. For Gramsci, hegemony is the ideological predominance of a political perspective, and organic intellectuals are agents who interrupt hegemonic perspectives to create/reinforce counter-hegemonic alternatives. Critical pedagogies and pedagogies of equivalence both aim to create conditions for effective participation in hegemonisation processes. However, critical (strong) pedagogies demand teachers act as organic intellectuals who struggle for counter-hegemonic left projects (Apple, 2016). Open-weak pedagogies of equivalence, instead, aim to facilitate that students can influence hegemonisation processes in the direction of their choice. Practitioners need to "offer a compass and a roadmap, not assume the role of navigator" (Snir, 2017, p. 361). Indeed, following Laclau (1990),

> "if intellectuals (…) are to play a positive role in the construction of the new forms of civilisation that we are starting to glimpse (…), they must construct the conditions of their own dissolution as a caste. That is, we should have fewer 'great intellectuals' and more 'organic intellectuals" (p. 196).

Whilst in strong pedagogies the politico-educational practice is directed towards a particular cause, in the context of pedagogies of equivalence, the politico-educational practice is open-ended.

[170] See Snir (2017) for more about this.

Limitations and risks

The decentring of knowledge

There are several challenges concerning these pedagogies (of difference, of articulation and of equivalence) that need to be acknowledged, beginning with the role of knowledge. As seen in previous chapters, knowledge plays a critical role in strong approaches to political education. Knowledge is seen as both an input and an output of educational activities; teachers use knowledge to obtain their desired results and to assess learning. Often tied to facts and accuracy, knowledge is understood to be unquestionable and singular: there is a 'right' answer for every question. Partially because of this, knowledge operates as the criteria to negotiate across different beliefs. Knowledge is also valuable because it signals teachers' academic commitments. Before joining the teaching force, many political education practitioners studied a humanities or social science discipline, and this period of study often influences profoundly how teachers see themselves and what they teach. What is more, teachers' authority is directly connected to knowledge; there is an expectation that teachers are respected because they are knowledgeable.

By pointing at the limits of knowledge, open pedagogies question these premises. What teachers know from their disciplines is unlikely to be enough; teachers need to consider other ways and forms of knowing and embrace knowledge(s) in a plural sense. Becoming a teacher, more than ever, implies becoming a permanent learner. Practitioners might need to show some self-criticality and be suspicious about their academic commitments. Knowledge distributed by universities is also political and cannot regulate other forms of being/knowing without creating hierarchies across value systems. Teachers wishing to engage with open pedagogies need to consider other forms of judging student' learning or avoid individual assessment overall.

This change of perspectives does not happen overnight. It needs time to readjust, and this time can be painful for teachers who might feel they are losing social respect. However, what the example of VOX demonstrates is that all these changes are already happening and some teachers are already suffering their consequences. What open pedagogies do is recognise these limitations and embrace an alternative. Teachers' authority should not only be dependent on how much they know. Social respect can also be a consequence of whether teachers facilitate educational experiences that allow (or at least do not prevent) learners from understanding themselves better, feeling more comfortable in their skins and making meaningful political contributions.

The limits of the class

Open pedagogies take as starting point the infinite plurality of our social reality; encompassing many ways of being with each other. Political classrooms, however, are closed systems that offer limited possibilities of relationality. There are heterogeneous others that will never be found in real classrooms for many reasons, including age, nationality, and patterns of consumption. Teachers might wish to create opportunities for students to find and express new subjectivities. For Laclau (1990), however, subjectivity "is nothing but the unstable articulation of constantly changing positionalities" (p. 92), the positions students can occupy in a classroom are narrow. At some point, teachers might feel they have exhausted the different combinations of political alliances or potential encounters with alterity, and nothing has changed. In a classroom with thirty teenagers taking conservative or feminist stances on gender, a political teacher can struggle to find others who can challenge situated binaries. However, these perspectives do exist. Practitioners do operate as scenographers, literally. Encountering others might demand from teachers to leave the comfort limits of the school classroom and look for scenarios or potential actors elsewhere. Teachers wishing to embrace open pedagogies might need to make political classrooms permeable to the outside world.

The risks of not knowing

Contrary to strong approaches to education, open-weak pedagogies do not expect to predict the results of any educational intervention. Arguably, uncertainty can be unsettling. For instance, what if, when opening a dispute, students embrace perspectives that could lead us to fatal disasters? (Mårdh & Tryggvason, 2017). Or, in our case, what would happen with the one student (or invited parent) brings extreme misogynist perspectives to class and defends violence against women? There is no doubt that teachers should respond to these situations. Open pedagogies would not be very consistent if, in its attempt to favour singularisation and more ethical relations, they would be benevolent with fantasies that directly challenge these standpoints. Teachers wishing to engage with open pedagogies should not be afraid to act if misogyny, racism, homophobia or any other oppressive system openly manifests in class. In a situation of racism, for instance, teachers could stop the class, and discuss and denaturalise 'race' instead of continuing with the planned activity[171]. Pedagogical interventions need to "seek no to silence voices in the name of our discomfort", but to "recognize the "wrong" by opening up new contexts for shared meaning and continued contestation" (Todd, 2015, p. 114).

The risk of these situations happening should not prevent practitioners from approaching challenging examinations and from inviting different perspectives to be discussed. Zembylas (2019) has convincingly written about the importance of pedagogically engaging with the affective dimension of political education, even when approaching extreme-right groups. Similarly, concerning populist religious groups in the USA,

> "Making schools more responsive to religious sentiments may seem like a simple step, but it can have echoes that are profound since it may undercut one of the major

[171] See, for instance, how Backer (2017) discusses this same issue using the work of hooks

> reasons some populist groups who are also religious find their way under the umbrella of rightist attacks on schools and on the public sphere." (Apple, 2009, p. 96)

Questions such as those related to gender mobilise people's affects. If students or parents feel that their perspectives are excluded from schools, they might be more likely to attach themselves to poisoning discourses such that of VOX. What is more, direct attacks or exclusions of specific fantasies are more likely to energise, rather than inhibit, fantasmatic structures in which teachers are seen as obstacles. The risks of repressing and excluding these fantasies can be higher, after all.

The power of the fantasies

Open pedagogies are also hampered by the strength of pre-existing fantasmatic bonds. On some occasions, it will not matter what teachers do. Students or their families might be predisposed against them. Some of those who side with VOX, *Escola Sem Partido,* or Ben Baker are inclined to denounce teachers regardless of how open these teachers are to listening to their concerns. This is because, in their fantasy, teachers are on the side of the enemy, they are the obstacle that needs to be defeated. Practitioners' sincerity can always be questioned regardless of what pedagogies are embraced.

Simultaneously, whilst students might engage with open pedagogies, nothing guarantees that these pedagogies will indeed create the conditions for learners to traverse their fantasies. Christa Albrecht-Crane (2016) explains the example of one of her students who, having strong religious belief, was requested to write an essay on the arbitrariness of social beliefs. The student wrote a very insightful piece concluding with the statement:

> "There is a strong possibility that I am looking at this backwards, and that the only reason my religion does these things for me is because I have given it life and meaning through personal faith, which in itself is a construction of reality created through the mind. But for my own personal belief's sake, I sure hope not." (p. 506).

For the author, “I sure hope not” demonstrated how the student resisted being mobilised outside the limits of his fantasy and how his previous affective commitments prevailed over the educational challenge. Traumatic experiences are arguably painful, and students might reject them for their "own personal sake". This is a very likely ending of open forms of political education; students might engage with discussions in the context of the classroom, but when the class finishes and everybody goes home, students return to live their previous tales.

A final consideration results from teachers' political commitments. Young people are not the only ones who need fantasies; we all do. There will be instances when practitioners will feel divided between their educational and political commitments. They might wish to prepare their students so they can make a difference, but they might feel that some of their students are the enemies to be defeated. A comment, a VOX bracelet, a mere presence can put the teacher in question in such a way that it feels there is nothing more to discuss (Tryggvason, 2017). The teacher can feel that their animosity towards their student limits their “horizon of options” (Laclau, 2000, 82–83) to two: fight or flight. Indeed, teachers, as everyone else, also function within the margins of their own fantasy and in, this fantasy, there is no space for certain beliefs.

This affective constraint can be read as a limitation of open pedagogies, but there is also scope for a more optimistic outlook. Open pedagogies seek to avoid external templates that define what can be done in advance. There is, however, a vital difference between not having a pre-determined ethos and having no ethical principles at all. As mentioned, advocates of open pedagogies pursue forms of ethics that are internal and situated to educational practices. This shift redefines teaching politics as a moment of both freedom and responsibility that emerges from every teacher-student relationship. In the intersection between two agents and their fantasies, situated practical ethics can be continuously

negotiated. And when ethics fail, and fantasies prevent us from encountering others in their singularity, politics might begin. Paradoxically, when democracy appears to be in crisis, politico-pedagogical encounters might help us to rediscover that democracy was always meant to be about people coming together, sharing experiences, and deciding how to regulate their different ways of making life better.

Summary

There is an urgent need to renew political education practice. This renewal demands a change from future-orientated and outcome-based strong pedagogies, to open pedagogies whose purpose is to prepare children and young people for an uncertain and politicised reality that will at some point be reconstructed. For that, three types of open pedagogies are particularly well placed. Pedagogies of difference aim to facilitate questioning and alternatives, looking for more comfortable ways to negotiate uncertainty without losing all faith. Pedagogies of articulation attempt to normalise dispute and recreate conditions for encounters with alterity and commonality. Pedagogies of equivalence seek to foster opportunities so young people can be active members of the reconstructive task.

There are, nevertheless, important challenges for these open pedagogies. Firstly, the move away from knowledge-centred pedagogies can accelerate a change in the reasons underlying teaching authority. Secondly, the limited possibilities for relationality within political classrooms might demand that teachers open the classroom to others. Thirdly, teachers might need to assume that we cannot predict the results of open pedagogies. Lastly, there is a possibility that students and teachers' fantasies are more powerful than educational experiences, and on some occasions, open pedagogies will just not be possible. Open pedagogies demand situated forms of ethics that, without standing in democratic grounds, can offer more democratic prospects.

Chapter 8

Promoting Fundamental British Values as a Pedagogy of Differences

Abstract

Chapters eight draws upon empirical data of teachers promoting fundamental British Values in England to illustrate open pedagogies of difference. The chapter begins introducing the policy framework of British Values and the empirical project. It then considers different discourses and fantasies related to British Values and how these fantasies can influence teachers' pedagogies. The chapter presents pedagogies of difference as alternative to approach the controversial topic of British Values in class.

Keywords

open pedagogies; British Values; controversial issues; epistemic criterion; citizenship pedagogies

Since 2014, all teachers in England are legally required to promote Fundamental British Values (FBV) defined as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (Department for Education, 2013). Embedded as part of the anti-terrorist and anti-radicalisation PREVENT policy, the promotion of these values, however, is not allocated specific time in the school curricula. As a cross-curricular theme it is to be embedded within all schooling practices. The promotion of FBV is the most prominent component of political education in English schools. All children and young people in England are expected to learn about democracy, liberty, the rule of law, tolerance and respect, and all teachers, regardless of their specialism, are expected to "actively promote" them.

The policy has generated significant controversy within and outside academia. FBV was launched at a time when the leadership of the Conservative party was shifting their discourse on Europe to counter-act the rise of the pro-Brexit UK Independence Party (UKIP), and there was a movement away from multiculturalism towards assimilationist agendas that clearly manifested in the rise of leaders such as Michael Gove and Boris Johnson. Indeed, it has been argued that FBV is racialised in both, its history and its potential enactment, and the policy is a clear illustration of the nationalist-populist strategy that prevails in the Conservative party[172].

Alongside the political controversy, the request for promoting FBV has generated pedagogical dilemmas. Research suggests that FBV are open to multiple interpretations and many believe that Britishness, not the values, needs to be promoted[173]. Little pedagogical guidance has been provided, and teachers struggle to interpret the demands being made upon them in this area[174]. Yet, Ofsted – the Inspection Office operating in English schools – evaluates whether schools fulfil their PREVENT duty and inspectors' assessment on how well schools promote FBV is part of their evaluation used to publicly rank schools. As a result of this, "[t]here has been a proliferation of pictures of the monarch and union flags being put up on classroom walls just in case an Ofsted inspector pops in" [Moorse, in Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement (SCCCE), 2017]. Despite criticisms of this strategy even by the same inspectors, there is general confusion on what is expected from teachers. The case is particularly challenging to student teachers who are assessed against a set of ethical and behavioural standards – including the promotion of FBV – before entering the teaching profession.

[172] See, Baldini, Bressanelli and Gianfreda (2019)
[173] See, for instance, Elton-Chalcraft et al., (2016)
[174] See, for instance, Farrell, (2016)

This chapter draws upon empirical research conducted with student teachers in England to revisit the political dilemmas and the pedagogical possibilities that politics teachers encounter when teaching in contexts of populism. The chapter is organised in five main sections. The first section introduces the research project and its methods, whilst the second reviews the policy context and what we know of its enactment. The third section builds in earlier conceptual tools, including that of empty signifiers and fantasies to analyse how educational policymakers, academics and practitioners discursively construct FBV. Such analysis, as discussed earlier in this book, is essential to consider the nuances of this particular populist manifestation. The fourth section considers the possibilities available to teachers and makes a case for pedagogies of difference as an alternative to approach controversial topics in times of political polarisation.

The empirical study

The research underpinning this chapter was carried out in a postgraduate course of teacher education at a university in the North West of England. The postgraduate course was for student teachers aspiring to become teachers of English language and literature, with most of them having an undergraduate degree in humanities and/or arts. The course was university-based but with ample time spent on school placements, and it offered a mix of theoretical content (subject knowledge and teaching studies) and practicum activities.

The research was conducted by my colleague Chris Hanley and myself. Chris was the teacher educator in charge of providing subject knowledge and supervising placements, but I did not have any professional or personal links to the participants. We followed a small cohort of eleven student teachers in their journeys from graduate students to qualified teachers. The group was composed of 9 females and 2 males, all of them having an undergraduate degree and humanities and/or arts. Our participants identified themselves as British (6 participants), British and English (1 participant), English (1 participant), Welsh (1

participant), British and Welsh (1 participant), and British and other nationalities (1). The students were volunteers from a particular university and a particular course, and thus, we did not assume that other pre-service teachers shared their experiences. It is worth emphasising here that our participants were not studying to become specialist teachers who would directly teach politics. However, in their forthcoming professional practice, they were expected to enact a political education policy.

Our study took place between October 2015 and June 2016. By that time, discussions on 'Britishness' had become quite common. With the 'Brexit' referendum taking place in June 2016, the discourses that would become increasingly pervasive after the referendum were building up during the project. We collected data using written accounts, observations and interviews. In the beginning and at the end of the course, students were required to provide a written account of their understandings and views of the FBV requirements and how they would unfold these requirements in their teaching practices. In-between, we conducted non-participant observations in a range of settings, including university lecturers and seminar, and school-based placements. We collected field notes of the interactions of our participants with others, including peers, teachers, teacher educators and pupils. Besides, we conducted individual and group semi-structured interviews, where we encouraged our participants to discuss the political and pedagogical implications of the 'British Values' requirements.

We analysed data using a normative content analysis derived from two distinctive theoretical frameworks. We approached the political question of FBV in line with Laclau's (2007a) notion of empty signifier, as discussed earlier in this book. Underpinned by an interpretivist understanding, we assumed that our participants would give meaning to their reality through discourses or systems of meanings and values. We also assumed that discourses were constructed around nodal points or empty signifiers and that FBV would be

like an empty signifier with "different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 28). Meanwhile, we approached the pedagogical question of how the promotion of FBV could be unfolded using the framework developed by Hand and Pearce (2009). As we shall explore below, these authors document four potential approaches to controversies related to patriotism. We used these four approaches to examine the pedagogical alternatives discussed and practised by our participants. Our study was first published in the British Educational Research Journal (Sant & Hanley, 2018), but this chapter revisits and further elaborates some of the ideas that are particularly relevant for our discussion here.

The policy context

Currently, the term FBV is susceptible to multiple and contradictory meanings. The genealogy of the PREVENT policy bears witness to the complexity and the political struggles underpinning the term. PREVENT can be tracked back to Thursday 7 Jul. 2005, when a series of coordinated suicide attacks took place in central London, causing 52 deaths and more than 700 injuries. The attacks were perpetrated by four British Islamist suicide bombers. The terrorist attacks such as the 11th September 2001 attacks in the USA and the 2004 Madrid bombing among others, had a tremendous impact on global geopolitical dynamics and on national security policies. But the London attacks had a direct consequence (or at least provided justification for) an additional policy shift on the British approach to the question of diversity and national identity.

> “It was frequently noted that unlike other terrorist attacks, such as those in the United States on 11 Sept. 2001, the London bombings were perpetrated by British citizens[175] whose loyalties evidently lay with their ethnic and religious identities over and against

[175] Three of the four terrorists were born in the UK. The fourth one, emigrated to Britain when he was five years old.

the British state. Thus, the lack of a successfully mobilising, inclusive civic British identity came to be seen as the cause of large-scale divisions within the United Kingdom that could increasingly serve as a source of friction and conflict." (Asari, Halikiopoulou and Mock 2008, pp. 1-2).

The New Labour government had already leaned their policies towards reinforcing the idea of a shared national identity within multicultural Britain, but the terrorist attacks provided additional leverage to Prime Minister Gordon Brown in opening a new debate on 'Britishness'[176]. Brown argued for a rediscovery of enduring British values in an attempt to "prevent the 'Balkanisation of Britain' threatened by the rise of multiculturalism, increased immigration and, more latterly, nationalist separatism" (Andrews & Mycock, 2008, p. 141). Gordon Brown's emphasis on Britishness was taken on board by subsequent governments. However, whilst Brown had defined British Values as "liberty, responsibility [and] fairness", Brown's successor, David Cameron shifted the emphasis to democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, equal rights and freedom of religion[177].

The PREVENT strategy was launched in 2006 as part of the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism strategy. PREVENT was not initially intended for schools, but did provide guidance on how schools could combat initial 'symptoms' of terrorism[178]. As a result of the strategy revision in 2011 (HS, 2011), the “fundamental British Values” (FBV) of “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”[179] were officially included within the Teachers’ Standards and in 2013 and all teachers were requested to not ‘undermine’ such values.

Documents alleging a conspiracy to Islamise Birmingham schools were leaked to the media in 2014, fuelling a national scandal that came to be known as the Trojan Horse affair.

[176] Maylor (2006) provides a good account of this
[177] See, Osler (2009) and Arthur (2015).
[178] For a discussion, see Arthur (2015)
[179] See, HS (2011)

After Birmingham schools were accused of educating young people into strict Islamic ethos, the Department of Education imposed no-notice inspections on schools performing their PREVENT duty. Schools, particularly Islamic schools, were further scrutinised, and, in 2014, the Department of Education launched the Guidelines Promoting fundamental British values as part of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in schools (DfE, 2014). Since then, schools and teachers have been required to actively promote FBV.

In her study of how FBV have been enacted by English schools, Carol Vincent (2019a) documents four different approaches to the promotion of these values. Some schools have aimed to represent the British nation by displaying symbols including the Union Flag, the Queen or even cups of tea. Other schools have re-packed or re-located FBV as part of their school culture, either by identifying some already existing practices (e.g. school councils) that are ought to promote democracy, either by explicitly teaching these values, for instance, in citizenship education classes. The fourth group of schools has taken a critical engagement with FBV, allowing learners to examine the advantages and limitations of these values. There is no consistency in England in how schools approach political education, and FBV are not an exception[180].

Examining Fundamental British Values

Fundamental British Values as an empty signifier

The genealogy and the enactment of the policy illustrate how FBV function as an empty signifier, a placeholder for multiple interpretations of what Britishness and British values are. In our study, we identified three major competing themes attempting to give meaning to the question of FBV.

[180] Secondary schools in England are also expected to teach citizenship education, but the subject is taught differently in different schools. For a discussion on this, see Sant and Menendez Alvarez-Hevia (2019)

A first theme was associated with what is often known as the civic nation or a "set of institutions, rights, and rules that preside over the political life of the community" (Bruter, 2004, p. 190). In the documentation, FBV directly appeals to this civic nation with reference to the political tradition of democratic liberalism, including individual liberty, the rule of law, democracy, respect and tolerance. Two of our participants referred to this tradition:

> "Living in any country under British rule and citizenship. England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland etcetera" (Lorna)
>
> "Democracy, the right to freedom of speech, opinions and values. The right to your own beliefs. Equality no matter what race, religion, gender or age" (Carla)

Aligning with traditions of liberal democracy, notions of the civic nation were not uniform. Two distinctive chains of equivalences were united. One of them was associated with liberalism (the rule of law, individual liberty), and the other with democracy (fairness, equality). Whilst some, like Carla above or Gordon Brown, emphasised the democratic tradition, others like David Cameron and the policy itself, shifted the balance towards liberal values. Yet, these two traditions seemingly merged without major conflict within this perspective.

A second theme was associated with ethnic and/or cultural approaches to the nation. In the case of the British nation, this goes from racialised accounts of Britishness referring to bloodlines or Christianity, to cultural customs and practices such as tea, fish and chips, cricket, and so on[181]. Whilst there is no explicit mention of such features within the written policy, they do manifest in practice. When requested to talk about FBV, one of our participants mentioned a mix of "Being born in Britain" and "silly traditions that we have". Other participants mentioned, "tea", "being polite" and "being friendly". Many schools have indeed taken this cultural identity on board by displaying of union jack-themed decorations.

[181] For a discussion on the differences between political and cultural values, see Arthur (2015).

Indeed, whilst the policy explicitly mentions the political culture, its genealogy and enactment clearly signal a cultural, or even, and ethnic dimension. The policy was not originally intended to create a shared cultural framework for Britons but to counteract a terrorist Islamic Other. Further, politicians' and journalists' pronouncements re-centred the focus on culture and ethnicity. As an example, the tabloid the Daily Mail published a piece entitled: 'Teach British values in schools'. Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw insisted that young Muslims 'need to believe they belong to our society'". Given that the Other, as many have argued, has been racialised and constructed in cultural and ethnic terms, it was not surprising that many thought of the British "we" in similar terms[182].

A third theme is associated with ethno-symbolists accounts where the nation was understood as a convention of myths, memories and symbols that can be constantly reinterpreted[183]. Two of our participants argued,

> "I think Britishness, in its most basic sense, is being British. It has connotations of drinking tea and eating cake, despite the fact that these foodstuffs originate from India" (Monica).
>
> "What to be British means is constantly changing and adding in more (…) acceptance connotations, but constricting it to and interweaving it with the traditional Britishness definition" (Alistair).

These participants conceptualise FBV as an umbrella term that allowed the interaction of ("traditional") narratives interacting with more disruptive contemporary understandings. Such discourse is not that far of that from Stuart Hall, who once explained that "[c]ulture is produced with each generation. We reproduce our own identities in the future, rather than simply inherit them from the past." (Hall in Paul, 2005, p. 44). From this perspective, civic

[182] For a discussion on the racialisation of FBV, see Lander (2016), Elton-Chalcraft et al., (2017) and Jerome, Elwickb and Kazim (2019)

[183] See, for instance, Smith (2000)

and cultural discourses were acknowledged, but the doors were also opened to re-imagining FBV in different terms.

This later theme implicitly acknowledged the empty nature of FBV. What is more, it pointed towards an understanding of FBV being a floating signifier subject to the discursive pressure of, at least, two distinctive political perspectives On one hand, there was the cultural/ethnic chain in which FBV is associated with a range of practices, traditions and symbols including the Union Flag, tea and politeness. On the other hand, there was a political chain in which FBV was constructed through democratic and liberal values such as individual liberty, respect, the rule of law and equality. Whilst these two competing chains appeared to be in a battle (or a "war of position") to define how FBV are interpreted within schools, the third theme seemingly bears witness to such struggle, questioning whether FBV could be something different.

The Fantasies of the Empire

The FBV policy attempts to politically educate new generations of Britons in a national conception of the good life, whatever that is. Ideologically divergent politicians variously show their commitment to educating children and young people into these shared values since FBV is a response to a failure of convergence of fantasies among the peoples of the United Kingdom. Fantasies, as previously explained, are “collectively invested form of life, the good life” (Berlant, 2011, p. 11). Within the parameters of modernity, fantasies are needed for communities to survive and reproduce themselves. Britain, as Gordon Brown clearly identified, suffers from a lack of shared understandings of the good life that puts at risk the national survival. Brown thought that immigration and national separatism were the dangers to be fought, and British values were the solution. My suggestion is that Britain is also divided as for the question of Britishness itself.

The existence of two main oppositional fantasies around FBV has been suggested. In a focus group interview, student teachers discussed:

> "Holly. - … there are definitely places where no women have freedom of speech or they don't have a democracy or people aren't tolerated, so I don't think it is a global thing, (…) And it does happen, like it's happening in Syria every day for people just doing something simple.
>
> Ciara - And what we've got to understand is some of pupils are going to be coming from them places in the world …
>
> Holly - Yeah definitely.
>
> Donna - I know, but I just think all this kind of … these are British values, it just makes me think of like a British Empire, like we're so good at giving these values to the rest of the world, we're the best."

Holly positioned FBV in relation to freedom of speech, democracy and tolerance. Implicitly, she saw FBV as something positive, a promise for "places where no women have freedom of speech or they don't have a democracy or people aren't tolerated". In contrast, Donna associated FBV with the British Empire, and ironically questioned whether "we're the best". As explained earlier, in an interview, she discussed how FBV made her think about "colonisation and repression". For Donna, FBV were not a promise of something better, but a reminder of the colonial and oppressive history of the Empire.

We can see here how two oppositional fantasies of FBV. FBV, or Britishness, promised a good life to many. It suggested civic discourses spanning the nation where FBV were seen as a sign of prosperity and dignity. The fantasy was that if everybody were assimilated into the principles of FBV, societies would be more prosperous and harmonious. The fantasy could bring together Brexiter campaigners advocating "recovery" or the "independence" of Britain with aspirational democrats who believed on the undoubtable and

universal value of liberal democracy. Meanwhile, FBV and Britishness represented a symbol of the historical and contemporary consequences of the Empire to many others. From this perspective, the civic nation could not be separated from the cultural and ethnic tradition as they were historically intertwined. For instance, Black Live Matter protesters recognised symbols of the historical Empire as obstacles for a genuinely egalitarian society and as reminders of how Britain and its Empire took prosperity and dignity away to many. I suspect some of these protesters were guided by an understanding that if symbols of colonialism and of nationalism would be destroyed, the world could leave behind its modern legacy and immediately become a much better place. The opposition between these fantasies puts into question whether attempts of reconciling both perspectives are condemned to fail. Britishness or "British" generate oppositional feelings, it creates as much attraction to some as repulsion to others. In the words of Sarah Ahmed (2014), Britishness 'sticks'. It is not easy to trouble the affective investments that the symbol has historically accumulated and currently carries.

'Promoting' Fundamental British Values through practice

Available pedagogical alternatives

Notwithstanding their personal feelings about FBV, all teachers in England are expected to promote these values in their practice, regardless of their specialism. This is particularly problematic for student teachers who need to demonstrate this 'pedagogical competence' if they wish to gain recognition as teachers[184]. There is an expectation that, whether or not teachers engage with the cognitive domain of FBV (knowledge and skills), they still need to engage with the affective domain (values and practices)[185].

[184] For a discussion about this, see Maylor (2016)
[185] See Peterson (2011) for a deeper discussion around cognitive/affective domains.

Hand and Pearce (2009) identify four alternatives for teachers in approaching patriotism: avoidance, promotion, rejection, and problematising. We used this framework to interrogate our data.

Avoidance. Teachers can attempt to avoid the topic of FBV overall. They can do so by merely 'skirting around [it] in lessons and steering discussion into safer territory when it is raised by students' (Hand & Pearce, 2009, p. 453). In our study, only one of our participants implicitly suggested that she would avoid the topic if possible. In her practices, this student-teacher took a teacher-centred approach, showing particular interest in subject knowledge (English) and not much more. Avoidance is, a priori, the preferred practice for those who would favour narrow understandings of political education. It is here assumed that education is not linked to any moral aspirations, and it is just about passing 'useful' knowledge and skills to new generations. Besides deeper problematics of this approach associated with the economisation of education[186], my argument is that, in the context of this study, avoidance is neither possible nor desirable. Contexts of high polarisation such as Britain in times of Brexit led to the politicisation of society. Children, young people, and their families are prone to position themselves on one side of the dispute, and educational policies are likely to be aligned with strong forms of political education that transparently define political commitments. In these circumstances, it would be irresponsible for teachers to avoid such issues. If young people have questions, these questions need to be interrogated. And if, teachers are required "by law" to actively promote values, "skirting around” is just not a possibility for professionals.

Further, what this policy illustrates is that avoidance is impossible. Political education referenced to FBV is not only about knowledge but also about values. Teachers can avoid

[186] For this, see the numerous work of Biesta on the problems of qualification (e.g. Biesta, 2009; Biesta, 2015)

discussing the strengths and weaknesses of democratic systems, but they cannot avoid promoting or not promoting tolerance, democracy, etc. in class. Avoidance triggers the continuance or neglect of these values. More widely, what this contradiction reveals is the impossibility of avoiding political education altogether. Narrow forms of political education influenced by neoliberal discourses, whilst they seek to escape political discussion, still favour particular forms of the good life. Teachers might well focus, as our participant did, on the cognitive purpose of distributing knowledge but, in doing so, they will enact a particular set of community values linked to rationalistic or/and neoliberal values. Indeed, the FBV policy makes it clear that all teachers, regardless of their specialism, are political teachers.

Promotion. A second alternative has to do with actively promoting FBV by socialising students into the community values. Five of our participants showed their commitment to this perspective and described how they would use humour and stereotypes to discuss Britishness or would ask students to read a text and identify what British values were promoted. In our fieldnotes, my co-researcher Hanley noted how one of these participants was better at promoting a particular point of view than at problematising it. These participants felt comfortable teaching about FBV. Their response to the FBV policy was to teach English-subject knowledge so students would become advocates of these values.

Our examination of written accounts and interview data suggested that these participants understood FBV in relation to a set of cultural and civic traits. Whilst their conceptualisation of British values was variable – some mentioned tea and the Queen and others mentioned democracy and equality, they all felt that FBV were critical common bonds for into which students would be socialised. Indeed, these participants demonstrated a tidy narrative in which their professional, academic and political commitments coexisted harmoniously. Strong forms of political education were evident in this approach where the pursuit of knowledge, democratic values and political freedom were mutually dependent. Our

participants understood that if learners acquired particular forms of knowledge, such as specific understandings of FBV, they would develop particular values (support for democracy) that would make them independent (individual liberty). Earlier discussion in this book have shown some of the problems with assuming this perspective. Knowledge does not necessarily lead to specific values, and the links between community values and individuals' autonomy can be challenged. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) explain, Rousseau and his followers defended the idea that "men should be obliged to be free" (p. 183) without noticing that by posing freedom as an obligation, that very freedom was being curtailed. The same could be said about FBV. By positioning "individual liberty" and "democracy" as values to be promoted, the same FBV policy becomes paradoxical.

Rejection. A third option available is that of rejection. Jerome and Clemitshaw (2012) explain how teachers can take a "critical stance" while "generally refusing to promote simple or simplistic messages on behalf of politicians" (p. 39). Two of our participants, Donna and James, took this option. James explained,

> "I would never voluntarily teach or "promote" British citizenship. I don't think British citizenship needs promoting – it isn't a commodity".

These two participants were committed to pedagogies that would mirror democratic principles. For instance, in one of his lessons, James facilitated a debate encouraging students to voice their opinion and to support their points with evidence. Both James and Donna were willing to engage with the affective domain of the political education policy. Yet, they were opposed to explicitly 'promoting' FBV, arguing against the cognitive side of the policy. As teachers of English, they would be respectful and tolerant, but they would not explicitly teach their students about tolerance, which they saw as a problematic value. These participants demonstrated their alignment with discourses that conceived of British nationhood as the obstacle to be overcome. Despite FBV being explicitly defined in relation to political values,

cultural and ethnic understandings of FBV were ingrained in their accounts. They could not stop feeling the colonialist heritage of the Empire when thinking about 'British'. For instance, James explained,

> “Although I acknowledge that I am British I don't feel particularly patriotic and I don't rank my own heritage above other people's” (James).

My analysis of their perspective suggests that these two student teachers experienced an incompatibility of commitments. Whilst in their capacity of prospective teachers they were expected to educate new generations in the shared values defined by policymakers, their political commitments did not allow them to do so. This contradiction was a result of a clash between the two fantasies explored above. FBV were presented as a promise in the context of the policy, yet, they were read as an obstacle by these two student teachers. Indeed, if they could not engage with the policy, it was because they saw the policy and what it represented as the 'enemies' to be eliminated.

Many academics have praised teachers who, like these two student teachers, reject the idea of promoting FBV[187]. In contrast, my argument is that this rejection does not escape some of my concerns raised above. Rejecting the FBV policy is still a strong form of political education, in which teachers already have answers to all questions. These two student teachers certainly committed themselves to egalitarian and democratic principles, but yet, they still saw these principles as destinations to be achieved. Whilst advocating for more egalitarian societies with less oppression, those taking this perspective assumed that they knew better than everybody else.

Problematising. Hand and Pearce (2009) identify problematising as the only viable option. Problematising[188]means taking "a stance of neutrality, inviting discussion” and

[187] See, for instance, Bamber et al., (2018)

[188] This is very similar to the work on controversial issues which has highly influenced political education pedagogy worldwide

“presenting it as an open question or controversial issue” (Hand & Pearce, 2009, p. 454). Following the epistemic criterion, we explored in chapter one, the task of the teacher is to present arguments for and against the discussion and to facilitate students evaluate such arguments. In our study, three student teachers appeared to support this perspective, explaining that their main purpose would be for their students to debate Britishness. For instance, Monica explained she would introduce “British values”, check “students’ awareness” and, more importantly, “debate”. In the observations, Alistair demonstrated how he would practice this approach. He asked students to discuss a quote in their exploration of a character. Whilst he challenged students’ statements when he felt they were not coherent, the students felt confident enough to challenge Alistair's ideas and to ask further questions. Our analysis suggests that these student teachers understood FBV as an empty signifier open to change and modification. As highlighted above, they explained FBV were “constantly changing”, and they did not appear to position themselves in relation to any of the main fantasies outlined above.

As we were writing our article, we agreed with Hand and Pearce (2009) that problematising was the better alternative. We were not the only ones. Others have emphasised the value of this approach. Jerome and Elwickb (2019) argue,

> “by providing them [young people] with the knowledge to adopt a critical stance, and the opportunities to engage critically with media representations, the lessons appear to have provided at least some of these young people with the building blocks to be sceptical in the best tradition of the term, to disrupt the unconscious processes that may influence their thinking and to use ‘powerful knowledge’ to help them to think afresh about the challenges of terrorism and extremism and the value of democracy” (p. 110-111).

Yet, the problematising approach, as encountered in these academic accounts, is problematic as for the way it conceptualises knowledge. On one extreme, Hand and Pearce (2009) assume that knowledge is neutral and thus, teachers who follow the dictates of reason can take a stance of neutrality, escaping any consideration of a good life. As largely explored in this book, this is just not a possibility. Epistemic accounts are still underpinned by rationalistic accounts of the good life, and whilst teachers might not privilege debates in favour/against FBV, they still favour accuracy over other principles. Hand and Pearce's stance of neutrality is not that far from avoidance/narrow conceptions of political education, and thus, it is open to similar critiques. As Peterson (2013) writes, a stance of neutrality is just not possible.

On the other extreme, others – including Jerome and Elwick (2019) – take a problematising approach and implicitly understand that knowledge unavoidably leads to the conclusion of rejecting FBV. There is an expectation that "powerful knowledge" will change students' perspective regardless, and that knowledge is useful to traverse the nationalist fantasy. However, as seen in chapter six, this is not the case for those students who position themselves on the side of the fantasy of recovering the Empire. Those advocating for ethnic accounts of Britishness are unlikely to be convinced by academic knowledge. Further, this conception of problematising is not that far from that of rejecting. The difference is that there is an expectation that students will learn what is expected without telling them directly.

FBV through pedagogies of difference

Pedagogies of difference share much ground with problematising approaches, yet they are distinctive in their purpose and assumptions. Problematising approaches often assume that knowledge is universal or that there are universal ways to reach consensus, where by acquiring these knowledge and skills, we can escape our ideological constrains. If children and young people learn this knowledge and these procedures, they will escape corrosive fantasies. Knowledge is here the tool through which we emancipate ourselves from fantasies.

Rather, pedagogies of difference are grounded in an understanding that universal and consensual knowledges are both promises of the modern fantasy. If children and young people are convinced by the idea of powerful knowledge, they will be embracing a different interpretation of the good life. Pedagogies of difference question that liberation from ideological constraints is possible and challenge the assumption that consensus is something inherently good. Instead of attempting to emancipate learners from their present fantasies, they aim to expand the repertoire of available fantasies whilst keeping at stake the more corrosive elements of our fantasmatic constructions.

This subtle difference is more evident when considering practical implications. Teachers wishing to engage with pedagogies of difference needs to begin considering FBV as an empty signifier and develop strategies so students can map out existing demands on the question of FBV. For instance, teachers could ask students to draw images that represent these values, survey their friends, family and neighbours on their understandings, explore the web searching from alternative conceptions of the signifier, etc. They could also engage students with more theoretical approaches. Outline the history of Britain and its imperial past. Providing traditional narratives but also more critical accounts such as the Windrush scandal. The teacher could take their students to a museum such as the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool or the People's History Museum in Manchester. They could discuss different conceptualisations of Britain – from George Orwell's romantic England to Stuart Hall's multicultural Britain. They could then engage in discussing alternative realities with students. For instance, they could also use science fiction to outline very different interpretations of what FBV could mean. Fortunately for teachers working in the UK, there are multiple books that explain fiction realities for future Britons, from *Never Let me Go*, *The Children of Men* or, more recently, *Drone State*. Teachers could also go on to explore what alternatives are available outside the margins of the 'nationhood'. They could, for instance, bring global

citizenship, human rights, education for sustainable development or global ethics into the debate of FBV. The purpose should be to expand the repertoire of available understandings, so students can imagine more refreshing alternatives.

Pedagogies of difference as a response to the FBV situation are not far from what is already happening in some schools. Yet, pedagogies of difference demand not only an interrogation of nationalist fantasies but also an ongoing process of self and social interrogation. Teachers cannot expect that pedagogies of difference will lead students to more egalitarian and more knowledgeable perspectives. Pedagogies of difference are open pedagogies; we assume that we cannot predict and we do not wish to predict its results. Teachers needs to approach the pedagogical process with a sincere, open mind, without knowing what understandings will emerge and without positioning these understandings in an explicit hierarchy. The aim is to push to open possibilities rather than narrowing these down.

This obviously does not mean that teachers “do nothing” if, when opening alternatives, colonial fantasies manifest in the shape of racist, homophobic or any other sort of extreme-right fantasy. But, in order to keep these fantasies at stake, it is probably more helpful to further question these discourses rather than simply shutting them down directly using knowledge-based hierarchies or just teachers’ authority. Zembylas (2019) argues,

> "this idea would mean providing opportunities in the classroom to debate the politics of different ideologies, including far right ideologies, as long as this takes place within a democratic frame. It is easier said than done, of course, however, educators attempting to do this may need to employ a range of pedagogical strategies that skillfully navigate the dangers such as: developing a supportive emotional atmosphere and a trusting, open relationship between educator and students; being sensitive to students' personal biographies; acknowledging how the educator and students feel about the issue at hand; emphasising the importance of educators and students

> reflecting critically on their emotions and affects; recognising and examining multiple perspectives and interpretations, yet identifying and taking a firm stance against racist views; and finally, using familiar active approaches such as discussion, small groups, and independent learning as short-cuts into controversy" (p. 10).

As Alastair, one of our participants, explained, teaching and learning are ongoing processes of negotiation where the role of the teacher is to “pose questions”. The teacher can ask, “who thinks this is moral?”.

Summary

Student teachers in England are demanded to promote Fundamental British Values as an example of the relationship between political commitments and pedagogical dilemmas. In a context of politicisation, it is likely that competing discourses and fantasies exist and that teachers find themselves having to make politico-pedagogical decisions. In some occasions, teachers might feel a harmonic balance between their academic, political and professional commitments, whilst in other occasions, they might feel contradictions in what is the best way to proceed. Avoidance, promotion, rejection and some problematising perspectives are challengeable as they rely on modern assumptions on the nature of knowledge and autonomy that are problematic. Pedagogies of difference are an alternative to this approaches which purpose is to facilitate a renewal of repertoires of existing fantasies.

Chapter 9

Pedagogies of articulation. The example of global citizenship education

Abstract

This chapter introduces discussions around global citizenship education to consider the possibilities and limitations of pedagogies of difference and of articulation. Drawing upon two different empirical studies, the chapter first considers different fantasies associated with global citizenship and how these fantasies might interfere teachers' expectations. The chapter then makes a case for pedagogies of articulation as a way to offer opportunities to find and manifest different subjectivities.

Keywords

agonistic pedagogies; open pedagogies; global citizenship; citizenship pedagogies; higher education

In 2015, as an academic working on a higher education institution, I was given the responsibility of developing a programme focused on global citizenship and education for the undergraduate Education Studies degree. The degree focuses on the theoretical study of education drawing upon related disciplines and, although it does not itself lead to teacher qualification, we calculate that more than half of our students will enrol to postgraduate teacher training course once graduated. The new BA Education, Global and Citizenship Studies was going to have a particular emphasis on the role of political education in the global context.

It was not random for my university to consider a course on global citizenship and education. Global citizenship is a vital feature of the internationalisation agenda within the Western Higher Education sector. Often embedded within discourses on social responsibility, the rationale for the internationalisation agenda is essentially economical. Universities

assume that graduates who gain attributes such as global perspectives in knowledge, flexibility or linguistic skills might be better positioned to compete for jobs in an increasingly globalised world[189]. This neoliberal discourse is often intertwined with a more benevolent liberal discourse emphasising the appreciation for global institutions of governance, human rights, and intercultural communication, which are seen as 'global ideals'[190]. As in all aspirational accounts, the logic here is that if learners engage with the appropriate forms of knowledge, they will autonomously behave in such a way that will benefit global ethics. Yet, when accepting the responsibility of developing a programme on Education and Global Citizenship, my purpose was different. Influenced by critical accounts of global citizenship, I was concerned about the hierarchies of gender, race, culture, class, and knowledge that framed dominant conceptualisations of citizenship and humanity and how liberal and neoliberal discourses reenergised existing us-versus-them narratives[191]. My ambition was to unveil these frameworks of domination to learners, unsettling the anthropocentric, Cartesian and binary understandings that underpinned them.

With this purpose in mind, the new programme gave me an opportunity for pedagogical inquiry. Whilst working on the curriculum design, I undertook two small scale research projects piloting open pedagogies in relation to the topic of global citizenship. This chapter draws upon my experiences in these two projects to exemplify the differences between pedagogies of difference and pedagogies of articulation, and how the later can complement some of the limitations of the former. The chapter, therefore, draws upon research conducted in higher education settings. Findings and conclusions would be different if the studies would have been conducted in schools; yet, as the main purpose of the

[189] For a discussion on the neoliberal discourse, see, e.g. Oxley and Morris, 2013, Morais & Ogden, 2010; Zahabioun et al., 2013, Haigh, 2002; Shultz, 2007; Walker, 2012

[190] This is often known as world-culture theory. See Sklair, 1999; Spring, 2008

[191] See, for instance, Roman (2003), and Gammal and Swanson (2017)

discussion has to do with pedagogy, implications can be drawn as for school-based political education.

The chapter is divided in two sections. The first section examines the first study. It first discusses its methods and procedures, and then it considers the findings and the implications for pedagogies of difference. The subsequent section focuses on the second study. Again, a discussion of methods is followed by an examination of the possibilities and challenges of pedagogies of equivalence.

The limits of pedagogies of difference

The first study: a collaborative project

I conducted the first study in early 2016[192]. In undertaking this work, I was driven by an assumption that my undergraduate students would more likely support neoliberal or liberal discourses of global citizenship, and I had an interest in examining what type of pedagogies could facilitate the interrogation of us-versus-them narratives. Following Andreotti (2006), my explicit aim was "not “’unveiling’ the ‘truth’ for the learners, but providing the space for them to reflect" (Andreotti, 2006, p. 49); yet, implicitly, I hoped that engagement with relevant texts would trouble my students’ fantasmatic constructions.

I worked with a group of five self-selected students enrolled in the second year of their Education Studies degree. The students were all in their twenties, and they defined themselves using a range of concepts including their gender (three females, two males), their interest in becoming a teacher, their residence in Greater Manchester, and their religious beliefs. For three months, I met with them weekly for about an hour to discuss ideas related to global citizenship. In the first session, I introduced the overall project and provided tools for educational research. We discussed our alternative perspectives and experiences and, at the end of the meeting, I provided students with a range of readings for them to explore

[192] This was published in Citizenship Teaching and Learning (Sant, 2018)

different conceptualisations of global citizenship[193]. The following sessions were dedicated to analysing different understandings, with conversations constantly shifting between theoretical and personal accounts. During this time, I became a participant-facilitator, privileging my pedagogical task when discussing theory (offering advice, helping to understand ideas), and my role as a participant when discussing experiences. The pedagogical dimension of this project echoed processes underpinning pedagogies of difference. We collected data collaboratively. We took field notes during meetings, kept an online blog where we wrote reflections on what had happened during the session, and audio-recorded some conversations. At the end of the project, in line with the academic demands of the degree, the students submitted an assignment where they examined this data. My own analysis included a focus on the pieces we created together as well as on students' assignments. For the purposes of this chapter, I have revisited this data in relation to the conceptual tools of fantasies[194].

Five fantasies of global citizenship

My analysis suggests that my initial expectations were not fully realised. In designing the project, I had assumed my students would understand global citizenship through the lens of neoliberal or liberal fantasies, and I had anticipated that aligned with critical perspectives would be adequate to trouble these fantasies. Our first conversations already revealed more nuanced and multidimensional interpretations, that coalesced around five different fantasies across two axes: globalists/nationalist; left-wing/ring-wing[195]. Diagram two illustrate these fantasies; the horizontal axis represents economy from the traditional left to the traditional right. The vertical axis represents culture from globalists to global sceptics[196] including nationalists, sovereigntists and anti-globalisation movements.

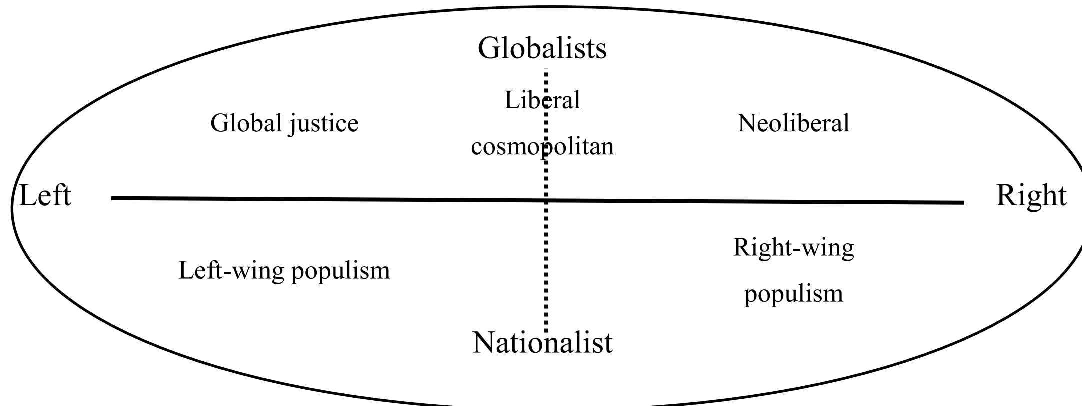
[193]. The texts included an institutional policy, Coryell et al. (2014), UNESCO (2014), Osler and Starkey (2003), Caruana (2014) and Andreotti (2006).

[194] See more in chapter 5

[195] For this, see also Inglehart and Norris (2016)

[196] See, Torres (2015)

Figure 2. Double polarisation (inspired from Friedman, 2015, p. 183) and five fantasies related to global citizenship



The first fantasy (bottom-right in diagram 2) positions the national/local people (us) against the global people (them). This is the fantasy that sustains right-wing forms of populism, including, for instance, that related to Donald Trump or Boris Johnson. The fantasy promises national recovery, cultural or ethnic homogeneity. The obstacle is the global immigrant-other who is constructed in relation to "weaker groups, seen as corrupting, leaching off, or otherwise undermining the integral "people"" (Ingram, 2017, p. 648). The notion of global citizenship, in this perspective, represents an alliance of these global vagabonds[197] with 'lefty' elites. None of my students believed in this fantasy; still, their accounts were full of implicit mentions on the dangers of these discourses.

The second fantasy positions the national/local people against the global elite (bottom-left in diagram). Global citizens are here seen as cosmopolitan elites or, "finance capital, media elites, political classes, cultural elites including intellectuals, all interact within a process of cosmopolitanisation" (Friedman, 2007, p. 451). This is, to some extent, the focus of many contemporary left-wing populisms that define the obstacle as globalised elites or

[197] The notion of vagabond is used by Bauman (1996) who describes this global other as those forced to move 'because they find the world unbearably inhospitable' (Bauman, 1996, p. 13).

imperialist forces[198] (e.g. SYRIZA in Greece, Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela). This fantasy implicitly underpinned some of the students' accounts, particularly at the beginning of the project. Harry explained,

> "Personally, I don't have much of a connection between the country where my grandparents grew up and this may mean that I'm at a disadvantage in terms of being a global citizen due to the poor link between my' home country' and the country I was born in" (Harry, blog).

For these students, the global was implicitly considered to be the privileged other ("I'm at a disadvantage in terms of being a global citizen"), the one who had something (in these extracts, access to different forms of knowledge and different cultures) than the national/local citizen had not.

It is worth noticing here that by the time of my early data analysis this fantasy had become meaningful to me. The realisation that my student did not in fact share the neoliberal or liberal fantasy pushed me to reconsider the purposes of my project. In the online blog, I wrote,

> "I think they would have never thought about researching on global citizenship without me suggesting it. In certain ways, power relations. GC can be highly linked to power relations. I can imagine "important people" from the United Nations, UNESCO and so on being quite happy in promoting GC to everybody. But what GC means to most people? I guess absolutely nothing. Someone "imposes this on me, I "impose" this on you guys, you "impose" this into next year students…"

As the note illustrates, more than anybody else, I fantasised through the perspective in which global elites or the "important people" were seen as the obstacle to be eliminated before emancipation from "power relations" could take place.

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[198] See, for instance, Ingram (2017).

The third fantasy is connected to the liberal (aspirational) approach. Positioned in the top-centre part of the diagram, this fantasy portrays global citizens (us) against the national people and national elite (them). Whereas globalisation represents progress and the promise of a better world, nationalism is at “odds with a world in which economic, social and many political forces escape the jurisdiction of the nation-state” (Held & McGrew, 2005, p. 17), and it is the obstacle to be defeated. This is the anti-populist fantasy *per excellence*. In theory, this discourse presents itself as universalist and all-encompassing. In practice, however, it operates through a fantasmatic construction in which populists are understood as those who threaten social order and harmony. This fantasy underpinned some of my students' discussions on global citizenship, particularly as they were discussing some cosmopolitan accounts they had read. Students mentioned that global citizenship education was a way to promote "better people", to teach learners the "the right and wrongs in the world”, and a “solution for social and political unrest that divides society”. Global citizenship education was here portrayed as a tool to better present deficits or to emancipate us from our social woes.

The neoliberal fantasy of global citizenship (top-right in the diagram) conceptualises the global elite in opposition to the global and national people. In this fantasy, global citizenship "offers the 'ordinary citizen' the promise of the benefits of progress, security, the suggestion of certainty, and the hope of mostly-economic ascendancy of the nation-state and its people" (Gamal & Swanson, 2017, p. 22). Neoliberalism promises productivity, competition and individualism, and neoliberals see themselves as the winners of the globalisation process. The obstacles to be defeated are the losers who are less educated and whose knowledge and skills are obsolete. The neoliberal promise is not much of a social promise but a promise of individual success over others.

My students did not align with the neoliberal fantasy of GCE at the beginning of the project as I had expected, but did so at the end. For two of them, global citizenship had become an aspirational identity. Caitlin and Sandra wrote in their final notes,

> "the world has taught me how I should act and how I can succeed in life. Education contributes to global competition which I therefore belong to" (Caitlin, coursework)
>
> "In the end I think [that global citizenship] (…) relates to the development of knowledge, skills and understanding, eventually leading to a world of work" (Sandra, coursework).

Caitlin and Sandra understood global citizenship as the corporative citizen who was successful in developing the knowledge and skills needed to prosper in the market economy. For these students, this fantasy provided a promise of order, harmony and a way of understanding their present reality and their potential struggles to achieve success. If they could just defeat their adversaries in the "global competition", the world would become a much better world.

The fifth discourse understands that we all are global. In line with critical accounts of global citizenship, this discourse embraces plurality and diversity, and there is an explicit attempt to overtake binarism. As mentioned, in designing the collaborative project, I was driven by an implicit interest that my students would engage with this approach. At the end of the project, only Bess, one of my students, appeared to fantasise about it. She explained,

> "I don't think you should enforce your own opinions on other people. (…) But I think social justice has a better impact that just looking to an education based on economy. (…) Even if it might be wrong, I feel one opinion is better than the other".

Bess acknowledged the existence of multiple perspectives, and she committed herself to a social-justice orientated approach. I initially felt delighted when I read her conclusion. Yet, a closer examination showed that Bess had not overcome binary thinking. Instead, she had

created a new binary structure. In this fantasy, the promise was social justice or those fighting to make their "better" opinions prevail. The obstacle was those "just looking to an education based on economy". The global people were here opposed to the right perspective overall. The obstacle to be defeated were neoliberal elites and right-wing populists.

The fantasmatic trap

The pedagogical aim of this collaborative project was to interrogate dominant neoliberal and liberal discourses to unsettle the binary understandings that framed them. Students began the project with left-wing populist fantasies, and they finish aligning themselves with neoliberal, liberal, or critical fantasies. As I see it now, the project was successful in opening students to new subjectivities. However, I did not experience a feeling of success whilst analysing data. As mentioned, the collaborative ethnography was secretly underpinned by a strong rationale with a more definite and desirable outcome: my implicit hope was that students would be able to problematise fantasies. As a strong pedagogy, the results of the project did not give much scope for optimism. Only one of the students aligned herself with what I thought to be a more desirable discourse, and the rest of the students essentially moved from an unexpected fantasmatic narrative to a fantasy I was trying to defeat.

This experience illustrates some of the challenges of open pedagogies. Pedagogies of difference, and likely other open pedagogies, are not easy endeavours for educators more accustomed to outcome-based rationales. Whilst I explicitly committed myself to ""not “’unveiling’ the ‘truth’ for the learners", I hoped that my students would reach to similar conclusions to my own when presented them with the ‘right’ sources. Yet, as the results of this project suggest, these predictions were mistaken. Strong pedagogies in hyperpolarised context are unlikely to provide the expected results. Educators, like me, who may expect that by having the same knowledge, students will reach the same conclusions, are at risk of being

somehow naïve. We do not know how students feel and experience their reality, and we cannot predict all the possible dimensions of polarisation available to them. Strong pedagogies feel a little bit 'too simplistic' in our current context.

What is more, strong pedagogies that seek democratic purposes tend to be self-defeating. We cannot promote democracy, without falling into Rousseau’s paradox of ‘forcing democracy’. In my case, by attempting to create doors for students to escape their fantasies, I became a victim of my own persuasions. My examination of Bess's accounts evidenced that both of us were functioning within the fantasmatic structure; we both saw neoliberal and liberal fantasies as the enemies that needed to be defeated. Whilst today, I still feel more comfortable with Bess' fantasy than with any others, the critical account of global citizenship that I embraced was still grounded in the same meta-fantasmatic structure that I was trying to challenge. We have a limited horizon of options (Laclau, 2007b); we all are historical subjects trapped in a meta-fantasmatic structure[199]. Prescribed pedagogical approaches are at risk of "projecting colonial desires and entitlements onto those alternatives if trying to imagine them from within our colonial system" (Pashby et al. 2020, pp. 157). Most attempts to escape fantasies are built within conceptions of the modern good life, and they perpetuate the deficits they attempt to overtake. The modern way of thinking conditions our possibilities, and it is difficult, if possible, for us to see anything else. The best chance for teachers and other educators to not reproducing what we are trying to question is by embracing our situated practices, rather than attempting to grasp the horizon itself.

Pedagogies of articulation

The second study: agonistic workshops

[199] See, Gilbert (2014)

Unsatisfied as I was with my framing of the collaborative ethnography, I decided to pilot a very different pedagogical approach. It was 2016, and we[200] were given some funding to further explore the pedagogical dimension of the new programme. On this occasion, the pedagogical activity was underpinned by radical approaches to democratic education, particularly those deriving from the work of Chantal Mouffe. The purpose here was to help learners to navigate their complex realities and create spaces for them to manifest their singularities. I designed agonistic workshops as a pedagogy of articulation with three aims: (1) normalise political disagreement, (2) offer opportunities to express different subjectivities, and (3) demonstrate the contingency of political alliances and our fantasmatic narratives. We invited our undergraduate students (some of whom had participated in the collaborative research), master students, academic experts, teachers, university, primary and secondary students and members of civil organisations promoting global citizenship. I defined the activity as an agonistic workshop: participatory workshops where theoretical, practical and experiential experts join their efforts to explore the plurality of options to complex issues – in that case, that of global citizenship.

I drafted eight statements on the topic of global citizenship. The aim was to ensure the statements would represent alternative perspectives on the notion of global citizenship. The statements were:

- In a better world, we all would have the same rights and responsibilities.
- In a better world, everybody would have the same resources
- In a better world, we all would share a similar culture
- Everybody should be able to say what it means to be a 'global citizen'

[200] Whilst I designed and led this activity, the workshop was embedded into a broader project I co-led together with Chris Hanley that included numerous colleagues. Among them, Jane McDonnell, Karen Pashby and David Menendez Alvarez-Hevia with whom I have critically examined and written about this project elsewhere (Sant et al., 2020).

- I can feel part of a community that includes all human beings
- Some people are more “citizens of the world” than others
- Schools should educate children and young people to be citizens of the world
- I think I could help others to discuss about “global citizenship”

In writing the statements, my primary purpose was to make room for controversy. Each statement was considered to be a situation in which participants had to respond, and the range of statements was purposefully selected to illustrate possible polarisations (e.g. economy, culture, politics, education). The aim was that participants would position themselves differently in relation to different statements.

The forty-four participants were organised on mixed tables for discussion, with each table including a representative of each of the groups mentioned above. In each table, a researcher (myself or a colleague) took the role of facilitator. After an ice-breaking activity, the facilitated presented participants with a statement on global citizenship. The participants showed an *agree* or a *disagree* card to express their opinion. Then, the facilitator asked participants to join the side of the table with other members who had shown the same opinion. In the sub-groups, participants debated their ideas and later presented those to the opposite side of the table. After the discussion, the facilitator introduced a new statement and the process re-commenced. The activity finished with a plenary where the different reasons were presented to others.

Several strategies were used to capture data. These included two research assistants taking fieldnotes, pictures and conducting short informal interviews during breaks. In addition, all participants were requested to provide a written account of their experiences and to write short notes on a post-it note to be put in a box. Six months later, some participants were requested to provide an additional account of their memories. I analysed this data

together with some of my facilitator-colleagues[201]. Our analysis was driven by theoretical ideas, particularly those from Mouffe, and for our intention to examine the pedagogical possibilities and limitations of pedagogies of articulation.

Agonistic workshops as pedagogies of articulation: possibilities

Our analysis of data suggested that the agonistic workshops were partially successful in their purpose of normalising political disagreement. As a new question would immediately replace the previous one, there was not much scope for engaging in a conflict that escaped the statement itself. In contrast with what one could expect, there was no time for what we could define as personalised conflicts or attacks to individuals. Conflict was somehow 'confined', and some participants really enjoyed this. Two primary students reported,

> "[I] like seeing what other people think about statements and seeing different statements of what people think. Whether I agree with it or not" (Primary student, informal interview).
>
> "[I enjoyed the] disagree and agree things. It was really fun doing that and listening to each other's opinions and working together" (Primary student, informal interview).

Agonistic workshops, as pedagogies of articulation, did create conditions for participants to expose their subjective motivations. Some of us had initially assumed that participants would select their cards following their peers (primary students with primary students, undergraduates with undergraduates). But this was not the case. Instead, each of the participants came to conclusions, based on their singular experiences. None of us could have predicted how each participant would respond to statements.

The tempo of activity was critical to its success. In schools and other educational settings, we usually encourage 'rational' engagement with debates. In line with the logic of controversial issues, students are often requested to assess the cons and pros of each

[201] Sant, McDonnell, Pashby & Menendez Alvarez-Hevia, 2020

controversy using pieces of evidence and to reach a consensual decision that might lead to something else[202]. Such activities require time to allow students to refine their arguments. In agonistic workshops, there was no need or time to engage with evidence, but rather questions requested immediate and affective responses. One of the participants in the workshop defined such opportunity as "free ranging". Participants felt free from rationalistic constraints.

The workshops evidenced the contingency of political alliances and its underlying fantasies. Participants were requested not only to position themselves but to openly manifest this position to others. The transparent and public dimension of the activity was essential to expose the "new layers of social reality" (Snir, 2017, p. 19). Participants had to display and perform their views showing their cards and moving to one or the other side of the table. Those movements were essential to expose the contingency of all subjectivities. Our visual data illustrates a constant flow of participants who would move to one and the other sides of the table to discuss their views with different people each time. Participants' written and spoken accounts suggest this troubling of subjectivities. They explained,

> "Really worthwhile day and set of activities – enjoyed the agree/ disagree activity in particular. Impressed with student's capacity to justify opinions and our ability to disagree well. Some arguments changed my view." (unknown participant, post-it)
>
> "On the 'agree/ disagree' task, the discussion was much more free ranging. (…) I felt that this task allowed us to get into 'meatier' discussions about our thinking and to be involved in collective reasoning. Paradoxically, despite - or because - we did not have to come to a decision, on this task, there were more examples of people being persuaded by others' views". (researcher, field notes)
>
> "It is surprising how the discussion changed some of the participants' views. A couple of weeks after the activity, I was told that one of the primary students has

[202] See, for instance, Bickmore & Parker, 2014; Lo, 2017; Parker, 2010

mentioned that, after thinking carefully about arguments putted forward, she thought she should change her mind" (researcher, memories)

In pedagogies of articulation, "no performance is merely a repetition of a given pattern; all necessarily involve unpredictable interactions" (Snir, 2017, p. 354). We did not know what will result from such interactions, but we did know that only insofar different interactions were available, new subjectivities could emerge.

Agonistic workshops as pedagogies of articulation: challenges

Our analysis also illustrated two critical challenges of pedagogies of articulation. Firstly, despite the relatively secure environment, some participants reported conflicting feelings negotiating disagreement. This was particularly the case as for older participants, most of them qualified teachers and/or educational researchers. In the fieldnotes, one of the facilitators wrote,

> "I was interested to hear that Adrian [an invited international researcher] - also on my table - had enjoyed the first activity [the ice breaker] more than the second, as he found it more collaborative and creative (I think his words were that it involved creating something together)." (Researcher, field notes)

According to Audre Lorde (2017), we all have been programmed to respond to human diversity with fear, and to fight or flee when we encounter difference. We are products of a modern regime of desires that tells us that we need to assimilate or destroy others. We feel the need of "creating something together", and this something always needs to have a singular and uniform voice. We are not used to disagreement, and we do not know how to deal with it. Whilst the purpose of pedagogies of articulation is precisely to tackle this situation, it would be naïve to think that this will happen overnight. Pedagogies of articulation are likely to generate contradictory feelings.

Secondly, assembling pedagogies of articulation is a complicated task. We noticed how some of the selected statements did not generate the expected controversy and, in our conclusions, we explained how perhaps more concrete situations of injustice would have been more helpful for this purpose. Simultaneously, we acknowledged that, the main reason for new subjectivities to emerge, and for the creation of new alliances, was that participants were able to interact with different others. In contrast with the exceptionality of these agonistic workshops, political classrooms are usually much more confined. Having said this, teachers wishing to engage with pedagogies of articulation can create conditions of exceptionality with far fewer resources. Teachers can open the gates to all forms of visitors students would not normally interact with. In some contexts, for instance, this might mean opening the classroom space to refugees, homeless, people living from social benefits. In other contexts, to elderly citizens, activists, civil servants, etc. Even, within the school context itself, students can interact with others including teachers, and other members of the staff. Mixing students from different age groups in the same activity can be quite unsettling for students, and bringing unexpected views to class, such as those of the coach, the concierge, or the chef could have similar or even more unexpected developments.

Summary

Pedagogical interventions are unpredictable in hyperpolarised contexts. As the example of pedagogies of difference in the case of global citizenship education has illustrated, educators cannot know in advance the result of any political education practice. As educators, we are also conditioned by our own fantasies, and reality tends to more complex than our initial analysis. Even when students engage with academic or other knowledge-based sources, their conclusions can be unforeseen. Teachers of politics will better assume this uncertainty and embrace the opportunities that this openness offers.

Agonistic workshops, where a diverse range of participants share their views on several controversial themes, are a good example of (open) pedagogies of articulation. Agonistic workshops can facilitate learners to become better positioned to navigate the hyperpolarised reality by normalising conflict, creating opportunities to manifest subjectivities and new alliances. Yet, the lack of ability in navigating dissent and the finitude of the class present some additional challenges for those willing to engage with these pedagogies.

Chapter 10

Pedagogies of equivalence in the context of the Catalan movement for independence

Abstract

Chapter ten draws upon empirical data to discuss social studies and history education in the case of Catalonia (Spain). The chapter begins by examining the historical context of the Catalan movement for independence and it provides a brief account of the empirical project. The chapter considers how secondary students fantasy around the question of independence and scrutinise how teachers could respond to this challenging context. The chapter concludes examining the possibilities and challenges of engaging with pedagogies of equivalence in a hyperpolarised context such as that of the Catalan society.

Keywords

open pedagogies; fantasies; nationalism; Catalonia

The last decade has seen the ascent of right of centre newspapers and politicians in Spain[203] accusing schools in Catalonia of indoctrinating children into Catalan separatist ideology. Several factors have been identified as causing such indoctrination, including schools dominantly using Catalan as a language of instruction, schoolchildren being allowed to participate in separatist demonstrations, and teachers' response (as we saw in the introduction of this book) to the Catalan referendum for independence in 2017. A key focus of educational controversy has been the way in which some historical events have been taught. In Spanish schools, history education is integrated with geography within the subject social sciences, and social science teachers are also in charge of political education through

[203] See, e.g. https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2017/09/22/59c4153eca4741101f8b458f.html ; https://www.elmundo.es/cataluna/2017/10/16/59e3ae1a46163f94488b4640.html

the independent subject of citizenship education. The Catalan government has established the syllabus for social science as an additional layer of the Spanish syllabus. As part of their programme of study for social science, students aged 13-14 are requested to examine the final incorporation of Catalonia into a centralised Spain under the Castilian rule in Eleventh September 1714.

In 2014, the Catalan people celebrated the 300th jubilee of the historical events of 1714. The events of 1714 have for a long time been explicitly discussed in all the textbooks for secondary social science. However, as part of the jubilee, the Catalan Government, the Barcelona City Council and several other organisations developed different educational expositions, materials, games and activities to teach the children and young people of Catalonia about 1714. Teachers and academics had mainly developed the resources, yet they did not satisfy everyone. Many thought that the historical event was mystified and supported a unidirectional national narrative. As an academic and former social science teacher, I felt at discomfort with the nationalist narratives underlying some of these resources. Together with colleagues from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, we carried out a research project to further evaluate the magnitude of our concerns. We published some of our initial findings in a professional journal for teachers, where we manifested our worries about the dominance of a majoritarian narrative that understood "the Catalan nation as immutable and not as an imagined community (Anderson, 1993) that can choose it imagines itself". We recommended that teachers "should probably explain numerous different stories" (Sant, Boixader, Pages & Santisteban, 2015).

Unintentionally, our article became part of the political controversy that it described. The Spanish newspaper *El Pais*[204] gathered and summarised parts of our article[205]. The

[204] El Pais tends to support arguments against the separatist movement (Munoz, 2014)
[205] https://cat.elpais.com/cat/2015/10/04/catalunya/1443977920_418699.html

newspaper piece became a resource for anti-separatist internet activists that used the *El Pais*' interpretation of our analysis to justify the claim that Catalan schools were indoctrinating students into Catalan separatism. Our research had 'impact'; it was just not the desired one. Whilst we had argued that the Catalan nation was an imagined community that should be able to reimagine itself, the anti-separatist activists understood that the Catalan nation was imagined in opposition to the 'real' nation of Spain. Whilst we have argued that the events of 1714 should be taught through multiple narratives, the anti-separatist activists argued that it should be aligned with the majoritarian Spanish narrative. Our article was decontextualised and used as a weapon to criticise schools as indoctrinating apparatus associated with the separatist movement. Now, six years later, I return to that context and to our original data. That data was initially collected with the primary purpose of examining how the myth was constructed and the secondary purpose of mapping out how current discourses connected with earlier manifestations[206]. My ambition here is different. I seek to revisit how politics teachers could respond to these issues. Earlier the example was offered of teachers who were investigated for organising a minute's silence against police violence during the referendum day, and others who had just given up political discussions. My question is, what could teachers do?

This chapter begins by examining the historical context of the Catalan movement for independence. It then provides a brief account of the empirical project, including a description of methods and the participants involved. Drawing upon data, the chapter then scrutinises different fantasies existing in the Catalan society and the relations and connections across fantasies. It then moves to examine the possibilities and challenges of engaging with pedagogies of equivalence in a hyperpolarised context such as that of the Catalan society.

[206] We have published these examinations elsewhere (Sant, 2019; Sant, Pagès, Santisteban & Boixader, 2015

The context

Catalonia is a region situated in the northeast of Spain whose capital is the well-known city of Barcelona. With a population of more than 7.5 million inhabitants, Catalonia is the second most populated region and the fourth wealthiest region of the Spanish state. Often described as a "nation without state" (Guibernau, 2000, p.4), Catalonia is entitled to self-government within Spain. In Catalonia, three official languages coexist, Catalan, Spanish and Occitan – with Catalan being the vehicular language within Catalan schools.

The Catalan claim for independence has a long history that, for my purposes here, needs to be outlined. Catalonia was not incorporated into a centralised Spain under Castilian rule until 1714. A key date of the Spanish War of Succession (1700-1714) was Eleventh of September 1714 when Barcelona surrendered to the French-Spanish army of Philip the 5th. Eleventh September 1714 is commemorated today as the Catalan national day (la *diada*), and it is often seen as the end of Catalan political autonomy and cultural organisation[207]. Catalan nationalism appeared in the 19th Century in the context of European romanticism. As Catalonia was experiencing a fast and extensive industrialisation[208], intellectuals turned their attention to Catalan traditions, mainly its language. In 19th Century Catalonia, Catalan was the prevalent language used in everyday affairs by most, yet, it did not have political or economic value[209]. Spanish was the administrative language and the language of nobility, where the political and economic elites would prioritise Spanish over Catalan as a sign of status. This shifted as a consequence of Catalan romanticism. Romantic intellectuals, most of them belonging to the emerging bourgeoisie, revitalised language and traditions and began to claim the recovery of Catalan institutions, banned in 1714. The first celebration of the Eleventh September 1714 took place in 1886, and it became a ritual to be followed every

[207] Crameri, 2014; Guibernau, 2000; Mock, 2012
[208] See, for instance, Muro & Quiroga, 2005
[209] See, for instance, Nelde (1996)

year. The Catalan self-government, including its parliament and its Government (*La Generalitat*) was reinstated in 1932 in the context of the Spanish Second Republic.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) divided the Spanish society in multiple ways, one of which was regional. There were many Franco supporters in Catalonia, but most of the population and its government sided with the legitimate republican government of Madrid. In his statements explaining the coup d'état, General Franco proclaimed,

> "Our victory means the salvation of Spain and it will avoid Spain becoming a Soviet colony. It means the restoration of the national unity that was threatened by political dealers and traitor separatists" (translated from Llera, 2001).

After Franco's victory, Catalan self-government was revoked and prohibitions of use of Catalan language, traditions and cultural demonstrations began. The Catalan president, Lluis Companys, was executed in 1940 accused of rebellion. During Franco's dictatorship, Catalan society changed dramatically. Extensive populations migrated from South and Central Spain to Catalonia to work in the Catalan industrial sector. Perhaps over 1.5 million Spaniards migrated, doubling the population of Catalonia[210]. Meanwhile, and despite the political ban, Catalan nationalists began to reorganise themselves. Mock (2002) puts it thus:

> "when it [Catalan cultural organisation] in resistance to the Franco dictatorship, it had adopted very different social forms concerning very different political ideologies. The notion of restoring a sense of distinct Catalan political identity developed mostly in reaction to Franco's repression of the fledgling Catalan cultural revival, centered on recovery of the language. This made defense of the language into a political act, and language rights became an issue around which national democratic forces could converge.

[210] See, Marin (2009)

> The first public celebration of the Diada in 1964 was also the first postwar Catalanist street demonstration. It thereafter became an annual occurrence, gradually incorporating participation from all social and political segments identified with Catalan national distinctiveness in reaction to the Francoist regime, culminating in the Diada of 1977, two years after Franco's death. A million people attended this gathering to demand a statute of autonomy for Catalonia (…) causing the annual commemoration of September 11 and the Catalanist movement in general to be inexorably intertwined in popular imagination with the struggle against dictatorship and the broader movement for democracy and decentralisation" (Mock, 2012, p. 41 - 42).

This alliance between the Catalanist movement and the pro-democratic sentiment became apparent when two years after Franco's death, the Catalan president elected in exile, was allowed to return. The reestablishment of Catalan laws and institutions in 1977 was seen as a sign of democratic health for many.

The relationship between Catalan and Spanish institutions became normalised, and to an extent, pragmatised. In contrast with the left and anarchist orientation of Catalan movements in the early 1930s, Catalan nationalists, in this period, were under the leadership of a centre-right party. Their discourse was one of protecting the, by then, minoritarian Catalan culture and language[211], and of self-autonomy within Spain. The main controversies with Madrid had to do with the way taxes and funding were distributed across regions. Then, new tensions began in 2006. In 2005, a new autonomy law regulating the Catalan-Spanish relationships was approved by both Catalan and Spanish parliaments and gained the support of 74% of the Catalan people in a referendum. The Spanish Conservative Party (*Partido Popular*), then the second party in the Spanish parliament, appealed the new law to the

[211] In 1986, 34% of the Catalan households would use Catalan as their primary language (Nelde, 1996).

Spanish High Court of Justice arguing that it breached the Spanish constitution. The Spanish High Court of Justice sanctioned the policy in 2010 generating a sense of democratic outrage among Catalans and provoking massive protests in Barcelona, mobilised under the slogan, "we are a nation, we decide". Simultaneously, the 2008 financial crisis impacted strongly on Catalonia. For some, the crisis increased the "awareness of the impact of accumulating an annual deficit of 8% of Catalonia's GDP due to the financial arrangements established by the Spanish state" (Guibernau, 2014, p. 15), fostering popular classes to support independence. For others, separatism grew as the "political expression of a new generation of entrepreneurs ready to compete on a global scale and without the costly and often hostile intermediation of Madrid" (Illas, 2014, p. 16). It is commonly agreed that the economic crisis did not originate the claim for independence. Still, it nurtured it.

From 2006 to 2014, support for independence dramatically increased[212]. According to Gillespie (2015), Catalan independence was driven by both top-down and bottom-up processes. Top-down, the Catalan government, again led by the Catalanist centre-right party, began an institutional campaign supporting a referendum for independence. This party had evolved from demanding more self-autonomy within the Spanish state to support the motto "Catalonia, the new state of Europe". Whilst in the government, the party had also introduced strong measures of austerity supported by the Spanish state and the EU. Bottom-up, (often left orientated) social and civil movements fostered the support for secessionism through unofficial referendums, the use of social media, and the organisation of social events, including demonstrations, and human chains. The tensions between Catalan separatists and the Spanish government grew as the *Partido Popular*, who had appealed against the autonomy laws, gained the elections in 2011. The coalition of the top-down/bottom-up

[212] Surveys indicate a growth of support from independence from 14.9% in 2006, to 48.5% at the beginning of 2014.

separatist movements culminated in the organisation of a referendum in October 2017. Separatist requested Catalan people to vote about the demand of an independent state. Meanwhile, the Spanish authorities declared the referendum to be a breach on the constitutional arrangements and forbid the event. Several independentist politicians, activists, and officers were arrested or charged with sedition because of their involvement. The (illegal) referendum and the police violence that TVs across the world showed was the visible result of those tensions.

The empirical project

We conducted our research in 2014 when tensions were growing but had not yet reached their peak. Catalan people were by then celebrating the 300th jubilee and, as mentioned earlier, we were interested in examining how teaching resources and students understood and mystified the historical event in that context of political polarisation. The research had two separated dimensions. The first part of the project comprised an analysis of teaching resources used in schools at the time. I collected 18 instructional materials that discussed 1714, including textbooks, and lesson plans and museum resources gathered in a pedagogical website created by the Catalan government to celebrate the jubilee. All materials were addressed to secondary students and included written text and images[213].

The second part of the project focused on how students understood the event. By way of professional networks, we contacted six teachers from six different schools. The schools represented a range of institutions and populations, semi-private or state school, rural or urban location economic status and anticipated support for independence. Within these schools, we requested 340 students (aged 13-15) to respond to a questionnaire with multiple questions, including 1) what groups do you identify yourself with? And (2) do you know what happened on the Eleventh of September 1714 which is commemorated every year

[213] The first analysis of that data was published in Sant (2017)

during the national day of Catalonia? And if so, could you provide an account of this?[214] We selected two or three students from each school to be interviewed. In selecting these students, we were driven by an interest in capturing a range of different historical and political viewpoints. I interviewed a total of fourteen students using a sorting-picture task. I selected twenty-eight pictures that could represent the social and political groups that had emerged from the questionnaire data, and I used these pictures to warm-up conversation. To understand how students saw their contemporary political reality, I invited students to sort the pictures into as many or as few groups as they wished, as many times as they liked. Afterwards, participants discussed their views of 1714 in relation to our previous discussion. The purpose here was to investigate how current and past understandings were nurturing each other[215].

When, for the purposes of this book, I came back to these two sets of data, I used the conceptual tool I have developed in this book as analytical drivers. In this occasion, and in contrast with my previous manuscripts, my main interest was in gaining an understanding of how the students understood their present reality. I first used the conceptual tool of 'fantasy' to examine accounts. I then further explored these fantasies in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's notions of demands, antagonism and chain of equivalencies.

The hyperpolarised political classroom

Four fantasies

My analysis of the data suggests the existence of four different fantasies somehow related to the Catalan nationhood.

Figure 3. Four fantasies within Catalan schools

[214] We published some results from our questionnaire data in an article in Enseñanza de la Ciencias Sociales (Sant, Pages, Santisteban & Boixader, 2015).
[215] An analysis of this data was published in Sant (2019b)

	Catalan nation (independence)	Spanish nation	‘Cosmopolitan’ people	Vague populism
We	Catalan people	Spanish people	Liberal - cosmopolitan	The people
Other	Spanish elites	Catalan separatists	Nationalists	The elites

The first fantasy positioned the Catalan nationhood in opposition to the Spanish elites. Carlota and Lina, two thirteen-year-old, explained in the questionnaire,

> "[I identify myself with] the young people, the people who celebrate my local festivity, the people who support the independence, the people from my theatre and swimming clubs, etc. (…) In Catalonia, we were independent, and they took everything from us in 1714. They abolished our laws, and we stopped being independent because the Spaniards took it from us. And now we are part of Spain. We celebrate our national day each 11th of September since then, and we claim our independence, because if we had it, there would be fewer injustices" (Carlota).
>
> “[in 1774] he [the Spanish king] stole all of our [the Catalan people’s] freedoms, our language, our laws and our culture in general and he imposed their language [Castilian] (…) And now each 11th of September we claim to have our rights and freedoms back. (Lina) "

In these student analyses, the social reality was constructed through an antagonistic relationship between the Catalan people and the Spanish authorities, with the latter mainly represented by the Spanish king. These authorities were seen as the obstacle to be overtaken for the Catalan people to recover its self-sovereignty. Independence was here the promise of a world with "fewer injustices". This discourse of the Catalan nationhood was built through an

equivalential chain, spanning numerous and divergent demands. One of the teaching resources explained the relations between Catalonia and Spain from 2006 until 2012 in the following terms,

> "In 2006, the Catalan Statute [autonomy law] of 1979 was replaced by a new Statute that defined new relations between Catalonia and Spain and regulated auto-government and financial issues. The new statute was impugned by the Popular Party that appealed to the Spanish High Court of Justice. In consequence, the people of Catalonia lost their capacity of self-government and therefore freedom. Furthermore, successive Spanish governments have neither accomplished the funding agreements nor the payment terms. This, together with the economic crisis, has brought Catalonia to a critical economic situation.
>
> The present situation led to the creation of the National Assembly for Catalonia [ANC] in 2012. The Assembly, together with other social movements, demand the independence of the Catalan nation. On the Eleventh of September 2012, the ANC organised a demonstration in Barcelona that gathered more people than the demonstration in 1977. The motto of the demonstration was "Catalonia, the new state of Europe"".

Alongside the students' account, this text pointed to the different demands evident within the chain of equivalences. Independence or the "new state", as an empty signifier, brought together demands of cultural, economic and political sovereignty. The new state signified an ambivalent promise of cultural recovery, wealthier economy, "self-government" and "freedom". The common ground for these demands was its opposition to "successive Spanish governments". Independence here ought to brings what Berlant (2011) defines as an affective sense of wholeness, projected in the future.

The second fantasy positioned the Spanish people against the Catalan elite. According to Muro and Quiroga (2005), Spanish nationalism has been unified in its opposition to Catalan (and also Basque) nationalism movements. Similarly, Gillespie (2015) explains,

> "Both the conservative Popular Party (PP) and the centre-left Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE, henceforth abbreviated to Socialist Party) have taken note of the concerns of regionally based defenders of the unity of the Spanish state, not least because they have to compete in regional elections every four years. Elements within the PP, meanwhile, have made ideological efforts to reaffirm a Spanish nationalist discourse while showing a lack of empathy for the ambitions of other nationalisms within the country. Thus, in contrast to simplistic depictions of a "rise in regionally-based nationalism," there is evidence of tension, if not a clash, between different national sentiments and regional interests" (pp. 6-7).

Whilst none of our participants explicitly aligned with this fantasy, traces could be found across accounts. One of the participants suggested that students should not learn Catalan history and another that the celebration of the Eleventh September was a nationalist invention that "interrupted" an otherwise peaceful day. The Spanish fantasy was the mirror image of the Catalan fantasy. Whilst in the Catalan fantasy, Catalan independence promised a more harmonic society, in the Spanish fantasy, Catalan separatism was seen as the obstacle for a more harmonic Spanish society. The switch also operated at the level of portraying the fantasmatic 'roles'. In the Catalan fantasy, the Catalan nationhood was portrayed as 'the people', and the Spanish authorities as the elite. In the Spanish fantasy, the Spanish nationhood was portrayed as the people and Catalan nationalists as the elite. Catalan nationalists were here seen as 'elitists' who thought they were better and wealthier than their Spanish counterparts.

The words of Artur, one of our participants, bear witness to these two antagonistic fantasies. In the interview, I asked Artur to explain how people in Catalonia would portray the events of 1714 if they were to make a film. He explained that a Catalan nationalist would portray the Catalan people as heroes who should be proud of their fight, whilst a Spanish nationalist would show that Catalan people were defeated by the Spanish troops. Artur, nevertheless, did not align himself with any of these two discourses. He preferred to describe it as a social division between the nationalists (Catalan and Spaniards) and the 'liberals'. He later explicitly defined the liberals as those,

> "who have an open mind. For instance, who are not racist. Who respect all types of conditions. Who lives in a world where we all respect each other. (Artur, interview) "

Artur presented himself as liberal rejecting any form of nationalism. Similarly, to all the other students, Artur described his reality in antagonistic terms. This antagonism, however, was different in character to those previously discussed (Catalan/Spanish; People/Authorities). For Arthur, the 'liberals' with an open mind were opposed to the nationalist implicitly defined as "racist" and not "respectful". In the interview, I invited Artur to explain how he would narrate the story if he was a film director making a film on the historical event. He described:

> "I would show the truth. Catalan people were defeated, and yet they are proud of it (although I don't share this perspective). (…) But I would certainly know how to evidence reality because there is a reality and this cannot be hidden".

Artur's account is a perfect example to illustrate how different moral and epistemological principles intertwined within the aspirational fantasy. The aspirational (liberal) chain unites knowledge (reality) and values (open-mindedness) in equivalence. This mutual dependence provided epistemic justification to separate himself from the others. Artur saw nationalists as those who did not see reality, and himself as the one who did. Yet, he was not able to

recognise that he was still part of the same meta-fantasmatic structure that he criticised: nationalists were the obstacle to be defeated to achieve a more harmonious society. The difference was that whilst nationalists were transparent as to the political nature of their demands, the libera fantasy was here depoliticised in its appeal to knowledge as self-evident reality.

The fourth fantasy can be illustrated through the comments of Adria, a fifteen-year-old who explained in the interview:

> "We now speak our language, Catalan, because of us, not thanks to the politicians, because politicians do not care whether we speak Catalan or Spanish. We, the people, are the ones who want our language.
>
> Edda: (…) What politicians? The Catalan politicians or the politicians from where?
>
> Adrià: The politicians.
>
> Edda: In general?
>
> Adrià: Yes, in general.
>
> (…)
>
> I would demonstrate to demand the Catalan independence, I want it… But, I would not gain anything, because those who decide are those who are 'uppers' and although we demonstrate several times, we might help a bit, but not a lot. Furthermore, this might have an impact on you losing your job. If you go to demonstrations, you might get a bad image, because people might recognise you."[216]

Adrià's demands were articulated in line with those of Carlota's and Lina's above. He explicitly indicated that he wanted Catalan independence and, implicitly, he demonstrated his alignment with discourses around Catalan culture, participatory democracy and economic concerns. Adrià's demands were united in an equivalential chain with more explicit separatist

[216] Translated from Catalan.

perspectives. It is not surprising that Adrià claimed "I would demonstrate to demand the Catalan independence, I want it". Yet, Adrià's perspective was distinctive in two different ways. On the one hand, Adrià explicitly constructed a "we" defined as "the people" in opposition to an "other" represented by "the politicians" and "the uppers". The "other", the obstacle whose defeat would mean something, were those with the power of decisions, "in general" regardless of whether they were Spanish or not. In Adrià's account, the obstacle was not Spain or Catalonia, but the elites overall. On the other hand, Adrià's views did not entirely operate within the fantasmatic construction. His account showed the obstacle, but not the promise. This as a perfect example of the populist fantasy. A great critique of our system that does not offer any alternative at all.

A lack of promises

A final fifth perspective was represented by Andrea, a fifteen years old who explained in her written account,

> "My mother is from Barcelona, and my father is from Malaga. I am from B[217] but I identify myself as "Malagueña". (…) [I also identify myself with] women, smokers, young people and music fans.
>
> (…)
>
> I don't care whether or not they become independent, providing they allow me and my people to live in peace. I am honest; I do not try to be offensive.
>
> (…)
>
> I am not very interested in this topic [Catalonia and its history]. I do not identify as Catalan"[218].

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[217] B is here used to represent a small village within Catalonia

[218] Translated from Spanish.

I requested an interview with Andrea, but she declined; apparently she was not interested in anything to do with politics. Her account demonstrated both, a lack of interest and a lack of sense of belonging beyond what she thought to be her 'local' space (Malaga) or her kinship groups ("me and my people"). Andrea, in this respect, did not engage in the political debate at any level. It did not matter to her, providing it did not trouble her people. I read Andrea's account as an example of political nihilism. There were no affective investments in her account or in her actions, and she was not inclined towards one direction or another. No consideration of society for her seemed present beyond the limits of her kinship community. There was no hope, promise of a better future, or optimism. Whilst she was not trapped in circles of cruel optimism, her words and actions indicated her apprehension of politics and a lack of trust of others that still felt very cruel.

Pedagogies of equivalence

This range of distinctive positions, opens the question as to what teachers of politics could do? Or, more broadly, what type of pedagogies might be appropriated in hyperpolarised classrooms? This section further examines pedagogies of equivalence as alternatives. The discussion is organized in terms of potential responses to students' fantasies, students' lack of fantasies, and clashes of fantasies.

Students' fantasies

In a context of uncertainty and change, teachers of politics can attempt to facilitate that young people can make meaningful contributions. As previously argued, it is likely that at some point, society will settle in one way or another. As I write in late 2020, claims for independence have not disappeared. The Catalan society, however, is now immersed in a more profound social, health, and economic crisis that has calmed libidinal energies associated with the Catalan nation. Things change, particularly in times of uncertainty, and new generations will be part of this change. My argument is that teachers of politics have a

responsibility to facilitate young people in pursuing their fantasmatic promises. Students are not to be seen as those who need to be assimilated or transformed, but real others who cannot be apprehended. Teachers do not need to agree with their student, and yet, as a teachers of politics, they can help young learners to make visible their causes. For instance, teachers can help students to understand and use rhetorical strategies such as those of populist movements, or they can connect learners with others who support causes similar than their own. Given the fantasies above, teachers could consider possible alliances across discourses. Or otherwise, would any particular affiliation with others outside class benefits students' goals?

Lack of fantasies

The lack of fantasies requires a different pedagogical approach. Cases like Andrea above represent a very different challenge for practitioners. Of course, there is a chance that this student was just not invested in the secessionist debate, but she was committed to alternative causes (e.g. climate change, feminism, refugees support). In such a case, the role of the teacher would not differ much from what it was outlined above. Teachers could just facilitate that these students pursue their political dreams. There is also a possibility, however, that this girl was not trapped in fantasies but, rather, she had just given up any public expression of these. Tired of politics, she had retracted from others. What could practitioners do in such instances?

It would be understandable to think that not being trapped in the fantasmatic structure is a ‘good thing’. Indeed, in the course of this book, we have largely examined how fantasies tend to cause discomfort to those who embrace them and can nurture enmity, oppression, discrimination and violence. There is also a possibility, however, that things are not that easy. The organic crisis of modernity has fuelled a crisis of our fantasmatic regimes of desire. Still, as no alternative has yet emerged, many feel that, without fantasies, we are lost, and we do not know how to affectively and institutionally regulate the public space. In other words, we

are unhappy where we are, but we do not know where to go either. This is what Simon Critchley (2012) describes as passive nihilism. He writes,

> "Rather than acting in the world and trying to transform it, the passive nihilist simply focuses on himself and his particular pleasures and projects for perfecting himself. (…) In a world that is all too rapidly blowing itself to pieces, the passive nihilist closes his eyes and makes himself into an island" (pp. 4-5).

Andrea had given up in any chance of transforming their society. The problem with this perspective is double. In one end, as Critchley (2012) nicely illustrates, passive nihilism pushed her to closed their subjectivities to others. The meta-fantasmatic structure is so embedded in us than we only know how to find collectiveness and togetherness if we inhabit fantasies. Otherwise, we are lost in an "island", without any alternative to be with others. If we all did the same, society would cease to exist. This leads me to the second problem. It is unlikely that society will cease to exist, but it is likely to change. As Laclau and Mouffe's work indicates and my data suggests, most people have not given up on promising and looking for promises to believe in. Thus, in embracing nihilistic stances, we cede to the existing powers who will be further energised to decide the future. The world changes regardless, and the only difference is whether these young people participate or not in the direction of this change. Given this analysis, politics teachers do not have any other chance than to attempt to provide nihilist students with alternative fantasies. Pedagogies of difference are here needed to try to expand our repertoire of promises and desires, so nihilists leave their island and embrace the transformation of their world. Whilst there is no guarantee of success, teachers of politics do not have a choice other than keep trying.

Clash of fantasies

Another critical task for politics teachers is to find ways, so those who embrace competing fantasies can learn to coexist together. This is not an easy endeavour. How do we

make it so that Spanish nationalists who see Catalan as enemies, Catalan nationalists who see Spaniards as obstacles, or liberals who see all nationalists as problems, learn to live together? Obviously, not all political classrooms are the same, but it is likely that, in our current times, some polarisation exists within the limits of the class. A combination of pedagogies of difference (ongoing open interrogation) and pedagogies of articulation (normalisation of conflict, alterity and contingency) are well placed to face this challenge. It is not for politics teachers to challenge students' nationalist or anti-nationalist fantasies, but to prevent any fatal disasters.

Teachers, nevertheless, are not immune to fantasies clashing. Teachers can find that somehow they are in the middle of the political battle. When the nine Catalan teachers decided to organise a minute's silence against police violence, some argued that teachers should have done nothing or they should have taken a more balanced approach. All possible course of actions would have caused the disappointment or the rage of one family or another. Let me use my own example to develop this. When we wrote our article demanding a more inclusive narrative of the Catalan nationhood, we were calling upon a critical interrogation of nationalist fantasies and upon an opening of the fantasy to competing narratives. Whilst writing the article, we were careful not to position ourselves on either side of the nationalist fantasies. In contrast with more teaching experiences, we had the time to think about it and to make a conscious choice. We appealed to knowledge, well documented and respected theory on the "imagined nation" (Andersson, 1996), and we sustained our claims in our data. It did not matter. They took pieces of what we said, they decontextualised these pieces, and they gave them the meaning that better suited their interests. In a context of hyper-polarisation, most contributions are likely to be seen as fuel for fantasies, or otherwise, just to be ignored.

In these circumstances, no one can judge teachers for their caution. Teachers will know more than anyone else whether it is secure for them to pursue certain pedagogical

endeavours, favouring, for instance, that their students find political allies. They also will know how much they are willing to risk. As educators, we unconsciously evaluate our environment, and we affectively react to it driven by our multiple commitments. Concerns about potential consequences of our educational activity are mighty, and, understandably, they can push us to flee on occasions.

Teachers, however, might react differently in other instances and become an active part of the political struggle. Teachers are not machines who can just amplify their students' perspectives. We have seen this in the preceding chapters. We did have our point of view when we wrote the article, and so did the nine Catalan teachers when they decided to undertake their actions. Practitioners who teach politics are political in both their capacity as teachers of politics and as political beings. As such, practitioners also operate within fantasies that determine what they can do. In some instances, teachers might feel that specific political ideas disturb the core of their being as they come from the side of the 'moral enemy'[219], and it will be less easy for them to facilitate their students to pursue certain fantasies. Some teachers will not be able to facilitate Catalan nationalist fantasies, other teachers will not be able to facilitate Spanish nationalist fantasies, and a third group will not be able to facilitate any nationalist fantasy at all. No matter how inclusive or benevolent these fantasies are, they will just be seen as obstacles. Under these circumstances, one can wonder what can teachers do? There is no template for this. As mentioned, teaching politics involves situated forms of freedom and responsibility that can only be determined from every teacher-student encounter. No one, not even the teachers themselves, can predict what will happen or how they will react to their encounters with others. Instead, if teachers wish to engage with open pedagogies, they need to open themselves to the pedagogical activity not only as teachers but also as learners. Teaching politics is a process of ongoing learning and self-interrogation in which

[219] See, for this, Tryggvason (2017)

teachers cannot do anything else than constantly question what pushed them to react in a certain way and how they felt after such reaction. Teachers can question, was my response a denial of alterity or the result of an obligation to "intervene in the erased conflicts in which victims cannot signify their damages" (p. Ziarek, 2001, p. 93)? Was I a victim of my narrative, or was I interrupting the more nasty side of someone else's fantasy? To the question of what should have the nine teachers done the day after the separatist referendum, only the teachers themselves could have an answer.

Summary

Catalan society is a hyperpolarised society where at least four competing fantasies (Spanish nationalism, Catalan nationalism, anti-nationalist liberalism, and populism) coexist. Under these hyperpolarised circumstances, some members of our societies might align with passive nihilistic stances, retracting from politics. Teachers wishing to engage with pedagogies of equivalence can facilitate students can make meaningful contributions in their own terms and can attempt to expand the repertoire of available fantasies so young people do not retract from politics. But it is likely that teachers will often find themselves caught between fantasy struggles, either as unintentional or as intentional participants. In such occasions, teachers do not have any other alternative but to become permanent leaners and ethical judges of their own pedagogies.

Epilogue

Abstract

This chapter concludes summarising the argument built in this book. The chapter considers the risks and possibilities that political educators might encounter at a time of democratic crisis.

Keywords

democratic crisis; open pedagogies; political education; citizenship education

Dominant practices of political education are in crisis. Political education is the process through which societies guide their members into understandings of power, differences and group-decision making, and thus all communities educate their young members politically. Yet, modern democratic states have amplified and professionalised political education to unprecedented levels through schooling. This book has argued that this dominant mode of political education is at an impasse and needs to be revisited.

There is something inherently good about school-based political education. Schools are framed under a very particular set of social conditions that make them a unique, complex, and valuable space for political education. Political classrooms, provide children and young people with an opportunity to interact with perspectives different to their own. Professionals of education, who are also experts in humanities, social sciences, or politics, are there to mediate between students and to facilitate that all students have opportunities to find and express their uniqueness. Political classrooms are microcosms of our social realities where students can safely and comfortable practice.

We need to maintain these unique and valuable social conditions but to revisit what actually happens in political classrooms. Political education curricula, as we know it, is a consequence of the way enlightened philosophers rediscovered ancient Greek thought to

build the foundations of what had to be known as modernity. The modern good life was framed by six principles (individualism, reason, productivity, universality, hierarchies and a linear way of thinking) that grouped together created a fantasmatic affective regime where our desires were always projected in the future and were always frustrated by a present obstacle. Such system-value underpinned most schooling practices. The schooling institution functioned through an outcome-based logic where pedagogies were selected only insofar they respond to aspirations for the future. Generations of children and young people were educated in the principles that reason, productivity and individual autonomy are unquestionable principles that need to be pursued. Young members of our communities needed to be moulded to fit into the parameters of the good citizen.

Democracy was also built upon these modern foundations and mainly framed liberal forms of democratic politics that progressively became hegemonic. In theory, liberal democracy was seen as an aspirational form of politics that ought to deliver dignity, prosperity and stability to all. Liberal democracy was seen as an objectively 'better' systems in a hierarchy of political practices, and there was an implicit understanding that all societies would eventually embrace democratic politics. Liberal democracy also offered a promise of togetherness, one in which individual and collective will would map each other. In practice, this aspirational account always translated into a pragmatic system of institutions that regulated everyday politics. The last decades saw how this pragmatic system progressively embraced neoliberal understandings that gave primary to the rules of the market economy. Individualism, productivity and competition replaced sovereignty, dignity and prosperity for all.

Two dominant forms of political education emerged as a result of these two coexisting democratic framings. Narrow forms of education inspired by neoliberal pragmatics privileged vocational knowledge and skills and, consequently, segregated political education

from the school curricula. Meanwhile, aspirational accounts of democracy defined strong forms of political education that simultaneously distributed three modes of the good life: political freedom, the pursuit of truth, and democratic values. Children and young people learnt that acting and thinking independently was something desirable and that, knowledge framed in relation to accuracy, rationality, or consensus was an instrument to gain autonomy and individual power to participate in democracy effectively. It was rarely stated, but the implicit logic was that the three aforementioned modes of the good life were mutually dependent. As democracy was rationally better, if leaners became more rational, they would become more autonomous and yet, still favour democratic ethos and institutions. Strong forms of political education offered a straightforward narrative of why political education was (or could be) emancipatory. Political education ought to deliver knowledge and skills so communities could free themselves from their anti-democratic deficits, and individuals would be emancipated from ideological traps and sociocultural constraints.

While criticising narrow forms of education, academics and practitioners of political education found comfort in this strong emancipatory narrative. As specialist teachers, teachers of politics needed to negotiate different commitments, including the transmission of academic knowledge, professional commitments, standards, and syllabus, their own political viewpoints, and their position as educators who were expected to favour students' uniqueness. Strong forms of political education offered an explanation on the compatibility of these commitments and a template on how to approach everyday teaching of politics. As stated in many curricula, practitioners could rely on their academic knowledge to educate new generations in the knowledge and analytical thinking skills that would make young learners more autonomous and more democratic.

In recent years, this comforting narrative has been interrupted by the rise of populism. The scrutiny of what populism is and what it tells us about our current times has led me to

three conclusions. Firstly, populism can only be defined for its thin and vague nature and thus, it is difficult to make any generalisation as for its ideological content. Even if there was an ultimate test to determine whether something is democratic, we would not be able to apply this test to evaluate the ideological nature populist phenomena. There is no one populism, but many. Teachers need to consider their particular populist idiosyncrasies; chapters 8, 9 and 10 have provided examples as for this. Secondly, populism is what Margaret Canovan (1999) once defined as the shadow of democracy. Populism is the result of the internal mismatch between the aspirational promise of democracy which claims no gap between public and power, and its pragmatic face that attempts to solve everyday disputes. Populism signals the impossibility of total emancipation. Thirdly, populism is always there, but it more clearly manifests in processes of social change. Current manifestations of populism are a symptom of an organic crisis that affects different modern institutions. It is a symptom of a lack of democratic faith caused by the distance between what democracy promises (sovereignty, dignity and prosperity to all), and what it offers (competition and individualism). It is also a symptom of a much broader crisis of our modern affective regime. Modern fantasies promised our enhancement in togetherness with others, but they drove us to endless circles of dissatisfaction and/or isolation. Populism signals that we are leaving modernity behind, but we still do not have any alternative.

This transition has, nevertheless, reinforced some modern fantasies. Populists are one of the present-day phenomena operating in this fantasmatic mode. As if to rub salt into the wound, populists have questioned the compatibility between individual and collective sovereignty, and openly queried liberal institutions for their ability to represent the popular will. Importantly for us, some populists have also challenged the emancipatory narrative that underpinned political education. They have disregarded reasonableness, and they have openly challenged the sincerity of academics and teachers. As any other fantasies, populists have

identified obstacles that need to be overcome: the elites. Either political, academic or economic elites have been signalled as the cause of all our democratic woes. Populists have grown in influence and power by pointing at the internal paradox of the system and signalling scapegoats. But populists have not offered any alternatives for the times to come, or if they do, they offered the same old alternatives: the promise of the market, of the nation, of the self-sovereign people, of raw knowledge, etc.

Far from representing a challenge to the existing system, populists have re-energised the aspirational fantasy of liberal democracy. Aspirational democrats have now a new obstacle (populists) to blame in their justification of why we have not yet achieved prosperity and dignity for all, and how we might achieve this in the future. Aspirational democrats can win elections only because of the perceived populist catastrophe. Liberal institutions are indeed suffering in the hands of populists, yet the overall narrative of liberal democracy benefits from the populist phenomena. As a consequence, strong forms of political education have been invigorated. The more populists have questioned academic knowledge and directed their critiques towards political and other social scientists, the more academics and practitioners of political education have emphasised that the solution to populism was a political education based on knowledge and critical thinking.

This has positioned political education in a cul-de-sac. Neither populists nor aspirational democrats can communicate with others because they are trapped in their fantasies, and they only see the other as the obstacle that needs to be overcome. Strong forms of democratic political education will not convince populists, who only will see these forms as an elitist attempt to keep control of political and epistemological power. Populists, regardless of their right-wing or left-wing colours, will never convince aspirational democrats. The latter see in populists the image of ignorance or traces of a past already left

behind by modernity or the end of the Cold War. This has become a dialogue of the deaf, with some appealing to accuracy and consensus, and others to sincerity and free-expression.

This context of uncertainty and polarisation has melted the glue that binds together strong forms of political education. The challenge that some populists have posed to academic knowledge have evidenced that if we challenge the assumption that knowledge brings economic prosperity, and individual and collective freedom, the full rationale of emancipatory political education falls apart like a house of cards. Acquiring academic knowledge does not necessarily lead to economic prosperity, it does not free us from ideological constraints, and it does not make people more democratic. Populists were neither the first to pose this epistemological challenge nor the ones with more nuanced or ethical concerns. But the populist critique comes from the core of the modern democratic project, and it evidences that there is no compromise on what the democratic good life is about or a majoritarian criterion to scrutiny what is politically desirable. In consequence, practitioners teaching politics find themselves in the frontline of the battlefield teaching new generations how to regulate differences and what is human flourishing, in a context that there is no agreement about what this means.

My argument in this book has been that strong forms of political education do no longer offer the security they once did, and we need to revisit what is political education about. We are trapped in this fantasmatic conversation that only generates discomfort and animosity, that hinders what is visible to us, and limits our possibilities to become something different to what we are. As we are leaving modernity behind and we are yet to see what will follow, we need to pursue more sustainable, comforting, and ethical ways of being. Neither the aspirational nor the populist fantasies seemly offer any alternatives for the future. They offer the same story, one again. And this story is now in crisis, and people, particularly young people, are tired and no longer believe in these fairy tales.

Given this lack of prospects, I have advocated for a change in the way we approach political education. Rather than focusing our attention on promises for the future, we need to focus our energies on the challenges of the present. Political education needs to prepare children and young people to live these uncertain and polarised times. This demands a movement from future to present and from purpose to practice. School-based political education needs to stop educating children and young people *for* democracy and to begin preparing them *through* democracy. This has two consequences. Firstly, the three modes of the good life that schooled political education currently distributes (i.e. political freedom, the pursuit of truth, and democratic values) need to be revisited. Democracy needs to be understood as a starting point rather than as a destination, more pluralistic accounts of knowledge need to be embraced, and political freedom needs to be reconceptualised from individual autonomy to openness to becoming and to alterity. Secondly, political education needs to reconsider open pedagogies as an alternative to strong forms of education. Open pedagogies do not offer any clear templates or best practices; instead, they position students and teachers as the true creators and evaluators of their pedagogical encounters.

Concerned about the minimal practical advice often offered by advocates of open pedagogies, I have tentatively gathered three groups of open pedagogies. Pedagogies of difference aim to facilitate questioning of our current social practices and inquiry of alternatives by embracing a more comprehensive range of knowledges. The purpose is to facilitate that young people find more comfortable ways to navigate our times without failing in nihilistic stances. Pedagogies of articulation attempt to normalise disagreement as part of our everyday reality. By evidencing the contingency of political alliances and favouring practices that encourage students to manifest different subjectivities, these pedagogies seek to prevent the more fatal consequences of high levels of polarisation. Pedagogies of equivalence aim to create opportunities so young people can be active members of the reconstructive task.

The task of the teacher is to facilitate alliances so young people can pursue their political projects.

Open pedagogies are not perfect or universal, and that they do carry risks. In 2006, Gert Biesta recognised the dangers of both strong and open forms of education. Yet, in his conclusions, he made a case for openness, arguing that it was more dangerous to define what it meant to be human than to leave the question open. Twelve years later, his arguments are still relevant, but we are at a point of no return, and this is no longer a sustainable decision. Then, some of these ideas, discussions and concerns felt much theoretical to many people, now they have become an everyday reality visible in schools and other educational settings. Classroom windows have been smashed, and teachers have been targets of public persecution. Political education can no longer avoid these questions, and there is a need to recognise that strong practices will only immerse us deeper in the more nasty side of modernity that some manifestations of populism represent. If political educators want to maintain the spirit of the emancipatory project that first drove democratic political education, we do not have a choice other than opening this project and see what happens.

The limits and possibilities of the fantasmatic construction

Any analysis of our current situation is likely to be a consequence of a fantasmatic construction that somehow hinders what it is visible to us. This contradiction is also true for the writing of the present book. Me, the author of this book, might well seek an analytical position that allows me to understand our present better and to generate more appropriate responses. However, I am still part of a regime of desires that limits what is available to me, in terms of knowledges and alternatives. To begin with, this book makes a case for more pluralistic conceptions of knowledge. Still, justifications for arguments have been provided primarily on the basis of academic theory and research, and secondarily via my experiences as a practitioner, researcher, and political being who live in what some might define as

Europe and who has good connections and friends in the other side of the Atlantic. My knowledge and experiences are contained within these parameters. This book might well claim that modernity is broken, but as a child of this system, my only language is that of the morbid rule. There may be alternative regimes of desires, alternatives forms of education and political education that are invisible from my locus of enunciation. Out there, there might be more ethical, sustainable, and enhancing ways of regulating power, differences and group decision-making, and more satisfactory and comforting ways of experiencing pedagogical encounters. There is no claim of universality in these lines, but an explicit acknowledgement of how the modern ensemble has conditioned this book in several ways, beginning with the anthropocentric, Eurocentric and sometimes disembodied framing of my line of thought.

In retrospective, at least two courses of action opened as a result of the more analytical examinations of political education and populism that framed chapters one to six. One course of action could have led me to question school-based political education overall. Indeed, school-based democratic political education is double framed by modern parameters. If rationalistic accounts of knowledge are in crisis, will schools survive the impasse? If the compatibility between prosperity, individual and collective sovereignty is at stake, will democracy and what it represents die? Such questions could easily have directed any writer to embrace nihilist tendencies and to claim the end of the school-based political education. However, this book took a different course of action. I searched alternatives, revisiting how school-based political education was and considering how it could be different. Aligned with this perspective, chapters seven to ten made a conscious effort to look for pedagogical alternatives. It is true that these chapters deliberatively avoided pragmatic questions such as that of the assessment, syllabus, and behaviour management. Yet, they did focus on how alternative forms of political education could be *practised* at the light of our current times.

My undoubtable commitment to this second course of action suggests the limits of my own fantasy. My only option was always to keep trying.

This book can be read as a critique of current forms of democratic political education. However, the purpose of these lines has been to protect forms of the good life that once led to schooled education and democratic politics, from its dissolution. Democracy was supposed to be a dignifying, ethical and harmonic way to be in togetherness with others outside our kinship. Education was expected to be the process through which each of us could find and manifest our singularity. And schooling, intentionally or not, became the primary setting where children and young people would socialise with others outside their kinship groups. These promises are still very much alive in the foundations of this book, both in terms of its aims and its final proposals. In his book *Emancipation(s),* Ernesto Laclau wrote we are coming to an age in which the promise of emancipatory democracy is no longer believable. However, this finitude opens new "potentially liberatory discourses of our postmodern age have to start" (2006, p. 18). This book has suggested that the same can be said about democratic political education. We have reached the limits of what modern political education can offer us, yet new liberatory discourses can now begin. What about if the only way for political educators to protect democracy, is to stop trying to save it and open alternatives for the future to come?

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