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COLLECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLEXIVITY ON ACTIVE AND COMPASSIONATE CITIZENSHIP IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, socio-economic inequalities have become exacerbated and COVID-19 related hate crimes have increased. This paper explores how citizenship education might be reimagined in response to this context, with the vision of rebuilding a more equitable and compassionate society. By using a collective autobiographical writing approach, this study documented six different autobiographical reflexivities of citizenship education scholars who were from different parts of the world: China, South Korea, the Philippines, the United States, Nepal and the United Kingdom. It also observed the way the pandemic played out in the location where they were situated during the research as well as how it played out in their countries of origin, and further, how it affected the civic development in each context. The scholars' range of autobiographical expressions resulted in insights for developing a type of citizenship education, namely, education for active and compassionate citizenship.

Keywords: *Citizenship education; Active citizenship; Compassionate citizenship; Civic identities; Collective autobiographical reflexivity; COVID-19 crisis.*

> Research, like almost everything else in life, has autobiographical roots.

> (Seidman, 2019:36)

1. INTRODUCTION

At the start of London's first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, our eclectic and international group of education researchers linked to the Research Training Programme at University College London (UCL) launched a research group around the theme of citizenship, called "Citizenship Amid the COVID-19 Turmoil". Using a combination of semi-structured online discussion and digital reflective journaling, we met fortnightly to share our personal experiences of the

lockdown as the events unfolded, wrote collective reflective writing and rooted our discussions in academic theory.

A question that emerged was how we might reimagine citizenship education in light of the pandemic. Specifically, we wanted to know, "How has the global health crisis shaped people's civic identities and how can citizenship education be reframed to respond to these changes?" We decided to develop a research paper that sought to answer this question. The events that played out around us determined the direction of our discussions and we worked through academic literature and popular discourse on citizenship, hate speech (Waldron, 2012), economic and political populism (Zembylas, 2020), decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011) and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. We each brought our unique perspective in exploring answers, influenced by our disciplinary inclinations, diverse geographical locations and countries of origin. We became conscious that citizenship was not merely a subject to be taught; we, too, were personally implicated as citizens whose civic identities were being affected by the events.

2. THEORISING CIVIC IDENTITIES AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Projecting Bourdieu's (1984; 1990) concept of habitus onto civic identities, civic identity can best be understood as a sense of civic self-fostering by the interplay of socially constructed norms and conditions in society and individually internalised values, beliefs, dispositions and experiences that enable individual citizens and the collective citizenry to practise and engage in society (Hart *et al.,* 2011; Tracy & Robles, 2013). Current sociological explorations of civic identity generally fall within three categories of research: civic elements, civic competences and civic engagement (Jenks, 2013; Hart *et al.,* 2011; Levinson, 2005; McCowan, 2011; Starkey, 2017; 2019). Traditional approaches to citizenship education focus on civic elements such as citizenship and a sense of belonging (Galston,1991; Kymlicka, 1997; Tomasi, 2001). In contrast, contemporary trends emphasise civic competences and civic engagement (Banks, 2017; Gutmann, 1987/1991; Nussbaum, 1996; 2001; Osler & Starkey, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Zembylas, 2015). Civic identities are dynamic and flexible, shaped and reshaped through formal and informal civic practices associated with civic competencies and civic engagement (Hart *et al.,* 2011; Vihalemm & Masso, 2003).

Because the pandemic was shaping our own civic identities and given the variety of our experiences across six contexts, we realised that our own narratives were rich material through which we could investigate our research question. We, therefore, explored the possibility of writing a collective autobiography written by multiple authors, as the core of our methodology.

3. COLLECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLEXIVITY AS A METHODOLOGICAL CORE

Various versions of the autobiographical approach – from Mertonian sociological autobiography to the contemporary approach of socio-biographical studies – have been used in sociology research; autobiographical narratives allow sociologists to analyse and interpret comprehensive patterns of the life out there and the particularities of a subject's experiential world through emotional reflexivity (Bertaux, 1981; Chamberlayne *et al.,* 2002; Davies, 2012; Merton, 1972; Stanley, 1993).

In seeking to transform our autobiographical accounts into empirical and analytical tools, we aimed to show the collective nature of autobiography, disconfirming the traditional view

that autobiographical writing is mainly an autobiographical nature self-construction (Hazlett, 1998). As argued by Wright (2019), one author cannot thoroughly grab collective identity complexities. Thus, we aimed to capture multiple memories, emotions and concerns about the COVID-19 crisis, hoping that such would reveal how civic identities – our own and those around us – were being reconstructed in the pandemic.

The incorporation of autobiographical reflexivity (Ruokonen-Engler & Siouti, 2016; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) creates self-referential forms on the social phenomenon; the investigator becomes both the informant and the analyst (Ellis & Adams, 2014; Smith & Watson, 2016). We, six scholars, agreed to participate as informants and analysts; we conducted our research between May 2020 and July 2020. The collective autobiographical approach we had chosen posed practical and analytical challenges that demanded a high level of reflection, frequent dialogue and the negotiability of our autobiographical narratives (Scott, 2011; Wright, 2019). This approach continuously invited discussions between contributors, including reflections on previous accounts. Because this was a multi-authored text in which the established collectivity was as much in the disharmony as it was in harmony (Hazlett, 1998; Wright, 2019), our biggest challenge was negotiating different perspectives about our research question alongside our memories of and feelings about the pandemic.

This disharmony, however, served to ensure that our methodology remained critical, reminding each of us of our interpretative position (Fook, 1999). We followed McIlveen's (2008) adaptation of Morrow's (2005) framework of trustworthiness of our research: even through the revisions, each author wrote a faithful account of their experiences because of the unusual situation of the pandemic. Each experience shared was unique and unlikely to be experienced again and (3) as the vignettes below show, each experience and explication was self-transformative, leading to new insights or actions. The ethical issue of anonymity was addressed by mutually consenting to reveal our authorship to each another: each reflection was read by the other contributors at every stage of revision and even after all contributors had expressed their initial consent to participate, we reiterated this consent at each stage of revision and during our online meetings (Lapadat, 2009).

Our chosen methodological approach confirmed what Wright (2019:104) has posited: "empathy, and even imagination, can add depth to a text and help reproduce multiple voices". The method gave us a creative platform to deeply explore our own experiences and emotions as citizenship education researchers. In the vignettes that follow, we demonstrate the possibility of collective autobiographical reflexivity in citizenship education research, based on six settings: China, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, the USA, Nepal and England.

4. VIGNETTES

4.1 Compassion and uncompassion across geographic and racial borders

Yaobin Tong

As a Chinese person living outside China, I witnessed the worsening of the pandemic through social media. Seemingly confirming Ben-Porath's (2006:11) view that crisis periods lead some people to behave as "belligerent citizens", the early news about the spread of the disease included multiple disappointing stories of regional discrimination within China that victimised people in Wuhan who had already been suffering from the public health crisis. Before the complete lockdown in Wuhan City and Hubei province, millions of people living or working

in Wuhan left the city. Some of them posted on Chinese social media platforms accounts of their experiences being discriminated against by others in their local communities. Many were barred from returning to their homes or booking into hotels. Some became targets of cyberbullying, even though Wuhan residents were victims of the pandemic, not the cause. Comfortingly, most Chinese people criticised those behaviours that had stigmatised Wuhan. Some netizens (e.g., Internet users) posted statements such as, "These are not the traditional moral values that are taught to us", "Our education teaches empathy rather than a curse", and "Those people [who behaved that way] need more moral education to learn morality" (Grammes, 2020; Wang, 2020). The value of moral education was repeatedly mentioned, an apparent appeal for people to rediscover their responsibility, sensitivity and sense of compassion amidst the pandemic (Ghosh & Jing, 2020; Haste, 2004).

After the epidemic spread beyond the city, people outside Wuhan began to grow in sympathy for the residents there, especially the front-liners who had stayed put to battle the virus. Chinese citizens used social media to organise assistance for them. For example, when some hospitals in Wuhan posted about a shortage of face masks and protective clothing, people coordinated with local factories and pharmacies to send inventory to Wuhan, with one netizen emphasising that:

> As a Chinese person, it is my moral responsibility to help people who are suffering and [help] the community, which is one of the moral principles coming from my family and school education – [to] help others. (Li & Xie, 2020: 29)

This was just one of many statements made online describing the task of helping those affected most adversely by the pandemic as an act motivated by moral standards and not just civic duty.

After China managed to bring the epidemic under control, the spread of the virus worsened outside China; Italy, Russia and Spain became the epicentres. Chinese people attempted to help those countries as they had done for China at the beginning of the pandemic (Reuters, 2020; Xinhua, 2020). The Chinese saying, "All for one; one for all" surfaced in Chinese people's displays of compassion (Tan, 2020). I was glad to witness people across different nations also cooperating to defend human health, regardless of race, nation and status.

Unfortunately, new instances of "belligerent citizenship" began to emerge worldwide; this time victimising Chinese people outside China. Racism and hate crimes targeting Chinese and other Asians dramatically increased in the UK, the USA and many western countries beginning in February 2020 (Li & Nicholson, 2021). I read social media posts written by overseas Chinese students about their experiences being discriminated against on the street. In London, there were at least two serious incidents involving racist crimes. The first involved a Singaporean UCL student who was attacked by a group of racists on Oxford Street (BBC, 2020). The second involved overseas Chinese students threatened and harassed by a few British teenagers even after police officers came on the scene in Southampton. After reading about these incidents, I minimised my trips outdoors out of concern for my safety, but I still had three racist encounters on the street. People and politicians emphasised that those attackers had broken the law and had failed to display social responsibility; however, I wondered whether civic or legal regulations could work to resolve hate crimes, racism and scapegoating (Galston,1991; Noel, 2020; Tomasi, 2001).

Such antagonistic attitudes allowed me to reconsider Nussbaum's (2001) concept of compassionate imagination. Compassionate civic identity may not work very well in the Chinese context. Instead, the compassion coming from moral responsibility can provide insight into what Chinese people hold to guide their actions compared with general phenomena in Western countries.

These reflections helped me to see that the global health crisis was also a crisis of compassion and solidarity that invited an educational response, whereby I realised that citizenship education was the most important channel to nurture people's sympathetic consciousnesses and their appreciation of moral standards, which was much more appreciable than only focusing on legal and civic standards. I raised these ideas with my colleagues during our discussion sessions in hopes that they could help me think through these ideas further.

4.2 Education for compassion: COVID-19 and Korean civic identities

Stella Mi-cheong Cheong

"Coronavirus, coronavirus, go back to China!" I was surprised to hear these words coming from behind me while I was grocery shopping. I assumed that somebody had ridiculed me because I was an Asian, but I did not look back for fear of a worse attack. In fact, I am not Chinese, but Korean. Yet it would not have mattered to them which I was.

Although such racism against Asians overwhelmed me with anger and despair, by turning a blind eye to the incident, I was passively responding to the racists' behaviour. As a citizenship education scholar, I felt completely helpless, wounded and even guilty. However, this experience led our group to discuss possible educational solutions to tackle such injustice that Galtung (1969:180) calls "structural violence".

Citizenship education alone cannot rebuild global solidarity. However, it can equip young people with a strong sense of agency and the confidence they need to be active and compassionate citizens who can help rebuild a just, united and compassionate society (Nussbaum, 1996; Starkey, 2019; Waghid & Davids, 2012). Reflecting on Nussbaum's (1996: 57) concept of "compassionate imagining", a compassionate citizen can be understood as "one who not only recognises the vulnerability and otherness of someone else but also acts humanely towards others who might experience the vulnerability" (Waghid & Davids, 2013:5).

Amidst the pandemic, I found an approach to compassionate citizenship in the Korean education system and the Korean civic habitus. The construction of the Korean civic habitus (e.g., reciprocal and solidary attitudes) results from Korean education, particularly, the humanitarian ideals (*Hongik-Ingan* in Hangeul) that are the fundamental principles of the Korean education system (UNESCO, 2006). The Education Act states in detail the principle of education regarding the ideals of *Hongik Ingan* in the Republic of Korea. Article[1] 2 reads:

> Education shall aim at enabling every citizen to lead a life worthy of humankind and to contribute to the development of a democratic state and the realisation of an ideal of human co-prosperity, by ensuring cultivation of character, development of abilities for independent life, and necessary qualities as a democratic citizen under the humanitarian ideal.

As can be seen, the objectives of education under the ideals of *Hongik-Ingan* are to help all people perfect their individual characters, develop the ability to live independently, participate

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1   This Article Wholly Amended by Act No. 8705, Dec. 21, 2007.

in building a democratic state and promote the prosperity of all humankind (UNESCO, 2006). The Korean scholar Kim Bu-sik (1145) introduced the traditional philosophy of *Hongik-Ingan,* which stemmed from the *Dangun* stories about the *Gojoseon*, the mythical beginning of Korean history over 4 300 years ago (Suh, 2014). *Hongik-Ingan* literally means people who contribute to "universal welfare of humankind"(Jeong, 2010:34). The ideals of *Hongik-Ingan* aim to enable people to sustain their lives and fulfil their civic responsibility concerning the government and the socio-political system, thus contributing to development and prosperity individually and civically (ibid.). It is characterised by humanism, mutual respect, equality, peace, self-discipline and harmonious cooperation for the prosperity of human society (Cartwright, 2016; Kim *et al.,* 2020; Suh, 2014). Korean citizens learn this value-laden goal from childhood – at school, where it is embedded in the Korean education system and by reading *Dangun* mythology retold as children's fairy tales – both of which construct Korean civic identities as *peace civic identities*. Once these identities have been internalised, *Hongik-Ingan* ideals enable individuals to act as active and compassionate citizens.

Having seen how South Korea has effectively responded to COVID-19 allows me to interpret Korean citizens' civic commitment through the lens of Korean habitus. Korean citizens have voluntarily stayed indoors to combat the high transmissibility of the virus. They have maintained a high level of hygiene and have strictly complied with social distancing rules. Almost everybody has taken for granted the importance of wearing masks in public to protect themselves and their fellow citizens. Discipline in this context is understood to mean self-discipline to help others; this may explain why most Korean citizens are willing to give up small freedoms in the context of COVID-19. Such civic identities have played a key role in overcoming national crises by encouraging Koreans to fight together.

By reflecting on the successful Korean response to the COVID-19 crisis and Korean civic identities, I shared with our group my modest insights on how to develop compassionate citizenship education; an attitude that might be especially valuable in a post-pandemic world.

4.3 Exploring our complicity in uncompassionate epistemes

Rowena Azada–Palacios

Tracking pandemic-related news coverage across both my homes, the UK and the Philippines, I was struck by how little coverage there was in the Western press about the successful public health measures used in Asia, where more countries had chosen to err on the side of over cautiousness early on in the pandemic. An article on the Medium self-publishing platform, titled "The Overwhelming Racism of COVID Coverage" written by Indi Samarajiva (2020), gave me the words to describe an additional source of the discomfort that I felt about the Western coverage of the pandemic. In the opening paragraph, Samarajiva criticised a New York Times article about Thailand's success at controlling the virus. Although the article suggested that Thailand's public health system might have been responsible for its success, it had also asked whether there might be a "genetic component" that made Thais "more resistant to the coronavirus"(Beech, 2020). Samarajiva pointed out what he saw to be the underlying presumption of that sentence: "Because Thai people couldn't possibly just be competent, it must be *alchemy*" (Samarijva, 2020, emphasis in the original).

As a scholar working on anti-colonial political thought, I am not surprised by Eurocentric biases that pervade the Western press. In his piece, Samarajiva interpreted this phenomenon using the language of racism. Apart from racism, anti-colonial thinkers have also used the

language of coloniality and colonisation. Within the postcolonial tradition, Edward Said famously laid bare how the colonised world to the east of Europe has been represented in Western art and literature as an essentialist "Orient" (Said, 1979). The coloniality/modernity collective extended the analysis further, demonstrating how the history of Western imperialism has created a global matrix of epistemic power in which Eurocentric ways of thinking dominate, and in which other ways of thinking are either appropriated to become European (their non-European roots erased) or are suppressed and dismissed as inferior to European epistemology (see Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2011).

Yet even if I identify firmly as a member of historically colonised peoples, I find myself reproducing a lot of this Eurocentrism in my work. I am completing my doctoral thesis in London, one of the major imperial metropoles of history. As a philosopher of education, most of the works I engage with have been canonised in Western universities. For any academic committed to an ideal of a more decolonised academy, questions of positionality and complicity inevitably arise.

These were my thoughts as I prepared to teach an online survey course on anti-colonial political thought at a Philippine university. My fourteen students all identified as coming from postcolonial backgrounds: 13 students identified as "Filipino" and one identified her ancestry as half-Filipino. Over eight weeks, we read through some of the foundational literature in anti-colonial traditions, spanning Frantz Fanon (1990) to Glen Sean Coulthard's (2014) recent work in North American indigenous studies. Once a week, we met for a synchronous Zoom seminar to discuss our reactions, thoughts and critiques of the literature we were reading.

The students' reflections during class echoed their positionality. They made connections between the texts and the Philippines – either its colonial history or the way it is presently affected by continuing structures of neo-coloniality. Just as reading Samarajiva's article had reminded me of how I reproduce Eurocentrism, they also realised their own complicity in continuing neo-colonial practices that harm indigenous ways of acting and thinking, such as through economic systems that continue to harm indigenous peoples. These reflections were encapsulated in a post-course thank you message from one of the students: "I appreciate how the course has instilled in me a critical view of myself as a political actor in the current state of the world".

My student's arrival at deeper insights about himself as a *political actor* was an outcome I had not originally anticipated. However, the path from civic identities to active citizenship (Starkey, 2019) can explain this. Many anti-colonial texts frame engagement within the political community in the language of identity: identifying with the dreamed-about nation rather than the colonising empire (Fanon, 1990; Anderson, 2006). The texts that we studied had evidently led my students to themselves think about their identities in the context of Philippine postcolonial society. The students' input during discussions showed how they were thinking about their civic identity as postcolonial selves and becoming more aware of the value of their citizenship, both as persons from the Global South and postcolonial subjects straddled the world of the coloniser and the colonised. This helped them see that they had a potentially valuable perspective to contribute to the global community and a more compassionate role that they might play towards others in the Philippines who suffer the greatest injustices as a legacy of continuing coloniality. The question that remained, which I brought to our discussion group, was whether these theoretical realisations could lead to actual changes in my students' actions.

4.4 From theory to active participation

Kamille Beye

As with Azada-Palacios, the events that have unfolded during the pandemic have made me think about racial and social inequalities in the institutions and structures around me.

While surveying the damage of COVID-19 on my life and the lives of people of colour in the US, I often think of the "I Am A Man" posters that Black men carried in 1968 to protest low wages for recognition of their right to unionise and the need for safe working conditions (The collection, n.d.). Although I am not a man, the same rights that Black men fought for then have become symbolic of the rallying cry now to be seen as human, to have one's rights to organise be acknowledged and respected and to work and live in spaces where the wearing of a mask to protect against COVID-19 is not seen as a form of political correctness, but a patriotic duty to save lives. When my home country, the United States, began closing its borders, I was still in London, debating if I should go to the airport amidst the crowds of panicked fliers. I would not be part of the masses that I saw on the news. Instead, I waited. For eight weeks, I watched and read report after report of the COVID-19 cases rising in the US. I read how this virus was affecting communities of colour at higher rates. The "essential worker" was not just the person with a medical degree. The janitor, bus driver, cafeteria worker, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screeners, grocery store cashier – all on the frontlines being exposed, left to clean up after the death and become the dead themselves. COVID-19 has humbled many Americans as it changes our way of life. We eat differently. We mourn differently. Many of us think differently. We love at a distance. Our eyes have opened to the things we did not want to see yet many of us knew.

The COVID-19 crisis paraded the gaps in medical care access. COVID-19 has forcefully brandished the inequalities of those who lost jobs through the weekly unemployment numbers and the crisis partnered with the clouds of racial injustice to create a storm that rained down mistrust, anger, despair and surprisingly, the awareness that the current systems that have been put in place are not working for the masses. The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor as well as the politics of division that ravage the airways cause me to ponder how we in the United States will come together to create "that beloved community" that the late civil rights icon, John Lewis, often spoke of. Frantz Fanon once said that "the living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people" (1990:165). Currently, the expression of the US is one of confusion as the government's bungled response to COVID-19 continues to affect every area of our lives. Our response has shown the world that money is more important than science and therefore lives. It makes no sense that wearing a mask has become a political football. It is amongst this chaos that decency and respect for humanity must bloom and I must act.

The average person of colour faces economic and social disadvantages that have been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 crisis (Van Winkle, 2020; Chetty *et al.,* 2020; Hardy, 2020). What I and others can do to demonstrate our compassion as fellow Americans is to wear a mask and vote for change in our upcoming election. I do not want lives and jobs lost to be in vain. It seems that our elected officials have refused to see the devastating effects the virus has caused working people. To fight our way out of this conundrum, we must work collectively. It feels like the virus has fundamentally changed our sense of community. You either believe in the science that says that wearing a mask saves lives or you do not. President Trump continues to say that "we are rounding the corner". Yet, recently, the US reached over 100 000

COVID-19 cases in one day. Many Americans have taken cues from the government and have shown disrespect for this virus by refusing to wear masks and purposefully exposing others to the virus. They have forgotten that we are stronger together. To turn the tide on this new normal, I am convinced more than ever that to do my part as a compassionate citizen, I must vote. Suppose the source of inequalities of race and class are found in the structures of our political communities. In that case, the solutions to these inequalities must be found by affecting change within those political communities. At this moment, I feel that it is not only my civic duty to vote, but that my life and the lives of others depend on a change in our national leadership.

4.5 Civic and uncivic acts at different levels of power

Nar Bahadur Saud

Beye described in our research group how the inequalities of American society exacerbated by the pandemic motivated her to vote. In my case, I saw how the flawed response of the Nepali government was countered by different forms of Nepali civic engagement at all levels of power.

The second case of COVID-19 to be found in Nepal was diagnosed on 17 March 2020. The government immediately imposed a nationwide lockdown to control the spread of the virus, just as I was doing fieldwork for one of my research projects. Because the lockdown was implemented with barely any notice, millions of other people and I found ourselves stranded or haphazardly making chaotic mobility arrangements. However, the neediest people in Nepali society suffered the most, finding themselves cut off from various forms of support.

These events showed how decisions made by power-holders in Nepal – that is, the people who occupy positions in federal, provincial and local government; security agencies; health institutions and volunteer organisations – could affect the most powerless members of society. Hopkins (2011) emphasises that citizenship education values such as honesty, compassion and responsibility are essential during a crisis. I believe that while they are relevant to all people, they are vital for people who hold the most power. Had persons in power fulfilled their duties more compassionately, virus control measures might have been carried out in less harmful ways, encouraging rather than deflating citizens (Kielburger *et al.,* 2009).

Despite flaws in the government's performance, the positive effects of guiding one's civic actions by such values could be seen in hopeful examples at all levels of society. Many Nepali citizens fully supported some of the government's plans such as the lockdown. Security forces and health workers performed their duties professionally despite the political chaos, limited resources and lack of health safety measures, even to the point of sacrificing personal and family priorities. Individual and group-based voluntary initiatives across the country strove to ameliorate the difficulties that people were facing. For example, local government units in Udaypur, Rupandehi, and Parsa districts were able to control their high case numbers through community-based coordination. Likewise, volunteers and private organisations supplied free food to the needy in Kathmandu and elsewhere; sharing food was one way to show love, care and the value of humanity. Other groups helped manage the distribution of safety equipment and materials to hospitals to support health workers facing supply shortages. Some citizens also offered free use of their vehicles in emergencies, such as to bring coronavirus patients to hospitals, because of the lack of ambulance services.

These initiatives are examples of civic roles and identities (Nussbaum, 1996; Starkey, 2019). In Nepal, it is clear that the initiatives were also inspired by religious beliefs and expressions of respect for the equal dignity of vulnerable members of society (Waldon, 2012). *Sanatana Dharma* exerts a vital influence on Nepali society that is guided by Hinduism and Buddhism rituals. It tries to find "eternal" truths while emphasising the indivisibility of humans and non-sectarianism. Gyawali (1987) defines *dharma* (religion) as a correct lifestyle of living in harmony with one's nature in a world of perpetual change, a lifestyle in harmony in three spheres; the philosophical, the social and the environmental. These spheres include the attitudes and behaviours of people. Religious rituals and societal activities are carried out to observe *dharma*. During the religious rituals and ceremonies, one or more deities are worshipped using actions, processes and products prescribed by texts, priests or local tradition. The social services include the construction of temples, schools, rest houses for pilgrims, the building of water taps, donating to charity and constructing bridges, roads and *Chautara* (resting place), many services of which have been crucial during the pandemic. Clearly, religious beliefs heavily influence citizens' lives, value systems, social norms and Nepal's identities. Thus, the moral and religious education that Nepali citizens likely received in their childhood was probably one of the roots of the acts of solidarity they displayed during the pandemic.

However, this does not erase the need to hold those in power accountable. This highlights the gap that emerges in societies between those in power and those who are most powerless. How can people who have power retain their compassion and empathy for those at the other end of the scale? This was a question that I brought back to the study.

4.6 The uncertainties that remain amid the rise of illiberal tendencies: London and the revelations of COVID-19

Adam Peter Lang

In London at the start of the lockdown in March 2020, unsure of what to expect and somewhat fearful, I turned, as a disruptive scholar (Ball, 2017) to re-read Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Foucault finds that "history teaches us that epidemics are more like revelatory moments than social transformers", and that "the plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilised by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies – this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (Foucault, 1975:198). Was I witnessing this in my home city in 2020?

How has the concept of citizenship, as it has in times of war and conflict, shifted during the pandemic (Zembylas, 2015) and how has this related to new forms of citizenship required by the "muscular liberalism" (Cameron, 2011) that former Prime Minister David Cameron wished to promote and that is now occupying the civic habitus in English schools? Since 2014, teachers in England have been required to promote the "fundamental British values" defined by the government as democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and the inter-linked 2015 "Prevent duty" enshrining a legal responsibility on public bodies, including schools, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being into terrorism" (Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015). Both have been controversial and provoked fierce debate (Vincent, 2020).

Could Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) offer a perspective and understanding of our current crisis? London lost a quarter of its population to the Bubonic Plague: the rich fled town to their country homes; other citizens took refuge in churches or blockaded themselves in their homes. "Lord have mercy on London", they cried. What would other active citizens and I do in 2020?

The Spanish Flu of 1919 and what happened in San Francisco was illuminating. I stayed put in London and took my allowed daily exercise, cycling through the deserted streets, taking photographs and keeping a diary to chronicle a small part of London's and a big part of my COVID-19 experience. Was Foucault (1975) right when he said, "The plague is the marvellous moment when political power is exercised to the full" where in the world would we now be seeing a complete imposition of political power over the population?

In this "Age of Anger" (Mishra, 2017), there has been anger that has been created by the practice of neoliberalism and a reaction to its failings and shortcomings. Using Foucault, it is possible to identify a recent period of ruptures that have occurred including the economic crisis of 2007/2008, which has seen a "crisis of capitalism" and linked to it a "crisis of liberalism". From these dynamics, the different responses and reactions have supported a global rise of populism and anti-democratic non-liberal forms of government. While still dominant, neoliberalism has and continues to be challenged, as there has been a shift away from neoliberalism, both economically and culturally, with the rise of the concept of economic populism.

The pandemic has escalated these geopolitical dynamics. Governments around the world have used emergency powers to counter the pandemic. Still, many countries, including the UK, have moved to use and abuse these powers to restrict debate and scrutiny of policy, ban protests, silence critics and scapegoat minorities. Freedom House (n.d.), a US NGO counts 80 countries where the quality of democracy and respect for human rights since the pandemic began has decreased.

I cycled through London in late March and early April shocked to witness beggars on the street, homeless people sleeping in doorways and drug addicts openly trying to deal behind bus shelters. The pandemic was disproportionately affecting the poor such as our "Black, Asian and minority ethnic" (BAME) communities and citizens.

How was this playing out with young people with no school and the exertion of "muscular liberalism" on their citizenship? Black Lives Matter: citizens demonstrate in Hyde Park in early June, statues are toppled and thrown into the dock in Bristol. The national discourse changes and quickly, this is more than just a moment it feels significant. It is online and television stations and newspapers try to keep pace interviewing BLM supporters, BAME academics and listing books from the anti-racist canon.

Then came the push back. I am kept awake all night on 3 July 2020 by the whirring blades of a police helicopter overhead. They are policing a block party on a nearby housing estate that they believe has gotten out of hand. A "Section 60", to stop activity taking place, has been issued. The next day I speak to some of the local youth who are angry about the police and believe they are being over-policed. Over the coming summer months, I work with some of these young people and they produce a powerful video "We Exist", which tells part of their story that they feel is not being heard and of their need to be seen as equal citizens, needing the space to consider and develop their citizenship education. Some trainee teachers have since used this video in their teaching practice schemes of work in London schools opening

up the debate for their students. Young people in London/UK. have powerful and compelling COVID-19 stories to tell, including no schooling for months, lack of contact with friends, child food poverty, mental health issues, the summer A-level results fiasco (young people's demonstrations changing government policy), the growth of youth unemployment, the chaos of the return of universities in September and the fears for future job opportunities. The pandemic brought a range of social issues; however, they also remind us that compassionate citizenship requires these needs to be addressed as we reimagine schools, the curriculum and citizenship education.

5. DISCUSSION: REIMAGINING EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE AND COMPASSIONATE CITIZENSHIP

As the vignettes above show, we six researchers reflected on our pandemic experiences, articulated our realisations and remaining questions and shared these with the group to be explored further by our colleagues. This back-and-forth allowed us to collectively reimagine a paradigm for citizenship education arriving at the proposal that *education for active and compassionate citizenship* can equip young people with the moral imagination they need to be participatory civic agents and moral agents.

Tong's reflections helped us identify that the pandemic was not merely a public health crisis, but also a crisis of compassion and solidarity. This realisation echoes some of the earlier literature: Ben-Porath (2006: 11–15) has argued that civic identities are reformulated as "belligerent citizens" in times of crisis, as a public response to perceived threats to national and personal security. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic made many citizens focus on individual survival efforts and national solidarity rather than eliciting compassion and global solidarity. Tong's reflections indicated that such a crisis demanded an educational response and this was the challenge that he brought back to the group.

Tong's reflections also highlighted the moral dimension of developing compassion. These reflections are supported by the concept of *moral imagination,* a theoretical framework developed by Dewey and Nussbaum. In Dewey's work, moral imagination has two dimensions: empathetic projection and responsiveness (Schulenberg, 2015). Empathetic projection can be fulfilled by imagining the other's experiences and perspectives: imagination helps one put oneself in another's position (Waghid & Davids, 2012). Nussbaum (2001:299) discusses imagination in relation to civic identities; she emphasises that "compassionate imagination" – taking another's perspective – can help people treat others equally and humanely. One way in which moral imagination is used is to understand oneself in light of the other is responsiveness. By anticipating the responses of the other, "we can control our own actions to communicate; gestures can thus become symbols. The personal imagination is a further refinement of the social imagination" (Alexander, 1993: 388).

Cheong responded to the challenge posed by Tong of an educational response to antipathy by highlighting such an example. The ideals of *Hongik-Ingan* taught to pupils in the Republic of Korea, construct Korean civic identities as peace civic identities. Cheong realised that the same ideals also encouraged pupils to be compassionate towards others, as expressed in the mindfulness of others with which Koreans were behaving amidst the pandemic.

Azada-Palacios's reflections complicated the problems associated with acts of uncompassion by demonstrating how it was possible to be unknowingly complicit in uncompassionate structures that harmed certain groups. She showed how an educational

approach that exposes these structures could lead to a desire for personal change, reconfirming the link between civic identities and active citizenship. According to Starkey's (2019) analysis of the active citizen, all human beings can be citizens; however, individuals can specifically be *active* citizens when they begin to value citizenship.

This, however, raised an additional question: how might such realisations translate into practical action? Beye highlighted political participation through elections as one way an individual could be actively involved in changing structures of inequality. Saud described how ordinary Nepalis practised the principles of *Sanatana Dharma* amidst an inadequate government response to the pandemic. Together, they demonstrated that the educational response invited by the pandemic ought to be concerned not only with cultivating compassion, but also active participation. Such insights highlight the importance of past research on active citizenship. Affective civic competences – civic self-efficacy, responsibility and commitment – are strongly related to capacities for action, playing a crucial role in becoming an active citizen (Bandura, 1997; Galston, 2007).

Saud had left an issue unresolved, though, related to imbalances of power in societies. This was a point of departure for Lang, who illustrated a remaining challenge for our vision of citizenship education: how to implement it without committing over-governmentality. Such is particularly important in the current global political context. Exclusionary populist movements have been growing in strength, threatening democracies and fragile states, human rights and vulnerable groups' security. Lang indicated how this could be a future direction for further developing this paradigm, but also, through the example of his work with London youth, gestured to a possible way forward. Education *for* action and compassion also entails education *with* compassion: citizenship educators must ensure that the students they teach are heard, seen and empathised as equal citizens.

6. CONCLUSION

Through the innovative method of collective autobiographical writing, the researchers have concluded that the notion of active and compassionate citizenship is an important one during large-scale crises such as the current pandemic. Our experiences confirmed that crises could foster belligerent behaviour and exclusivist thinking and ignite greater compassion and civic engagement. Guided by these insights, citizenship education practitioners may want to use the concept of *active and compassionate citizenship* as the core theme around which to teach citizenship, as we support one another through and beyond the current pandemic.

7. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

8. ETHICAL STATEMENTS

The research was based at University College London. All procedures were followed in accordance with the ethics guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2009) Code of Ethics and Conduct and (2014) Code of Human Research Ethics or British Educational Research Association (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Education or British Sociological Association (2002) Statement of Ethical Practice. All personal data were protected based on Article 32 of the data

protection legislation (GDPR). Informed consent was obtained from all authors included in the study.

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