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Research Article

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Abstract

Encounters with marginalised spiritualties and religions can assist in the creation of a post-2030 agenda that recognises the limitations of existing ideas of 'sustainable development' and 'progress', the necessity of which is evidenced by our worsening climate and ecological crisis.

The acknowledgement that religion plays an important role in the lives of the majority of the world's population has led to increased partnerships between religious communities, humanitarian and development practitioners, and policy makers. At best, this has resulted in fruitful partnerships with those whose world views fit into predefined understandings of religion and development. At worst, it has led to the instrumentalisation of religious and spiritual leaders to implement western, individualistic, capitalist, anthropocentric ideas of development. Knowledge flows have remained unidirectional with the aforementioned partnerships yet to see the transformative potential of engaging with a greater diversity of religious and spiritual communities when imagining a post-2030 agenda.

This paper draws on ethnographic engagement and interviews with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and Lumad Indigenous people in the Philippines to highlight how learned ignorance, encounters and horizontal relationships can expand individual and collective imagination – deconstructing imperial imaginations and prioritising people and planetary flourishing above profit. It highlights the potential way in which diverse subaltern, abyssal and decolonial movements can be engaged to support

a burgeoning of ecologies of knowledge capable of challenging hegemonic under-standings of 'progress' and 'development', essential to the post-2030 debate.

Keywords

1   Introduction

Within the field of development the United Nations frameworks, whether in the form of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or a new post-2030 agenda set the norm: they determine what constitutes 'development' and what is 'alternative develop-ment'; they determine funding priorities and project design (Öhlmann, Gräb and Frost 2020). The current framework, the SDGs and the global commit-ments to the 2030 Agenda more broadly have had a positive impact on the lives of countless people.[1] The Agenda brought issues of climate change and environmental degradation into greater focus and included the principle of universality (UNGA 2015). This decentred industrial nations as the exemplar of development (Kothari et al. 2019, xiii) whilst acknowledging the existence of an imperial south in the global north and an imperial north in the global south (Santos 2016).

However, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are also deeply flawed.[2] Whilst no longer holding the West as the exemplar of development they continue in the capitalist, individualistic and anthropocentric western tradition that views modernisation, progress and development as a linear process of mate-rial improvement. They frame 'green capitalism' or 'green growth'[3] as the solu-tion to ecological destruction and gross inequalities in the world (Kothari et al. 2019, xxvi) and are therefore incapable of addressing our ecological crisis

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1   For example, the *Sustainable Development Report 2020* notes progress in maternal and child health, access to electricity, and women's representation in government (UNSD 2020).

2   The UNSD report itself noted that 'advances were offset elsewhere by growing food inse-curity, deterioration of the natural environment, and persistent and pervasive inequalities' (UNSD 2020).

3   Although these may perhaps be more illuminatively labelled greenwashing (Barry and Frankland 2014, 19) or green colonialism (Normann 2021).

noting that 'They [the SDGs] render environmental problems technical, promising win-win solutions and the impossible goal of perpetuating economic growth without harming the environment.' (Kallis 2015).

Furthermore, as Sartorius notes, they are depoliticising, because 'causes, for example struggles of wealth distribution and land repartition, are veiled by statistics' (2022, 100). The result is that the SDGs are 'without strategies to reverse the global North's disproportionate contamination of the globe through waste, toxicity, and climate emissions' (Kothari et al. 2019, xxvii). In this way, the SDGs allow for and even support the very exploitative economic systems that cause many of the environmental and health wounds they purport to solve.

There exist many examples of alternative development or alternatives to development. One of the most commonly known is *buen vivir*, an internally and historically heterogeneous concept (Gudynas 2011),[4] which gained popularity and its present, generally accepted, meaning of intertwined community and environmental and social well-being in Latin America in the 1990s (Gudynas 2014). Another is ubuntu, which originated in Southern Africa and is often explained through the phrase 'I am because we are' in which all beings are interdependent and interconnected (Ramose 2015; Bowers Du Toit 2020; van Norren 2020; Sartorius 2022). A further example that is gaining attention in Europe is that of degrowth, which Kothari et al. describe as 'the hypothesis that we can live better with less and in common, in western countries' (2019, 2). *buen vivir*, ubuntu and degrowth acknowledge examples of alternatives to development that have been discussed in the post-development discourse and are among many transformative ways of living, the most comprehensive collection of which can be found in Kothari et al.'s *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (2019).

These alternative understandings of development had entered popular discourse prior to the formation of the SDGs[5] and the language of some non-western cosmologies, world views and development alternatives are present in the goals (van Norren 2020). However, simply including alternative language is insufficient without challenging the underlying assumptions on which western linear understandings of progress and development are based. Furthermore, notions of spirituality and community that are fundamental to understanding *buen vivir* and ubuntu were not even included tokenistically (van Norren 2020). It therefore remains that 'the SDGs do not effectively address the

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4   The term was first used as far back as 1615 (Quijano 2016).

5   See, for example, the article in *The Guardian*, a popular British newspaper (Kothari, Demaria and Acosta 2015).

human – nature – well-being interrelationship' (van Norren 2020), nor do they acknowledge the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of the majority of the world's population (Öhlmann, Gräb and Frost 2020). The fact that the 2030 Agenda did not incorporate these alternatives suggests that it is not enough to know about them – western development agendas need to be transformed by them in order to decentre dominant notions of progress and development.

However, whilst literature acknowledges the failure of the SDGs and the need for transformation, less attention has been paid to what such transformations might look like. This paper draws on the example of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) and Lumad Indigenous people in the Philippines as narrated in 37 semi-structured interviews that took place in early 2020, supplemented by informal conversations, online events and interviews throughout 2021 to highlight how such transformations can and do take place. It argues that the IFI's theologically informed understanding of equality encourages a humility and learned ignorance that facilitates relationships and intercultural dialogue, leading to an ecology of knowledges that furthers the IFI's commitment to the Lumad struggle and alternative understandings of development.

2   Writing on Indigenous Spiritualities: A Personal Introduction

I am a white, cisgendered, able-bodied female born into a close-knit family in the United Kingdom, currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Birmingham. The ideas shared in this paper have developed from my relationships with three communities: those who are research collaborators within my ongoing PhD project, Lumad Indigenous people and the IFI; those engaged in religion and development spheres with whom I have interacted for the past five years; and my family and community here in the UK. Indigenous methodologies have been key in informing my research. Within Indigenous methodologies and understandings knowledge is relational; in undertaking the research and writing of this paper I am not only answerable to the aforementioned communities but to the entire cosmos (Wilson 2008). Relational accountability begins with a choice of what to research (Wilson 2008). To situate myself and explain why I chose to write this article I share a story, a common research method within Indigenous methodologies:

A few weeks ago, I met my niece, who is eight, from school and asked her, as I normally do, how her day was, the emotions she felt, the experiences she had, the things she learnt. She told me that she had been learning about how

humans became civilised. I held my breath, waiting for her to regurgitate something her teacher had told her that we could then gradually unpack together. I was unprepared for what happened next. My beautifully kind-hearted niece had internalised this narrative to the degree that she did not regurgitate, but gave me an example she thought I might understand:

> You know, like how we put tigers in cages, like I know that's not where they belong but we *can* do that to them and they can't do that to us. So that means that we are civilised and animals aren't.

How do you respond to that? The violent anthropocentric power hierarchy in what she said, the history behind it. I did not even know where to begin. I am writing within an exploitative capitalist system that regurgitates old colonial narratives to justify its continued existence, but also as a doting auntie who wants an alternative future for her family and as someone who has been fortunate enough to engage with communities around the world to know that alternatives exist.

I am not an expert on Lumad cosmologies or IFI theologies, nor could I ever be. Many people know much more about the sphere of religion and development than I do. However, I hope that by sharing and linking my understanding of the knowledges that have been shared with me I will be able to demonstrate the necessity and benefits of deconstructing imperial imaginations as we look towards a post-2030 agenda.

3   Ecologies of Knowledge and the Potential for Transformation

3.1   *Religion and the SDGs*
The marginalisation of spirituality and religion in the 2030 Agenda is not new. In the hierarchy of knowledge underpinning dominant development agendas rationalism has persistently relegated faith, religion and spirituality to positions of inferiority (Santos 2015). Whilst the SDGs contain no specific reference to religion, the consultation process leading to the formation of the SDGs did include religious actors and faith-based organisations (FBOs). This was the result of decades of advocacy and research by faith-based actors in academic, development and policy spheres, tired of having to 'leave their faith at the door.' The challenge was that those invited to engage were primarily large FBOs who engaged as NGOs, with nothing unique or 'faith based' about their engagement except for often a quiet personal motivation (Haustein and Tomalin 2019, 9).

Since the formation of the SDGs there has been an increase in partnerships and funding made available for faith-based initiatives (Petersen 2019).[6] However, this has largely been through an 'instrumental addition of religion to the pre-set, mechanistic sustainable development production process' (van Wensveen 2011, 85). The focus has been either on the 'added value' of engaging with religious actors, or the barriers they pose to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly in gender equality (Petersen 2019). Engagement has centred on the ability of FBOs to use existing faith networks for service provision, their long-term presence in communities, the trust they have often developed, and their ability to change attitudes and draw on their own funds (Petersen 2019). Bilateral and multilateral donors have used FBOs to implement their western capitalistic, individualistic, anthropocentric understandings of development.

3.2 *Imperial Imaginations*

Why have so many well-meaning partnerships led to instrumentalisation and dominant paradigms not managed to incorporate alternative understandings of development? Whilst I believe there are many reasons for this, including the need for funding, the desire for recognition and selective inclusion, what I wish to explore here is the limitations of the imperial capitalist imagination present in the so-called global north and global south.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the climate and ecological crisis necessitates a complete rethinking of systems and structures of power when looking towards a post-2030 agenda (Eisenmenger et al. 2020).[7] However, the western imagination has been limited in such a way that many of us are no longer able to imagine alternatives beyond our rational, progress-driven world view (Andreotti 2016). For many, like myself, who have been socialised within neoliberal capitalist notions of progress and development, alternatives are hard to imagine. Andreotti (2016) labels this box thinking, using the image of a person with a 3D box for a head to demonstrate the logocentric, universal, anthropocentric and teleological limits placed on our imaginations by dominant neoliberal capitalism. She argues that box thinking encourages us to focus on our minds rather than our bodies through a formal and informal education that 'attempts to tame or repress forces deemed unreasonable such

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6   Although these were mainly Christian partnerships with those holding similar ideas of development (Petersen 2019).

7   As do other intersecting issues normalised by colonisation including issues of race and gender inequality.

as the aesthetic, the erotic, the more-than-human, the divine and the hilarious'
(Andreotti 2016).

Those of us educated within this box are encouraged to believe in only the
empirically knowable and the describable, to believe that the way in which
we see the universe is the only real and reasonable interpretation of it. The
box convinces us that we can design our future into existence and that human
beings' ability to think elevates us to a position of superiority that permits our
control over non-anthropic beings (Andreotti 2016).

Writing over fifteen years ago, but accurately descriptive of the knowledge
that supports neoliberal capitalist thinking today, Berry (2005) described the
existence of a 'smart corporate mind' and the 'arrogantly ignorant' whose
financial investments blind them to the negative consequences of their
actions. Today, the corporate mind defines never-ending consumption as
ethical whilst silently forcing communities and indigenous people from their
lands to make way for mining and new technologies (Anlauf 2017; Mekaoui
et al. 2020). Individuals remain blind as the corporate mind 'justifies and
encourages the personal mind in its worst faults and weaknesses such as greed
and servility, and frees it of any need to worry about the long-term conse-
quences' (Berry 2005, 60). The underlying message: I am a green consumer,
therefore I can continue to consume.

The continued dominance of the corporate mind and the superiority of
imperial knowledge is not limited to one geographical region. Limited imagi-
nations and support for the exploitative capitalist system and neoliberal
understandings of growth do not only exist in the west (Santos 2012). An impe-
rial south also exists in which empirical knowledge has been elevated to a
position of superiority in a way that undermines and discredits all other forms
of knowledge (Berry 2005; Andreotti 2016; Santos 2012).[8]

One way in which limited imaginations are being addressed is through
decolonisation movements. However, much of the literature on religion and
decolonisation focuses on reconnecting and recentring knowledges that have
been colonised.[9] Whilst this is a necessary and important task, there is also a
need, less often acknowledged, to decolonise the imperial mind. To enable this
task to take place, religious communities rooted in imperial knowledges must
be willing to be learned ignorants (Santos 2016), to know that which they do
not know, to enter into horizontal relationships with alternatives and to be

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8   The individual knowledges referred to in Berry include empirical, experience, traditional,
    religious, inborn, intuition, conscience, inspiration, sympathy, bodily and counterfeit
    knowledge.
9   See for example Öhlmann, Gräb and Frost (2020).

transformed by them. It is only from here that they will be able to refamiliarise themselves with local contextual alternatives to development as well as those from their own tradition in different areas of the globe. The question that we must then ask in preparation for a post-2030 agenda is how we can work across cultures and linguistic and ideological divides to deconstruct imperial imaginations wherever they are and move from a '"sacred market" to a sacred world' (Augustine 2019, 128).

3.3   *Ecologies of Knowledge and Intercultural Translation*

Ecologies of knowledge are an epistemology to counter the exclusive primacy of western, supposedly rational, scientific knowledge (Santos 2009, 68). According to Santos, the logic of the monoculture of western knowledge that includes capitalist growth, linear time, universal and global scales and the naturalisation of differences through racial and sexual hierarchies produces non-existence (2014, 172–174). 'The repeated mantra that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism and all it entails aims to sweep away from social thinking the will to criticism and the possibility of an alternative.' (Santos 2018, 249–250). Santos labels this process the sociology of absences and argues that the appearance of 'no alternatives' conceals alternative knowledges and the possibilities they present for the future (Santos 2016). Ecologies of knowledge are one of five knowledges that Santos recognises as necessary to counter absences, recognise marginalised knowledges, and counter the production of non-existence. 'The ecology of knowledges aims to provide epistemological consistency for pluralistic, propositive thinking' (Santos 2009, 69).

Ecologies of knowledge are then, according to Santos, spaces in which people and knowledges interact in horizontal relationships of reciprocity. Multiple meanings and understandings of the world are held with respect and the incompleteness of each form of knowledge acknowledged whilst maintaining each group's unique motivation for social action. 'In the ecology of knowledges, knowledges intersect and so do ignorances. As there is no unity of knowledge, there is also no unity of ignorance' (Santos 2009, 69). Through such an ecology, each form of knowledge is expanded, its incompleteness addressed, and the anti-capitalist struggle strengthened (Santos 2016, 227; 2018, 78). Key to the formation of an ecology of knowledge then is the willingness of those involved to discern commonalities and ways of working together for a common cause, defamiliarising themselves with knowledges that are no longer valuable where value is determined by the contribution made to a particular struggle and the broader anti-capitalist movement (Santos 2012, 57). This defamiliarisation is supported by intercultural translation in which cultural

similarities and differences are understood and, when necessary, hybrid forms of communication devised. The process of intercultural translation and the forming ecologies of knowledge then expands the sociology of absences whilst reducing the sociology of emergences in a way that acknowledges the limits of future possibilities (Santos 2016, 185–186), such as the impossibility of simultaneously perusing endless growth and global well-being.

Ecologies of knowledge, as outlined by Santos, have the potential to support the defamiliarisation of imperial imaginations in a way that supports the creation of a post-2030 agenda rooted in understandings of progress and development that are supportive of the flourishing of all people and the planet. In what follows, I demonstrate how an ecology of knowledge that formed between the IFI and Lumad communities helped the IFI to defamiliarise themselves with their imperial imaginations and strengthen the anti-imperial struggle in the Philippines.

4   Methods

I was introduced to the IFI by the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG), an organisation with which I previously worked which has partnered with the IFI for over fifty years, and introduced to Lumad communities by trusted IFI leadership. Whilst informed by broader relationships and activities, this article is largely based upon ethnographic engagement and qualitative data collected from the thirty-seven aforementioned interviews that I conducted with Lumad and IFI communities in the Philippines between January and March 2020. Members of the Obispado Maximo, the leading unit of the IFI, organised the fieldwork schedule. However, the evolving security situation thwarted our attempts at prolonged ethnographic engagement and the length of time spent with each cohort and interviewee ranged from two days with some Lumad communities to six weeks with some members of the Obispado Maximo.

Within the IFI, semi-structured interviews took place with six bishops, sixteen Church leaders and four staff of the Obispado Maximo, all of whom had a history of engagement with Lumad communities. These interviews were conducted in English and focused on individual motivations and the institutional mandate to engage with Lumad communities despite military persecution. Being introduced by USPG likely had a positive influence on the initial level of trust that I was afforded by the IFI, supporting the discussion of 'difficult' topics including government criticism and individual experiences of persecution. However, USPG's relationship is largely with bishops and throughout

the research I remained cognisant that my association with USPG may have affected individuals' willingness to criticise the IFI's institutional approach to the Lumad mission.

Issues of access and participant safety largely determined the selection of Lumad communities. I conducted six interviews with the first cohort, a Lumad community who still reside on their ancestral land, who requested anonymity. The second cohort consisted of four students, two teachers and one community leader at the Lumad Bakwit (evacuee) School who were, at the time, receiving sanctuary in the University of the Philippines. Interviews with both Lumad communities were of a semi-structured nature and sought to elicit understandings of what is commonly referred to as the Lumad struggle, the motivation for participating in such a struggle and experiences of persecution. These interviews relied on Lumad advocates to translate with interviewees speaking in Tagalog or Visayan whilst I spoke in English. That introductions to both Lumad communities were made by members of the IFI with whom they had existing relationships and who identify as 'progressives' likely indicated that it was safe to criticise the government, military and capitalist approach of foreign companies. However, it is possible that these introductions also discouraged criticism of the Church and Lumad advocates for fear of affecting the funding provided by the IFI. Furthermore, my position as a white British person influenced responses as interviewees assumed a level of power and initially greatly overestimated my ability to encourage United Nations intervention in the Philippines. The need to manage research participants' expectations was a continual struggle.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the inability to travel during 2021 I supplemented the data shared in 2020 with online interviews with six members of the Obispado Maximo and three Lumad leaders. I contacted the IFI members via Facebook and interviews were conducted via Zoom, in English using a semi-structured format. These interviews encouraged further reflection on themes emerging from the initial analysis whilst also discussing recent developments in the IFI's theology and the way this interacted with and was influenced by their mission with Lumad communities.

The online interviews with Lumad leaders were arranged by a teacher at the Bakwit School with whom I had maintained contact via Facebook Messenger. An IFI member joined each of these semi-structured Zoom interviews to translate as the leaders spoke in Visayan and I spoke in English. The interviews focused on understandings of Lumad identity and the challenges of recognising the heterogeneity of Lumad tribes whilst maintaining a collective struggle.

5   Findings

5.1   *Lumad Indigenous Communities*

Lumad is a term adopted by 18 ethnolinguistic indigenous groups and numer-
ous subgroups from Mindanao and the Caraga region of the Philippines in
1986, to reflect their collective identity and distinguish themselves from their
Christian and Moro Muslim neighbours (Paredes 2013, 24). Despite their diver-
sity, Lumad tribes hold a common affinity with their ancestral lands, a unity
with nature and collective living practices that bind them together and lead
to understandings of success and development that are foreign to the busy
metropolitan cities of the archipelago.[10]

Nature is at the centre of Lumad spiritualties and understandings of power;
spirits live in the trees, rocks, water and air (Clariza 2005). In Lumad cosmol-
ogy, the individual is inseparable from their human and ecological community
and their spiritual understanding. For Lumad, power is a divine energy that
resides in nature and responds to human attempts at appeasement through
natural phenomena, such as rains for a bountiful harvest (Clariza 2005). This
power is sometimes referred to as God, but not God as a singular entity, rather,
God as an energy that is everywhere and in everyone and everything. There is
an inseparability of God, self and nature, as one teacher explained, 'We have
a God but if you ask the child, they will say [that they] have a God but the
God is herself, is she or he self' (Lumad teacher). The power derived from this
understanding of God dwelling in nature and of each person being part of that
nature fuels Lumad unity and their collective work on the land (Alamon 2017).
It is what underpins the anti-capitalist sentiment and alternative understand-
ing of development held by most Lumads.

However, Lumad ancestral lands contain minerals for mining and rich soils
for plantations, making their lands a prime investment for national and mul-
tinational companies and government programmes of economic develop-
ment, which Lumad communities have resisted for centuries (Alamon 2017).
Despite legal recourse, including the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997,
the Filipino government label those who resist 'development' programmes
and refuse to sign over their land in free, prior and informed consent agree-
ments as terrorists (Alamon 2017). This label then supposedly justifies the
Filipino military's forced removal of entire communities from their ancestral
lands using violence that by June 2020 had resulted in the bombing, burning or

10   For more information about Lumad culture see Masinaring (2014).

other means of forced closure of at least 178 of 220 Lumad schools.[11] By labelling those who resist the exploitation of their lands as terrorists the Filipino government is able to narrate these forced evacuations, school closures and arrests and extrajudicial killings that accompany them as peacekeeping activities, supporting the achievement of SDG 16.[12]

The Pantaron Mountain Range is one site where the Filipino government's understanding of capitalist development and economic gain clashes with the intergenerational, communally driven and cosmically connected development of Lumad communities. The Pantaron is home to an incredible biodiversity of flora and fauna, including the Philippine eagle, and has the last remaining virgin forests in Mindanao where 'even if 16 people hug the tree they can't hug it because it is too big' (Lumad student). The mountains are the home and recognised ancestral domain of the Manobo, Higaonon, Talaandig and Agusanon Lumad tribes. The government continues to issue mining certificates for the area, allowing national and multinational companies to destroy Lumad communities' source of food, health and education. In a prime example of the way in which the neoliberal capitalist system purports to solve the very problems it causes the government argues that Indigenous groups benefit financially from the royalties of destructive mining projects that provide good jobs, economic growth, innovation and infrastructure (SDGs 8 and 9) (Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs 2020).[13]

To feign support for its understandings of neoliberal capitalist progress at the expense of the lives of its own citizens the Filipino government bribes individuals within Lumad communities to become paramilitaries and support the violence against their own community. This takes place in two ways: 'they [young people] are threatened that if you don't go to military then something will happen to you. The second is economy, money. Because of the life that we Lumads have.' (Lumad community member). This demonstrates both the immediate violence used to allow neoliberal capitalism to thrive as well as the results of decades of such abuse where capitalist development has disrupted Lumad life to such a degree that some are now unable to live off the land and are forced to assimilate into the neoliberal economy.

Acknowledging the importance of Lumad systems of governance, the government supports this process through the employment of a fake *Datu* (tribal

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11   Dino N (2020).

12   For the Filipino government's narrative of peacekeeping activities in relation to human and ecological rights see Philippines Department of Social Affairs (2020). Available from: https://www.genevapm.ph/HRC/PHRS.pdf.

13   For an example of the violence and resistance associated with the exploitation of the Pantaron range see Kagula (2019).

leader), where 'the government also chooses a *Datu*, which is a *Datu*, paid, has a salary. And then it happens that our tribe has two *Datus*. And the *Datu* that is paid is fake.' (Lumad community member).

The creation of such a position adds cultural integrity to capitalist exploitation.

These divide and rule strategies are a twenty-first century version of forced assimilation. They make it more difficult for Lumad communities to meet their daily needs and transfer their spiritual, linguistic and cultural heritage to the next generations, thus reducing future resistance to the exploitation of the land. For Lumad communities reducing poverty is reducing the theft of their land so that they may continue in harmony with this source of life, energy and spirituality, not destroying it so that they can be employed and pay for the food and healthcare services the land once provided.

There are many points of struggle against the exploitation that Lumad communities face however; Lumad communities define their schools as their highest form of resistance. It is in their schools that Lumad youth understand and acknowledge the limitations of education within the neoliberal capitalist system and in which alternatives are lived and continually developed:

> The dep ed [Department of Education], they focus on the students to be exported like labour export policy, it is not just the goods that they export, it is the people too. We study for the benefits of the community, not for the other country because the mind of the mainstream universities and schools is they study to gain more money to become rich because you know dollar is so big when converted into peso so they want to go abroad. In our school the concept of the students they want to learn to defend their rights. They want to graduate for the benefit of the other children who are not in school.
>
> Lumad teacher

Lumad communities are not opposed to other knowledges and they describe their education as scientific (SOS 2020).[14] It is just that their science, what they investigate, how and what they consider a successful outcome differs; for Lumad students success is dependent upon an idea or a contribution of activities to the community as an interconnected part of the cosmos. Lumad education has similarities with broader conversations on the need to decolonise education where, as Mbembe notes in relation to the South African context,

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14   For more information on Lumad schools see https://www.facebook.com/saveourschools network.

'decolonisation (*a la* Nugugi) is not about closing the door to European or other traditions. It is about defining clearly *what the centre is*' (2015, 16). Innovation and infrastructure does not mean destroying the land but finding new ways of working with it.

Whilst scholars such as Alamon (2017) have documented this struggle, what has been missing from scholarly and activist initiatives is a purposeful attention what dominant societies, in the imperial south of the Philippines and beyond, have to learn from Lumad teachings. Such multidirectional knowledge flows are essential if the notions of progress and development that underpin Lumad persecution are to be decentred and alternative understandings of development and progress, capable of addressing our ecological crisis, are to inform our futures.

5.2   *The Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI)*

Whilst there have been peaks and troughs of attention to the Lumad struggle there are groups of dedicated activists, NGOs and religious organisations whose commitment to support the Lumad has remained steadfast for decades. This support is imperative, particularly when forced removals disconnect entire communities from their source of nutrition, medicine, shelter and spiritual well-being. The IFI is one such religious group. The IFI are an independent nationalist church that formed from the people's struggle in 1902 (Whittemore, 1961).

Whilst they formed from the people's struggle, the neoliberal capitalist environment in which the IFI has subsequently developed has also influenced them. They have at times been part of the anti-imperial south but at times supportive of the racist and exploitative economic systems of the imperial north. In what follows, I share the experiences that IFI leadership used to explain to me how they are learning what it truly means to be a Christian in the Philippines today from Lumad communities. By sharing this information, the IFI have provided us with an example of how intercultural translation and ecologies of knowledge can work to challenge the persistence of neoliberal capitalist thinking and how, through engagement with the struggle of those marginalised by the violence of this system, the individual and collective mind might be expanded to imagine beyond them.

According to the IFI, their calling is to stand with the oppressed and the marginalised, supported by a missional understanding in which God created all people in God's image with no missional distinction between those who identify as Christian and those who do not. For many of the IFI leadership in Mindanao their understanding of their calling naturally meant engagement

with Lumad communities. This engagement began with unequal hierarchies of power, rooted in imperial-south understandings of 'helping' by providing aid to the 'poor' Lumads. As one participant noted:

> ... the church has been responding in whatever way the church can and I can say that, that began with relief, I think that's the easiest now the church can do. You have a news, you receive a plea for help and you tell the people about them and you ask to collect some rice and all those things.
>
>   IFI priest

However, these hierarchies have changed significantly over the past five years. In September 2015 IFI clergy were asked to join a fact-finding mission in response to the deaths of five Lumad people in Pagadian, Western Mindanao. Whilst participating in this mission they received the news that three Lumad leaders, one of whom was the head of the award-winning Alcadev School, had been murdered in Lianga, Surigao Del Sur, Mindanao. These events represented an increase in military and paramilitary violence against Lumad communities, a violence that the IFI believed necessitated a more coordinated and institutionalised response. Through discussion with Lumad communities, the IFI Lumad ministry began to take shape. A key component of this ministry was an accompaniment programme that invited clergy to spend approximately six weeks living in Lumad communities as a 'protective presence', monitoring and raising awareness of human rights abuses (CPCS 2017, 10). The aim of the project, approved by the Mindanao Clergy Conference in February 2016, was to accompany Lumad communities in their struggle to protect their ancestral domain (CPCS 2017, 10).

In addition to the six-week accompaniment programme the IFI responded to requests to attend special events, such as harvests, as Lumad communities believed that the presence of the IFI accompaniers could protect them from government and military theft and exploitation where previously 'after they harvest, the guns are already waiting to harvest their harvest' (IFI priest). The IFI also increased their participation in resistance marches, such as Manilakbayan (a countrywide Indigenous mobilisation that travels from Mindanao to Manila), at government meetings when requested and continued to support those the military had forcibly removed.

These various forms of interaction enabled the building of relationships and reciprocity between the IFI and the Lumad that led to the organic development of an intercultural exchange and ecology of knowledge:

... we have not even consciously entered into a multicultural dialogue or intercultural dialogue trying to understand this "other" or I mean there was no conscious of doing that, like I mean like "let's talk we want to understand your faith, we want to share", the Ecumenical *chuchu* thing. So we were just there because we know the issue and we know that they are human and we know that by our faith they are as important as anyone else. And that if we are there by our practice we have been helpful at least.

> IFI priest

The gradual formation of this ecology of knowledge began with the simple act of being together in relationships of respect.

The humility and learned ignorance of the IFI then allowed them to begin the process of defamiliarising themselves with dominant societal narratives, starting with understandings of Lumads as 'backwards' and 'lazy.' For example, one bishop noted that he grew up in a community that 'easily discriminates Lumads', sharing how:

Lolo and *Lola*, our grandparents, teach us about the kind of, the Lumads ways and their living ... Lumads as different from us; they have dirty clothes, they have ragged wears. That is why, for a community who easily discriminate, we put them into a lower degree of being a human and worth not to be accompanied.

> IFI bishop

The bishop noted that he grew up with notions that 'Lumads are just only poor' and that 'Lumad is good for an alms' (Bishop Carlo), a Greek word which the Bishop translated to mercy or pity. However, he noted that 'as I grow and as I become a minister of this church and get involved and have an opportunity to visit them [Lumad communities], my learning has been gradually changed' (IFI bishop).

The bishop then proceeded to share stories detailing what he had learnt from Lumad communities, all of which centred on communal living, sharing and attitudes towards the environment.

This defamiliarisation with societal narratives of Lumads as backwards and lazy had also taken place in other clergy. One young priest shared that:

... some of them [Lumads, are] living there on the streets, and we are discriminating against them because of what they wear, what they look like ... After the immersion, I know and I understand the life of them.

> IFI priest

The building of relationships and the process of defamiliarisation from abusive hegemonic narratives has allowed IFI leadership to identify the way in which the government narrates dehumanisation and human suffering as natural or necessary in order to justify abuse (Santos 2016).

In the continuation of their defamiliarisation process, IFI leadership began to acknowledge the way in which the government used abusive narratives of Lumad communities to justify their forced removal from their ancestral land and assimilation into the neoliberal capitalist system:

> … especially in the government, they threaten the Lumads, and think they are the lower rank people, the illiterate people. They threaten them … They grab it [Lumad ancestral land] and they use constitutions; they use their powers in order to oppress, in order to harass.
>> IFI priest

The IFI understood the motivation behind such dehumanisation and abuse to be purely financial where:

> … they are dehumanising the existence of our people in the Philippines. … both of them are collaborating, the government and the companies, using people and just to augment their capitalist ideas. To have more money at the expense of people.
>> IFI priest

This understanding and ability to see Lumad people for who they are, not who exploitative systems narrate them to be, gradually reduced power hierarchies and allowed an intercultural translation to take place.

The defamiliarisation process continued as the IFI began reflecting on their own lives and defamiliarising themselves with capitalist notions of progress. For example, one priest noted the way in which Lumad communities 'are contented [with] what they have, they share what they have … I tell myself that I don't need big money, much money, big land' (IFI priest).

This ecology is more than just a collaboration. It is a transformational relationship that inspires knowledge holders to rethink basic assumptions underpinning their capitalist world view including the idea that economic gain is necessarily positive or that the value of land can be determined by how much one can gain from its minerals in the global market.

Understanding that the IFI has much to learn from Lumad communities led to new forms of engagement. For example, one diocese asked the *bahi* (spiritual leader) of a Lumad community to lead their Lenten retreat where:

> ... the *bahi* was sitting there on top of that, the priests who were in cassock were down there listening to her.... The clergy are really learning from the *bahi* ... some of the clergy are now doing full retreat under instruction of the *bahi.*
>
>   IFI priest

Reflecting upon this process in 2020 the Obispo Maximo, the head of the Church, identified three particular areas in which he believed the IFI could learn from Lumad communities:

> First is how they regard and treat the earth and the environment.... Secondly, we learn much about how they regard their own God, their belief is part of themselves unlike the Christians, there is tendency for the Christians to have their faith separate from their daily life.... The other one is a sense of being a community; they are part of one another.
>
>   Obispo Maximo

Whilst not all members of the IFI leadership have begun this process of defamiliarisation, the role of the Church according to those who had was to stand with Lumad communities in their resistance, learning how to challenge the political, economic and cognitive stronghold of the system whilst acknowledging an immediate need for aid and sanctuary. They were conscious of the potential of aid to distract from the need to destabilise underlying systems and structures of exploitation and its historic role of silencing transformative agendas and suppressing revolutionary energy (Shivji 2007; Banks, Hulme and Edwards 2015). In his seminar to IFI students, one bishop shared that:

> Historically, conservatives and reformists ... utilized programs to promote the Christian religion, as a humanitarian response to the needs of the poor, and to neutralize and defuse the growing demands of the people for revolution. In some cases, these programs were used as a counter-revolutionary tool.
>
>   ABLON 2021

However, the IFI believed that aid and sanctuary take on a very different dimension when they are part of a broader struggle. Being rooted in the struggle ensures that they are not silencing but are meeting immediate needs to ensure the continuation of the struggle. It is not about assimilating Lumad

communities into the dominant world view but enabling them to continue fighting for respect for their own world view from which the IFI is learning.

6   Discussion

Over the past six years the IFI has strengthened their understanding of the impact of neoliberal capitalist development and the narratives used to justify its continuation through the development of horizontal relationships with Lumad communities. The ecology of knowledge between the IFI and Lumad communities enabled the IFI to re-see marginalised knowledges in an alternative light and thereby further their commitment to the struggle of counter-hegemonic globalisation (Santos 2016). This understanding has helped strengthen the anti-capitalist struggle as the IFI supports Lumad communities to raise awareness of their situation, seek legal support and interact with national and international governmental and intergovernmental policy-making spheres. In this way, their experience provides an example of how humility, learned ignorance, relationship and intercultural dialogue have the potential to form ecologies of knowledge that defamiliarise groups' imperial knowledges and the violent systems of exploitation on which they are based.

The IFI's theology means that they, like many other religious institutions and FBOs, are particularly well placed to form this ecology. Understandings of the physical and spiritual as inseparable domains for well-being by religious institutions and FBOs often pose a challenge to modernist conceptions of development (Bowers Du Toit 2019). It allows them to understand the inseparability of God, self and nature within Lumad cosmologies. Furthermore, the IFI's theology and aforementioned belief that all people, Christian and non-Christian, are created in the image of God facilitates their ability to rethink and learn from others. This ability to develop such an ecology of knowledge is not rivalled by the government nor the humanitarian aid and NGO sector. The government's aforementioned view of the Lumad as 'lower rank people, the illiterate people' (IFI priest) closes it to any form of reciprocal learning whilst its capitalist-informed notions of progress and development prevent it from understanding the inseparability of the physical and spiritual. NGO and humanitarian sectors also focus on physical development and are often accountable to donors who require demonstrable progress towards external frameworks such as the SDGs. There is little room for incorporating

non-material domains or encouraging the learning that challenges the systems that sit behind such frameworks. Local religious infrastructure with theologies rooted in equality, with humility and a desire to continue understanding the will of God, to whom they are ultimately accountable, can offer unique spaces for the development of ecologies of knowledge and the emergence of alternatives to capitalist development.

Whilst within religion-focused development and policy spheres there has been great encouragement for challenging social norms, this is normally the imperial north challenging norms in the imperial south. What is needed now are similar initiatives to challenge norms related to capitalism, materialism, greed or mammon and growth in relation to our ecological crisis. However, there is little support for such initiatives, as they would mean the periphery challenging the core, those marginalised by the abyssal line challenging those who created it, and those defined as in need of development challenging those who defined them as such. The entire global capitalist system would slowly, but surely, come into question.

Growing energy and literature surrounding decolonising practices offers vital insight (Öhlmann, Gräb and Frost 2020). However, much of this literature argues for an expansion of existing models. What is unclear is how to support those that do not call for the expansion of existing models but for their demise. Those situations of alternative development where taking into account local religious or spiritual knowledge and cosmologies would mean challenging the entire neoliberal capitalist system, ideas of growth and a good life and relationships between the people and the land. As we have seen, in the current Filipino context, challenging the hegemonic system results in your labelling as a terrorist, your schools being bombed, and you being forcibly removed from your ancestral land.

The relationship between the IFI and Lumad communities demonstrates the cross-cultural interfaith potential of ecologies of knowledge to challenge the existing exploitative world order and the efforts of governments, encouraged by large corporations to silence them. Looking forward we must build on the advances made, the recognition of and space for religious voices, the increasing acceptance of alternative forms of development, and the universality of the SDG s. Global religious institutions and networks have two opportunities: firstly, to support and add legitimacy to these existing struggles. Secondly, to look for those alternative understandings of development within their own institutions, such as the Indigenous Network in the Anglican Communion, and to work with them in creating an ecology of knowledge that helps the parts of the institution rooted in imperial imaginations to delink their thinking from violent capitalist norms. This work is essential if we are to create a post-2030

agenda capable of addressing our ecological crisis that finally prioritises people and planet over profit and power.

7   Conclusion

With eight years to prepare for a post-2030 agenda the intertwined ecological crisis and persistent abuse of human rights under the neoliberal capitalist system make defamiliarisation imperative. Unless we decentre neoliberal capitalist notions of progress and development, the necessity of community for individual well-being and of remaining on one's ancestral land for spiritual and physical well-being will remain as 'alternative' world views. Centring so-called alternative knowledges through multidirectional knowledge flows has the potential to help expand limited imaginations and support the creation of a post-2030 agenda that moves beyond addressing the environmental and health wounds caused by exploitative systems and structures and begin addressing the roots of the current ecological, human rights and inequality crisis. Perhaps the way to ensure that 'no one is left behind' (UNGA 2015) is to ensure that no knowledge is left behind.

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