

The predatory state and radical politics: the case of the Philippines

Baquero Maboloc, Christopher Ryan

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Baquero Maboloc, C. R. (2019). The predatory state and radical politics: the case of the Philippines. *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, 7(2), 161-175. <https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v7i2.6163>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC Licence (Attribution-NonCommercial). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

The Predatory State and Radical Politics: The Case of the Philippines

Christopher Ryan Baquero Maboloc *Ateneo de Davao University, Manila*

Abstract

This paper examines why the radical approach to politics of President Rodrigo Duterte, halfway into his term, has not overcome the predatory nature of the Philippine state. The predatory nature of the state implies that politics in the country is still defined by vested interests. The struggle of the Filipino is largely due to the structural nature of the injustices suffered by the country. Duterte's brand of politics is antagonistic. The president is a polarizing figure. Despite the declaration that he will punish corrupt officials, traditional politicians and elite clans continue to rule the land with impunity. The country's political ills are actually systemic. Elitism is rooted in colonial history that is perpetuated by an inept bureaucracy. It will be argued that the strong resolve and charisma of a leader is inadequate to remedy the troubles in fledgling democracies such as the Philippines.

Key words: *predatory state, elite democracy, radical politics, President Duterte*

Introduction

What is the fundamental task of every Filipino president? There can only be one answer – to change the political landscape in Philippine society. In order to do so, Filipinos have to become mature in terms of their choices. Yet, it is wrong to blame them for their situation. The problems of the Philippine state are structural in character. Political overlords control the lives of the people and manipulate political exercises to perpetuate themselves into power. As a result, millions have not escaped the poverty trap and continue to suffer from the discomfort of an inept bureaucracy. In

2016, Rodrigo Duterte was elected by an overwhelming majority of the electorate hoping that the radical approach of the tough-talking politician will alter the fortunes of the Filipino people. In this new study, the author uses the interpretive method in textual analysis, using texts and materials culled from various sources, including books, recent newspaper articles, and scholarly works on the subject matter at hand.

Democratic Paralysis in the Predatory State

John Sidel's *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* explains

that bossism is the “interlocking and multitier directorate of bosses who use their control over the state apparatus to exploit the archipelago’s human and natural resources.” (Sidel, 1999) The roots of bossism in the Philippines can be traced to the American period. The Western colonizers put the coercive and extractive power of the state into the hands of the traditional ruling class. Elected officials, untrained in the sophistication of democratic governance, found at their absolute disposal the opportunity to manipulate the affairs of the state. The systemic exploitation of the Filipino was entrenched in the politics practiced in the country. The landed class enforced the monopolization of enterprises. Bureaucrats became tools of corrupt rule. This is apparent in provinces and cities that are dominated by political dynasties. The Philippine state even after the People Power Revolt of 1986 is a paralyzed form of democracy that has been subordinated to the vested interests of traditional politicians and corporate masters.

Since the time of President Manuel L. Quezon, the traditional politician remains to be the boss in Philippine society. Bosses, Sidel (1999) argues, “are predatory power brokers who achieve monopolistic control over both human and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or bailiwicks.” Business interests and the politics of money mix up in the Philippines. The businessman, who often monopolizes the trading of goods of a locality controlled by a few, finances the politician because the former expects the latter to protect his

profit-making ventures. This scheme is mutually beneficial for both but is dangerous to the basic welfare of the people. Nathan Quimpo (2005) thinks that “bossism reflects a common conjuncture in state formation and capitalist development: the superimposition of the trappings of formal electoral democracy upon a state apparatus at an early stage of capital accumulation.” State formation in the Philippines is the conspiracy between two evil masterminds: the traditional politician and the oligarchs who continue to subjugate, abuse and ultimately exploit the Filipino to the hilt.

Predation in the Philippine state is about the use of machinations to control the population. Understanding the political consciousness of the poor matters in this regard. But one cannot blame the masses. The poor have been forced into circumstances that influence the way they think about and choose a candidate. This explains why the masses still elect corrupt politicians. The traditional politician has successfully portrayed that for the *masa* (people), it does not really matter who rules them. This fatalistic attitude is a consequence of latent as well as obvious forms of maneuvering from the barangay up to the provincial level. Party bosses hire starlets and celebrities, transforming election campaigns into entertainment shows and public spectacles. At the root cause of it all is the politics of money.

In Sidel’s theory, the state is a Mafia-like enterprise that exploits with impunity the natural and human resource of a political jurisdiction. The predatory

state feeds on the weaknesses of the poor, many of whom lack formal education. Having no decent means of living, the poor succumbs to dependency. Political leaders organize the poor in urban centers as well as in rural areas into groups. Leaders sell their votes wholesale. Folks are made to attend fake seminars and mass rallies. Even senior citizens are paid to distribute election materials. The poor see this as means to make money during elections. The electorate will ignore candidates who do not provide them with food packs or cash. In the end, the damage that a predatory state makes is irreparable. The people are used as means to perpetrate a systemic exploitation that is seemingly legitimized by dirty electoral exercises. The politics of money paralyzes democracy by influencing the outcomes of elections.

Quimpo (2009) explains that in a predatory regime, "clientelism and patronage give way to pervasive corruption, a systematic plunder of government resources and the rapid corrosion of public institutions into tools for predation." Public officials only approve business applications after they are bribed with shares of stocks. Corrupt politicians also have a say on who must get the licenses in legal gambling like the Small-Town Lottery. Developers of subdivisions are forced to give *padanlug* (grease money) to have their land conversion requests approved. In addition, there are politicians who are engaged in smuggling and drug trafficking. The individuals who conspire in these evil schemes – businessmen, local

police, and public officials – divide the loot. They do not only paralyze the bureaucracy; their wicked ways also destroy the future of the nation.

Culture and context will always matter. (Paredes, 2002) For example, the value of "utang na loob" (debt of gratitude) is negative when applied in the political arena. According to Oona Thommes Paredes (2002), "in the case of the Philippines, it is clear that certain cultural factors configure social and political relations between bosses and their supporters, as well as within a given network of bosses." People see their political overlords as their first resort when they need money during town celebrations, weddings, or baptism. In return, their sense of gratitude will translate into votes. Paredes (2002) says that for Sidel, "electoral democracy and bossism go hand-in-hand." For this reason, the reality of bossism is inevitable in impoverished societies like the Philippines. Since the electorate is conditioned to think that they owe something to the traditional politician, the latter thinks that the people are no longer entitled to anything. The boss dictates not only the rules of the game but also the outcomes of the lives of the people.

Sidel's analysis is important in understanding the type of leadership that usurps the state. The failure of any government to protect the welfare of its citizens may be due to the incompetence of technocrats but the root of the problem is dynastic rule. In the Philippines, 169 or 84% of the 200 elected members of

Congress belong to pre-1972 ruling families. (Tadem & Tadem, 2016) Senator Manny Pacquiao, a Filipino boxing hero, thinks that “too much democracy is bad for the Philippines” (Elemia, 2019). Pacquiao, who is also building his own dynastic rule in Sarangani Province, has the highest number of recorded absences in the Senate (Talabong, 2019). The effect of dynasties is apparent – persistent poverty. The monopoly of power means that people do not have the means to voice out concerns. As a result, the interest of the public is not attended to by their government officials. By limiting the field of candidates to a few, dominant family, national progress stagnates. But the bosses – mayors, governors, including the president – become richer.

President Duterte is a polarizing figure. His brand of politics is disruptive. But to put things into context, it is important to revisit the real reason why Filipinos put Duterte in Malacañang. D. S. Panarina presents a positive view on the Philippine president. Panarina (2017) observes that “Duterte made a strategic decision to start his domestic policy with reestablishment of law and order using rather authoritarian and militaristic methods, but at the same time rapidly earned him the abovementioned trust of ordinary people.” Duterte does not seem to mind the opinion of the West against him. A realist by heart, Duterte’s pivot to China and Russia presumably is for the sake of national interest, arguing that the US is meddling over his domestic policies, especially his war on drugs. Panarina (2017) believes that despite the president’s

“lack of diplomacy, Duterte clearly comprehends the biggest dangers for his nation (potential or existing) and acts accordingly.” In fact, Duterte’s timid yet realist position on the West Philippine Sea issue is simply misunderstood. While some accuse him of selling the country off to China, the president is clear in saying that he only wants to protect national interest by not instigating any potential military conflict against China.

That Duterte is an autocrat is debatable, but what seems clear is that he has the tendency to ignore public morals. To his critics, he sometimes speaks like a thug (Wood, 2017). Indeed, in his three years in office, critics and admirers alike would remember his rape joke, his cursing of Pope Francis and President Barack Obama, and above all else, his decision to allow the burial of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*. The burial happened at early dawn. It was a strategy that caught his critics by surprise. But as of the moment, protests on Duterte’s decision has since subsided. But while the president is projected negatively, he has also achieved unique accomplishments through his maverick ways. Duterte solved the “laglag bala” racket at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, he made Lucio Tan’s Philippine Airlines pay its seven billion-peso debt, and the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was passed by both houses of Congress and ratified in a referendum.

The Pejorative Term “Buang”

Senator Ronald dela Rosa, who led Duterte’s “War on Drugs” then as head of the Philippine National Police, was criticized for describing the death of Kyla Ulpina, a three-year old girl killed in a drug operation as “collateral damage” (Aurelio, 2019). Police operatives alleged that the girl was used by his father as a shield, although the report of Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicates that the latter was actually unarmed. The human rights group said that the girl is a victim of Duterte’s drug war (Conde, 2019). The excessive use of force is the object of criticism. When Duterte mentioned that he will protect law enforcers from legal suits emanating from anti-drug operations, critics said it gave the police a feeling of impunity. When the “right to due process” was raised by the Catholic Church and the country’s constitutionally independent Human Rights Commission, Duterte rebuffed his critics, saying that “your concern is human rights, mine is human lives” (Villamor, 2018). Critics were alarmed that murder has become a national policy. The problem of the president’s statement is that human rights and human life are not mutually exclusive. To protect human lives, one needs to value human rights.

But one needs to ask, what is the reason for the huge support for Duterte’s violent anti-drug war? Arguably, it lies in the prejudice against drug pushers and drug users. Drug addicts, in the mind of the Philippine president, is “buang” (crazy). Calling a person “buang” is

reflective of the kind of bias that is still prevalent in Philippine society. Someone who is “buang” is not only an irrational man. The same is also considered as undesirable in society. This prejudice might have come from the fact that there are insane persons roaming the streets, the ones called “taong grasa”. They have been abandoned by their families and are left to scavenge for any leftover in garbage bins. This reminds us of the politics of exclusion, in which the bad elements of society are to be separated from the good ones. Duterte characteristically portrayed the drug addict and drug dealer as vicious villains. For the president, both should be punished. Steffen Jensen and Karl Hapal (2018) in researching their paper, interviewed a law enforcement officer who put it this way: “The people we put down are not people anymore. They are demons that need to be removed from the face of the earth. We the police are like angels that battle those demons. We know what is right and we know that what those criminals do is not right.”

According to HRW, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) has recorded 4,948 deaths of suspected drug users and pushers in police operations since July 1, 2016 up to September 30, 2018. The same report indicates that 22,983 such deaths have been classified as homicides under investigation (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Some critics say that Duterte only targets small drug dealers, although during the Senatorial Debate, then candidate Dela Rosa fired back at critics in defense of the president saying that police anti-drug operations have

neutralized 'big fishes' like the Parojinogs of Ozamiz City and Albuera Mayor Rolando Espinosa, the father of the suspected drug lord Kerwin Espinosa. However, in a survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations in December 2018, it was shown that 78% of the public are worried about extra-judicial killings. In the same survey, 50% of the victims of summary executions in the country belong to poor households. Only 3% come from wealthy families (Rappler, 2019). However, the Filipino public has not shown any massive indignation against the president's war on drugs. Even the members of the clergy are divided. Daniel Franklin Pilario (2017) says that it is because "the official political machine officially extols the success of the anti-drug project." Beyond this observation, however, is the feeling that the war on drugs has made many communities safe from criminal elements.

Duterte's mystique was reinforced when he met with the alleged drug kingpin Peter Lim of Cebu City. The president has warned that he would kill the Chinese businessman. So far, that has not happened. For some critics, Duterte's war on drugs is morally troubling. They argue that it is an extermination program (Esmaguél, 2017). Violence is at the heart of this anti-drug campaign. For three years, scores of drug suspects have been killed and then marked with a cardboard, "Wag Tularan" (Do not follow). The context is clear. It warns the public to keep themselves away from illegal drugs. Critics contend that Duterte's radical approach revolves around a world of

crime and punishment. For historian Vicente Rafael (2016), the president's violent ways are nothing but a manifestation of a principle of vengeance. He writes that "for Duterte and the rest like him, justice means revenge." Rafael argues that the president is using his campaign against criminality as an excuse for his dictatorial infatuations.

Randy David (2016) says that such phenomenon of blind obedience and ultra-fanaticism is "pure theater – a sensual experience rather than the rational application of ideas to society's problems." David says that Duterte is using the coercive power of the state against his dissenters. The sociologist thinks that Duterte is the "incarnation of a style of governance enabled by the public's faith in the capacity of a tough-talking, willful, and unorthodox leader to carry out drastic actions to solve the nation's persistent problems" (David, 2017). He calls such phenomenon, "Dutertismo". Benjiemen Labastin (2018) explains that the idea "could be read as a prophetic warning to remind the people not to be trapped again with the sweet promises of authoritarianism as an easy path to solve the country's woes." David believes that Duterte's type of governance is nothing short of a demagoguery. Labastin says that for David, the president is subverting the sovereignty of the Filipino people (West Philippine Sea issue) and bastardizing its democratic processes (right to due process of drug suspects), suggesting that such an attitude is a characteristic of leaders who pay no respect to the rule of law.

The paralysis of state and society in the Philippines is manifest in the deaths of thousands in the war on drugs. It is no secret that the violent means employed by the state through law enforcers have resulted in the murder of innocent lives. The reason is simple. Police operatives are human beings who make mistakes. They can also be abusive and so by giving them the absolute blanket of authority to kill every drug suspect, such an approach will have far reaching implications that can destroy Filipino families. Duterte, in this sense, is not only ruining Philippine democracy, but is also obliterating the future of children whose parents have not been given the chance to reform. The death of thousands is a disturbing reality. In this regard, critics contend that the president is a danger to Philippine society (Panarina, 2017).

Politics as Usual: The Corrupt Ways of Post-Colonial Philippines

According to Michael Cullinane (2003), "bureaucrats who were appointed to implement the new laws more often than not abused them." The ilustrados aggrandized themselves. Moreover, the same cabals impoverished the Filipino people. The incompetent brand of service rendered to the people would be carried over decades thereafter. At the heart of the ilustrado rule is centralized governance. The Spanish authorities instituted a system to administer the islands more effectively, although the main motive of the friars were land and the subjugation of the local population. When Spain left the country, the Americans maintained the

system and distributed the resources in the country to the elites in Manila. Since the provincial elites were beholden to the national leadership and the oligarchs in the capital, the American imperialists knew that all they had to do was keep close ties with the ruling class in Manila.

Paul Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora (2003) explains that "the logic of Philippine politics became driven to a considerable extent by the politics of patronage and the division of the spoils among the elite and the expansion of the quantity of spoils available to the elite as a whole." The EDSA People Power failed to emancipate the Filipino from oligarchic rule. The elites used their status to influence policy. Post-EDSA II governments promised to serve the Filipino under the pretext of moral reform, but the predatory culture of corruption continued to stifle progress and governance. The elites in the provinces too wielded great power and influence. The Philippine state had no real means to control them. Instead, national leaders used local dynasts to perpetuate their positions. In return, the bosses in the poor provinces persisted in their greedy and corrupt ways. While relative economic growth was achieved during past administrations after EDSA II, this has not trickled down to poor households.

The ascent of Duterte to power can be attributed to the discontent of the Filipino. Duterte succeeded in projecting himself as the right candidate for the job by building that image of an alternative to a lousy leadership. But Duterte is not

someone who can be exempted from the predatory nature of the Philippine state. While Davao City can be showcased as a success story, this success is not about good governance, but the kind of discipline imposed on the people. It is the personality of Duterte, more than his principle of governance, which charmed the Filipino electorate. This makes manifest what Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso (2005) calls “the slide of Philippine society from institutionalism into pure politics.”

Elite democracy only privileges the few. Its rent-seeking ways only benefit those at the top. In such kind of politics, extraction and exclusion characterize the system. The Filipino, as a result, finds himself serving two overlords – Chinese-Filipino tycoons and dynasts. Chinese migrants effectively integrated themselves into Philippine society. While they were unable to do so in Malaysia or Indonesia, it was a different case for the Philippines (Kusaka, 2017). Filipinos of Chinese descent control 60% of the non-land capital in the Philippines. Chinese tycoons own the biggest banks, manufacturing firms, and malls. They have shares in infrastructure, mining, and in utility firms. A rising oligarch, Dennis Uy is of Chinese-Filipino blood. Injap Sia, an emerging tycoon who at a very young age became a billionaire, is also of Chinese descent. This is not to diminish the huge contribution of Chinese Filipinos to the development of the country. What we this claim intends to show is that opportunities have been scarce for the ordinary Filipino but not for those who live in gated communities.

The silencing of the voices from the margins, including the media, the perpetuation of a neo-colonial regime, and the presence of a semi-feudal socio-economic order, reveal the predatory nature of the Philippine state. The real problem of politics in the Philippines is that it has been reduced into the pursuit of personal interests. President Benigno Aquino III campaigned on the promise that he would reform Philippine society by running after corrupt government officials. Yet, as his administration started its mission, it has become clear that he was only interested in prosecuting President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Aquino’s government was also embroiled in many controversies, the most prominent of which was the Development Acceleration Program (DAP) where then Budget Secretary Florencio Abad was accused of re-aligning surplus funds from the national budget into discretionary projects without the proper authorization from Congress as mandated by the Philippine Constitution.

Three years into the Duterte presidency, it seems that it is “politics as usual” for corrupt politicians. Duterte understands what power means. For this reason, he has to make alliances with dynasts and the traditional politicians in pursuit of all his agenda. The senatorial elections of 2019 proved that the president still has that charm, although some in the political opposition would like to insinuate that the exercise was rigged. Clearly, the election of his Special Assistant Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go is a testament of the high trust and

confidence of the majority of the people on President Duterte. The Liberal Party's slate of senatorial candidates known as "Otso Diretso" that included the incumbent Senator Bam Aquino and former Department of the Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas, all lost in the election. The midterm election was simply a vote of confidence for Duterte.

The LP slate represented the elite. But the defeat of "Otso Diretso" does not also mean the defeat of the ilustrado class. In fact, many of the candidates who won in the 2019 midterm election are political butterflies or turncoats. The majority of the congressmen and senators who are now allied with Duterte formerly belonged to the Liberal Party. For obvious reasons, politicians change loyalties for political expediency. So, despite the strong pronouncement of the president against corruption, it still widespread. Indeed, traditional politicians have positioned themselves since time immemorial with the ruling party to secure their place in the hierarchy and the necessary funding for pet their projects. Infrastructure projects are a potential source of kickbacks that range from 10 to 30 per cent. As a consequence, it is the people who suffer. In fact, it can be said that Duterte has not dismantled elite rule in the country.

The reason why the predatory nature of the Philippine state remains is apparent. Corruption in the country is systemic. Unless the people mature in politics, there is no way to overhaul the elitist nature of Philippine democracy. The

cycle continues because no single man can reform this system. Duterte himself knows that he has to play his cards well and dance with the wolves if he wants his agenda to push through. Change does not happen overnight, not even after three years. The political machine has embedded itself and the traditional ways of politics have penetrated the deepest roots of Philippine society like a cancer. While roads and bridges have been built in the countryside, poor houses occupy the landscape. Without jobs, there is no way for the Filipino to overcome his situation. Politicians give people a reason to hope, but it is our choice of principles that would matter in the end. The traditional politician has none.

Moral Politics and the Radical President

Agonistic politics is grounded in the idea of struggle. Society is not a homogenous set of identities. Antonio Gramsci's constructivist view of the world tells us that human society has no intrinsic nature. What becomes of society is a product of hegemonic relations. This is the case for the Philippines. For instance, the ownership of vast landholdings by the ruling class during the colonial period defined the economic as well as the social landscape of the country. There remains to be hierarchical differences that influence how citizens relate to each other politically. In fact, it is the case to this day. As such, after Duterte won, big businessmen from Manila came to see him at his temporary office in Davao. They all wanted a big part of the action. But more than anything else, they simply needed

assurance and security for their businesses.

The thing that people call consensus is no more than an ordering of power. Prior to Duterte, those in the capital dictated what was to become of the country. The idea of dialogue is nothing but a disguise for the selfish motives of the powerful. The anti-establishment strategy that Duterte employs is a type of antagonism. This type of conflict comes in various forms – Manila versus Mindanao, the educated versus the unschooled, the rich versus the *masa* (people) (Kusaka, 2017). This is even clear in the reaction of Mayor Sara Duterte, the president's daughter, when she reacted against the use of the song "Manila" during the Opening Ceremony of the 2019 SEAGAMES. Yet. It can be said that Duterte's rule is not defined by class struggle. It is more of a disruptive type of politics that uses to the fullest extent the divisive situations of people in order to control the state and its political machinery.

The daily life of the people cannot be separated from the dimension of their communitarian soul. Nation-building as the slow unfolding of history in political movements is something that the atomism of most liberals has never paid attention to. Radical democracy maintains that the political cannot be limited to rational discourse because doing so is to tie politics to the narrow limits of logic and explanation (Mouffe, 1995). Indeed, the notion of identity cannot be established without the reality of difference. Any form

of rational consensus ignores the value of passion in the political. Indeed, the normal way of doing things will not work in a society like the Philippines where the situation is abnormal. The clamor for someone who is strong, even this leader will bypass legal processes, becomes inevitable.

Thus, with his aggressive and adversarial style of leadership, Duterte may have inaugurated radical democracy in the country. The moral vision of politics in the Third World is that ideal of establishing an egalitarian society. There is a true concern for the equal rights of the poor and the disadvantaged who have been perpetually oppressed. The reason for every desire for radical reform is that social inequalities are unjustified. Duterte has always considered himself a progressive. He has endured having embraced this principle, even with all the political divergences, many breaking points, and splits in the country after EDSA I. But as a "contested democracy", to use Quimpo's term, Duterte's style is of course subject to the judgment of history. It must not be forgotten that the kind of society Filipinos have is not a matter of fate but a conscious act on the part of their bosses to exploit the powerless.

In modern democracies, it is unexpected for a provincial politician to seize power from the ruling class of traditional political families. Duterte is the product of a society that has failed on its democratic experiments, the latest of which was grounded on Aquino's moral recovery model of reform. Even the

development-oriented model of President Arroyo did not work in the country. Arroyo's corruption plagued administration gave legitimacy to someone who represents change. President Aquino became that person when his mother, the former president, died. The second Aquino administration began with a great promise, only to suffer from the same malady the Arroyo administration had. While President Aquino may not be corrupt, he was not emulated by his fellow politicians as an example. Aquino was a weak leader. But this weakness, it can be presumed, is not just a personality thing. It bespeaks of the lack of concern of the ruling elite beyond their own kind.

It appears that most Filipinos are not against shortcuts if the same can bring actual results and immediate benefits. The only problem is that the masses look up to their idols like some kind of a demi-god who will solve their problems. Moral development, in this respect, is farthest from the mind of the electorate. What brings a poor man to City Hall is not the desire to live the good life. Rather, it is about his daily survival, the problem that he is embroiled in, and that hope that the politician-patron will be able to give him money to free him from his troubles. A poor man is not in search of virtue when it all comes to politics. He is looking for attention from the politician who is also a caring father figure, one who is expected to provide solutions to impossible problems. Technical expertise may be crucial to the success of the state, but the most immediate concern of the poor

Filipino is really the way out of his desperate situation.

The above attitude is ingrained in Filipino political culture. Politics has become some form of ritual for people wherein they worship their political idol. Duterte is a political paradox. Many of his critics say that he is no more than a dictator who use his colorful language to hide his true motives and ambitions of power. It is possible, for instance, that his daughter will run in the 2022 presidential elections given the weakness and lack of unity of his political opponents. But to his supporters, Duterte's maverick ways can help a society find the means and measures to achieve change. While the antagonistic nature of his politics will require people to go beyond the limits of rational discourse, Duterte thinks that a politician must distinguish his politics from morality to realize the meaning of the common good. Liberalism provides a straight path in achieving the ideals of democracy through discussion and dialogue. But the dynamics in Philippine society, given the hegemonic relations rooted in an oppressive colonial past, leads one to think that Duterte's radical kind of leadership is necessary.

Limiting politics to the binaries of morality misses the important aspect of decision making which is crucial in realizing change. This should not mean that people must reject morality. It only means that citizens have to make the distinction when it comes to the political. For Carl Schmitt, politics refers to institutions designed to govern society.

The political, on the other hand, is about relations of power. Indeed, it is argued that the concept of a perfect consensus is an illusion. The same is utopian and unrealistic. Despite the criticisms, Duterte is using well the card of hegemony to his advantage. This is not to suggest that he has the wrong motives in doing so. But what is obvious is that he has been able to consolidate his powers to protect himself from any threat from those who may have plans to challenge his position, including the military.

Radical politics may characterize the situation of the Filipino's post-colonial struggle. But the ordinary Filipino still finds himself voiceless in the affairs of the state. This colonial legacy appears to give some semblance of legitimacy to Duterte's radical leadership. But the death of elitism is temporary and the reason is often obvious. Duterte has not implemented principle-based reforms to change the socio-political establishment. In fact, the president is aware that the same cabals in Congress are still there. He has to depend on the normal state of things in order to pursue his agenda. The president also knows that he has to deal with the oligarchy and the traditional elites in Philippine society. There's the rub.

Conclusion

The history of the Filipino people is generally presented through the eyes of Manila. Such shatters the voices in the margins of Philippine society. The radical approach of Duterte is no less than his way of challenging the *status quo*. Duterte as a father-figure knows how important it

is for him to bring out the agenda of the masses. On the other hand, as the boss he also realizes the pragmatic reality of Philippine politics. The only way forward, in this regard, is for the president to have the radical resolve to face the problems that bedevil the nation. The norm is for an elected leader to conform to tradition and protocol that befit the highest position of the land. But Duterte shows that in his case, it is the other way around. The weakness of Philippine institutions manifests the political and moral divide in society. Institutional decisions are based on the choices made by people in authority in whom the electorate entrust political power. As such, it matters how people choose their leaders. People should play a part in the formulation of policies that are to affect their situation. It is beyond question that the development of modern nations draws from the principles of democratic governance because political maturity and economic progress must go together. The political will of Duterte is a good thing, but the Filipino people must also embrace the virtues of democratic governance and the rule of law if the country must escape from the ills of the past. The Filipino people cannot just rely on outside help because in the first place, it is foreign rule that has bedeviled this society and cemented the latent and obvious moral and hegemonic divide among its people. Filipinos must face their most pressing political problem – the absolute dismantling of a predatory state. The way forward is to overhaul a corrupt system and empower a people who have been deprived of their rights. Nothing replaces institutional reforms

that are truly grounded in democratic principles.

About the Author

Dr. Christopher Ryan Maboloc, associate professor of philosophy at Ateneo de Davao University, finished his doctorate in philosophy at the University of San Carlos, maxima cum laude. He graduated from the Erasmus Mundus Master in Applied Ethics at Linköping University, Sweden and NTNU, Norway. He also has a master's in philosophy from Ateneo de Manila University.

References

- Abinales, P. N., & Amoroso, D. J. (2005). *New States and Reorientations 1368–1764. State and Society in the Philippines*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 53.
- Aurelio, J. (2019, July 6). *Dela Rosa's comment on child's death in police raid hits the fan*. Retrieved from Philippine Daily Inquirer: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1138433/dela-rosas-comment-on-childs-death-in-police-raid-hits-the-fan>
- Conde, C. (2019, July 1). *Three-year old girl latest Philippines' Drug War victim*. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/01/three-year-old-girl-latest-philippines-drug-war-victim>
- Cullinane, M. (2003). *Ilustrado Politics*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University.
- David, R. (2016, May 1). *Dutertismo*. Retrieved from Philippine Daily Inquirer: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/94530/dutertismo>
- David, R. (2017, June 17). *Where is 'Dutertismo' Headed?*. Retrieved from Philippine Daily Inquirer: <http://opinion.inquirer.net/109531/where-is-dutertismo-headed#ixzz5MnE0yDr6>
- Elemia, C. (2019, March 2). *Pacquiao: Too much democracy is bad for the Philippines*. Retrieved from Rappler: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/24754-manny-pacquiao-too-much-democracy-is-bad-for-the-philippines>
- Esmaquel, P. (2017, August 30). *What have we done to deserve this?*. Retrieved from Rappler: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/180640-catholic-religious-superiors-duterte-drug-war-killings>
- Hotchcroft, P., & Rocamora, J. (2003). *Strong Demands and Weak Institutions: The Origins and Evolution of Democratic Deficits in the Philippines*. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 3(2): 259-292.
- Human Rights Watch. (2019, July 23). *World Report 2019: Philippines*. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/philippines>

- Jensen, S., & Hapal, K. (2018). Police Violence and Corruption in the Philippines: Violent Exchange and the War on Drugs. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 37(2): 39-62.
- Kusaka, W. (2017). *Moral Politics in the Philippines*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.
- Labastin, B. (2018). Two Faces of Duterteism: Two Visions of Democracy in the Philippines. *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 4(3): 31-54.
- Mouffe, C. (1995). Liberalism and Modern Democracy. In J. Carens, *Democracy and Possessive Individualism*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Panarina, D. S. (2017). Rodrigo Duterte: Who is He?. *International Relations*, 17(3): 588-597.
- Paredes, O. T. (2002). Capital, Coercion and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines, John Sidel. *Moussons*, 5(2): 137-139.
- Pilario, D. F. (2017). Praying Bodies, Dying Bodies: A Reflection on the Nazareno and the Santo Nino. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 65: 160-162.
- Quimpo, N. G. (2005). Oligarchic Patrimonialism, Bossism, Electoral Clientelism and Contested Democracy in the Philippines. *Comparative Politics*, 37(2): 229-250.
- Quimpo, N. G. (2009). The Philippines: Predatory Regime, Growing Authoritarian Features. *Pacific Review*, 22(3): 335-353.
- Rafael, V. (2016, June 13). *Duterte's Hobbesian World*. Retrieved from Philippine Daily Inquirer: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/95185/dutertes-hobbesian-world>
- Rappler. (2019, March 2). *4 of 5 Filipinos worry over extra-judicial killings – SWS*. Retrieved from Rappler: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/24732-sws-survey-filipinos-worry-becoming-ejk-victim>
- Sidel, J. (1999). *Capital, Coercion and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Tadem, T., & Tadem, E. (2016). Political Dynasties in the Philippines: Persistent Patterns, Perennial Problems. *South East Asia Research*, 24(3): 328-340.
- Talabong, R. (2019, June 9). *Pacquiao is senate's top absentee*. Retrieved from Rappler: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/32615-manny-pacquiao-senate-top-absentee-attendance-congress-adjourns-2019>
- Villamor, F. (2018, July 23). *Your concern is human rights, mine is human lives, Duterte says in Fiery Speech*. Retrieved from New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/23/world/asia/philippines-duterte-speech-muslims.html>

Wood, G. (2017, May 2). *The Thug Appeal of Duterte*. Retrieved from The Atlantic:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/rodrigo-duterte-donald-trump/525072/>