

Between Radical Politics and Duterteismo: A Reply to Critics

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Abstract

The radical approach to politics in the Philippines did not begin with President Rodrigo Duterte. Rather, such can be traced to the struggles of past revolutionary leaders that include the likes of Macario Sakay, Julian Montalan, and Luciano San Miguel. But a deeper plot needs to be uncovered since the Philippine Revolution was not the kind of struggle that it must be – it was predominantly Tagalog and middle-class, as correctly claimed by Orlino Ochoza. In this sense, Duterte is that act of defiance of the Bisaya. It will be argued that the president's radical anti-establishment attitude is symptomatic of the Bisaya's resistance to the traditional centers of power. An alternative narrative to the Western-bred view of liberal critics is necessary. This study theorizes that Duterte's method or style is rooted in some form of tribal politics meant to liberate the Filipino from elite rule.

Keywords: Radical Politics; Tribalism; Elite Democracy; Duterteismo

Introduction

Radical politics in the country is not something new. Researchers can find in the literature the exploits of local heroes who continued to defy foreign rule after Spain left.¹ The most important among them, of course, was the revolt of Macario Sakay. In fact, the Americans have labelled him an outlaw, although the locals at that time knew that Sakay was not a bandit but a real revolutionary. Sakay's story has been silenced for a very long time because our colonial masters emphasized the heroism of non-aggressive figures. Nothing short of deception, authors presented the narratives of the *ilustrado* class, for instance, that of Jose Rizal, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, Gregorio del Pilar, and Antonio Luna, but excluded the many nameless others who martyred themselves for the country.

Adrian Cristobal once wrote that the real tragedy of the *Philippine Revolution* was Andres Bonifacio's death at the hands of his fellow Filipinos. Rightly so, for the execution of the *Supremo* of the *Katipunan* conveyed that our foreign conquerors have succeeded in dividing us. Every tragedy is grounded in an irony. But the tragic irony lies in the greater meaning of the death of Bonifacio. It is not just about his fellow Katipuneros betraying him, notwithstanding the fact that without their founder, there would have been no one to start the revolt of the Tagalogs against Spain. But beyond the surface meaning of that murder and betrayal is the story of a people who would continue to be marred by a moral divide that will cut through the soul of this nation.

Three years into office, President Rodrigo Duterte has caused an unprecedented stir in the political life of the Filipino people. No Philippine president in recent memory has made prominent headlines around the world like President Duterte. He has shifted alliances away from the US and the European Union, embracing China and Russia instead in what he claims is an "independent" foreign policy. Duterte has ordered the

¹ Orlino Ochoa, *Bandoleros: Outlawed Guerrillas of the Philippine-American War*, (Manila: New Day Publishers, 2005), 11.

rehabilitation of Boracay and then Manila Bay, in a very heroic fashion that no president before him was actually able to do so. However, Duterte has antagonized the Catholic Church, which has become the staunchest critic of his “war on drugs”. Duterte took over a position that was overly burdened by disillusionment, exacerbated foremost by the lack of political will of its past leaders. Indeed, the task ahead is to be able to re-examine the context and offer an alternative to the Manila narrative on Duterte’s style of governance.

Wataru Kusaka theorizes that Duterte is a ‘folk hero’ whose main symbolic function was to protect the people from their oppressors.² For Kusaka, the ascent of Duterte to power is an adverse reaction or response to elitism in Philippine society by those in the margins. Duterte’s militant ways or brash manner of speaking are the stuff of legendary heroes who have acted as liberators of the people. From a Western perspective, such may be judged as a form of ‘populism’. However, from the vantage point of his supporters and followers, Duterte’s triumph against the dominant voices in Philippine politics is also their own.

Populism and Duterte’s Radical Politics

The central thesis of the critics of Duterte is that the president’s method or style is a form of penal populism.³ Kusaka explains that in this view, people are divided into the ‘virtuous’ and the ‘undesirable’.⁴ In its broadest conception, ‘populism’ refers to an appeal to the people in order to win their sentiment by amplifying the fact that they have been at the receiving end of oppression and historical injustice. In contrast, ‘penal populism’ creates that demarcation line in

² Wataru Kusaka, “Bandit grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politics.” in *Philippine Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 64.

³ Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power.” in *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 3 (2016): 100.

⁴ Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 4-5.

society that will separate the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’. Duterte won the presidency, Nicole Curato argues, by portraying an image of a perilous Philippines mired in ‘crime and violence’. She suggests that for Duterte, there is a danger to the everyday life of the Filipino people. This imminent threat comes from illegal drugs. Curato says that Duterte views drug addicts as the “scums of the earth” who do not have the right to exist.⁵

However, Curato fails to expound why the country is actually fed up with the ineptitude and lack of will of past national politicians, hence, the desire for an alternative or even a strong type of leadership. It helps if one will try to look into the demographics of the supporters of President Duterte. Duterte won across all classes during the 2016 Elections. And there is a sound argument for this. Many who believe in the agenda of the president actually belong to a rising middle class.⁶ Young professionals complain about their discomfort in the urban centers of the country. Hence, Duterte’s appeal is not just with the “masa” or ordinary people. While this may be objectionable given the reality where patronage politics still thrives, the point of the matter is that the president was able to win the middle and upper classes in the 2016 presidential derby.

Indeed, it is problematic to think, to say the least, that the people who voted for the president were docile-minded electorates who do not know how to reflect about notions of right and wrong. According to Benjiemen Labastin, many of those who criticize Duterte are “possessed by the amnesia of how the ruling elite make use of the democratic processes to perpetuate themselves in power.”⁷ In a populist regime, the leader is nothing more than a cult of personality who is hailed as a liberator by a blindly obedient public. It is for this reason

⁵ Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power,” 100.

⁶ Julio Teehankee, “Duterte’s Resurgent Nationalism in the Philippines: A Discursive Institutional Analysis.” in *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35:3 (2016): 73.

⁷ Benjiemen Labastin, “Two faces of Duterteism, two faces of democracy in the Philippines,” in *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Volume 4, number 3: 49.

that it is simplistic to label Duterte's governance as populist. The main reason why millions of Filipinos continue to rally behind Duterte is the fact that previous leaders have been inutile in addressing many of the country's problems.

The sociologist Randy David argues that President Duterte's style is the "methodical use of the coercive power of the state in order to intimidate dissenters, critics, skeptics, deviants and non-cooperative individuals."⁸ He points to a "fear factor" directed at the enemies of the president. In a similar vein, UP economist Solita Monsod believes that the incarceration of Sen. Leila de Lima is a shameful act all meant to silence the critics of the Duterte administration. "Something is very wrong here,"⁹ she writes. Meanwhile, the online news organization *Rappler*, another vocal critic of the president, has called President Duterte "the most foul-mouthed chief executive."¹⁰

Despite all, the president has remained popular. Duterte succeeded in convincing the public that the second Aquino regime has failed to control criminality and therefore, his hardline approach is necessary and even prophetic. But Duterte's style, while fraught with dangers and perils, may not really be a new phenomenon in the Philippines. Orlyno Ochoa writes that many Filipinos during the Philippine-American war depended on their local leaders for safe refuge. Leaders like Sakay, Montalan, and San Miguel, portrayed as bandits by the Americans, were nevertheless embraced by the local people as their liberators.¹¹ The reason for this is that they acted like the 'father-figure' who cared about the lingering

⁸ Randy David, "The Duterte Method." In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. April 22, 2018. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/112636/the-duterte-method>

⁹ Solita Monsod, "The shameful persecution of Senator Leila de Lima." in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 9, 2019. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/119437/the-shameful-persecution-of-sen-leila-de-lima>

¹⁰ Pia Ranada, "The Duterte Insult List." in *Rappler*. June 29, 2018. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/list-duterte-insults-second-year>

¹¹ Ochoa, *Bandoleros: Outlawed Guerrillas of the Philippine-American War*, 1.

concerns of the people in difficult times. In contemporary times, the same can be said about the likes of ‘Kumander Parago’ or even ‘Kumander Dante’, who as communist revolutionaries, also paid attention to the everyday concerns of local folks.

Solidarity is developed through meaningful communal ties. Duterte has shown the character of being a father-figure when he was a mayor. He attends to the needs of the ordinary people and by speaking their own tongue, he secures their trust. Calling him “Tatay Digong” meant that he is a leader who makes himself readily available to the people, consults them whenever he needs to, warns and issues threats to those who might mean harm to his constituents. The concept of “Tatay” or father in the context of the Filipino’s communal experience is not limited to blood relations or anything biological for that matter. It is about being endeared to the wisdom of old. Someone is respected as such because one cares about the good and shows compassion to the people.

But Duterte’s style can be seen as something that may have evolved from ethno-nationalism. Tom Nairn and Paul James mention that “ethno-nationalism has normally had a powerfully rural or small-town foundation.”¹² Small town mayors rule the population but at the same time, they are loved by the people. They are viewed as fatherly figures who would take care of the poor. Duterte is one of those politicians who has made social programs that cater to the poor the centerpiece of his administration. As a result, he is loved by the masses. For the people of Davao, it is wrong to say that he is their boss. Liberal critics though think of Duterte differently. Nathan Quimpo writes that rural bossism is “a common phenomenon in the Philippines.”¹³ Leaders of political clans use their power and influence, including violence, to maintain their rule. The boss takes care of the people but he does so

¹² Tom Nairn and Paul James. *Global Matrix: Nationalism, Globalism and Terrorism*. (London: Pluto Books, 2005), 220.

¹³ Nathan Quimpo. “Duterte’s War on Drugs.” in *A Duterte Reader*. Edited by Nicole Curato. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 155.

only because he can exploit or take advantage of them. And yet, this may not be the feeling of the people of Davao City where Duterte was mayor for two decades. For the people of Davao, Duterte saved the city from the chaos and disorder of the 80's.

A more apt image for Duterte, perhaps, is the idea of a "manoy." A person who is seen as "manoy" is someone who is "strong-willed" and "fearless." The word may also connote the 'strong resolve' or 'determination' of someone who wants to do things in his own terms. But a person who is a "manoy" is not necessarily bad. For instance, the term can be contrasted with the word "maro." A person who is "maro" is someone who is clever but one with a sinister agenda. In this way, the person who is labeled as such may be "strong-willed", but his motives may not be good. Now, as "manoy", Duterte may be perceived by many, including the Catholic Church, as some kind of a bully. But the most important aspect of being a "manoy", it can be said, is the image of someone who is not afraid to confront his adversaries.

Perhaps, Duterte being "manoy" is the reason why his detractors consider him a threat to our democracy. But the alternative interpretation to Kusaka's thesis on Duterte as a 'social bandit' is that Duterte is simply the people's resistance to elite democracy. Annoyed by the empty promises of EDSA I, Mindanao has become allergic to a Manila-centric style of leadership that often hides under the guise of moral discourse. President Benigno Aquino III earned the presidency on a promise to reform Philippine society. However, as his days in office began to unfold, it has become clear that he was only interested in doing one thing – to run after President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA). Aquino used GMA as the escape goat for his inability to make real change in Philippine society. It is not wrong to rectify mistakes and punish those who have done harm against the people. But by spending most of his energies on his predecessor, his government was no more than a vindictive regime that cared more about the past than the future. The Filipino people have longed for someone who will solve their problems. Aquino alienated himself from the poor with his Typhoon Yolanda blunder. In fact, if the second

Aquino government actually lived up to expectations, Duterte could not have won the presidency.

The conflicts in Philippine society may be viewed as a virulent form of 'moral antagonism'. By moral antagonism, Kusaka mentions the 'demarcation lines' between classes and the moralities of people.¹⁴ Duterte's rise to power comes as antithetical to the oligarchic forces in Philippine politics who are now displaced by his progressive style. Radical politics is about that substantive approach to governance that bypasses deliberative norms in favor of anti-establishment principles that seek the improvement of the society beyond normative procedures. Indeed, the president has created many enemies, including human rights groups, the clergy, and mass media organizations. But in the end, why has Duterte maintained his popularity? The president's high trust rating is a result of the fact that for the first time in Philippine history, Filipinos have found a leader who is not afraid to speak his mind. Normally, the person elected to Malacañang has to adjust to the job of being president. In the case of Duterte, he is defining the meaning of his presidency.

It should be noted that before 2016, Duterte was an outsider to national politics. The president has mentioned in interviews that he finds the job of being a legislator boring. National politicians are usually impersonal in their ways of dealing with the electorates since they do not have a direct contact with them. For example, while Senator Bam Aquino is proud that he is the sponsor of the law that provides free education to students enrolled in Philippine state colleges and universities, the public do not feel a sense of gratitude because they know that it is part of his job to pass useful laws. The personalized approach is something that is lacking in many national politicians. What makes a politician appealing to locals is the ability to engage with them. Duterte, with his demeanor and style, has bridged the gap between Malacañang and the poor Filipino, especially the people of Mindanao. Kusaka says that "Duterte and other strongmen in the world have appeared as attractive alternatives for those who have

¹⁴ Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, 6.

been disillusioned by some conventional liberal democratic politics.”¹⁵

Dutertismo and the Dismantling of Elite Democracy

David says that Duterte manifests a form of fascism. He proposed the term “Dutertismo” to characterize the style or method of the president. The use of the term Dutertismo is synonymous to the concept of “Chavismo” in Venezuela. Hugo Chavez, after gaining total control of the government, had nationalized many industries, especially oil. This gave him the money to give to poor citizens who, in return, expressed absolute support for Chavez. Hence, the regime was branded as populist as far as Chavez effectively portrayed an ominous rich versus poor narrative in which the function of the government was to side with the latter. However, Chavez alienated the whole country from the world, especially the United States. When the global market prices of crude oil plummeted, Venezuela saw vicious chaos on the streets. The government found itself in insurmountable financial woes. After his death, the country remained in deep political and economic turmoil.

David’s claim is with factual basis. It is undeniable that familiar faces and interests have remained in Philippine politics. While Duterte may be saying that he wants to change politics in the country, bad politicians are still in control. For instance, 72 out of the country’s 81 provinces are controlled by powerful political dynasties. The Marcoses, removed in 1986, are back in power. Politicians, who have been accused of stealing money from the government, especially those who are charged with involvement in the pork barrel scam, are running in the 2019 elections. Political bickering is aplenty, which in the end, stalls economic progress. Personal interests, not principles, determine how most Filipino politicians act. This was clearly shown during the deliberations of the 2019

¹⁵ Kusaka, “Bandit grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politics,” 71-72.

national budget in which self-serving interests have been exposed.

David is convinced that the president was able to take advantage of the sentiment of the people. By portraying himself as one with the people, the president, according to David, is exploiting their often-negative sentiments against elite rule in the country. David describes the Duterte phenomenon as 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.”¹⁶ For David, the Filipinos are “trusting almost exclusively in the instinctive wisdom of the leader to determine what needs to be done, the public is concerned less with the rationality of policy decisions than with all the leader’s manifest readiness to take full responsibility for all his decisions.”¹⁷ In fact, this can be seen in the choice of personalities who have no evident experience or a level of competence required by the position to which they have been appointed to. David thinks that such is symptomatic of the making of an ‘authoritarian’ rule. David elaborates:

Fascists dismissed modern liberal politicians as “culpably incompetent guardians” against the enemies of the state. They had nothing but contempt for humanist enlightenment values. The supreme irony is that the typical bearers of these values—the educated middle classes—found themselves cooperating with, if not actively supporting, the movement. Unable to appreciate the complexity of the problems facing modern society, and seeing only the unpalatable choices before them, they primed themselves for a “brutal anti-

¹⁶ Randy David, “Where is ‘Dutertismo’ Headed?” *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/109531/where-is-dutertismo-headed#ixzz5MnE0yDr6>, 17, December 2017.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

intellectualism” that reduced everything to the “will and leadership” of the strongman.¹⁸

But elitism in Philippine politics, not Duterte, is the real problem. Elitism points to the idea of a privileged class who dominates the many aspects of life in the state. Rich families control the economy and by implication, the affairs of the state since they are the ones who finance politicians. Governance, in this way, has been a matter of self-interest. Democracy, from a moral end, is about the service that the government must render to the people. In an elitist democracy, however, it is not the people who benefits but the wealthy. In this sense, there is an obvious perpetuation of injustice. The problem, therefore, is structural. Ultimately, the poor are wrongly perceived as a burden to society. Kusaka thinks that reducing politics as the conflict between the elite class and the masses hides the fact that inequality is rooted not only in unjust systems, but also in uneven structures that reveal a clash of values and the struggles of a people against all forms of oppression and injustice.¹⁹

The elite among Filipinos who benefited from foreign rule are the ones who have mastered the system. According to the eminent historian Renato Constantino, “the fact that the Americans were able to count among their supporters the leaders of the revolution proved very useful to them, the collaboration of the *ilustrados* provided the Americans with a justification for the colonization of the Philippines.”²⁰ The same pattern exists to this day where the reality is that the educated are employed by the oligarchy, thus perpetuating an extractive economic system that has widened the income disparity between the wealthy and the poor. The abuse of authority in the areas of public and private life reflects the moral gap in Philippine society. Even low-ranking public

¹⁸ Randy David, “Dutertismo,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 1, 2016. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/94530/dutertismo>

¹⁹ Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, 5.

²⁰ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, (Manila: Tala Publication, 1974), 236.

employees want to take advantage of their position. Instead of being an opportunity to serve others, they abuse the power of the office for their personal good.

Indeed, EDSA I only restored the tyranny of the old order. EDSA began as a grandiose promise that is supposed to emancipate poor Filipinos, but in the end, it only cast them away into a sea of doom with the resurgence of the old and new breed of leaders who are infected by corrupt ways and practices. Hence, the return of the old order in Philippine society and politics after the overthrow of Marcos has signaled the resurrection of elite democracy. Politics in the country is still about the high culture that is only enjoyed by the elite. As a consequence, Filipinos are enjoined to believe that radical rather than inclusive measures are required as they envisage political transformation. This progressive attitude only means one thing – Filipinos have not found the right answer to their difficult age-old political dilemma. Henceforth, the people welcome anti-establishment leaders like Duterte.

The gated communities across the Philippines are a manifestation of the great divide, to use the term of the great historian Teodoro Agoncillo (1956), between the “haves” and “have-nots” in the country. Millions of Filipinos remain in the margins. It is the victors, not the vanquished, who write the history of a nation. Every great revolution is defined by a special class of people who would exclude and consider as criminals anybody who does not belong to their league. Such hides, for instance, the perpetual struggles of the people. For example, when Duterte ruled in favor of *Kadamay*, a group of homeless individuals who have illegally occupied vacant subdivision lots, he has cemented his image of being pro-poor. In this way, inclusive democracy and populism do not have clear demarcation lines.

What Filipinos have is a weak state. This weakness is portrayed in the lack of leadership of Aquino, a problem that has led to the Mamasapano Massacre and as a consequence, his failure to deliver the promise of an expanded autonomy for Muslim Mindanao. The sudden rise of Duterte into power is nothing accidental. It is the consequence of the failures of an elite democracy that has for a long time only benefitted the

rich but has alienated the masses. The second Aquino regime served under the pretext of political transformation, but the same cabals in the halls of Congress still maintained their grip into power. Local dynasts have remained unchecked and so those who had the trust of the former president continued in their self-serving ways. In this sense, President Aquino has not transformed Philippine society, even with his purported moral compass, because he was too weak to address what ailed the nation – its rotten system of elitism – because he himself is a part of it. While Duterte’s method can be shocking to his critics, it is nonetheless effective and so, in the eyes of the people, he is the kind of leader that they want.

Tribalism and the Revolt of the Bisaya

Amy Chua describes tribalism in an article in *Foreign Affairs*. She notes that “humans, like other primates, are tribal animals.”²¹ People have a need to belong to groups. This belongingness characterizes the idea of a group identity. The group has power over the person. The reason is both historical and social. Oppression, for example, can be experienced by some groups when members are marginalized. From a moral end, belonging to a group means some kind of a social bond or attachment that describes one’s sense of identity. From a political end, tribalism means finding that common interest of the nation that will determine for a people the values that they would uphold, defend, and nurture as a community.

Duterte injects tribalism in his politics. However, in his lucid analysis, Karl Gaspar believes that the president does not embody any of the admirable traits of the *Lumad* chieftains.²² The term *Lumad* refers to the natives of Mindanao. The anthropologist writes that the president’s “style of leading the

²¹ Amy Chua, “Tribal World: Group Identity is All.” in *Foreign Affairs*. July 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/tribal-world>

²² Karl Gaspar, “An Attempt at Dissecting the Presidency of Rodrigo Duterte.” in *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Volume 4, Number 3 (2018): 27.

affairs of government veers away from that of the *datu*s and *fulongs* who are able to exhibit true wisdom, deep compassion and selfless service towards the common good.”²³ Gaspar says that President Duterte is “nowhere near to the required level of a transformational leader. Instead, the level that he [Duterte] occupies as a leader is one characterized by elements of the *laizzes-faire*, paternalistic, autocratic and undemocratic styles.”²⁴ Gaspar’s position is well-taken. There is wisdom in his judgment, having been with the lumads in their struggle for emancipation. As such, a good counter-argument must offer the broader context of the country’s colonial struggles.

As a country, the Philippines does not have a homogenous identity. This is true given the mixed cultures and the manner that Filipinos practice their way of life. Language might be one way of explaining the reality of regionalism and the cultural divide of the nation. The Tagalogs have always considered themselves as culturally superior to the true Bisaya and the Muslim-Filipino. Given this context, it is not unexpected for Duterte, a Bisaya, to react against the dominance of Manila. Spain has made Manila the seat of power and for this reason, many national politicians come from the capital. The Tagalogs, in this way, rule the country while the poor Bisaya has no meaningful voice. Thus, the Philippine Revolution might as well be called the Tagalog Revolution. If we consider the Philippine flag, Mindanao is a part of the symbolism demographically, but never politically or even historically.

When Duterte speaks his native tongue, the Bisaya-speaking people feel a sense of awe that finally, one of them is finally holding the most powerful seat of the land. Such expresses the sense of solidarity of a tribe. It is evident that Duterte has given the Bisaya the power to determine for themselves their destiny. Incidentally, for the people of Luzon, the island of Mindanao is no more than a land of conflict. They unjustly associate the Moro with “terror” and the Bisaya with

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

being a “promdi”, a derogatory term. In fact, this attitude has been perpetuated by the country’s ruling class, a situation that has given impetus to the ill feelings of some Filipinos against the affluent few.

Tribalism, in this regard, does not only imply the power of culture to bring people together. It also serves as a moral force for people to object and demand freedom from socio-political and economic exclusion. The solidarity of the tribe also conditions human behavior and teaches people how to empathize with a fellow human being with whom one shares a unique culture. For instance, the Muslims in Mindanao resent the fact that they have been forced out of their tribal land with the coming of Christian settlers. The struggle of the Moro, in the respect, is a fight to reclaim a lost sense of identity. President Duterte is trying to disarticulate political power away from the old and traditional players to correct this historical injustice. Among local tribes, especially those in the hinterlands of Mount Apo, the male carries a “bangkaw” while the female goes to harvest some crops. This is symbolic of the protection that the head of the family must provide. Past leaders in the country have not provided the same type of protection to the people of Mindanao.

Duterte’s act of defiance is symbolic of the struggle of the Bisaya and the Moro against exclusion. For Adele Webb (2017), Duterte is nothing but the expression of a past revolution that has not been truly concluded since the Americans left. The problem, however, is that the Philippine Revolution is exclusive to Luzon. Webb believes that Duterte “embodies the scrutinized Filipino native subject of history, subordinated and looked down upon by the foreign outsider; in standing up for the people, he signifies a refusal to continue the indignity of the past.”²⁵ Yet, what is hidden in Webb’s analysis is the reality that the Tagalogs themselves have excluded the Bisaya and the Muslim when it comes to the meaningful fruits of nation-building. Duterte, a Bisaya, is the

²⁵ Adele Webb, “Hide the Looking Glass: Duterte and the Legacy of American Imperialism,” in *A Duterte Reader*. Edited by Nicole Curato, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press), 139.

one who is dissolving the age-old “little brown brother” image of the Filipino.

Conclusion

The *Philippine Revolution* of 1896 had a clear target – the power and absolute control of the Filipino nation state.²⁶ The country’s old archipelagic configuration, however, has contributed to its new political disarticulation. What hungry revolutionaries and insurgents in Luzon achieved after *Biak-na-Bato* is something that the natives of Mindanao are not so quick to accept. Mindanao has never been conquered, the Bisaya and the Muslims here have been taught. The noble intent to end an oppressive colonial power was there, but Filipinos were ill-prepared. What transpired thereafter was a co-optation of a national struggle.

The Philippines has never matured into a genuine democracy because of the inability of the Filipino people to actualize a common ground that unites them as one nation. But the reason why this appears to be the case is now clear. The enemy is elitism in Philippine society. It dictates the course of the public lives of Filipinos. Duterte’s radical approach has been judged as a form of populism. What is apparent, however, is that elite politics in the country excludes many in order to benefit the few. For his reason, while it may be a bad idea to elect someone who is as acerbic as the president, there are some good reasons for doing so.

What critics refuse to see is the fact that under elite democracy, the Philippines is a society that is exclusive to the rich. While the lack of-political maturity is often blamed for our problems, the fact of the matter is that the enslavement of the Filipino by the oligarchic character of our economy is deliberate. Such is meant to perpetuate the old order. Duterte is simply seeking to dismantle this unjust system by

²⁶ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “The end of the nation state.” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. April 6, 2017.
<https://opinion.inquirer.net/103016/end-nation-state>

disarticulating power away from the center. It is an act of defiance that is rooted in that resurgent revolution that ultimately envisions to topple the hegemonic powers that continue to trample the rights of marginalized Filipinos, notably the Bisaya and the Muslims in Mindanao.

For many decades, the intellectual and economic elites in the capital have defined for the Filipino people the meaning of political correctness and even the meaning of their lives. For many years, personal success for any Filipino meant studying or working in the capital. The *ilustrado* type of politics has determined how the state can be so reconfigured to serve the agenda of the powerful. But this is unacceptable. Duterte's resistance and resolve, it can be said, is what the country needs, in this moment of Philippine history, to begin that long march toward freedom as Filipinos seek to overhaul elitist rule.

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