

## **A.E. (AFTER EDSA): On the Simultaneous Death and Rebirth of Philippine Politics under President Duterte**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to provide a critique of the approaches adopted and enunciated with respect to the Duterte administration and relationship to the public sphere in the Philippines. A digression from institutionalist and progressive tendencies, the Duterte administration is then reexamined from the point of view of hauntology as its main theme, a word coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida and adopted by the theorists of late capitalism such as Slavoj Žižek, in which the specters or the ghosts of the past are argued to have been playing a decisive role in shaping and maintaining the politics of the status quo (together with its inverse/opposites) as opposed to its predecessors, coupled with the widespread retreat and rejection of the liberalism on a global scale. Such shifts in tendencies and perspectives, contrary to the scapegoats ascribed to xenophobia and populism are symptoms of a fading global consensus translated and assimilated to the wider Filipino discourse concerning the role of historical memory and the search for a 'nationalist alternative' in the midst of these transnational dislocations and fragmentations.

**Keywords:** EDSA, Politics of the Status Quo, Rodrigo Duterte, Politics of Rage,

## Introduction

Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the Last Man* published in 1992, decided to backtrack the statements he had written more than two decades ago, declaring the project of democracy as humanity's endpoint postponed.<sup>1</sup> This glaring and blatant admission of the man largely responsible for the ushering and the flowering of a post-Cold War epoch is an admission of the current decline of Liberalism together with its various iterations. In opposition to the promises endowed in the new millennium, these dreams are turned astray by environmental calamities, widespread discontent, the incompetence of the market forces and wars of the periphery and that of the chokepoints largely fought for resources.

Exacerbated by the lingering effects of the Great Recession, the deepening culture wars, distrust of governments and the concerns and problems posed by the mass migration of the dispossessed, the world-edifice is a far cry from the aspirations of the globalized world. In almost every circumstance and situation, the optimism embedded in globalization quickly dissipated, becoming nightmares of their own. Globalization is revealed to be a farce, a scheme intoxicated and reveling on its own claims of successes and the contradictions it builds and furnishes. If one is to subscribe to the viewpoints of the analysts and news pundits, the year 2016 is the year of a Great Reversal. The supposed advances of Liberalism are put in jeopardy and uncertainty. From increased social rights to an extended market integration of the economy through financialization, the rise of populism from Duterte to Trump is a setback in terms of these specified rubrics.

The academics who are watching the unfolding chain of events responded to these setbacks as a consequence of a still largely reactionary, reductive, racist and misogynistic world, a world still

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<sup>1</sup> See Louis Menand, "Francis Fukuyama Postpones the End of History." *The New Yorker*, September 3, 2018.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/03/francis-fukuyama-postpones-the-end-of-history> (accessed September 14, 2018).

not entirely willing to accept the 'prosperities' brought by multiculturalism, increased mobility and inclusivity. On the other hand, the Great Reversal of 2016 is neither the confirmation nor the confident assertion of a world deviating from Liberal doctrines or principles according to the critical voices across the ideological spectrum, with philosopher Slavoj Žižek being the most notable. For Žižek, the electoral victories of the populist coalitions and what the economist Yanis Varoufakis calls as the "Nationalist International" is something that is systemic in Liberalism and in general to all ideologies. Instead of an anomaly, they argue that the current order of things itself is the culprit responsible for the recent woes—from celebrity culture to fake news.<sup>2</sup>

In the Philippines, a similar albeit a muffled revolt against the People Power of 1986 and to some extent, against Liberalism took place thirty years after the deposition of the paternalistic regime of Ferdinand Marcos. The candidacy of Rodrigo Duterte, the feisty and controversial Mayor from Davao, known for his 'no-nonsense' attitude to narcotics, crime and corruption, ended with a Roman triumph. With his opponents in complete disarray, the entire nation braced for his pronouncements. The Reaffirmist Left, having a tenuous but cordial relationship to Duterte, chose a strategy of selective collaboration to the administration's emphasis on social reform, economic nationalization and land redistribution, to be only affirmed by Duterte's supposed orientation towards socialist commitments and principles. The Rejectionists on the other hand vehemently opposed the Duterte administration since the very beginning, aided by various civil society groups condemning the President-elect's lack of moral compass and his unleashing of a militaristic War on Drugs, responsible for the loss of thousands, the majority being victims of extra-judicial killings or EJK's committed by unknown vigilantes and policemen. The anti-Duterte opposition for the most part, is organized on its opposition to the War on Drugs and Duterte's public statements. The seeming absence of the previous taboos and mores to Duterte is widely seen as a deviation from

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<sup>2</sup> See Yanis Varoufakis, *Adults in the Room: My Battle with the European and American Deep Establishment* (New York City, United States of America: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

the usual politicians and his contemporaries. But this absence is also a growing tendency amongst those who have been perceived as the dispossessed. A wider battle of values is being fought, and its implications are made evident with the rise of social media as the most prominent contributor to public opinion. This abandonment of taboos and topics which are otherwise restricted in previous years is all-encompassing and globe-spanning, and it brings a message of a world-order that is in crisis. As of this writing, *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Duterte's Early Presidency* by Nicole Curato stands as the only comprehensive examination of the Duterte administration. A collection of essays from scholars of various disciplines but related to the study of the Philippines, Nicole Curato's *A Duterte Reader* is intentionally combative of the administration from its outset and demonstrates the underlying perspective of the academics on how they view Duterte and in general, the state of the Philippines under Duterte. The authors also took note of an essay within the compilation titled "*Duterte: A Fascist Original*" by Walden Bello, who examined Duterte in these terms:

"His charisma is not the demiurgic sort like Hitler's, nor does it derive so much from an emotional personal identification with a "nation." Duterte's charisma would probably be best described as *carino brutal*, a Filipino-Spanish term that denotes a volatile mix of will to power, a commanding personality, and gangster charm that fulfills his followers' deep-seated yearning for a father figure who will finally end what they see as the "national chaos." Duterte is not a reactionary seeking to restore a mythical past. He's not a conservative dedicated to defending the status quo. His project is oriented towards an authoritarian future."<sup>3</sup>

The authors, however, partially oppose this reading of Duterte confined in these labels, but at the same time, has recognized the rigor and the contribution brought by *A Duterte Reader* to the table. Still, the conclusions and assertions did not go far enough on the parameters that this paper is seeking to supplant and

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<sup>3</sup> See Nicole Curato, *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 78.

reinforce, and these limitations serve as the paper's origin point. The objective of this paper is not to highlight the Duterte administration or the personality of Duterte through policy studies and media coverages surrounding present-day concerns, for this paper identifies Duterte as a symbol of a simmering and an evident revolt against the modern world. The paper defines modernity as the modernity produced by the current economic system, with its values and tenets emanating from the relationships embedded in this economic system. To understand the paper's emphasis, the inquiry expands beyond the focus of the contemporary. To eschew the contemporary requires the examination of Duterte akin to a dissection, a dissection of the image imposed by Duterte is bringing into the sphere of culture, an image that is a representation of a culture that has already nullified the very notion of culture from the notion of a community of similarities, into a community of strangers. Duterte is not a generic strongman among other strongmen, but a confirmation of the limitations of Liberalism mired in its own contradictions, with avenues for its rejuvenation unavailable or shut-off from its grasp. Duterte's rise and his enduring support represents a legitimate grievance and a desire to create a new future away from the futures presented by a system they deem to be inattentive and detached. Nor he can be enclosed in the caption of an 'authoritarian futurist' as Bello had put it, for Duterte escapes any categorizations. The absence of such a categorization not only shows the breaking point of the aforementioned approaches; it is also a condition that one can take advantage of, to bring new approaches and readings forward.

The following arguments or theses that this paper will put forward are as follows. First, this paper will have a global outlook on contextualizing the rise of populism across the world as a result of economic and social distress produced by the current order. Second, this paper will trace a possible major factor that has made the aura of populism palatable to all social classes, both entrenched and emerging, with particular attention given to the economically precarious sectors of the society with their values and attitudes. Third and last will be the examination of the various factors concerning the rise of Duterte and the overall breakdown and crisis of the general system of capitalism and its

justification for existence, arguing that Duterte has won due to the upsurge of a 'nostalgic hauntology' in politics first expressed in aesthetics whether social-realist or avant-gardist, and the general or official historiography of nation-building which has characterized the Philippine Revolution as a project that remains 'unfinished' and is yet to be fulfilled.

### **Re-Contextualizing Populism in the midst of Protracted Decay of Ideologies**

Can populism still be defined, semantical ascriptions aside? Is coming up a definition of populism a venture that simplifies, rather than understanding the word itself? Is populism a semantical or blanket terminology, or a collection of multiplicities? In mainstream circles, both journalistic and academic, 'populism' has attracted and continues to attract a pejorative definition, primarily because the usage for populism as a pejorative is a default. This approach not only falters, but it also complicates the attention of one to populism itself. Neither a model from political theory nor a simple descriptive category will satisfy the definition of populism in modernity.

The ambiguity of the populist discourse is its actual strength. One may refer to populist demands to be simplistic and an outright vagary, though this impulse is the propeller of populism. Rather than to postulate and confine the examination of populism to the moment and to the sequential drawing of events, one is to examine populism for what it defines and describes. Since populism is a state of mind, the state of mind also reflects the current order, or the present arrangement of things. It is the order that reinforces populism, and becomes the harbinger of populism, while claiming to despise its character and its intentions. One can label populist speeches for sounding similar to rhetorical quips and techniques, though such rhetorical quips and techniques are not possible without the contextualization of populism as a part of the order, and as a process of the order, intended or unintended.

The maintenance of things is the paramount concern of management; politics therefore is the face of management, where

it skillfully conceals its contempt for the lay, for the hoi polloi, for the apathetic and illiterate. If politics still has a place in this century, then that politics is confined to the image of politics. The widespread hiring, constructing and utilizing agencies catered to marketing made politics reduced to its present shell. The image of politics is the role of politics that is by itself, mediated through the images that there are still political decisions and that the art of politics still functions with the aforementioned responsibilities and duties assigned to the practice of politics, though such a practice is now questionable. Populism symbolizes the return of the public though not in a way that is deemed necessary or acceptable. Populism concerns itself with the public, and it ends with the public; the private is viewed with suspicion and with the wildest of skepticisms. The private is the den of conspiracies, of restricted chambers, of the carceral and of the passed down values of the bell jar, as the Annales historian Braudel once put it.

The unspoken dialectic of the private and the public well pronounced in the Age of Revolutions and Industrialism is embedded in populism's desire to erase the private out of existence, and out of its territory. In recent years, the public has suffered a death of its identity, and a disappearance of its lucidity. The public, castigated, ignored and maltreated, is no longer public. The public man is a stranger, the embodiment of the private's triumph, and the eventual cementing of its hegemonic position. Individualism acquired a private language, a private literature and a private methodology that attacks and ridicules the public and has sown the contempt for the public. A thoroughly 'private' ideology, the apparatus depends on the non-existence of such apparatus and its non-committal (albeit subtle applications) of the apparatus.<sup>4</sup>

This total hegemonic machine of the private is a short-lived affair. Technological leaps, innovations and transformations are challenging the private's hold over the instruments of repression and control. While it retains a relatively dominant role in regulating public life as private life, the emphasis of the private has been reduced and undermined. The Internet, once an early

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<sup>4</sup> See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York City, United States of America: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977).

form of bypassing the official channels and avenues commonly tainted by the apparatuses, is tearing the barrier of the private. It does not respect the concept of property, copyright and the foundations of private society itself. But this optimism did not last, for the private has a tendency to be assimilatory to its opposite, though despite of the undergoing assimilation of the Internet to the private, a large section of it is still out of reach from the private. It is uncertain however, if this sector can still resist and hold the bastion, as the encroachment of the private through pervasive dissemination of propaganda and generators of the profit motive are in full operation and in full swing.

In addition, the private's research on security measures and monitoring cameras/sensors oftentimes with the aid of the virtual is turning the supposedly anarchic Internet to an infernal cell for its own purposes and its own ends, all in the name of the self-preservation of its own existence. Populism is an antidote to a segment of a population disenchanted with the private's allure. The rise of Populism in all forms of life is a confirmation of the collapse of the guiding superstructure and the prevalence of its residues. In this regard, Populism's re-contextualization begins and ends with a redefinition that shall examine Populism and its role to the order of things. The definitions presented and elaborated by assumptions on Populism as temporal and ephemeral, are definitions which must be scrutinized.

Same is to be referred to the use of the term for the purposes of politicizing (politicizing in the sense of injecting a politics of moralism rather than that of content) and confining it to the specificity of the larger sphere, in which its specificity made its diagnosis as an abnormal affliction possible. Populism is not a mere glitch or dilemma that is foreign to the system. Populism is the vacuum and repository of desires and aspirations, of imaginings and phantasms, of horrors and concerns and of simultaneous hate and love, whose purpose is to endow a sense of experience and access to the immanence of grand affairs and pompous rituals far off from the mediocre and the rote, and from the capitulationism and elitism of the epoch that one currently belongs into. It replaces the role of the grand 20th century ideological projects, but it is also aware of its narrowness in terms



of scope, for it is entirely at war with the order that it seeks to abolish, giving the specters of Populism little time to reflect or ponder on the excruciating procedures to articulate itself and its own language as different from the language of the established.<sup>5</sup>

The challenges facing the two stanzas of "The Internationale" (a famous anthem of the radical Left) is twofold; that the prisoners are no longer starved and that the wretched no longer perceive themselves as the wretched of the earth. The superiority of the private is maintained by gilding poverty or destitution. The logic to this approach is practical and is comprehensible; for the underclass to dissuade themselves from joining unions and labor organizations, the State in this private domain cautiously asserts itself to be outside of interests and outside factionalism, though the State of the private domain is rife with factionalism, this time between its progressives and conservatives. The difference, if any difference exists in these factions is their degree of adherence to their cause. One prefers moderation and another fancies utilization, and with these 'differences' in mind, they constantly engage in battles over the affairs of the hours, though such battles do nothing other than publicity and faux-debates even to the most trivial of attitudes and customs, which only exudes the bleakness of the situation, a bleakness intensified with the realization that the politics of the 'real' is the politics of subsistence and for fulfilling short-term needs. At the end of the day, no one wins or loses this game. The State and its instruments stay in their place, including its vast array and collection of tactics and contingency plans in an event of an insurrection or a bank robbery. The State is the only entity which can legally declare a state of emergency, and this state of emergency has the legitimacy through the State's prerogative to exempt itself from irregularities and atrocities. It pulverizes the alternative, for the State deems itself as the only alternative, and the only institution that can ensure stability and harmony, downplaying contradictions, cloaking the justification for suspending the writ of habeas corpus in the name of the people, limiting civil liberties, rights to free expression, of

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<sup>5</sup> The inability of many variants of populism to articulate in the abstract plane is a consequence of capitalism's destruction of the abstract plane of idealizing the future. See Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (United Kingdom: Zero Books, 2005).

movement and lastly, the symbol of civilization against the uncharted and the unknown.<sup>6</sup>

The State's claim to civilization is an affirmation of its hegemony and its superiority. One can even attest that the periodic crises inherent in its structure, is actually a method by the State to ingrain itself to the general discourse. A crisis therefore, is a form of government and a form of governing. It is used to silence the public and repeated demands for transparency, and such demands for transparency are contrary to the existence of the State.<sup>7</sup> To deodorize society from subversion and the discontent of its subjects, a crisis is a blessing for the State. As the State has alienated the citizen, the citizen reverts to being a subject and a recursive element is completed. Citizenship requires the fealty to the State, though this fealty of the state is a necessity to stave insubordination and dissension from its bills and decrees.

Lastly, the State is converting its machinery for the service of financializing the economy, a form of de-territorialization that accelerates the construction of an individuated and an entirely artificial economy, stripped of production as its primacy. The widespread financialization of the economy necessitates an administrative body to make this privatization efficient. In Western Europe, a consequence of this privatization is the reduction of the welfare state and a consolidation of a bureaucratic apparatus clearly independent of public oversight in the name of this goal. For those who are victims of these reductions in benefits, in pensions and in services once available, the future has no alternative other than the destruction of the future and its entire edifice.

The State becomes privatized while maintaining the overarching control and the imposition of control for the needs of a sector that is dependent on hot commodities and liquid transfers. The apparatuses of discipline and repression are

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<sup>6</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception* (Chicago City, United States of America: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See, The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends* (Los Angeles City, United States of America: Semiotext(e), 2014).

therefore directed towards what remains of the frontier. The city-country distinction is beginning to disappear in place of the particularized metropole. This metropole takes its formation from a national trajectory, although its claims are undercut by its excessive attempts to be integrated to the global system of linkages among similar States. The State creates its own alienation, positive and negative; positive as it destroys identities in favor of a hollowed universalism, and negative as it creates discord and social conflict.

Likewise, the discord that stems out from alienation, as previously elaborated is a government or a system of affirming by itself. The cycle of crisis after crisis, is a process of consolidation and absolution, for as the system rots and decays, it ironically lingers longer than the time when it was stable. This is the enigma which still baffles contemporary scholars, but this consolidation is an actual process or logic inherent in the system of plutocracies. For the larger battle for culture has been won, the political system under this cultural system can exist without perfumed aspirations and promises. Instead, as it has been stated, the political system is a matter of administering a crisis while preventing such a crisis to be fully utilized to bring its own downfall.

Oswald Spengler postulated that the fate of this State is a predictable and an inevitable one. Capitalism for Spengler is a materialistic ideology with origins from the Enlightenment's revival of rationalism, and for this new economic system to function, it needed mass democracy. A mass democracy needs a compulsory education to shepherd the masses, and the media is the harbinger of this compulsory education, feeding the population with a larger sense of being connected from the lenses of the media's parameters for such a connectedness, with the media being the truth.<sup>8</sup> The saturation of novels, newspapers, radio and television are manifestations of this upsurge and a shift from the culture of the aristocracy and the culture of the merchants, later known as the bourgeoisie. As Guy Debord of the Situationist International remarked, life becomes enmeshed in the accumulation of spectacles, and this reality becomes society's

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<sup>8</sup> See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. H. Stuart Hughes (London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1991).

unreality. In a cynical manner, the democratic process is stifled from its inconsistencies and its avoidance of social problems.<sup>9</sup>

This critique of democracy is in line with Leon Trotsky's examination of Fascism. Fascism, unlike the liberal notions of blaming it on sheer coercion is the 'natural' cocoon of Liberal politics and polemics. As the class struggle intensifies and the conflict of the city and country in the metropole more widely pronounced, the bourgeoisie will retreat to traditional values and calls for unity. The Fascists take advantage of this need for unity to present itself as the guardians of order. Whether such regimes are Fascist or simply paternalistic, the Liberal ideal's endpoint regardless of its countermeasures to avoid it (since the Liberal justification for its existence is to safeguard the sanctity of property above all notions) is that of a Fascist reaction.<sup>10</sup> Still, to define Fascism purely as a force of reaction is to ignore or underestimate its modernistic implications. The reactionary zeal of Fascism is rooted on its skepticism of the progressive myth. For the syndicalist Georges Sorel, the modern world is prone to be immersed in myths rather than being averse to it.<sup>11</sup> The Fascist myth for example, has made its appeals to the role of nationhood as organic and class collaboration to make the revolution from the State possible. It takes advantage of the modern world and all the conveniences it offers to create an identity of its own, an alternate modernity, a modernity that is abject from the Other while also reliant on the Other to perpetuate its own justification to shield society from the so called malignant dangers ahead, for Fascism's appeal rests entirely on emergency and urgency to uphold itself.

In contrast, the Liberals adopted the myth in a subtle fashion, avoiding the overt displays of the Fascists or Communists. Late capitalism's decisive inroads is a success that avoids any structural analysis of any outsiders. Rather, its successes rest upon its very denial. The bourgeoisie must deny itself as a class to

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<sup>9</sup> See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Donald Nicholson Smith (New York, United States of America: Zone Books, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> See Leon Trotsky, *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight it* (New York City, United States of America: Pioneer Publishers, 1944).

<sup>11</sup> See Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press: 1993).

perpetuate itself, and as the demands of efficiency is brought to the toiling markets, the certainty of one's position is removed from the equation. The bourgeoisie, claiming to uphold the equalities of opportunity and that of law, also destroys the binary opposition of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, for the society it has created have appropriated the cultures of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: a proletarianization of culture on one hand, and the bourgeoification of values on the other.<sup>12</sup> What remains as a coherent class of any sort is a class whose prospects are miserable and in doubt. The precariat, a class ill-defined and fluid is the majority of what remains of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The larger demand of financialization requires the flexibility of one's labor, though the labor required for financialization is an ephemeral one that demands the constant expulsion and replacement of workers. It is this precariat, whose entire careers revolve in this type of labor, where resentment is evident. It can be further argued that the 'middle class' of the Global South is a subsection of the precariat. Their wealth may be equivalent to that of the traditional notions of the middle class, but their job insecurity halts their further progression to the ladders of social and symbolic capital. However, the precariat in general, with no means of production or the necessary skill of the now decimated proletariat, is a class that is dependent on the swings of the artificial economy, digitized and depersonalized, making them suspect to radicalism confined to their own.<sup>13</sup> The disdain for the artificial economy despite of bringing with it the economic opportunities and avenues is married with a desire for a competent leadership. The competence required in that leadership, is a leadership that secures the prospects of the precariat, hence their penchant for near-dictators and autocrats. Stability is extremely vied, because their position is volatile. The modernity they live in is fragile and subjected to shocks. They themselves create a revolution for their own ends, oftentimes in

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<sup>12</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, translated by Hannah Arendt and Harry Zohn (New York, United States of America: Pantheon Books, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

capitulation with the structures laid upon by the bourgeoisie, including its class expectations, class morality, class values and class attitudes.

The precariat by itself is now the bourgeoisie in all of its appearances and showcases of newfound luxury, splendor and industry. The world molded by post-industrialist techniques simultaneously uproots the notion of territoriality, while creating enclaves among communities. These enclaves of communities are reminiscent to a collection of strangers, whose affinity is their common alienation and anxieties about the unknown. The damage wrought by the acceleration of production is what creates this affinity by alienation, and this affinity by alienation forges the downfall of politics, and a desire to transcend beyond it. A people alienated is a people whose purpose of life is akin to a floating piece of metal, or that of a liquid, as no values could no longer hold society together.<sup>14</sup> The Philippine experience, a post-colony still suffering the distortions of these modes of production and its efforts to create a nation out of thin air, contains the recipe for the nostalgia of the pleasant days, and a knight in shining armor.

### **The Aesthetics of Recursion and the Politics of Rage**

The frustration of the present is the alienation from all social life and all preexisting connections. The spectacle-driven vision of life is compounded with challenges to sustain the life in the post-Cold war, whether coming from the lack of job security, decreasing pensions and exorbitant prices in commodities. The inflation of the contemporary is not only economic, but cultural as well. There has been an inflation of escapist modes of entertainment, reflecting the downturn of production and an increased push for financialism.

This correlation is not at all merely hypothetical, for this correlation has been widely observed. This mode of entertainment is greatly individualized and it caters to the notion

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<sup>14</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (New Jersey, United States of America: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

of the self, of 'I am what I am'.<sup>15</sup> In spite of the individualization of the medium, this individualism is empty at worst, and narcissistic at its best, highlighting the pursuit of a people who wanted to break free from their chains. The true becomes the moment of the false, and the false becomes the truth. A pseudo-world replaces the existing world in terms of its capacity to attract and elicit attention, an attention translated to the preservation of this otherwise well-crafted pseudo-world. It is to the surprise of no one, that the individualism that the society is currently possessing is an individualism that is an embodiment of cynicism. Cynicism is the anathema of the hopes permeating in the present economy of things and its corresponding relationships, though it is what keeps this permeation possible. Cynicism not only involves the rejection of politics as administration, but also the possibility of a systemic collapse. Cynicism in this sense is not the cynicism of the Ancient Achaeans (Greeks), but a cynicism for life, expressed in rage and hostility against the very fact of life itself.<sup>16</sup>

The avoidance of radical solutions, and to social questions, is Cynicism in practice. Therefore, it can also be classified as ideology. The manifestations of cynicism are enormous, though one can easily detect its manifestations from the plethora of entertainment shows catering to the expressions of bleakness to the future. It can range from dystopian fictions, to firebrand radio/television shows, to conspiracy theories and selective histories, all functioning as reproductive machines to bolster the cynicism implanted within the psyche of the cynical and the person whose avoidance of the social questions and whose stances are either not wholly supported by an examination of the world or a capitulation to the system in general.

Another aspect of Cynicism that is pervasive is its appropriation and fascination with the previous decades and its culture. Remembering is a large part of what drives Cynicism to its degree of indifference. Since it is fixated on the past, the Cynic mind is a mind in a perpetual quest to relive the past for its own

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<sup>15</sup> See, The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles, United States of America: Semiotext(e), 2009) 29-34.

<sup>16</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, United Kingdom: Verso Books, 1989) 28-30.

sake, on bygone playlists and 'throwback' classics. The difference between the appreciation of the past and the fascination of the past is a thin line that is oftentimes blurred, though in cases of intense fascination, the fascination of the past becomes the focal point of one's ambitions and one's aspirations.

For example, in the case of the Philippines, the 'golden years' of Martial Law is widely discussed in light of the failings of the succeeding administrations. One therefore acquires the perspective of the past as comparatively better than the present condition, and one exalts the past for being the beacon of hope. One is then led to believe that to replicate these 'golden years', a return to Martial Law and the Marcos regime, in particular, is a step that must be taken by the country, if it is to regain its lost prestige, and that of its former glory.

In this re-envisioning, the hauntological aspect is added and is the vehicle for the past to return itself back to the relevance of the present. The neo-classical/neo-liberal approach to change and its solutions all but crippled the possibilities of a strategic pursuit of change, as the dominating approach favors short-term and incremental solutions, for it is aware of its own limitations and is always willing to eliminate the element of failure, creating a society that may look stable on the surface, but is simmering with discontents and fractures behind the surface. A crisis that could not be governed is the hegemon's Megiddo and its Armageddon.<sup>17</sup>

This hauntological aspect is also evident within historiography and history itself. The sheer attention to nation-building strips the nation of its personal attachments and its evocation of sentiments which can never be measurable through empirical means. The Revolutions of the past and its sheer excitement is scattered in all conventions and all practices, whether in daily life or the workplace of various offices. History is not an empirical subject from this standpoint, it is a matter that preserves the myth of seamlessness and objectivity which is often utilized to justify the politics of the living, or the present year. The

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<sup>17</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (London, United Kingdom: Psychology Press, 1994).



social reality it tries to construct is an ethical one that is only regarded as a rulebook while it obfuscates the power relations between the elite and the ruled. Social reality is therefore understood as an action made out of belief, a belief that one is universal (such as a universal system of morality) despite of its particularity.<sup>18</sup>

The specters of the failed Revolutions produce the nausea and the evocations of the lost moments of a revolution. It is then delivered to the electoral mainstream, and widespread alienation contributes to the disruption of the consensus which is either the end of a deluge or the ushering of a new millennium. The mantra that the 'revolution is still unfinished' still resonates with the longing that the Revolution can still be consummated through the methodologies available in the present, thus its resilience in spite of its apparent datedness in the face of post-national ruptures.<sup>19</sup>

The expression of rage in this electoral mainstream is a factor that is worth considering in itself. The years of crises, deprivation and the implantation of the virtual to the physical only intensify the concept of rage as the locus of action. From the Arab Spring, to Occupy Wall Street, rallies against Putin in Russia, to the protests against austerity in Europe, the Million People March against pork barrel in the Philippines, the Brexit referendum and the elections of various populist figures such as Trump and Duterte, rage is the first perspective, followed by that of despair. The parliament of the streets, and the ever-political and ever-vigilant public, are crawling back from the gutter, though this parliament is a parliament of comradeship in alienation, and the politics it exercises is the politics of demands that are written all over. Most, if not all of these instances of disenchantment, is unable to channel a workable alternative to the powers that be and the order that it represents, for it can never produce an alternative as long as it is predicated on the concerns of the transient and that of what is experienced here and there.

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<sup>18</sup> Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> See Reynaldo Ileto, *Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998).

Cynicism therefore is an aesthetics that can be classified as fantasy, though this fantasy is not the fantasy that is confined to fiction. It is the fantasy that actually produces the reality of the entire condition. It is akin to a dream that has gone in motional perpetuity and is the affirmation of an aesthetic that depends on the negation of hope and yearning for collapse. The fantasy production entails that it entirely subsumes to the present system and all its manifestations.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, while rage has experienced revitalization in terms of mobilizing the public to express their dissatisfaction, rage by itself is a mere vehicle, and not an end of itself. The established parties and their personages are no longer esteemed or trusted, and its figures subjected to mockery and ridicule. Worse, it only replicates the neo-classical band aid remedies, and the public's lack of imagination in terms of actually concretizing the world after, or the day after the demonstrations or that of revolutions.<sup>21</sup>

The Duterte administration is an example of an administration which is reliant on the demands of immediacy, and without an open support of the national elite. It has the compelling quality of positioning itself against the past-present to create its own future-present. It is an insurgent presidency with elements of the failed attempts of the last three decades on changing the dynamics of governance and that of politics. Its roots lie on sources both foreign and domestic; foreign in the case of a global hostility towards the system and domestic for its appropriation of the role of revolution to consolidate the State. The direction it is heading into still remains to be seen in spite of its recent spiraling into a state of crisis, as it has offered and has given the Philippines a radical break from its previous legacies, either through direct or indirect means.

It is through and through, a revolution from above, in which the princes or the government in this case, is the inhibitor of revolutionary change. But this revolution has an element of being

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<sup>20</sup> Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation* (New York City, United States of America: Columbia University Press, 2010).

a farce, as it denies itself as a revolution.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the "Duterte Revolution" can be only summed up as a revolution exhorted in the ideals of social change, and coming from the line of thought from Quezon to Ramos, a revolution that seeks nothing less than the revolution of the State to exercise more power than it has been previously granted, with a generous backing of a disenfranchised people, which makes the revolution negate itself, and become a Thermidor.

### **Conclusion**

The authors seek to demonstrate in this inquiry, albeit scattershot and haphazard, the coming crisis or the ongoing crisis embedded in Liberalism and its ineptitude to handle its own affairs on a planetary scale. The genealogy of the Liberal state, its pursuit of securing its own legitimacy vis-à-vis its concessions to the wider demands of an integrated system of dependence made possible by late capitalism are furnishing consequences which are interconnected regardless of such consequences, from outright alienation to the explosive bouts of resentment. The culture that this Liberal state has created, which is a culture of spectacle, of images and of specters of past images only gave rise to the individuation of the citizen and the refusal of the citizen to participate, preferring either to resign to indifference or to express anger with other citizens to the ruling system. The recent upheavals pose doubts if this system can still survive and convert the process of crisis to its own advantage, for the line becomes ever clearer; it is the people (the hoi polloi) against the various forces of the political center.

The figure of Duterte is an example of these failures and consequences. Furthermore, it has rejected the core aspects taken

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<sup>22</sup> See Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York City, United States of America: Vintage Books, 1995). In it, Brinton argues for a structural analysis of a particular revolution, citing similarities in the sequence of events. The overthrow of the old regime comes first, followed by a honeymoon or an era of dual power, then by radicalism or the Jacobin takeover, and lastly by Thermidor, a continuation of the revolution albeit many steps backward to the point where this revolution would even adopt the style of the regime which it has overthrown.

by the Liberal state for granted despite of the Liberal state's lack of any volition on actually enacting them to practice, such as individual rights and the rule of law. Never one can imagine the outright obsolescence of these notions in the light of technological acceleration and artificial consolidation. The phenomenon of Duterte and the image it sets upon, is a confirmation of the hypocrisy and the weakness of the established parties and interest groups to maintain its grip to a populace that has turned its indifferent cynicism into a virulent practice of politics, a politics that is entirely aesthetic on its espousal of change, and realistic for its fealty to protect the President at all costs.

The messages of change, of a cleansing ritual, of a new age are messages of hope, while also the messages of exhaustion, and an affirmation of a continuing past that still views the future ideal as the past, and the past as the future ideal, tangled with a desire to break free from the bounds of a continuing past which has become eternal.

This is where the rebirth of politics lies and begins, as the election of Duterte is able to uproot the notions of an unquestioned elite rule despite the notion that Duterte himself is a part of the elite class. The Duterte administration, and the persona of Duterte himself, has managed to either subvert or destroy the pre-existing forms and techniques of political enchantment and that of engagement. The so-called process of the decades prior are eschewed in favor of a politics based on the fluid interaction of hostility, rage and resentment among the classes and among each other. It is a politics that is inherently revolutionary and has paved the way for a conceivable future in which revolutionary upheaval seems to be more palatable. In short, the Duterte administration has created a "Year Zero" for all political standpoints but it is up for such standpoints to properly acknowledge the deconstruction made by the administration to all governmental institutions. The only recommendation that this paper can leave is that any study in this present epoch requires a restart of our assumptions and if possible, the rejection of any return from the status quo, for the status quo is the crisis that unfolds its full ardor and the notion of permanence is now in serious doubt. The system at this point is losing its legitimacy; it

can no longer promise anything outside of the notion that it is what exists and can be the only alternative. This further highlights the inevitable implosion of the world order and the possible emergence of futures distinct from it. As for the Philippine context, it highlights the continuing pursuit of a universal change that is the focal point of the nation's history and its only source of hope, an echo in the midst of indecision. The entire nation is now at its breaking point and is now at the crossroads.

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