

**Editorial**

**Complexity, Agonism, and Solidarity: the  
Kaleidoscopic Picture of Philippine Politics and  
Society**

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**Introduction**

We live in a complex, pluralistic, and multipolar<sup>1</sup> world. This contemporary situation is referred to as the postmodern condition where the usual markers of certainty no longer applies and traditional foundations of reality are questioned. The emphasis is on fluidity, multidimensionality, tension, and conflict. The multiplicity of cultural, religious, and gender groups and the rise of various social movements have characterized this postmodern state of affairs. The traditional economic divide is no longer sufficient as a tool for analysis. Instead, emphasis is now on the new democratic struggles that has fueled the new social movement politics.<sup>2</sup>

In an ontological sphere, the condition is understood as putting emphasis on how to handle the differences and otherness that are brought about by race, religious affiliation, and gender identification. This ontological consciousness has translated into a multicultural discourse that puts into perspective the greater demand

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<sup>1</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy in a multipolar world," *Millennium* 37, no. 3 (2009): 549-561.

<sup>2</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and new political subjects: toward a new concept of democracy (1988)," in *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, radical democracy, and the political*, edited by James Martin, 45-57 (London: Routledge, 2013).

of minority groups within modern nation states for recognition.<sup>3</sup> This led scholars to re-examine the long-held views on social justice, common good, citizenship, and nation building in the light of the emphasis placed on difference.

This global socio-political condition is what also confronts Philippine politics and society. With the various challenges encountered in our country including economic, political and ideological, cultural and religious, as well as environmental concerns, the Philippine condition brings together plethora of actors, ideologies, challenges, and other factors that interplay in shaping our understanding of our country, our national identity, and our positions on various issues confronting the Philippines as a nation state.

One of the key features of Philippine society is the persistence of elitism. Highly influenced by its colonial past, elitist perspectives dominate the socio-cultural and political sphere manifested in how leaders are elected, how governmental administration operates, how analysis of socio-political issues are undertaken, how educational targets are being delivered, how gender identity is framed from the dominant masculinist perspective, and how influential figures dictate the shaping of the Filipino identity and consciousness. The elitism which has dominated the country's way of proceeding has led to the marginalization of a significant portion of the population primarily those who are economically disadvantaged, the regionally disregarded sectors from the south, those who were not educated in prestigious institutions, and those that have unconventional gender identification. The effect more that the economic disparity is also a cognitive deficit where these marginalized sectors were prevented from participating in the shaping of the Filipino identity and consciousness.

The hegemony of the elite is reflected in how these groups would judge voters' preference for populist figures as irrational and as counter to the rationality that defines Philippine polity.<sup>4</sup> Another form of elitism is reflected in the regional divide which has marginalized the

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<sup>3</sup> Seyla Behabib, "Introduction: The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, edited by Seyla Benhabib, 3-18 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez, *Governing the other: exploring the discourse of democracy in a multiverse of reason* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009); Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy and the Urban Poor* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019).

Moro populace in Mindanao and has led to rebellion with the demand for greater autonomy and recognition of their unique cultural rights. Furthermore, the infighting of the dominant cultural groups in the island namely the Christians and Muslims has further isolated and marginalized the Indigenous Peoples groups. Also, the dominant perspective in shaping gender identity based on machismo has led the emerging gender identities to be unrecognized in the social sphere. More than the socio-cultural, political, religious spheres where marginalization is evident, there is also an observed impact in the intellectual consciousness primarily in how philosophizing is being undertaken in a predominantly elitist perspective.

These unfortunate effects of elitist hegemony have rallied majority of the Filipino people to abandon the conventional options for voters and opt for populist leaders who promise to speak and represent the conditions of the masses. The rebellion of the Bangsamoro groups is geared towards challenging the century long oppression and injustice that are experienced from the hands of the entrenched Christianized groups and to ensure greater autonomy and self-governance. The striving of the Indigenous Peoples to be equally represented and heard is a desire for greater recognition of their equal status as a resident of Mindanao and of the Philippines in general. The clamor of the LGBTQ+ community is a resistance to the patriarchal order that limits understanding of gender identity to the masculine dominance or to the usual binary between male and female.

These identified challenges only shows that Philippine politics and society can be characterized not only with complexity and pluralism but also with power relations. There is a prevailing hegemony of the elite and dominant groups and consciousness that leads to the disadvantage of minority groups. Much of the analysis then of the Philippine socio-political and cultural condition is a challenge to the dominant order to be able to provide alternative to the unjust, restrictive, exclusivist, and marginalizing perspective. This only shows that Philippine politics and society is laden with power and antagonism as a resistance to the dominant order.

Despite the prevalence of a power laden understanding of the country's politics and society, there is also the desire for solidarity, for a unified and cohesive consciousness as a Filipino people, a Filipino nation. The trajectory towards challenging the prevailing order is not only then geared towards seeking for alternative but for recovering the

dimension of Philippine society that prevents greater inclusion, recognition and the attainment of the ideal common good that does not marginalize any members or sectors of the Filipino community.

### **The Framework**

Three lead articles introduce us to frameworks that are helpful in reading our complex socio-political realities. Juichiro Tanabe's "Examining Holistic Peace Thesis in Complex Society," provides us with a nuanced understanding of peace with all the complexity and the multilayer and multifaceted dimensions involved in the striving for peace. In recognizing this complexity, Tanabe provided a framework that is holistic enough to avoid the limits of the conventional Western, liberal framework. He incorporated in the holistic thesis intercultural philosophy with a strong slant towards the religious dimension. This means that peace should not only be approached from the economic, political or moral lenses but should also include the spiritual perspective.

Tanabe also brings to the fore the inherent contradiction in the tendency of other claims to peace which imposes its views on other cultures, contexts, and perspectives. Such an imposition even with a claim that it is a holistic framework, contradicts the goal of seeking peace. As such, the holistic peace thesis contains the dynamism and self-critique that would prevent it from resulting to an imposed hegemony.

The holistic peace thesis gains more anchor when integrated into the more specific context of the Moro people's striving for peace in the island of Mindanao. Christopher Ryan Maboloc, who is the co-editor of this issue, tackles the various manifestations of injustice experienced by the Moro people and the various forms of structural injustice that persists even to the present day, in his work "Structural Injustice and Peace Building in the Bangsamoro." His research is geared towards the exposition of these injustices but also towards the rectification of the unjust practices and culture that has contributed to the marginalization of the Moro people.

The establishment of the Bangsamoro governing region is a promising start towards the rectification and the establishment of a just order. However, he also recognizes that the initiatives are still at the vulnerable stage and would need lasting and enduring efforts.

This means a collaborative effort among all stakeholders is needed that will overcome the prevailing prejudices and sustain peace in the region.

The third lead article of Asuna Yoshizawa entitled “A Macho Populist Comes Again?: Robin Padilla and Radical Politics in the Philippines,” discusses the persistence of populism in Philippine politics with the win of an action star in the last national election. Her discussion of populism shows how the notion of the people as an electorate is constructed through their support of these populist candidates. She also discussed the implications of populism in the direction and future of Philippine politics. She contends that while populism has been used to rally the people who were marginalized by the elite order and thus form a counter hegemony, it can also on the other hand exacerbate the current divide in politics which is characterized as a divide between friend and enemy or between the we and the they.

## **Radical Democracy**

A significant dimension of Philippine politics and society is a discourse on radical democracy. In the Philippine context, works of Labastin, et.al.<sup>5</sup> has been instrumental in paving succeeding scholarly works on radical democracy in the Philippines where the take off point is the rise to power of Rodrigo Duterte.

The discourse on radical democracy and the place of Duterte is the focal point of analysis by John Randy Tuyo in his work “Rediscovery of the demos in the radical democracy of the Philippines.” Tuyo pursued the argument that the radical democracy in the country following the Duterte phenomenon is well explained through the perspective of Chantal Mouffe. However, he also recognized the limitations of such an analysis which made him complement the Mouffean reading with that of Jacques Ranciere who is better able to define the notion of the people as the demos where equality of participation is ensured even from those who resist the hegemonic order. Such a dimension is the limitation of the Duterte administration in its lack of tolerance for dissenting voices and views.

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<sup>5</sup> Benjiemen Labastin et.al. *Radical Politics in the Philippines: A Reader*. (2022).

The discussion on populism that was discussed by Yoshizawa is further pursued by Allison Cruyff Ladero. His paper "Recovering Democracy: Chantal Mouffe on Left Populist Strategy," tackled a re-understanding of populism as compatible with the concept of democracy. Challenging the prevailing view that paints the opposition between populism and democracy, Ladero claimed that the positive understanding of populism is instrumental in the attainment of equality and freedom particularly of those who are marginalized.

Such an agonistic view that is identified in the discourse of radical democracy is also been evident in the reading of Philippine history. Menlito Piscos Mansueto's "Distorted History, Distorted Democracy: A Case of an Historico-Economic Sabotage of the Philippines' National Politics," is a historical account of the Philippines that shows how the dominant reading is laden with hegemony of the elite. The unpopular or relativist reading he offers is a fresh perspective into the account of history and the striving of the people to reclaim the silenced and censored voices and dimensions of Philippine history.

### **Recovering our Resource as a Nation**

A significant dimension of Philippine society and culture is not only a challenge to the prevailing order but also a rediscovery of unrecognized resources as a nation. These resources that were often untapped can pave the way for the reconstruction of our national identity and of the recognition of those that are marginalized.

Shierwin Cabunilas' "The Lumad Nation and Decentralization in a Philippine Unitary Government: A Critique of LGC of 1991 and IPRA of 1997," is an analysis of the condition and the struggle of the Indigenous Peoples. His study showed that the element of contestation allows for the dimensions silenced by colonial past to be brought to the fore. The review of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) and Local Government Code (LGC) provided a perspective that there is the promise but also the inadequacy of these national laws in dealing with the pluralism and the complexity as well as the marginalization of the Indigenous Peoples. He suggests the expansion of these laws to allow for greater autonomy through the federal system. This discussion is highly relevant in the ongoing discussion of amending or revising the existing Philippine constitution.

Much promise is also highlighted in Sheldon Agaton's study entitled "The Padrino System in Philippine Politics and Society," where he seeks for the rehabilitation of the notion of the Padrino system – a practice that is often associated with the colonial past. Agaton seeks to rescue the understanding of the Padrino system from its colonial past to be able to rehabilitate it as a concept that incorporates traditional Filipino values of *kapwa* and *pakikisama* and essentially connects it with the concept of *utang na loob*. These concepts are essential in recovering key resources from our own culture that can strengthen our sense of nationhood.

The recovery of our cultural resources is also the intent of Manuel Jarabe, Jr's study "A Reconstructed Communitarian Perspective of Justice to the LGBTQ+ Struggles in the Philippines." Rather than rely on the dominant Western liberal frameworks of grounding the discourse on gender identity, Jarabe integrated insights from communitarian scholars namely, Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor to be able to reclaim the place of the LGBTQ+ in a communitarian context of Philippine society.

## **The Philosophical Intervention**

These manifold concerns that confront Philippine politics and society can be deepened with more profound reflections from the philosophical sphere. This is where we locate the place of critical analysis as well as the integrative perspectives. Much of the reflection from these contributions is the striving for the recognition of the role of philosophy in the holistic understanding of our national situations and the forging of greater unity as a nation.

Givheart Carmelo Dano's "Philosophizing and Democracy: The North, Central, and the South," illustrates how our perspective of democracy can be enriched through philosophical reflection. Such a philosophical reflection bridges the regional divide and gives more emphasis on the striving of the Filipinos for solidarity amidst the experience of plurality and complexity.

The need to expand the philosophical reflection of our social condition is also the focal point of discussion in Ruben Balotol's "Prospects of Doing Philosophy in Eastern Visayas from Reading Borrinaga and Kobak's *The Colonial Odyssey of Leyte*." Employing the

philosophical frameworks of Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, Balotol endeavors to shed light on the situation of Leyte and Eastern Visayas and to read the social conditions of the region through multidisciplinary lens.

The reflection is further deepened by Noel Pariñas' "Espasyo sa Pag-iral ng Tao," where he showed that Western concept of space can be integrated in our desire to open the dimension of the human or humanity in the shaping of the Filipino consciousness. The reflections on "Tao" and "Kapwa" can pave the way for the Filipinization of the philosophical enterprise.

The collection of work ends with the contribution from Maboloc and Gleemore Makie's "Poetic Justice, Love, and Womanhood," which is more of a Heideggerian reflection on addressing the challenges of our time. The turn to poetics provides an alternative to the mostly logical analysis of the Philippine condition. The analyzed poems show the Filipino perspective on love, politics, and womanhood.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, the Philippine political and social condition is a kaleidoscope. It mirrors the multiplicity of contexts and multiplicity of dimensions. It is this multiplicity and complexity that shows the richness of our national reality. The elements of hegemony and counterhegemony illustrates the agonistic dimension of our reality and the need to challenge the prevailing order to allow the voices and the perspectives of the marginalized to be brought to the fore.

The project of resistance, of challenging the prevailing order, however, should also be balanced with the striving for unity and solidarity. Such solidarity can be fully attained if the silenced and excluded elements are brought to the fore. It is the constant tension between the striving for alternatives and the striving for solidarity that manifests the unique and colorful appeal of the Filipino consciousness that characterizes us as a nation and as a people.



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