

Two Faces of *Dutertismo*: Two Visions of Democracy in the Philippines

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Abstract

In this paper, I present Randolph “Randy” David’s and Christopher Ryan Maboloc’s readings of President Duterte’s politics and leadership style. The former sees Duterte’s politics and leadership style as a form of authoritarianism while the latter views it as a form of radical politics. While their views can be brushed aside as grounded on their personal taste about the president, this does not do justice to their scholarship and personal integrity. In order to render a meaningful interpretation of their respective views, I propose to read their opposing analyses as two visions of democracy in the Philippines. David’s reading implicitly calls for political actors to stay within the democratic process, which succumbs to the vision of the ruling elite where any move to substantiate democracy must go through a process. On the other hand, Maboloc’s reading maintains that some “undemocratic ways” are important to shake the prevailing political order to move towards its substantive form.

Keywords: Dutertismo, Radical Democracy, Duterte politics, Substantive Democracy

Introduction

In this paper, I present two prevailing readings of Duterte's politics and leadership style by two of the most active social and political commentators in the Philippines today, namely, Randolph "Randy" David and Christopher Ryan Maboloc. Both are enthralled by the Duterte phenomenon yet read it differently. The former interprets Duterte's politics and leadership style as a form of authoritarianism while Maboloc describes it as a form of radical politics. I call these two readings as the two faces of Dutertismo. Here, Dutertismo refers broadly to Duterte's politics and leadership style. The first part of the paper presents David's and Maboloc's readings of Duterte's politics and leadership style. The second part attempts to locate their readings in the two visions of democracy in the Philippines, the electoral or formal, on the one hand, and substantive, on the other. David's objection to Dutertismo could be interpreted as a defense of electoral or formal democracy while Maboloc's favorable reading of it could be understood as a proposal for a need of substantive democracy.

Is Dutertismo a Form of Authoritarianism?

In the 2016 presidential runoff, David wrote an article about the then presidential aspirant Rodrigo Duterte. The title of the article was "Dutertismo." While it was only in his later article that he gave Dutertismo a precise definition, David, in the said essay, was toying with the idea that Duterte's persona or the kind of politics he brings with him is not different from Hitler's Nazism and Mussolini's Fascism. David's hostility to Duterte's style is premised on the latter's admission that "[Duterte] has no [political] program of his own to offer," and "he unleashes a torrent of aggressive and resentful impulses not previously seen in our society." But more than this, he bewails Duterte's "transformation of politics into aesthetics," that is, instead of laying concrete political programs, Duterte exploits the sentiments of the people by capitalizing on their desire to "restore order." Indeed, for David, Duterte's political campaign, or perhaps his whole brand of politics, banks on pure rhetoric to mobilize a throng of followers rather than a rational program of action. Accordingly, he says that

Duterte's brand of politics is a "pure theater."¹ For David, Duterte denigrates politics from the territory of reason.

Writing days before the May 2016 presidential election, David's article can be taken as a last attempt to discredit a person who is out to defeat his preferred candidate — Mar Roxas. After the presidential debate at the University of Pangasinan, David indirectly endorsed Mar Roxas as he unquestioningly passed the criteria for the president of the republic — "communicative rationality," "wholistic mind," and "personal integrity."² Furthermore, his assessment between the two candidates seemingly geared to overshadow Duterte's public support and to push hard a Roxas presidency. Commenting on the two candidates, he said: "Duterte [who spoke next,] rambling about correcting injustice, cleaning up government and not being afraid to copy the programs and plans of his rivals."³ While this statement appears to be objective, the following statement reveals David's bias against Duterte. He opines: "But gone was the reckless rhetoric with which he roused his audiences in the previous debates. This time he sounded almost as if he was determined to try speaking in measured presidential tones."⁴ While my interpretation could be wrong, phrases like, "reckless rhetoric" and "sounded almost as if he was determined," imply that David deemed Duterte as someone who is trying hard to describe himself as appropriate to the presidency. For David, Duterte is not, in any way, a president material, as he does not possess an iota of character appropriate for a president of a nation. David quips, Duterte's style is appropriate as a local mayor; appropriating it in the presidency, Duterte becomes a local mayor for "a nation of 100 million."⁵

¹ Randy David, "Dutertismo," *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/94530/dutertismo#ixzz5MnDSO63X>; 01 May 2016.

² Randy David, "The last presidential debate," *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/94468/the-last-presidential-debate>; 26 April 2016.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Randy David, "A Mayor for a Nation of 100 Million," *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/94752/a-mayor-for-a-nation-of-100-million>; 15 May 2016.

On the other hand, compare the following statements with those of the former. David said:

Roxas' opening statement was a thoughtful meditation on the kind of society he wished to see at the end of his presidency. With an economy of words, he ticked off quantitative targets in various areas, using well-chosen phrases to round off his vision of 'a nation that is free to dream.' One could sense the care with which these ideas were put together to form a coherent whole."⁶

If these words were not a clear endorsement of Roxas, perhaps the next statement is: "IF THE PRESIDENCY were something that could be won in a town hall debate, it would be fairly easy to pick out the next President based on Sunday's final debate. Mar Roxas would come out on top of my list as the best debater, way ahead of the others."⁷As someone writing in a newspaper circulated nationwide, David's views on Duterte and Roxas can hardly be interpreted as apolitical. Clearly, if we are to render judgment to David's Dutertismo within the context of his support for Duterte's closest rival, his branding of Duterte's political style as "Dutertismo" is nothing but a pure and simple propaganda to dissuade Filipinos from electing Duterte to the highest office of the land. But of course, to interpret David's Dutertismo that way is to dishonor a person who constantly provides the nation with incisive analysis of the country's important social and political events. David's social and political analyses, if truth be told, are always grounded on sociological and philosophical insights. Hence, to reduce his reading of Duterte as a simple personal disdain to the current president is to commit a grave injustice to his scholarship.

More than a year later, David defines Dutertismo as:

I refer to the Filipino 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. Trusting

⁶ David, "The last presidential debate."

⁷ *Ibid.*

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 the leader's manifest readiness to take full responsibility for all his decisions.⁸

Here, David adds a caveat. More than an assessment of Duterte's political style, he broadens *Dutertismo* as referring to "an entire political culture, and not just as a label for the person who becomes the repository of the public's expectations."⁹ Furthermore, he says that, "Heads of state like President Duterte are not solitary figures that stumble into the political scene by accident. They are, rather, the contingent products of a culture in which decision-making [are] seen as the duty of the brave and heroic few, rather than as the shared responsibility of active citizens and their elected representatives."¹⁰ Now, *Dutertismo* is no longer about Duterte. It includes those who supported him and those who believe in the power of strong leadership to lift the country out of the quagmire of unequal development. The fault is no longer just Duterte and his brand of politics. It lies deeper—in the messianic culture engulfing the Filipino psyche.

Commenting on Duterte's method after two years in the presidency, David has this to say: "It [the method of Duterte] is one based on the methodical use of the coercive power of the state in order to intimidate dissenters, critics, skeptics, deviants, and non-cooperative individuals who, in his perception, are not taking him seriously."¹¹

Duterte has not become a dictator but he has mastered the subtle and explicit art of intimidation; whether he will become a full-pledged dictator still remains to be seen. What is clear is that

⁸ Randy David, "Where is 'Dutertismo' Headed?" *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/109531/where-is-dutertismo-headed#ixzz5MnEOyDr6>, 17, December 2017.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Randy David, "The Duterte Method," *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/112636/the-duterte-method>, 22 April 2018.

Duterte has tried to live-up to his rhetoric of being a strong leader as shown by his dealings with the Philippine Airlines (PAL), in silencing his critics such as Rappler and former Chief Justice Sereno. David's reading of Duterte's politics as a short-circuited form of authoritarianism is perhaps an appropriate interpretation.

Dutertismo as a form of authoritarianism has gained a following among scholars.¹² This is perhaps through the influence of most media institutions, civil society, the Church, the United Nations, and human rights groups who despise Duterte's method of shaming and naming perceived enemies of the State. Dutertismo, according to these groups, come to mean all that are opposite to the liberal democratic ethos.

Dutertismo as Radical Politics

Christopher Ryan Maboloc posits a different reading of Duterte's politics. Using Chantal Mouffe's idea of radical democracy, Maboloc argues that Duterte's politics and leadership style reflect a kind of "radical politics." Radical democracy [read as politics] is defined as "the abandonment of the concept of a perfect consensus or of a harmonious collective will and the acceptance of the permanence of conflicts and antagonisms."¹³ While this definition brings to mind the contrast of the functionalist and the conflict model of society, it rather presupposes that politics is a site of struggle between competing views, values and interests. Politics in this view highlights the fact that it is power which brings forth social change. Radical politics

¹² See, John Nery, "New Filipino, or Anti-Filipino?" *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/106893/dutertismo-new-filipino-anti->; 5 September 2017; Roland G. Simbulan, "How 'Dutertismo' Can Make A Difference?" *CenPEG*; [article online]; available from http://www.cenpeg.org/2016/ia&c/HOW-DUTERTISMO-CAN_MAKE_A_DIFFERENCE.html; 19 May 2016; Remmon E. Barbaza, "Is Dutertismo Utilitarian?" *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/112777/is-dutertismo-utilitarian#ixzz5MnEm3e9Y> ; 28 April 2018.

¹³ Chantal Mouffe, "Liberalism and Modern Democracy," edited by Carens J. *Democracy and Possessive Individualism*. (New York: Suny Press, 1995) as quoted in Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte," *IQRA*, Vol. 7 (2017), 3-24.

thrives in the permanence of social division—between “us” and “them”—in this social divide the views, values and interests of some groups prevail over the others. Indeed, in the political arena, some groups lose while others win.

For Maboloc, while Duterte fully understands the political dynamics of the country, he also knows how traditional politics hides itself in the language of morality.¹⁴ But politics is not about acting on the basis of agreed norms of all possibly affected persons in rational discourses.¹⁵ It is about mustering a substantial support among the populace to push for a platform of actions. The effective “use of public persuasion” is a *conditio sine qua non* to fulfill this end.¹⁶ For Maboloc, Duterte’s politics stands as a complete “other” to a politics that professes consensus and communicative rationality. It banks on the reality of social division and it is founded on a clear grasp of the social animosity concealed by the rhetoric of reform and social development of Philippine politics, which is elite and Manila centered, American subservient, and church timid,¹⁷ all of which have become the object of Duterte’s ire. Indeed, Duterte’s effective articulation of the political tension between the center and the periphery gave him the momentum to win the national election. Moreover, the people’s support for his programs, even the most criticized “war on drugs,” can be attributed to it.

Examining Duterte’s language during his political campaign—like “*sila ra ang magbuot*,” “*bisaya na pod*,” and “*ato ni, bay*”—Maboloc notes that Duterte has successfully manifested “the reality of social divide that is rooted in cultural hegemony and political dominance” and articulated the “sense of solidarity for the Bisaya-speaking Filipinos”¹⁸ to take the helm of politics. But for Maboloc, Duterte’s politics is not simply an expression of

¹⁴ Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda...” 4.

¹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: A Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 107.

¹⁶ Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda...” 4.

¹⁷ Randolph David, “Handbook for Dictators,” *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/99731/handbook-for-dictators#ixzz4RwvHJDK5>; 8 February 2017.

¹⁸ Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda...” 10-11.

regionalism. It is a “revolution from below” as it “represents the struggle of a generation that has remained anxious due to their uncertain future” and “liberates politics from the fetters of formal institutional discourses and linear dialogues.”¹⁹ Maboloc grounds his contention from the fact that Duterte took decisive action to resolve issues and problems in the country. Cases in point are: SSS pension increase, oligarchic plunder of the economy as exemplified by government’s problem with Roberto Ongpin and Lucio Tan. But most importantly, Duterte wants to rectify the historical injustice suffered by the Bangsamoro. Other than the indecisive Noynoy Aquino government, it is only Duterte who has openly accepted the legitimacy of the Bangsamoro rebellion. And it is only him who “manifest[s] the strong will...to finally offer a lasting solution to a decades old regional rebellion in the South.”²⁰ In July 2018, Congress has finally passed into law the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). Days after, Duterte has signed it into law. The BOL grants greater autonomy to the Bangsamoro.

Maboloc, however, recognizes the limits of Duterte’s politics and leadership style.²¹ Yet, it cannot be denied that he gives it a generous reading. As opposed to David, he interpreted Duterte’s tirades as “emphasi[zing] the value of emotion in politics.”²² While David interpreted it as the aesthetization of politics, Maboloc views it as essential “to show the passion for change.” While David charged Duterte’s language as symptomatic of Nazism and Fascism, Maboloc claims that “[l]anguage does not seek to denote situations. Rather, it is meant to bring import to what the speaker intends to say.”²³

Having acquainted with Maboloc’s views on Duterte’s politics and leadership style, one cannot but think that he puts forward a strong anti-elite polemic. Incidentally, Maboloc is a scholar from the south—from Davao—where Duterte served as a mayor for

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “The Task of Ethics in a Radical World: Post-Colonial Struggles as the Root of Conflict in Philippine Society,” *Phavisminda Journal* Vol. 15 (May 2016), 91-108.

²² Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda...” 9.

²³ *Ibid.*

more than twenty years. Hence, aside from suspecting his favorable reading of Duterte's politics as anti-David, one cannot also set aside that it is more of a defense of an administration that is attacked from several fronts. Maboloc's reading of Duterte's politics as radical politics can be interpreted as a romantic musing of a staunch Duterte supporter. The fact that he is from Davao is part of an equation that cannot be left unnoticed. But like David, Maboloc is a respected scholar. Like David, his commentaries in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* give us critical analysis and insights of the current political and social conditions of the country. Thus, to simply consider him as an apologist of Duterte is to disregard his scholarly integrity and intellectual prowess.

Two Visions of Democracy in the Philippines

If David's and Maboloc's readings of the same phenomenon cannot be reduced to their personal biases, then how can we do justice to them? A meaningful reading of both requires that we move outside the realm of personalistic interpretation; through it, we do not succumb to *ad hominem*. I propose to understand their readings in the two visions of democracy in the Philippines.

The character and dynamics of Philippine politics, particularly the Philippine brand of democracy, has been an object of study by foreign and Filipino scholars. Recently, Quimpo's "contested democracy" aims to provide an alternative framework against the dominant lenses such as the "patron-client, factional framework," "neocolonial or dependency framework," "elite democracy or patrimonial framework" at looking Philippine politics.²⁴

The patron-client, factional framework was developed by Carl Lande. Lande's model was grounded on his critical analysis of the two dominant parties—the nacionalista and liberal—prior to the imposition of Martial Law. By looking at the nature and character of those parties, Lande asserts that party politics in the country revolves around "personal ties" and "exchange of favors" between wealthy patrons and dependent clients from the national to the provincial and local level, and down to the people. Hence, rather

²⁴ Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, *Contested Democracy and the Left in the Philippines After Marcos* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008).

than working for distinct and coherent party programs which reflects the party's sustained commitment to the electorate, politicians are emboldened by the desire to get elected in the office—a condition which necessitates that they cultivate patronage to get the people's vote. The Philippines has no genuine political parties. There are only factions between patrons and clients.²⁵

The neocolonial or dependency was articulated mostly by Filipino nationalists associated with the left like Renato Constantino, Alejandro Lichauco, and Amado Guerrero. These theorists contend that the Philippines is a neocolony of the United States. The Philippines, even after independence, is still controlled, albeit indirectly, by the U.S., as they claim. Particularly, this means that the Philippines continues to be a market of U.S. goods, source of raw materials, and a haven for American investment—particularly of its surplus capital. In this view, the Philippine elite works as an intermediate of foreign interests. The dismal economic performance, especially in agriculture and manufacture, is attributed to the export oriented and import dependent economy. The Philippine state which is dominated by the elite, acts as the coercive organ that protects and furthers foreign interests upon the behest of its neocolonial master.²⁶

The elite democracy or patrimonial framework is a staple model for many political and social scientists. Simbulan's *Modern Principalia*, Anderson's "Cacique Democracy," and Paredes's "Philippine Colonial Democracy" underscore the continuity of the elite in the origin and development of Philippine democracy from the American colonial period to the pre-martial law years. These studies accentuate the following: the elite's ascendancy to economic and political power in the Spanish and American colonial periods; the elite's clandestine and brazen manipulation

²⁵ Carl Lande, "The Philippine Political Party System," *Journal, Southeast Asian History* (March, 1967), 19-39.

²⁶ Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-consciousness* (Manila: Erehwon, 1970); Alejandro Lichauco, *The Lichauco Paper: Imperialism in the Philippines* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973); Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Ta Kung Pao, 1971).

of state apparatuses to protect and expand their interests; and the elite's employment of various strategies to stay in power. Overall, the American colonial policies on the disposition of friar lands, the preferential access of Philippine agricultural products to American market, and the gradual democratization of the country have given the elite's enough leverage over the poor; and hence, cementing their hold in the social hierarchy. When the Philippines was granted full independence, the elite has metamorphosed into a national oligarchy—deliberately appropriating the political and economic resources at their disposal.²⁷ Simbulan's study is instructive: the ruling class, the modern *principalia* as he called it, is comprised of landowners, bankers, and big businessmen—hold[ing] considerable stake in shipping and transportation industries, mass media, universities and colleges.²⁸ Thus, key legislations and policy directions on exportation, importation, manufacturing, and land reform were used not only to further their interests but also as protective gears to enhance their wealth and resources. Often they benefited loans, contracts and licenses offered by the government and its attached agencies.²⁹

Indeed, from the advent of Philippine democracy, to its pre-martial law years, the Marcos years and the post-Edsa regimes, Philippine politics is dominated by the elite; political parties revolve around personalities and “personal ties;” elections are characterized by manipulation, violence, and intimidation; social justice programs are watered-down and tattered by loopholes. The pre-authoritarian politics failed to “enact necessary legislation to solve mounting socioeconomic problems” such as genuine land reform, local autonomy, rational planning on infrastructures and tax reforms.³⁰ In the Marcos years, politics was transformed into a “politics of plunder.”³¹ The return of

²⁷ See, Dante C. Simbulan, “A Study of the Socio-Economic Elite in Philippine Politics and Government, 1946-1963,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Australia National University, 1965); Benedict Anderson, “Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams,” *New Left Review*, 169 (1998), 3-31; Ruby Paredes, *Philippine Colonial Democracy* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989).

²⁸ Dante C. Simbulan, “A Study of the Socio-Economic Elite...,” 105-111.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 295, 369.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-17.

³¹ Belinda Aquino, *Politics of Plunder: The Philippines Under Marcos* (Quezon City: Great Books Trading, 1987).

Philippine democracy through Edsa was also a frustration. The cumulative result of these was the lack of national direction as politics was emboldened by personal aggrandizement rather than about national interest.

Over the years, various studies deepened the elite democracy or patrimonial framework. Paul Hutchcroft's *Booty Capitalism*, John Sidel's *Bossism*, McCoy's *Anarchy of Families* and Jennifer Franco's *Clientelist Electoral Regimes* develop themes on "weak state" and "strong oligarchical families." In these studies, oligarchical families are pictured as predators siphoning and making use of state resources to enrich and perpetuate themselves in power. Moreover, oligarchical families employ various ways of political control from benign patronage to outright intimidation, coercion, and violence.³²

The dominance of each of these frameworks, according to Quimpo, corresponds to particular moments in Philippine politics, the patron-client, factional framework in pre-martial law years, the neocolonial or dependency framework in authoritarian years, and the elite democracy or patrimonial framework in the post-martial law years. The patron-client, factional framework slowly loses its explanatory powers before the martial law years as it fails to account the role of violence, intimidation, and coercion in the rivalries for power that defines the political atmosphere prior to the imposition of martial law. The neocolonial or dependency framework gained supremacy in the authoritarian years as Marcos increasingly relied for U.S. support to stay in power. It waned after Marcos was deposed and the elite came back to power. With the elite's return after Edsa 1, elite democracy and its patrimonial framework, developed by Simbulan and other scholars, was revived and regarded as an important model to explain the country's political conundrum.

³² Paul Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); John Sidel, *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Alfred McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994); Jennifer Franco, *Elections and Democratizations in the Philippines* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Those frameworks, however, Quimpo avers, privilege a “static, one sided, and top-down view of Philippine politics.”³³ The everyday struggles and initiatives of the people which sometimes manifest as political outburst in the forms of protests, strikes, or outright rebellion are muted. The HUK rebellion, the communist insurgency, the Bangsamoro and Indigenous People’s struggle for self-determination and other social movements articulate an alternative view of democracy that focuses on substance rather than form. For these groups, freedom is freedom from hunger, domination and from sociopolitical and economic structures that confine some sectors of the society to live in marginal and sub-marginal conditions. Efforts of these groups to challenge the status quo push the logic of formal democracy. Integrating the logic of their struggles in a theoretical model that seeks to explain the character and dynamics of Philippine politics is necessary if Philippine democracy is to move forward.

“Contested democracy” hopes to do justice to the role of social movements in pushing Philippine democracy to its substantive form. Far from being a “patron-client,” “neocolonial,” or “elite,” Philippine democracy is a contested one, Quimpo asserts. Recognizing the contested nature of Philippine democracy is essential to the democratization process as it does not only tell what is wrong with Philippine democracy, it informs the agent, the process, and the immediate goals of democratization. Contested democracy banks on social movements, the necessity of contestations, and redressing the historical injustices ossified by generations of social inequality. In other words, democratization proceeds through intense social contestations; the primary agents of which are the social movements rather than the traditional political actors. Social movements address the chasm between formal democratic institutions and the need to substantiate it by confronting or directly challenging those who are in power.

As opposed to the three dominant frameworks, contested democracy privileges the role of social movements in the process of democratization. When theoretical models are silent about social movements, the unit of analysis tends to focus on social forces that muddled democracy. For Quimpo, the future of

³³ Quimpo, *Contested Democracy...*, 41.

Philippine democracy lies in the social movement's engagement with traditional political actors by challenging their hold on power and by pushing for alternative forms of governance and politics. Indeed, for Quimpo, social movements must confront traditional political actors head on. It is through this, he believes, that the logic of democracy is moved towards the substantive part.

While Quimpo insists on the contested nature of Philippine democracy, he also criticizes the extreme left—the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the New People's Army (NPA), and the organizations allied with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)—as they are undemocratic in their internal operations and engagement with the government. Instead of participating in the democratic processes, such as elections, the extreme left clings to revolution as the privilege path to social change. Quimpo pins his hopes in the emergent left as they have proven that the democratic process is the only viable option towards social transformation. Quimpo wants contestation to take place within the democratic space.

The point is that Quimpo's *Contested Democracy* and the dominant frameworks in the study of Philippine politics have successfully pointed out that there are two visions of democracy in the country. The first is the vision of the ruling elite. In this vision, democracy is no more than electoral and formal. The second is the vision of those who are mostly in the peripheries such as the peasants, wage earners, laborers, fisher folks, women and indigenous peoples. In this vision, democracy is about the equitable distribution of wealth and the people's sovereignty through popular participation. Some segments of the middle and upper classes also share this vision. For the ruling class, the formal democratic institutions and the holding of periodic elections are enough to make the country a democracy. For the marginalized sectors, democracy means agrarian reform, just wages, roof over one's head, meaningful local autonomy and people's participation in governance.

Electoral or formal democracy and substantive are not necessarily at odds with each other. Formal democracy, if taken

and practiced sincerely, will not only realize the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances but will also serve the ideals of justice and fair procedures resulting to social development and equity. As Maboloc opines, “[D]emocracy is about two things: substance and procedure.”³⁴ Substance necessitates procedure while procedure implies substance. Barrowing the Kantian jargon, procedure without substance is empty while substance without procedure is blind. In short, the pursuit for personal and economic well-being cannot be justified if it is done at the expense of the people’s liberty and freedom. Indeed, the quest for substantive democracy cannot be realized arbitrarily especially at the expense of just and fair procedures. In a fully functioning democracy, there is no distinction between the formal and substantive part.

As it is known, the formal democratic institutions in the country such as political parties, representative government, bicameral congress and a national government with three coequal branches originated from the American colonial era. Ideally, formal democratic institutions are necessary structures which channel people’s interests and preferences, in the form of laws, government programs and policies to attain substantive freedom and social development. Periodic elections serve as the nexus of formal democratic institutions as it holds politicians accountable. Through periodic elections, leaders are recruited, platforms are made, and the government of the day is chosen, renewed and legitimated. Furthermore, political parties vying for the people’s vote are compelled to initiate policies that reflect people’s interests. Yet, in more than a century of formal democratic exercise in the country, majority of the Filipino people have yet to experience the kind of life envisioned by these democratic ideals. Even the most admired EDSA People Power Revolution that toppled the dictatorial rule of President Marcos did not make a dent in the people’s lives as Philippine politics returned to its old ways and practices. In many studies, scholars faulted the ruling elite for the country’s woes.

³⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “The Paradox of Philippine Democracy,” *Inquirer.Net*; [article online]; available from <http://opinion.inquirer.net/87705/the-paradox-of-philippine-democracy#ixzz5NjKoR1uZ>, 18 April 2018.

Quimpo's contested democracy tries to explain that the future of Philippine democracy lies with the subordinate's confrontation with the ruling powers. For Quimpo, this contestation happens in the democratic space such as elections. However, history tells that meaningful contestations do not only happen in the democratic space, as Quimpo suggests. The Huk rebellion, the communist insurgency, the Bangsamoro and Indigenous People's struggle for self-determination manifest as an open defiance of an existing regime. The visions of subaltern groups are not fought within formal democratic processes, although sometimes they resort to some democratic exercises like protests and participation in the electoral process like what the Democratic Alliance did, the ruling class often employs subtle and brazen methods to thwart any desire for social reforms. The communist insurgency and Bangsamoro struggle have forced the government to open the negotiating table to resolve "historical injustices."

While the contested nature of Philippine democracy is fundamentally grounded in the opposing visions of those who benefit and lose from the current system, traditional political actors want any move towards substantive democracy to be done through the democratic process, any expressions, more than this, is out rightly branded as undemocratic. But history might reveal that a move toward substantive democracy would necessitate intense contestation even to the point of taking arms.

To confine the act of contestation within the democratic process deliberately throws the social movement's quest for substantive democracy to the wolves, Bello and Gershman brilliantly explain why the ruling powers insist the democratic process,

bourgeois democracy in the Philippines is a complex system of outer fortifications, minefields, barbed wire, and outer trenches that disperse and defuse revolutionary challenges long before they reach the inner trench that hides the repressive core of class rule... elite democracy provides a sophisticated process of screening out fundamental challenges to the social status quo... this

screening process is based not only on mass socialization that brands radical proposals as illegitimate and suspect but also on the enormous advantage conferred by wealth and resources in the long, drawn-out and complex process of creating political parties, fielding candidates, waging lengthy political campaigns, dominating in the media, and last, but not least, bribing the electorate.³⁵

Through the democratic process, the hegemonic position of the ruling class is maintained. Importantly, this tells us, the ruling class's vision of democracy is not only about democracy's form. It implicitly suggests that those who aim for social transformation conduct their political activities within the ambit of the ruling power. The ruling class wants those who want to substantiate Philippine democracy to work within the democratic process.

Two Faces of *Dutertismo* through the Prism of the Two Visions of Democracy

It is easy to attribute David and Maboloc's views of the Duterte phenomenon to their personal taste or to their political inclinations. This does not, however, do justice to their scholarship. Furthermore, the current political atmosphere in the country necessitates caution in labeling certain perspectives. Most often, people quickly label those who have critical stance against Duterte as belonging to the opposition or the *yellowtard* and those who support him as a *Dutertard*. Name calling does not only promote hate, it hinders meaningful discussions which are essential to democracy.

There are two ways to make sense of David's notion of *Dutertismo*. Firstly, as a prophetic warning against authoritarianism and as an implicit call for those who aim for substantive democracy to stay in the democratic process.

Recent events such as the return of the Marcoses as prominent figures in national politics and the election of Duterte as the country's president have seem to reinforce, if not confirm, the

³⁵ Walden Bello and John Gershman, "Democratization and Stabilization in the Philippines," *Critical Sociology*, 17 (Spring 1990), 51-52.

view that the Filipino people are turning to strong leadership. When Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., the son and a namesake of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., who ruled the country for more than twenty years, came out as a preferred vice-president in pre-election surveys in the 2016 presidential election and Rodrigo Duterte, the former Mayor of the City of Davao, who is known for his authoritarian leadership, and who has been suspected of human rights violations for allegedly being the man behind the Davao Death Squad was elected as the country’s president, the defenders of Philippine democracy quickly came out and reminded the people of the horror of the martial law years. The prominence of Marcos Jr. and the election of Duterte are interpreted by some scholars as symptomatic of the people’s amnesia of the martial law and a clear flirtation with authoritarian rule. The political pendulum, after more than thirty years of democratic experiment, seems to be swinging back to authoritarianism. But whether these developments culminate to—what the defenders of democracy fears most—authoritarianism, only time can tell. It is not, however, naïve to think that the atmosphere of authoritarianism seems to be lurking in the corner. Indeed, the possibility of an authoritarian return cannot be simply brushed aside given the present social condition.

David is well aware that any able demagogue can exploit the present situation and bring into fruition the reality of authoritarian rule. In this case, Dutertismo could be read as a prophetic warning to remind the people not to be trapped again with the sweet promises of authoritarianism as an easy path to solve the country’s woes. David reminds that we’ve been here before—during the Marcos years. Reminiscing the Martial Law era, he wrote: “Marcos and his henchmen had read Philippine society very well. They knew that its democratic institutions benefited only a small segment of the nation... Marcos projected himself as someone who knew what he was doing.”³⁶ Building on the people’s dissatisfaction of the post-war democracy, Marcos has successfully exploited the people’s sentiment. Like Duterte, he appealed to strong leadership and people believed him, including some brilliant academicians and technocrats. And yet we knew

³⁶ *Ibid.*

how the Marcos experiment resulted to an unprecedented horror. For David, we are in the same situation now. And, “[T]he will to authoritarianism is alive in all societies that seek an easy way out of the complexities of modern politics in the simplistic rationality of command leadership.”³⁷ The Marcos years should have given us a lesson.

David’s criticism of Duterte’s politics and leadership style suggests that any move towards social equity and development must proceed through the complex process of modern governance and institutional procedures. He suspects that simplistic approaches, such as strong leadership, to redress the country’s problems, might bring more harm than good. However, to directly brand the president’s politics and leadership style as a form of authoritarianism is likewise laden with problems. Firstly, to simply uphold the democratic process is to be oblivious of the fact how these mechanisms were subverted and bastardized by the ruling powers. In fact, historically, it was the glaring manipulation of these mechanisms which led people to disillusionment and hence opening the void for the possibility of authoritarianism. Secondly, to unquestioningly agree and accept David’s position does not only make us complicit, it places us aboveground of the historical origins and development of the nation’s democratic experience. David’s reading is possessed by the amnesia of how the ruling elite make use of the democratic processes to perpetuate themselves in power.

Maboloc’s favorable reading of the president’s politics and leadership style takes cognizance of “undemocratic ways” to deepen and substantiate democracy. We need not go far, Edsa 1 and 2 are living models how extra-constitutional mechanisms changed a corrupt regime and brought back the democratic ideals. In the president’s mind, to address criminality, corruption, drug menace, and the Bangsamoro’s quest for greater autonomy will gain substantial foothold if done within and outside the democratic ways. While the president threatens to kill criminals, drug lords and users, he did not make any explicit declarations or directives to the Philippine National Police to carry his orders outside the bounds of law. What is certain is that the president is

³⁷ *Ibid.*

playing his card well. He knows that a little of “authoritarian atmosphere” is necessary to shaken Philippine democracy.

By reading the Duterte phenomenon as a form of radical politics, Maboloc appeals to the long history of struggle by subordinate classes. In this spectrum, the desire for social change is expressed outside the bounds of the democratic process. Politics is radical. It is *Realpolitik*. It is violent and coercive. While David privileges the institutional approach to social change, Maboloc amplifies the vision of subordinate classes as recourse to social transformation.

More than anything, David’s and Maboloc’s readings reveal the deep-seated division in the country. While it is important to recognize the value of democratic ethos such as rational deliberation, the absence of coercion to get people to do something, following rules and procedures, it is also necessary to be aware that majority of the Filipinos have grown weary, if not totally discontented with the democratic rhetoric. If all of what we have today is the only thing that Philippine democracy is to offer, I think, those in the bottom of the social ladder are willing to bet in strong leadership or in any form of authoritarianism just to attain the kind of life they want. It is risky and people know it. But, I think, people are willing to gamble with that kind of uncertainty rather than pin their hopes to a process that has not yielded results for so long. Rephrasing Marx, “[the subordinate classes] have nothing to lose but their chains.” As long as the Philippine society does not address social inequality in political and economic resources, the ghost of “undemocratic ways” as a way to radically resolve the country’s lingering sociopolitical and economic problems will always have a place in the hearts of the people. If the current sociopolitical and economic structures continue, a lot of Dutertes are still to come.

Will Duterte’s brand of politics bring the desired social change? It is up for history to tell us. For now, critical and supportive readings of Duterte’s politics and leadership style, like that of David and Maboloc, are necessary. Any direction towards authoritarianism must be criticized at all cost. But, any efforts to challenge and shaken the ruling order are all the more important.

We hope that this tension will bring the creative spirit of the Filipinos buried by years of colonization, domination and oppression. The rise of Duterte and the politics he is bringing brought to light the longings of the marginalized sectors which have been left in the shadows for so long. Philippine politics can no longer remain “business as usual.” Something ought to be done.

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