

Chantal Mouffe's Radical Democracy and Rodrigo Duterte's Radical Politics: A Second Reply to Critics

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Abstract

This paper responds to the critics of radical democracy in the Philippines. Critics say that I misused Chantal Mouffe's ideas on the subject. It is their contention that I misinterpreted radicalism to mean as a radical break from liberalism. Critics also suggest that my position is narrowly focused on the conflict between President Duterte and the elites, ignoring ordinary people or the *demos* as the essence of radical democracy. I believe that the claims they make are erroneous. Duterte's rise to power in 2016 was a reaction to elite politics in the country and the failures of EDSA People Power I. In both instances, the clamor for true reform or change came from the people themselves. Critics suggest that I failed to explicate the theory of Mouffe's agonism, which is at the heart of her radical democracy project. Duterte's conflict with the political elites in the country is a testament to the agonism or struggle in Philippine society. By dismantling elitism in the country, the consolidation of our democracy takes a "radical turn" and comes with the man who embodies the underrepresented voices in Philippine society. The point of the matter is that Duterte simply gave radical politics a substantive meaning. It is the same kind of radicalism that actually seeks a just, equal, and democratic way of life.

Keywords: Radical democracy; President Duterte; Radical Politics; Elitism; Liberalism

Democracy, Elitism, and History: Preliminary Insights

Sometime in 2017, I received an email from the National University of Singapore Press. They asked me to write an op-ed for Wataru Kusaka's new book, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*. The subsequent article was entitled "The Moral Consciousness of the Poor," which the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* published on June 3, 2017.¹ While I worked on Rawls and

¹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "The Moral Consciousness of the Poor." INQUIRER.NET. 2017, June 3. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/104492/political-consciousness-poor>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

2 CRB MABOLOC

his political theory for my dissertation, Philippine Politics was not really my field of interest. Nevertheless, I applied for a research grant. Ateneo de Davao University funded that study, the topic of which was, “Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte.” The research took two years to finish. The output was presented at Nagoya University in Japan during the First Philippine Politics and Culture Conference in 2018, upon the invitation of Professor Kusaka. My work produced several papers and a controversial book, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, to quote Kusaka, who wrote the Foreword. Putting those circumstances aside, let me begin with the book review by UP Diliman’s Symel Noelin de Guzman-Daulat:

Prevalent among scholars is the adoption of a leftist-leaning critique of the [Duterte] administration, primarily due to its unapologetic ratification of violence against drug pushers and users who subsequently have been portrayed as the cause of society’s major ills. As most academic opinions on Duterte appear to skew toward the unfavorable, a well-researched and well-written defense of the former president and the circumstances which propelled his rise and subsequent hold to power offers a fresh perspective often absent in the scholarly realm.²

Daulat’s analysis of *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte* does justice to what I intended to accomplish, which is not to deify Duterte, but to point out that the first President from Mindanao was the product of the Filipino people’s resistance against elite rule. She says, for instance, that the book “succeeds in presenting a historical exploration on the root of sociopolitical and cultural divide between the Mindanawons and the rest of the Philippines.”³ It is not an accident that a man like Duterte would rise into the occasion. Kusaka first theorized that Duterte acts like a folk hero.⁴ Beyond that appeal to folklore, however, is the reality that Mindanao has been “suffering from centuries of institutional neglect and oppression, the people of Mindanao sought to fight back against a system which relegated

² Symel Noelin de Guzman-Daulat, “Christopher Ryan Maboloc’s *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*.” *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, Volume 26, Number 3 (2022): 101.

³ *Ibid.*, 102

⁴ Wataru Kusaka, “Bandit Grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politics.” *Philippine Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 55.

their struggle as unsightly and barbaric.”⁵ Daulat is correct in saying that “the result of this revolt, Duterte - a seemingly simple everyman - dignified an anti-elite conduct which celebrates his vulgarity,” and who deliberately “pokes fun at formalities.”⁶

My work on radical democracy in the Philippines has been accused of creating theoretical contradictions.⁷ Such a reaction is actually due to the discomfort of many academics when President Duterte comes into the picture, the former president being a divisive figure. But to put things into context, Ian Clark Parcon explains that there are two ways of analyzing the leadership style of former President Duterte – the first has something to do with the deliberative model of democratic discourse while the other happens to be the agonistic model.⁸ The first is rooted in modern liberalism while the latter can be explained by means of the concept of a struggle or resistance. In my past writings, I have argued that President Duterte's anti-elitist approach was a result of the decades-old oppression of Mindanao at the hands of powerful interests in the capital.⁹ The Ilustrado-led Manila-centric type of governance, which has roots in the country's colonial past, excluded the island in the many aspects of economic progress and human development.

According to Parcon, it is not enough to simply resist elitism.¹⁰ It is in this way that my critics misunderstand my work. Such is due to the fact that critics believe that my radical democracy project is narrowly focused on the idea of antagonism or conflict. The objective of radical democracy is to empower ordinary people by means of a struggle that in the end must

⁵ Daulat, “Christopher Ryan Maboloc's Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte,” 102.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kyle Barte, “A Critique of Christopher Ryan Maboloc's Appropriation of Chantal Mouffe's Theory of Radical Democracy,” *Kritike*, Volume 17, Number 2 (2023): 18-19, 26, 32.

⁸ Ian Clark Parcon, “Understanding Dutertismo: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* Volume 49, Number 3 (2021): 133.

⁹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, (Cotabato City: Elzstyle Publishing, 2022), 130-132.

¹⁰ Parcon, “Understanding Dutertismo: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” 134.

4 CRB MABOLOC

reform society and its liberal institutions. It is for this reason that the last chapter of my book mentions the existence of a predatory state that must be reformed if the country were to become a true democracy.¹¹ Indeed, the elites in the Philippines “divide the spoils of this corrupt system”.¹² As a result, Philippine politics has always been about the contestation of power from top to bottom. But the enemy, contrary to what critics portray, is not President Duterte. The enemy is elitism. It is the root cause of the injustice in Philippine society that has impoverished the lives of millions and denied Mindanao its fair share of the nation’s wealth.

While I maintain the point that the birth of radical democracy in the Philippines is a reaction to the rule of the elite, the ultimate goal is to put an end to such an unjust system.¹³ The problem is that no one wants to fight the powers-that-be who control Philippine society and politics. It was only President Duterte who made that apparent in his reactions to elitism in terms of what I call his “grammar of dissent”.¹⁴ Critics often depend on Mouffe’s musings, even interviewing the philosopher to strengthen their weak position, but they simply neglect the fact that the Philippines during the governance of President Duterte was a different story compared to the lackadaisical leadership of the Aquino administrations. For some obvious reasons, I don’t think that Mouffe has a clear understanding or even an awareness of the Philippine situation. The people who interviewed her, in this way, simply reduced the philosopher into an armchair analyst. Facts do not lie. Duterte put the political and economic elites in the country on their toes. He also put the Philippines on the global map by challenging

¹¹ Reynaldo Ileto explains that politics in the Philippines is some form of a debt relation. The politician owes it to his patron his election into office. The masses, however, who often begs for favor from the politician, will feel obliged to elect the same into power. See his *Pasyon and Revolution*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979), 9.

¹² Paul Hotchcroft and Joel Rocamora, “Strong Demands and Weak Institutions: The Origins and Evolution of the Democratic Deficit in the Philippines,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 3 (2): 259.

¹³ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “President Rodrigo Duterte and the Birth of Radical Democracy in the Philippines,” *International Journal of Politics and Security*, Volume 2, Number 3 (2020): 117.

¹⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “President Duterte’s grammar of dissent”, INQUIRER.NET. 2018, August 9. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/115226/president-dutertes-grammar-dissent>, Accessed on November 27, 2023,

US Imperialism with his “pivot to China”.¹⁵ In reality, the reason why the ways of the former President remain impactful in stirring the emotions of the Filipino masses is that he actually embodies the resistance of unheard voices and hidden narratives when it comes to the history of our nation. Some critics, due to their ideological interests and hatred for the man, use propaganda in order to paint a different picture.¹⁶ To cite one example, the implementation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law is a testament of the will of the former President which was critical in the peacebuilding process. It is preposterous to think that such an achievement does not qualify as a type of democratic consolidation that liberalism wishes to accomplish.

The problem happens to be in the assertion that Duterte's leadership style is a ‘radical break’ from the politics that is practiced in the country. Benjiemen Labastin explains that this conception comes from the fact that Duterte is more concerned with the substantive elements of social justice rather than its procedural character.¹⁷ Yet, some critics zeroed in only the consequences of Duterte's violent approach to criminality, forgetting the other big reason as to why he was elected into office. There is no need to mention the Mamasapano incident and Super Typhoon Yolanda, both of which are telling in terms of the failures of the country's basic institutions during the Presidency of Benigno Aquino III. In fact, it was not the poor who actually put Rodrigo Duterte into power during the 2016 Presidential Elections. According to Dr. Julio Teehankee, it was the country's growing middle-class, especially young professionals, who were fed up of the weak leadership of PNOY.¹⁸ Indeed, the failures of the Liberal Party reveal the institutional weakness of the Aquino government. But while Duterte was a strong leader, there is no evidence that he tried to dismantle the country's liberal institutions, contrary to the suggestion of KM Barte who said that

¹⁵ Parcon, “Understanding Dutertismo: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” 134.

¹⁶ See Regletto Imbong, Jerry Imbong and Patrick Torres, “Chantal Mouffe on the Radical Politics of Rodrigo Duterte,” *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, Volume 21, Special Issue (2022): 88-117.

¹⁷ Benjiemen Labastin, “Two Faces of Dutertismo: Two Visions of Democracy in the Philippines”, *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Special Issue (2018): 34.

¹⁸ Julio Teehankee, “Duterte's Resurgent Nationalism in the Philippines: A Discursive Institutional Analysis.” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35:3 (2016): 73.

Duterte is a “contradiction” to the purpose of radical democracy which is to enable just institutions to realize equality in society. With power and all government resources at his party’s disposal, the former president could have easily transformed Philippine society with his revolutionary fervor. But instead, he chose the path that followed the dynamics of politics, when it comes to the pursuit of peace and his socio-economic programs. While they insist that Duterte used violence against drug personalities, nowhere in my writings did I endorse the President’s war on drugs.

One important background that is ignored by many critics is the fact that the rise of Duterte is connected to communal politics. There cannot be a universal characterization of nation states.¹⁹ The politics of nation-states is a reaction to liberal politics.²⁰ Modern liberalism is about celebrating human freedom as the ultimate value. The modern man, being the child of the Enlightenment, puts reason at the pedestal. According to John Rawls, social cooperation is only possible among free and equal (rational) human beings.²¹ This means that the parties to the social contract should be able to put aside their selfish interests in the pursuit of the principles of justice.²² However, beyond the hypothetical method employed by Rawls, the idea of social cooperation is actually based on the concept of mutual advantage. The “circumstances of justice” would require that any party to the contract should be able to benefit from the arrangement.

Modern liberalism, in this regard, is entangled with the demands of reason. The state can find legitimacy only in perfectly reasoned judgments on the basis of deliberative politics. But this is where critics miss the point. Deliberative politics in the country is not feasible given the elitist nature of its democracy. Its present societal structures favor the few among us. Radical democracy, hence, must be open to other ways of accommodating underrepresented voices. Such can explain why sentimentality matters in understanding the appeal of Duterte. “Ato ni Bay” was a battle-cry of the Bisaya. This points to the aspiration of Bisaya-speaking Filipinos to give

¹⁹ Graham Taylor, “The End of the Nation State: The Disarticulation of Power and Identity.” *The New Political Sociology*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 55.

²⁰ Parcon, “Understanding Duterteism: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” 135.

²¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

a chance to one of their kind. The same is important to realize the agenda for Mindanao. Peace in region has been about broken promises.²³ The fact that Duterte was able to get the trust of Muslim leaders meant that he was serious in reforming the country's social institutions by paying attention to oppression of Muslim Filipinos. Given the neglect and the exclusion of the Bangsamoro, they found a strong voice in a leader like Duterte.

The agonism that they insist from my elaboration can be found in the idea that Duterte was the embodiment of Mindanao's struggle against centralized rule.²⁴ Spain then made sure that the Philippines can be easily managed by bribing its way into total control during the colonial era. The scheme resulted in the exclusion of Mindanao, a historical narrative that Duterte used to advance his campaign. A reluctant candidate, it was not Duterte who catapulted himself into the highest position. It was the clamor of the masa (masses) for a leader who behaves, talks, and acts like them. Daulat rightly says that "suffice it to say that we acknowledge Duterte's [merit] to lie not on the results of his actions but through the embodiment of his dissent."²⁵ In this regard, Daulat believes, "by depicting himself as committed to dismantling a politics devoid of people, Duterte was able to emerge as a figure of resistance and plurality in the political field."²⁶ Duterte's main role as a radical leader was to cause change in the political landscape of Philippine society.²⁷ It is amazing how critics missed such a point. In many ways, Duterte has executed the important function of the state. The problem of politics in the Philippines is the reality of economic power players who dictate the way the people are supposed to live their lives. When Duterte became the President, he changed the configuration of power and gave it a new face.

²³ Amina Rasul, *Broken Peace: Assessing the 1996 GRP-MILF Final Peace Agreement*. (Makati: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2007), 81.

²⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "Situating the Mindanao agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte", *Iqra*, Vol.4, 2017 pp. 3-24.

²⁵ Daulat, "Christopher Ryan Maboloc's Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte," 103.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "The Predatory State and Radical Politics: The case of the Philippines," *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2 (2019): 162.

The real purpose of Mouffe's theory when it comes to my work on Philippine politics is anchored on her debate with Rawls.²⁸ The confusion of my critics comes from their insistence of invoking the overall project of Mouffe as a background when it is clear that I am only using the theory of the philosopher in a particular context. This is the reason why they suggest that I misused Mouffe's theory, saying for instance that Mouffe cannot be supportive of Duterte's style. They underestimated my work. When Rawls talks about the subject of justice, he meant to say that the basic structure is a product of a consensus on the part of the people when it comes to the kind of society that they desire to establish. Rawls assumes that rational beings can find something in common in their basic political principles. Mouffe, meanwhile, says that conflict, not agreement, is the starting point of politics.²⁹ But she doesn't stop there. Borrowing from Carl Schmitt, she pursues the distinction between "politics" and the "political". For Schmitt, politics has something to do with institutions and their basic functions. The political, on the other hand, explains the relations of power in society.

It is such relations of power that ultimately defines what is to become of a political relationship. Power, according to Michel Foucault, cannot be separated from knowledge. It contains not only the ability to make things efficient. Its function is to normalize the state of things.³⁰ Power emanates where the truth is. Power, in this way, does not stay in one position but in the interplay of forces and systems. Such a system defines who controls people. In the context of the critical stance of academics who have strong reactions to my work on radical politics, they actually mistake the trees for the forest. The historical perspective is important in understanding radical democracy in the Philippines. It is not just about Mouffe's elegant theory. President Duterte has shaken the comfort of the elites and shattered their grip into power. A radical way of looking at things from a "philosophical" vantage point, in this way, can be perceived as a threat that can alter the realities of power and the purposes with which society is designed. Indeed, it is high time that underrepresented voices are heard, and the Mindanao or the South lead the way in terms of our search for the truth in this world.

²⁸ Chantal Mouffe, "Liberalism and Modern Democracy," in *Democracy and Possessive Individualism*, ed. Joseph Carens, (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 178.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, "Truth/power." In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. (New York: Pantheon Book, 1984), 20.

Between Liberalism and Communal Politics: On Why Good People Fight Each Other

Jonathan Haidt explains that our political leanings are not rooted in rationality at all but in group dynamics.³¹ Haidt argues that men all evolved from group attachments in the same way as primates. There is no flaw to this design as we are all rooted in a moralistic strife given the primordial reality of social conflict and violence between groups. In this way, group differences and disagreements are a natural phenomenon. Since we use logical reasoning in judging human character, we can easily see others as different, hence, all the labels we attribute to our adversaries. In the natural selection process of species, morality has no primordial relevance. We act in a particular way because we want to defend our own kind or the group that we belong to.

Good people fight because, Haidt argues, morality is not just about questions of “virtue” and “fairness”. Haidt says that it also concerns issues pertaining to loyalty, belief, and commitment. We are acting like bees that dwell in a hive.³² On the part of a person, his gut feeling is telling him that his position is right because of his sense of loyalty to a cause. This explains why conflict is good for society as it teaches people how to value trust. Politics is about how we choose and embrace our associative relations with one another. This is clear in an ethnic divide. Unity is an illusion. There is no use pursuing a universal moral paradigm because the human mind is more sophisticated than that. People can judge a person all they want but he will stick to his political choices because it is not about what he thinks, but how he feels.

Communal politics is about the people's sense of belongingness. In this sense, it matters to truly understand the meaning of radical politics on the basis of social attachments, and not just logic. Precisely, the mistake comes from the liberal position that freedom essentially has one meaning. Some critics refuse to acknowledge that the problem is firmly rooted in the elitist nature of Philippine democracy. There is a moral divide that pits the elites as a group on the one hand, and the powerless, on the other.³³

³¹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 20.

³² *Ibid.*, 44.

³³ Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 4-5.

The resistance to such, especially in Mindanao, can be seen in terms of how people have developed their sense of group solidarity. In the Bisaya-speaking regions, language has played a huge role – “ato ni bay” (He is one of us) solidified the message of Duterte as someone who is not only one of them, but an authentic leader who will fight for the welfare of the “masa” (people).³⁴ Language is social in nature. To say that the language of solidarity of the Bisaya-speaking people only concerns one man is to undermine the sense of unity of the people who find their self-expression in the language they speak.

The harsh criticisms against my body of work on radical democracy are ideological in nature. It’s about their anti-Duterte stance. To cite an example, I questioned why the theme of a forthcoming regional conference was “Philosophy in the Time of Tyranny.” I argued that if Duterte were a tyrant, then how come academics like us are still free to gather and discuss anything under the heat of the sun? In truth, some critics simply misled Mouffe during that interview, who for obvious reasons has not read one of articles.³⁵ The truly important scholars in the field know that the basic idea of radical politics points to the distinct approach in which liberalism can be anchored. The whole contention is simple. Rawls, as mentioned above, connects politics to public morals. But for Mouffe, everything begins with contestation. As such, power relations should be altered in order to achieve the ends of social justice. This is what Parcon means when he talks about corrective agonism, another work that my critics also misinterpreted.³⁶

The problem with Rawls is that he begins his starting point by way of a methodical device that imagines the society as something that can be formed based on abstract principles.³⁷ This ahistorical positioning simply puts aside all the reality of structural injustices that need to be corrected if people are to establish a truly just socio-political order. Mouffe starts with the idea of conflict when it comes to the nature of political relationships. The “we/they” and “enemy/friend” relations should not be dismissed but

³⁴ Maboloc, “The Predatory State and Radical Politics: The case of the Philippines,” 165.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Parcon, “Understanding Duterteism: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” 135-136.

³⁷ See Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “What is Structural Injustice?”, *Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, Volume 47, Number 4 (2019): 1186-1187.

accepted as the necessary foundation of the “political”.³⁸ One cannot just put away an adversary. One must consider the same as worthy in order to give meaning to one's struggle. That is why it's called an “agonism”.³⁹ It recognizes the importance and value of the struggle. While Rawls seeks a perfect consensus, Mouffe maintains that the value of this struggle is the essence of democratic relations.⁴⁰

Correcting the Past: The Philippine Revolution and the Roots of a Moral Divide

In his Foreword to *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, Kusaka characterized my critics as people who would think that the book is an attempt to defend the former President. But he also added that to serious scholars in Philippine political theory, my insights are a fresh approach in terms of understanding the proposal for radical change in the country.⁴¹ Teehankee recognized this when he said during a lecture in an online conference that my work was the first to use a post-modern lens in analyzing the Duterte presidency. Beyond the attempt at theoretical rigor however, radicalism should not be viewed as some kind of a personal accomplishment. It is an event that actually unfolds in the ways ordinary people demand change and react to the unjust ways of the socio-economic and political order.

In our nation's history, the characters of the Philippine Revolution can be divided into two. The first comes from the elite class, a group that includes Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, Juan Luna, and Apolinario Mabini. The second group belongs to the lower class, a group that was represented by the Supremo and founder of the Katipunan, Andres Bonifacio. There is no need to overemphasize why the blatant murder of Bonifacio, as explained by Adrian Cristobal, was the greatest tragedy of the Philippine Revolution. The murder of the common man who started the resistance against Spanish domination has made apparent the deep divide in Philippine society and politics – the “powerful and the elite” on the one hand, and the “poor and powerless” on the other. In hindsight, the leaders of the Magdalo faction

³⁸ Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines*, 17.

³⁹ Parcon, “Understanding Dutertismo: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” 135.

⁴⁰ Mouffe, “Liberalism and Modern Democracy,” 185.

⁴¹ Kusaka, “Bandit Grabbed the State: Duterte's Moral Politics,” 56-57.

does not think that Bonifacio possessed the pedigree to continue leading the revolution.

The murder of Bonifacio was the biggest blunder of the Philippine Revolution. And so, while Gen. Aguinaldo surrendered to the Americans, the other members of the Katipunan found faith in their own leaders to continue the resistance away from the center – the most important of which was that of Macario Sakay, whom the Americans have labeled a bandit. Sakay, in fact, continued the revolt against the US colonizers. Unknown revolutionaries persisted in the fight against the American regime despite the fact that they were accused of being bandits.⁴² But Sakay was betrayed. He surrendered and was hanged by the Americans. The saddest part of the story of the Philippine Revolution was that some Filipinos actually sold their fellow countrymen for selfish reasons.

The moral divide during the Philippine Revolution is now apparent in Philippine society. This can be observed in the context of Manila versus Mindanao, Christians against Muslims, the Tagalog versus the Bisaya, the rich owners of business establishments against the lowly workers who are underpaid, the elitist schools in the capital and the unranked “provincial” schools, the rich oligarchs who own malls and the “pobreng tindera” (poor vendor) in the “palengke” (public market), and the “uneducated native” versus the “educated” woke in Philippine society. The we/they distinction as mentioned by Kusaka is operative in almost all aspects of Philippine society. The person on the other side of the fence is an enemy. The war on drugs, for instance, was interpreted by some scholars as the fight between “virtuous people” and the “scums of the earth”.⁴³ The same type of divide also grips the academe.

Every resistance, to be meaningful, should result to something that improves the life of the people. Radical democracy is not about power. It is about people who struggle so that they are not reduced into pawns in the affairs of the society and state. The will of the people is the essence of radical democracy. If the way Duterte solved the notorious “laglag bala” scheme, or the strong manner in which he addressed the utter failure of

⁴² Orlino Ochoa, *Bandoleros: Outlawed Guerrillas of the Philippine-American War*, (Manila: New Day Publishers, 2005), 9-10.

⁴³ Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, no. 3 (2016): 100.

Philippine Airlines to finally pay its debts to the government, or the way he prevented Maynilad and Manila Water from collecting billions of back payments from the public despite the fact that water is a natural resource cannot be considered as “radical” enough, then that simply makes the bias and ignorance of others apparent. Someone must take the cudgels for the common *tao* or *masa* (people) to confront the vested interests of influence peddlers, oligarchs, and powerful politicians.

But theory is not the problem when it comes to my body of work on radical democracy. The actual inadequacies though can be seen if critics will only take a closer look. They are in what Dr. Clarita Carlos calls the “institutional deficits” of Philippine democracy. These latent institutional weaknesses can be characterized as “unmet expectations” and goes back to the seventies in the analysis of Philippine democratic institutions done by Robert Youngblood. As someone who has studied applied ethics, my training under Professor Goran Collste has taught me how to use a theory in analyzing social and political problems. Beyond this, my close exposure to the transdisciplinarity method through Dr. Nima Rezaei, an outstanding Iranian scientist, helped me bridge the big gap in understanding theory and practice. The idea of a critique is very old school. What is important is for scholars to be able to collaborate and find relevant connections between the things that they write about. If the purpose of philosophy is to change the world, this goal could not be achieved if people are confined to their biased positions.

Their criticism could have been made clearer if they focused on the pragmatic side of the former President, instead of criticizing my use of Mouffe's theory.⁴⁴ Of course, what Duterte has accomplished for Davao City was a result of his strong political will. It was his courage that made him successful. President Duterte pronounced that every mistake by his administration is his and his alone, as a matter of fact. But critics simply turned to our ideological differences, especially because the President was no longer interested in pursuing the dialogue with what he considered as the enemies of the state. In addition, if only they read my papers closely, I have provided a definitive argument as to why the summary killings is a moral problem and that the position of the Catholic Church is a valid moral protest. In that respect, I have no disagreement with critics when it comes

⁴⁴ See Imbong, et al., “Chantal Mouffe on the Radical Politics of Rodrigo Duterte,” 100-101.

to the issue and question of the wrongfulness of summary executions. In one of my articles, I stated:

The Catholic Church must instill into the consciousness of people that the summary killings are morally disturbing. The public must not be silent about this moral wrong. When people become numb to such types of violence, those who possess power will take advantage of their position to abuse people even further. When evil seems trivial and the people feel helpless, society's basic moral foundation collapses, and its institutions are weakened.⁴⁵

Nicole Curato has put things into perspective. She has offered a more nuanced portrayal of the former President. For her, the approach of Duterte is a form of penal populism.⁴⁶ Curato says that Duterte used the position of the presidency as a means to threaten undesirable entities in the state – drug pushers, criminals, corrupt politicians, and traditional oligarchs. The President has actually achieved considerable accomplishments in his fight against the powers-that-be in Manila. While Curato's point is warranted, it should also be noted that during Duterte's time more than a million drug dependents actually "surrendered" to the government to be rehabilitated. None of the above can erase the fact that Duterte carried the aspirations of the Bisaya against the dominance of the Tagalogs in national politics.

The EDSA People Power Revolution created the man in Duterte. If EDSA did not fail, a radical leader like President Duterte would not exist. It is without a doubt that the Liberal Party is now part of the bygone era in Philippine politics. And if one were to answer why, it is the fault of their own leaders. The Liberal Party failed the Filipino people. The first EDSA Revolution, which overthrew President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. from power, has not lived up to its "promise" of changing the lives of ordinary people, millions of whom still rate themselves as poor. It is not only about the lost opportunities and chances, but the reality that EDSA was the restoration of the Old Order. President Corazon Aquino perpetuated the politics of

⁴⁵ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "An Analysis of the Philippine Catholic Church's Approach to President Duterte's Drug War," *International Bulletin Mission Research Journal*, Volume 46, Number 3 (2022): 353.

⁴⁶ Curato, "Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to Power," 102.

patronage by giving back to the country's oligarchs what the government sequestered from the cronies of Marcos.

President Duterte is not a saint. In fact, he is someone who wanted to show the bad side of politics. But unlike many of his predecessors, in a country that is wanting in almost all aspects of a dignified life, the former President possessed an authentic character that Filipinos actually admired. Indeed, he simply carried the struggle of Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao, and the Bisaya-speaking Filipinos against the elites of Philippine society. To say that my body of work on radical democracy is not about the people is to underestimate the aspirations of the Bisaya, who for the longest time have dreamt of being recognized. Duterte rise to power is history's way of rectifying its mistakes. Finally, Kusaka was generous with his words:

Like Rodrigo Duterte's political style, Dr. Christopher Ryan Maboloc, a Davao-based philosopher and public intellectual, presents unconventional, provocative, and controversial arguments. Some may criticize this book as a mere justification for the president who abused the state's power in his war on drugs. Others would gratefully find the book sharply articulate and justify their underrepresented voices supporting Duterte. However, reading and discussing the book merely in the context of the pro- versus anti-Duterte is misleading and counterproductive. I seriously hope readers do not reduce the value of the book with such shallow interests.⁴⁷

Conclusion:

It is important to have an open mind in analyzing political problems. The criticisms about my work on radical democracy in the Philippines are weak. They failed to point out the disconnect between Duterte's resistance and the idea of struggle that can be found in Mouffe. President Duterte is not the problem. The real problem is elite politics. Elitism has prevented the "democratic consolidation" of the Philippine state. Indeed, politics and the political are two different things. The antagonism found in Duterte's style bespeaks of the character of his politics. But the actual struggle, the

⁴⁷ Wataru Kusaka, "Foreword", In *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*. (Cotabato City: Elzstyle Publishing, 2022), 1.

radical side of his politics, can be found in his effort to fight the elites and give back to the poor what they truly deserve. Critics say that the “radical break” that I am pointing out is about a way of escaping liberalism. But I did not even use that term. The idea of radical democracy is the pursuit of reforms within the domain of a just liberal socio-political order. The point of radicalism in politics, that is, the struggle that the *demos* find themselves in, is the creation of just institutions, the equal treatment of people, and a truly inclusive or democratic way of life. Indeed, if Duterte did not contest the powers of the oligarchs, if he did not dismantle the center of power in Manila, the things that he has accomplished for Mindanao, would not have been achieved.

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