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Featured Article

President Rodrigo Duterte and Bro. Karl Gaspar: The Radicalization of Politics in Post-Colonial Philippines

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Abstract: This study attempts to deliver a means of understanding post-colonial politics in the country. Politics in the Philippines is “contested”. The liberal slant in finding solutions in the state cannot overcome the reality of uneven power-relations. Deliberation, anchored in a Manila-centric model of governance, offers no respite to the inevitability of conflict and antagonism post-EDSA I. The paper draws from the radical approach of President Duterte. Using it as a vantage point provides us with contrasts between concepts (e.g. populism and elitism). This study intends to understand what Philippine democracy is about. It will be accomplished by comparing the paths and struggles of two men—the anthropologist Karl Gaspar and President Duterte. The theological struggle to liberate the Lumads from bondage in which Gaspar has found the profound meaning of his faith mission is correlated to the radical struggle in which Duterte has built his difficult political role.

Keywords: Radical Democracy; Post-Colonial Politics; Rodrigo Duterte; Karl Gaspar

The Filipino anthropologist Karl Gaspar vividly remembers the day Rodrigo Duterte, the son of the governor of the undivided province of Davao, came to Holy Cross College (now Cor Jesu) in Digos, Davao del Sur. Duterte, who was expelled from the Ateneo in Davao City, caused a stir in campus. Gaspar, who lives a life as a missionary of the Redemptorist Congregation, was a classmate of the future president. Gaspar was on his third year in high school but their paths crossed since Duterte had to take up some subjects in that level though he transferred a senior. The former mentions that the school provided the governor’s son a place to stay inside the school campus. The attention given to Duterte, says Gaspar, was natural since his classmate was the son of a prominent politician. The Llanos family of Davao del Sur, an old political clan, took good care of the future President.

The two Mindanawons will go separate ways in their chosen paths in life. Gaspar was to become a multi-awarded anthropologist. The Redemptorist brother was an activist during the Martial Law years. He recalls the dynamic student movement at the time, saying the students were passionate in the struggle for freedom and human rights. Gaspar was among the thousands of political detainees that the dictator President Ferdinand Marcos put to prison. Meanwhile, Duterte was the prosecutor in the case filed against the scholar and activist. Gaspar spent 22 months in incarceration. When Philippine democracy was finally restored after Marcos left the country at the height of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, Gaspar would continue to fight for the cause of freedom and human rights. This time, he has devoted his life and talent in liberating the indigenous peoples or Lumads of Mindanao.

Duterte was appointed as Vice Mayor (OIC) of Davao by the revolutionary government of President Corazon Aquino in 1986. Davao City was chaotic before Duterte entered the political scene. The communist New People's Army's Sparrow Unit lorded over the city. Peace and order had been the main concern of local residents. Salvaging was rampant in a place once called Nicaragdao (a combination of "Nicaragua", which was a dangerous country at that time and "Agdao," a populated district in downtown Davao City). The Alsa Masa was established by Juan Porras Pala, an anti-communist crusader. Pala was to become a strong and prominent critic of Mayor Duterte. Pala would later die in an ambush. After defeating Zafiro Respicio in 1988, Duterte will embark on a peace and order campaign that will last for more than two decades, a battle against criminality that would later carry him to the highest position of the land.

The Vatican Council II (1962-65) had an impact in the work of the local Church during the time of Martial Law. Gaspar's interest in popularizing the "theology of struggle" was a major concern shared by the progressive elements of the Catholic and Protestant churches. He was involved in what was considered as a conscientization process in Mindanao. The island was to be ravaged by a Muslim rebellion for decades. Marcos alienated many Muslim Filipinos because of the Jabidah Massacre. The former dictator projected an image of a leader who gave the poor man his due. The New Society that he wanted to create was portrayed to foster a brotherhood of men. In reality, his neo-liberal approaches to the economy were blameworthy for the extreme poverty of millions of Filipinos. The excesses of the regime plunged the country into massive debt and a record of human rights abuses against those who opposed the dictatorship.

Duterte's relationship with the hierarchy in the Catholic Church is conflicted. He is a firm believer in the separation of Church and State. The 1987 Philippine Constitution expressly provides for this as a matter of policy. The foundation of this provision is historical. During the Spanish period, the friars served as the secular administrators of the Philippine archipelago. This resulted in usury and abuses that forced the natives to surrender their land to the oppressors. But the President's unconventional style of governance has generated powerful critics from the top of the

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Catholic Church hierarchy, including Bishop Broderick Pabillo, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, and Archbishop Socrates Villegas, who have all criticized the President's violent war on drugs.

Brother Karl and President Duterte are a manifestation of the ambivalent character of the faith experience in the country's 500 years of Christianity. Spain used religion to subjugate the native inhabitants of the islands. This was done by using the Christian faith as a means to convert the natives. Such was a prelude towards the acceptance of Spanish rule. Vicente Rafael explains this double meaning. The translation of the Christian faith into the native language was a form of conquest and a way of understanding colonialism.¹ Faith was meant to be seen as positive in this way. The influence of the struggle for decolonization of the Filipinos is at work until this day in the form of two modes of resistance. The first is the fight against the domination of the Lumads and the second, in the continuing resistance to elite politics. Gaspar symbolizes the former while President Duterte represents the latter.²

Radical Politics in Philippine Colonial History

Christianity arrived in the Philippines not because the faith experience was meant to unify the native inhabitants of the islands. The conversion of the natives was only secondary in terms of purpose. The reason is actually land grabbing.³ While conquest had contributed in uniting the disarticulated islands under one central government, this has resulted in the economic and socio-political divide of the people. It has created a vacillating way of understanding the role of the Christian faith. But what became apparent is the emergence of a class conflict within Philippine society that has permeated the consciousness of Filipinos, one that is manifest in the attitude toward social status. Colonial education has something to do with this.⁴ For instance, the term "way grado" is discriminatory. More than a description of a lack of opportunity to attend school, it is a derogatory expression of how the powerless are excluded in society.

Radical politics is about accepting the fact that change cannot always happen by using institutional approaches to statecraft. Rules are not always just because of the uneven political order in the country. The type of power-relations dominating Philippine society necessitates a continuing revolt against the elite. The subjugation

¹ Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), 7.

² In an earlier study, I had argued about the nature of politics in the country. The argument is that Duterte is the manifestation of the struggle against elite rule. See Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "The Politics of Nation-States: The Case of President Rodrigo Duterte," *Journal of ASEAN Studies* vol. 6, no. 1 (2018): 112-13.

³ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, (Manila: Tala Publications, 1974), 77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 310.

of the country by foreign rule was hastened by the betrayal of the Philippine Revolution by upper class families who simply took over from their Spanish oppressors the control of the power of the state.⁵ Orlino Ochoa writes about how revolutionaries have continued to resist American rule even after the surrender of Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, who belonged to the upper class of society.⁶ When it comes to Philippine politics, the ambivalence of the revolution is about the reawakening of unending mistrust. For instance, the radical elements of the masses, according to Teodoro Agoncillo – “the anti-friars” and “separatists” – targeted with contempt the rich “mestizos.”⁷

The Philippine Revolution was lost due to a lack of unity. In a letter sent by Gen. Mariano Trias, he explained to Gen. Miguel Malvar that the “goal of the revolution was out of reach.”⁸ Gen. Trias mentioned that it is a judgment that he considered due to the sentiments of the people. It was a conclusion arrived at because of the “evil” that haunted the revolution. Reynaldo Ileto writes that what Gen. Trias meant by this evil was the lack of unity within the ranks of the revolution.⁹ In response, Gen. Malvar thought that in his territory, the people wanted to continue the resistance since they were actually “less concerned about politics.”¹⁰ The revolutionaries cared more about their future and their freedom from bondage. The men under Gen. Malvar’s command were small landholders who do not want the domination of the Spanish regime to continue.¹¹

The moral of the Philippine Revolution points to the reality of a class antagonism as the starting point of post-colonial politics. The politics of nation building, in this sense, emanates from a dark past. The “we” versus “them” narrative within Philippine society has deep roots in the country’s struggle against foreign conquest. The kind of politics in the Philippines has always been conflicted. While Western-bred scholars insist in their Habermasian interpretation, politics in the country is actually about the struggle of the powerless whose dignity is trampled by the elites in society who want to dictate the destiny of the masses. Political conflict is not just about the narrative of political expediency. The elites belonged to what the colonizers considered as “leading citizens.”¹² The same people would label great

⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁶ Orlino Ochoa, *Bandoleros: Outlawed Guerrillas of the Philippine-American War* (Manila: New Day Publishers, 2005), 11.

⁷ Teodoro Agoncillo, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1956), 106.

⁸ Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1978), 162.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

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revolutionaries such as the Supremo Andres Bonifacio, Macario Sakay, and Julian Montalan as bandits.¹³

Ileto argues that it was easy for the upper class to accept the myth of banditry since the revolutionaries were viewed as men lacking in “social status.”¹⁴ Wataru Kusaka would ascribe to President Duterte the same bandit description a hundred years later.¹⁵ Benjiemen Labastin explains that Duterte’s style “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.”¹⁶ Gaspar will appropriate the communal character of this struggle. He will epitomize the nature of this radicalism as he lives with and fights for the Lumads in the margins of Philippine society against those who are out to destroy their sacred way of life. This can be interpreted as a radical form of resistance outside the spaces of the deliberative public sphere.¹⁷

Some critics fail to recognize the agonistic nature of Duterte’s war against the oppressors of the Filipino people. Agonism is about the recognition of conflict as a necessary element in nation-building. A pluralist society can only proceed with its just cause of liberating the people if the public sphere is not dictated by a dominant class. The critics of the President, however, have a point when it comes to the accusation of penal populism.¹⁸ To his critics, Duterte is making a wedge between the good and the bad elements of society. The protection of the latter, his critics say, is used to justify his violent approach to the problem of criminality. However, his critics also have to acknowledge that Duterte’s radical approach in solving the problem of criminality is symptomatic of the moral divide among Filipinos.¹⁹

Nathan Gilbert Quimpo writes that “the members of the elite – old and new – dominate the country’s political parties.”²⁰ The anti-elite claim in Philippine politics is not without basis. While the country is no longer under its colonial masters, Philippine politics is still under the influence of a patronage system. The loyalty of the ilustrado class has metamorphosed into a “patron-client relationship” between the

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁵ Wataru Kusaka, “Bandit Grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politics” *Phil. Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 49.

¹⁶ Benjiemen Labastin, “Two faces of Dutertismo, two faces of democracy in the Philippines,” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2018): 37.

¹⁷ See Chantal Mouffe, “Liberalism and Modern Democracy,” in *Democracy and Possessive Individualism*, ed. Joseph Carens, (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 186-190. According to Mouffe, liberalism has reduced politics into morality. For her, politics is fundamentally rooted in conflict and antagonism, not on a perfect consensus.

¹⁸ Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* vol. 3 (2016): 100.

¹⁹ Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 6.

²⁰ Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, *Contested Democracy and the Left in the Philippines after Marcos* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 3.

rich and the powerless that prevails to this day. The landed families in the country have established political dynasties in their own turfs, thereby controlling the state in a predatory way. The powerful have benefited from systemic injustices. Dynasties perpetrate the usurpation of power that takes advantage of the marginalized. As such, the state has become a cold-hearted monster used by the powers-that-be in Philippine society. The overarching political narrative in the country is the resentment of the poor against the elite.

Antagonism in Philippine democracy was created by a history of conquest. Iletto says that President Duterte reminds Filipinos of “the forgotten war against the United States.”²¹ Duterte’s foreign policy would be characterized as a pivot to China with its expected “gains, challenges and promises.”²² Since the Philippines owns a strategic position in the Pacific Theater of war, what the US wants from the country is the tactical importance of an alliance. But for Duterte, it exposes the country to the danger of being a pawn in the potential conflict between China and the US. The message of Duterte’s stubborn attitude is that the Philippines desires mutual respect. This position has been conveyed by the late Perfecto Yasay, the former foreign minister of the Duterte administration, who said that Filipinos should no longer be called the “little brown brothers” of America.²³

America’s legacy in Philippine history is the perpetuation of the patronage system started by Spain.²⁴ The centralized form of government, established by Spain to ease the administration of the islands, was copied by the Americans. To make the subjugation of the country effective, high ranking Filipino bureaucrats supported American rule.²⁵ The collaboration of the Ilustrados, says Renato Constantino, has naturally “provided the Americans with a ready justification for the colonization of the Philippines.”²⁶ The Ilustrados never desired to emancipate the Filipino from economic and political injustices. The “politics of change” of the second Aquino presidency, a battle-cry of liberals in the US, has not done much to improve the lives of ordinary Filipinos.

²¹ Reynaldo Iletto, *Knowledge and Pacification: On the US Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 310.

²² Lucio Pitlo III, “Duterte’s pivot to China: Gains, benefits, challenges,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (July 18, 2019), <https://opinion.inquirer.net/122680/dutertes-pivot-to-china-gains-challenges-promises>.

²³ Oliver Holmes, “The Philippines cannot be the ‘little brown brothers’ of America, says minister,” *The Guardian* (September 16, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/16/philippines-we-cannot-be-the-little-brown-brothers-of-america>.

²⁴ 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* vol. 3, no. 2 (2003): 259.

²⁵ Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, 236.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

State and Religious Hegemony

According to Gaspar, the life situation of Lumads in Mindanao “remains a desperate one urgently demanding alternative development models of engaging their communities.”²⁷ In his book, *Handuman (Remembrance) Digging for the Indigenous Wellspring*, Gaspar writes that the Spanish colonizers have “demonized our ancestors’ indigenous belief system.”²⁸ This injustice was apparent in the “destruction of the native religion’s sacred sites and the oppressive manner they dealt with the babaylans.”²⁹ Gaspar complains that “not one element of this belief system treasured by generations through thousands of years that has helped them survive life vicissitude, characterized by a belief in a Creator Deity, had any value at all... to a Chauvinistic type of Christianity.”³⁰ For Gaspar, the severance from the harmony with nature “would eventually negate the value of indigenous knowledge, skills, practices, and spirituality.”³¹

In echoing the reflections of Rafael on the religious conversion of the natives, Gaspar recognizes the positive impact of the Christian faith in the history of the Filipino nation. He writes that there were “unintended consequences to this evangelization campaign owing to the people’s wisdom embedded in their religious-cultural perspectives.”³² Gaspar believes that the Gospel’s “egalitarian messages helped to create the first stirrings of the desire for freedom and liberation.”³³ Despite the travails the natives have been subjected to, they managed to overcome Spanish conquest while keeping their faith in Jesus Christ. Gaspar, however, says that indigenous peoples have held on to their practices and rituals as they try to defy a hegemonic religion that continues to “erode what they still consider important to their way of life.”³⁴

The reflections of the anthropologist would guide a political philosophy that is rooted in the desire to liberate the marginalized from the pangs of extraction and exploitation that “cause strife among the Lumads.”³⁵ In a study on mining in Surigao, Gaspar explains the negative impact of certain types of economic progress in the life of the indigenous people. He warns that material progress, rooted in modernization theory, is wanting. Progress, while desirable to uplift the living conditions of people,

²⁷ Karl Gaspar, “Extractive Industries,” in *Ethics in Contemporary Philippine Society*, ed. CRB Maboloc (Davao City: SMKC Publishing, 2020), 113.

²⁸ Karl Gaspar, *Handumanan: Digging for the Indigenous Wellspring* (Manila: Claretian, 2021), 358.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 359.

³⁵ Gaspar, “Extractive Industries,” 113.

can also bring about the destruction of a way of life. Gaspar is fighting a continuing war – the struggle for the liberation of the Lumad from bondage. This theology of struggle seeks to give voice to the most vulnerable and powerless, who have become the victims of economic exploitation and cultural misappropriation.

Decolonization in the Philippines is the clash between dominant state institutions and the Church of the Poor. William Holden and Dan Jacobson write that the Catholic Church in the Philippines, in “demonstrating the influence of liberation theology” and its “preferential option for the poor,” has taken the position against activities “that may harm the poor by degrading the environment upon which they depend for their livelihood and further impoverish them.”³⁶ In a way, Gaspar, while not a politician, is a living symbol of the meaning of the “political” in terms of the experience of the faith. Jesus Christ was against social and political injustices, and this is expressed concretely in works of the Church of the Poor in the country to protect the powerless from the abuses of those who are in positions of power.

On the issue of Lumad Killings, Gaspar posed these hard questions: “What should we do as citizens? Should we tolerate it? Should we allow it? Well, if we believe in human rights, we shouldn’t and we should raise our voices.”³⁷ Gaspar feels that the youth of today have lost their dynamism to fight for the cause of human rights, unlike in the 70s.³⁸ Gaspar thinks, reflecting on the presidency of Duterte, that the test of being a leader is about asking if one “has been able to articulate a clear vision of his administration and can then mobilize his audience to take an active part in nation-building that champions the common good.”³⁹ Gaspar says that unlike the Lumad datus who exhibit good leadership traits and character, when it comes to the President, “there has been a paucity of visionary ideas... that would inspire the people to downplay their own personal interests in favor of that of the nation.”⁴⁰ He explains:

When he won, I was hoping that you know things would change. I was a bit optimistic regarding how he could function as president and truly proud that we have somebody from Davao, from Mindanao who finally made it as the President of the Republic of the Philippines.⁴¹

³⁶ William Holden and Dan Jacobson, “Ecclesial Opposition to Mining in Mindanao: Neoliberalism encounters the Church of the Poor in the Land of Promise,” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Cultures, and Ecology* vol. 11, no. 2 (2007): 155.

³⁷ Mark Joy Basallajes and Johanna Vaughn Dejito, “I did not vote for him. When he won, I was hoping that things would change. I was disappointed – Datu Bagu awardee Karl Gaspar,” *Davao Today* (March 19, 2018), <http://davaotoday.com/main/davao-city/qa-karl-gaspar-mindanao-duterte/>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Karl Gaspar, “An Attempt at Dissecting the Presidency of Rodrigo Duterte.” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* vol. 4, no. 3 (2018): 17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴¹ Basallajes and Dejito, “I did not vote for him...”

The frank demeanor of the President has contributed to his popular appeal. The language of the Bisaya was effectively used during his presidential campaign, including “Ato ni Bay,” “Bisaya na Pod,” among others.⁴² But to his adverse critics, the President is using the language of the streets to simply express his bravado. Critics rant against Duterte’s type of patronage that has resulted in the rise of the new oligarchs. Davao’s Dennis Uy of Udenna Corporation and Phoenix Petroleum, according to the political opposition, is a clear example. But at the heart of issues bedeviling President Duterte’s violent drug war, Fr. Daniel Pilario points out that most of the victims of many alleged extra-judicial killings are from poor families.⁴³ The President’s critics are unequivocal in claiming that the state has transformed into an instrument of murder.

But why do people support Duterte’s hardline approach to the drug menace? The blame can only be put on the failure of the country’s liberal institutions. The politics of reform under previous administrations was only a façade that hides the continuation of the rule of the elite in Philippine society. The majority of Filipinos felt that change can only be done by a leader who has the will to protect the interests of the people against the unfair privilege of those at the top of the ladder. While it is true that many of the victims of the drug war come from poor families, it is important to know why precisely the majority of Filipinos feel so hopeless and ergo, become susceptible to a dangerous “kapit sa patalim” mentality. An unequal dynamics of power have very deadly consequences.

Mistaking the Symptom for the Disease

No poor person will ever be elected as President of the Philippines. It is not really a matter of fate. It is by all means a question of political justice or the lack thereof. Every person who has been elected to the highest position of the land belonged to the elite class. The reason is that elections in the Philippines requires massive resources and a strong political machinery. The candidate has no option but to find a rich patron who will bankroll the expenses that make things work. Any individual who desires to become President of the Philippines has to seek the blessings of the country’s business elites. While a constituency is necessary to propel a candidate into national office, the backing of powerful oligarchs is a matter of necessity to launch an effective national campaign. However, the willingness of patrons is not without a price. They do it knowing that it serves their interest.

The tradition of patronage persists in every level of Philippine society. New couples would seek influential persons, business people and mayors as wedding

⁴² Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte,” *IQRA: Journal of Al Qalam Institute* vol. 4 (2017): 11.

⁴³ Daniel Franklin Pilario, “Praying Bodies, Dying Bodies: A Reflection on the Nazareno and the Sto. Nino,” *Philippine Sociological Review* vol. 65 (2017): 161.

sponsors hoping the connection can help them one way or another. Iletto explains that the model of politics in the Philippines is that of a “patron-client, wherein the patrons or elites are the source not only of money and favors but of culture as well.”⁴⁴ The situation of the people is such that when it comes to the political structures of the country, from the national scene down to the barangay level, “there is a debt relationship between rich and poor.”⁴⁵ When it comes to politics in the country, the masses have become victims of a social conditioning that is rooted in the largely unequal life situation of the people.⁴⁶ The elites force the masses into submission where options in life do not exist.

The rise to power of a leader cannot happen overnight. President Marcos then served as congressman for three terms, as senator and also as senate president before defeating President Diosdado Macapagal, to grab Malacañang. Former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and also, President PNOY were children of past presidents. President Corazon Aquino was the wife of the martyred Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., who became the youngest mayor in Philippine history at 25 years old. While former President Fidel Ramos never held office, he was the top brass of powerful Philippine Constabulary during the time of Martial Law, and together with Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile, a big player during the 1986 People Power, and Gen. Jose Almonte, Ramos won the endorsement of President Cory.

Elitism is rooted in ilustrado politics. Michael Cullinane explains that the ilustrado refers to “the wealthy, mostly ethnically mixed, intellectuals.”⁴⁷ Ilustrado politics today is nothing but the liberal reformist agenda that have since failed the Filipino people. Duterte won the 2016 elections because many of the problems – poverty and crime in the Metropolis, including the discomfort experienced by young professionals – have contributed to the situation in which Filipinos, especially a tech-savvy middle-class, would desire someone who has the political will. Institutional reforms are needed in the country, but not in ways shown by its weak former leaders. However, if critics ignore the historical contexts of its basic structure and the hegemonic configuration of the dynamics of power, the question is, who will fight the oligarchs? Constantino puts it rather succinctly when he says that the Philippine state under the tutelage of the Americans is a “coercive organ” that advances the “interests of its neo-colonial master.”⁴⁸ Duterte is the reaction to an elitist type of democracy that perpetuates the unjust structures in the country.

The liberal critics of Duterte are mistaking the symptom for the disease. Radicalism is a question of political justice. Duterte’s approach, it can be said, is not

⁴⁴ Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Michael Cullinane, *Ilustrado Politics* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003), 9.

⁴⁸ Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-consciousness* (Manila: Erewhon, 1970) in Labastin, “Two faces of Dutertismo, two faces of democracy in the Philippines,” 26.

tied to the strict formalities of a system nor the procedural purposes of protocols. In this way, he can be considered as radical.⁴⁹ In the same way as the Lumads do not have the leverage when it comes to the formality of institutions, the attraction of common folks to a charismatic leader whose best trait is his political will is due to “the persistent inability of the state to provide basic services, guarantee peace and order, and foster economic development.”⁵⁰ The Philippines, according to Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, is a “patchwork state.”⁵¹ In a patchwork state, the interests of politicians overlap with the role and function of governance. As a result, the government becomes a burden, not the solution to the problems confronting society.

The theological struggle to liberate the Lumads in which Gaspar has found the meaning of his mission and faith experience is the same political struggle in which Duterte has found his difficult role and function in Philippine politics. While the problem of the indigenous people in Mindanao is about land, it is also about the problem of poverty and the lack of equity when it comes to development and economic progress. But the problem is more radical than that. The problem is systemic exclusion. The modern state and its secular institutions are hegemonic. The neoliberal system that it patronizes is reflective of the means by which the political elites take control of the political landscape while the oligarchy holds the leash on the economy. What it results to is an enslavement of people who have no means to free themselves from their overlords.

Conclusion

The post-colonial context points to a progressive approach to governance that is meant to dismantle social injustices. While in the end, only history can tell as to what is to become of the legacy of President Duterte, this study has conjectured as to the main reason for his rise to power is the failure of EDSA to change Filipino society. Post-EDSA People Power Philippines is the perpetuation of an elitist model of democracy in which an oligarchy is given a license to extract blood and sweat from this nation and its people. President Duterte is a by-product of an uneven configuration power. The people cannot mistake the symptom from the disease. The utter lack of unity among the Filipino people has been taken advantage by their masters ever since the first conquest of the land 500 years ago. It is understandable why critics continue to demonize the state. Many of our problems actually have something to do with the attitude of the people and the divided political culture that influences their behavior.

⁴⁹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “President Duterte and the Birth of Radical Democracy in the Philippines,” *Journal of Politics and Security* vol. 2, no. 3 (2020): 125.

⁵⁰ Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 182.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

Gaspar symbolizes the importance of what is happening in the margins of Filipino society. The struggle for liberation of the Lumads continues. It marches away from the center. Gaspar's approach to social and political change is a radical model that seeks to overcome religious and cultural hegemony. Every ideology seeks to win the battle for truth against another ideology. But in Gaspar's case, the path to liberation can only be pursued by means of respecting differences and the uniqueness of other ways of life. The uneven situation of the people, the injustices done against Muslims and Lumads, the lack of opportunity among the many, point to the reality that an elitist type of governance is nothing less than a hideous form of oppression founded on foreign conquest and domination. President Duterte and Gaspar, in this respect, are battling the same monster – hegemony – but in ways that reflect that the quest for emancipation from elite rule is a continuing struggle.

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