



Mirroring Duterte

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ABSTRACT. This case study focuses on the role of the local media in creating an environment favorable for forwarding the political propaganda against illegal drugs in Davao City. The local newspaper of Davao, the *Mindanao Daily Mirror* appeared to serve as a mouthpiece of those in power in Davao City rather than as an inquirer, watchdog, or representative of the Davaoños. Through reviewing 256 news reports and interviewing journalists, this research casts light on how the media was used in antidrug campaigns and how it framed the narratives behind the operations in relation to the drug war in Davao City.

KEYWORDS. *Mindanao Daily Mirror* · Rodrigo Duterte · Davao City · local media · antidrug campaigns · political propaganda

INTRODUCTION

When he first became Davao City mayor in 1988, Rodrigo R. Duterte made a promise to his constituency: “to make the city the most dangerous place for criminals.” More than three decades later and against a backdrop of vigorous attempts to stamp out communism and crime by at least four presidents, Duterte, now the country’s chief executive, has kept and extended his local pledge through a “war on drugs” at the national level. The use of illegal drugs must indeed be addressed, but the president’s antidrug strategy has so far targeted the poor, with thousands killed by police and motorcycle-riding gunmen.

Except for when the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) initiated a formal inquiry into his link to the vigilante group Davao Death Squad (DDS) in 2009, Duterte received little criticism for the most part of his thirty-year rule as mayor, vice mayor, and district representative. But the tide would turn when Duterte rose to power as president in 2016, as Filipino and international news outlets and human rights groups reported and investigated his administration’s role in the extrajudicial killings resulting from his antidrug campaign.

In the age of social media where news reach audiences worldwide, a critical eye was cast on Duterte, his drug war placed under scrutiny. But the president has not taken criticism lightly. Journalists have been threatened and harassed. A senator, the former CHR chair who investigated him, is in prison.

Back in Davao City, a number of reporters and editors who worked for media outlets there have joined the Duterte administration in various posts in government. At least one community paper, the *Mindanao Daily Mirror*, is said to have changed ownership and is now a constant source of news about Duterte's aide-turned-senator Christopher Lawrence "Bong" T. Go. Leading up to the campaign period for the 2019 midterm elections, the *Mirror* started a new tradition of choosing its "Man of the Year." The editors' pick for the inaugural issue was Go, "the one person who made the headlines for his or her positive impact on the community."

The difference between the two scenarios is stark, pointing to a tendency on how Duterte and his group see the media and how it should be dealt with—and vice versa. In Davao City, certain news outlets mirror Duterte, uncritical of what his government is doing. Yet on the national stage, Duterte faces a press that cannot always be treated like papers such as the *Mirror*. This paradox opens avenues for research about the varying repertoires of engagement that the president has been using when dealing with the local and national press and the other way around. The troubled relationship between Duterte and several Metro Manila-based news organizations with respect to how the drug war is being reported is quite evident today. But the context, nuances, and implications of the former mayor's engagement with the community press in Davao City leave room for examination.

In this paper, we trace how local newspapers in Davao City, using *Mindanao Daily Mirror* as case study, reported drug-related events before Duterte became president. Founded in the 1950s, the *Mirror* was selected in this research because it is one of the longest running newspapers in Mindanao and because old copies of the publication are more accessible than other dailies. At the Ateneo de Davao University Library, two researchers scanned all of *Mirror's* issues from 1986 (May to December), 1998 (January to December), and 2009 (January to December) and found a total of 256 articles related to illegal drugs. The year 1986 was chosen because this was the year Duterte first served in local government—when he was appointed officer-in-charge as vice mayor by former President Corazon Aquino following the 1986

People Power Revolution. The year 1998 was also included because it was among the early years when various groups started documenting killings known to be the handiwork of the Davao Death Squad, and 2009, as this was the year when CHR conducted an investigation into the summary executions of drug suspects.

After gathering the news reports, the researchers, together with a third-party member, coded each article for a pretest which was then reviewed and approved by a statistician. The *Mirror* articles were then coded and analyzed in full using subject, sourcing, placement of article, and type of reporting as variables.

Through interviews with six journalists and media experts, the researchers surface first-hand accounts and insights on the challenges experienced by the community press as these intersect with the political and economic interests of local power holders.

This paper begins with a look at the role of the community press and their interactions with politicians. Albeit limited in scope, the narrative of the drug war as reported by the *Mirror* vis-à-vis events taking place at the national level is also presented. Next, the researchers discuss how the *Mirror* covered news about illegal drugs in Davao City in 1986, 1998, and 2009. Special focus is given on how the CHR investigation was covered, as it was one of few stories of resistance in Duterte's local drug war. Finally, journalists who have covered and observed developments in Davao City weigh in on the coverage of Duterte and drug-related events in the city.

THE *MIRROR* AND DUTERTE'S DRUG WAR IN DAVAO CITY

The history and development of the community press in the Philippines have been documented since the 1960s in various academic papers, from community journalism scholar Crispin Maslog's (1993) surveys to journalism professor Jeremiaiah Opiniano and his students Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas, Mía Rosienna Mallari, and Jhoana Paula Tuazon's (2015) more recent study on the roles, status, and prospects of the community press. Journalists and journalism educators Luz Rimban (1999), Red Batario (2001), and Chay Florentino-Hofileña (2001 and 2004), meanwhile, have written extensively about the challenges faced by community reporters during the years covered in this study. The media situation in the Philippines has also been assessed on a regular basis by international advocacy groups Freedom House, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters Without Borders.

From development journalism in the 1970s wherein the role of journalists has been described as to report on local socioeconomic issues that are underreported, the role of community journalism is said to have evolved to civic journalism in which reporters write about issues and engage with audiences to allow them to discuss said issues (Opiniano et al. 2015).

As cited in Opiniano et al.'s study (2015), Red Batario, executive director of the Center for Community Journalism and Development, describes how, in an ideal setting, a community paper is able to do civic journalism. The process starts with the paper reporting on an issue, to be followed by activities such as dialogues wherein journalists bring together stakeholders to discuss such issues. These stakeholders then become sources in follow-up stories in the paper. If done accordingly, these stories may create impact by deterring powers-that-be from making decisions that may be deemed detrimental to the community.

That is the ideal setting. Using Thomas Hanitzsch's (2011) study which tested four milieus of journalistic cultures (populist disseminator, detached watchdog, critical change agent, and opportunist facilitator), the researchers found that community newspapers in the Philippines play two roles: that of a critical change agent and that of an opportunist facilitator. Some community papers have become critical change agents in the sense that their reporters, critical toward government and business elites, advocate for social change. But other papers meanwhile have been described as opportunist-facilitators in the sense that because they, too, are business ventures, they must relate with whoever is in power so as "to collar not just political ties but possible revenues from local coffers." Journalists in these news outlets are depicted as constructive partners of government; they most likely support official policies and convey a positive image of political and business leaders.

Taking on the critical change agent role is a standard element of journalism. But the latter function, opportunistic facilitator, emerges primarily because many small community papers obtain revenue mainly from advertisements. These advertisements typically come from: (1) government in the form of judicial notices, local ordinances, and public bidding notices; (2) politicians through campaign advertisements when they join the triennial elections; and (3) businesses which may likely be owned by political allies or the politicians themselves.

This finding draws parallels from Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, which argues that among the media's

functions is “to serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them” (Herman and Chomsky ([1988] 2002, xi). It points to how resources like money and power can determine what gets printed or marginalize dissent, essentially allowing government and other private interests to get their messages across to the public.

The propaganda model uses five filters that influence the framing of news, the first three of which are found to be relevant in this paper: (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) “flak” as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism.

Former senator Orlando Mercado (1991) and veteran journalist Sheila Coronel (1991) meanwhile discuss the relationship between politicians and journalists in a March 1990 conference on media and politics in Asia. Anthologized in a book in 1991, the observations and insights put forth in their papers still ring true today (Hernandez and Pfennig 1991).

Mercado, a former politician and a radio broadcaster, says politicians are much like media owners in as much as they, too, have their own political and personal interests. Getting one’s name in the paper for government officials is as important as having passed a bill into law, he says. Having one’s photo taken for publication or being interviewed over TV and radio has even become a major preoccupation in most instances. Media need politicians and politicians need the press. They are joined together in what Mercado describes as a “love-hate” relationship, as there have been cases of political leaders who were “made” and “unmade” by media.

But Coronel points out that underneath the seeming adversity between politicians and journalists is the unspoken and comfortable relationship of patronage wherein the politician is no longer just a source of news, but the journalist’s patron. An elected or appointed official gives the journalist an envelope with cash or a regular allowance. In return, the reporter quotes him in reports or beams him on TV. The relationship, says Coronel, is hard to undo given existing conditions of low pay, especially for radio and tabloid reporters. But she notes, too, that society does not condemn this practice. “In many respects,

patronage is the glue that cements our fragmented society and politics altogether,” she adds (Coronel 1991, 51).

These studies and reports, written in various years spanning decades, document the changing and changeless scenarios for Filipino reporters, particularly those working in small news outlets and in highly politicized localities like the *Mirror* in Davao City. The situation has changed in terms of how roles evolve alongside audience needs, but it has not changed, too, because the same problems that are political and economic in nature continue to beset local reporters.

Founded in the 1950s by couple Demetrio “Demet” T. Flaviano and Anita Jacela Flaviano, *Mindanao Daily Mirror* is one of the oldest newspapers in Mindanao (Figueroa 2009). Demet Flaviano was an English professor at the University of the East and Far Eastern University, while his wife Anita managed a family-owned bookstore in Manila’s university belt. The couple moved to Davao City after realizing the area’s business potential in the 1950s. There they started the *Mindanao Mirror* as a weekly paper with only six pages. As the *Mirror*’s circulation grew, its frequency likewise increased to thrice a week, which then became four times a week, and then six times weekly. Instead of putting out a seventh edition, Demet Flaviano, decided to put out the *Mindanao Mirror Bulletin*, every Sunday (Edge Davao 2014). Today, the *Mirror* is printed from Monday to Friday. Half of the copies printed daily are distributed in Davao City while the rest go to other parts of the region, including Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, Davao Oriental, Kidapawan City, Butuan City, Cotabato City, and General Santos City. It is also online via <https://mindanaodailymirror.ph>.

For the past six decades the paper remained a family business, owned by the Flavianos and then later managed by the founders’ heirs. In late 2018, news about the paper being purchased by former presidential assistant Christopher Lawrence “Bong” T. Go began to circulate. Several sources say that the paper is indeed no longer owned by the Flavianos and that they too have heard of Go or an ally owning the paper now. The news came alongside a revamp of the paper’s editorial structure, design, and an obvious focus on Go’s activities as presidential assistant and now as senator. Go was Rodrigo R. Duterte’s assistant since 1998 during his terms as Davao City mayor, vice mayor, and congressman and then as president in May 2016. But Go supposedly left his assistant post after winning in the senatorial polls in May 2019.

The researcher sent a formal request to the *Mirror* and Senator Go to verify the reports, but both parties have not responded as of this writing. On paper though, the *Mirror* is still owned and managed by six members of the Flaviano family—namely: Marietta F. Siongco, Teresita F. Basilio, Giovanni Flaviano, Angelita Ty Flaviano, Michael Edouard F. Galvez, and Shirley Ann Galvez-Dominguez, the *Mirror*'s 2018 general information sheet shows (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 2018).

Insights into how the *Mirror* thrives as a community paper in context of the interplay with local power holders may be taken from how it operates now in light of reports of the ownership change and how it used to cover the drug war in Davao City before Duterte became president. In the next two sections, we first focus on the narrative that the *Mirror* created about drug-related events in 1986, 1998, and 2009, and then we analyze the manner in which the paper reported this narrative.

The *Mirror*'s Narrative of the “War on Drugs” in Davao City

Duterte's Drug War in Davao City

As if following a formula, the nature of Duterte's “war on drugs” as president mimics the way it had been done in Davao City. The cast of characters and circumstances are not all the same, but the chain of events seems to be very familiar.

Drug-related killings were often preceded by humiliation through a list drawn up by the local Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), which was supposedly based on information supplied by city and village officials, police officers, and civilian volunteers. Known drug users and pushers as well as persons with criminal histories were supposedly included in the “order of battle” that would then be used as reference in police house visits. But even before these operations would be conducted, Duterte would have revealed the names on radio and TV (Reyes 2016). Fr. Amado L. Picardal, a human rights activist who helped document extrajudicial killings in Davao City, recounts that “many of those in the list were killed” (Pulido 2009, 4:18–4:37).

What appears to be the first record of vigilante killings in the city can be traced back to as early as 1993. A Philippine News Agency article published by the *Mirror* (PNA 1998b) reports that the killing of four persons in “separate liquidation missions” in September 1998 could be the handiwork of the vigilante group that had at the time “liquidated more than 100 persons with links to illegal drug trade since 1993 when

then mayor, now congressman Rodrigo Duterte, waged war against illegal drugs.” But police officials would at several times discount the claim and say that the killings were purely due to personal grudges (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1998a).

According to the same report, the vigilante group stopped operations months prior to the May 1998 elections “when everybody was busy campaigning and almost every suspected drug trafficker, either male or female, seemed to have been eliminated for good already.” But after the May 1998 elections, drug traffickers who supposedly left the city during the heat of “vigilante” killings came back apparently to challenge the then newly elected Mayor Benjamin de Guzman, once described as “soft-spoken” by the paper.

Duterte was elected mayor of Davao City seven times. Serving the position for a total of 22 years, he has never lost an election. During his term, the so-called Davao Death Squad or DDS killed at least 1,400 persons or an average of five people per month. Not a single person was successfully prosecuted for any of these killings. Tagged as “the Death Squad mayor,” Duterte has done little to deny the accusation. When he ran for president in 2016, he said, “Am I the Death Squad? Yes” (Fernquest and Johnson 2018).

Duterte was mayor of Davao City from 1992 to 1998. He then ran for Congress after completing three terms as mayor. From 1998 to 2001, Benjamin de Guzman, Duterte’s vice mayor and former political ally, took over after winning over Prospero Nograles in the mayoral race.

Even with de Guzman at the helm, the city’s antidrug campaign continued with arrests and pronouncements against drug users and pushers. In “Mayor Vows No Let-Up vs Crime” (Mellejor 1998a), de Guzman promised that there would be a “no let-up” campaign against crime as he commended the Davao City Police Office, then headed by Supt. Isidro Lapeña, for the early resolution of the killing of a police officer and a jeepney dispatcher. De Guzman ordered the manhunt against four suspects in the killings, saying that fighting crime is the “top-priority program of the city government with the support of the police and the civilian populace.”

The front-page story was accompanied by a photo of de Guzman and Lapeña along with the caption “HARD AT WORK. Mayor Benjamin de Guzman instructs police director Supt. Isidro Lapeña to step up the fight against crime.” De Guzman and Lapeña would appear in subsequent photos of drug arrests in the *Mirror*’s front pages. (When

Duterte became president, Lapeña was appointed PDEA chief, then Bureau of Customs chief, then Technical Education and Skills Development Authority head.)

Duterte meanwhile brought his crusade against illegal drugs to Congress by proposing amendments to Republic Act No. 6425 or the “Dangerous Drugs Act of 1972.” In “Duterte Wants Drugs Law Revised” (Mellejor 1998b), Duterte said he wants all drug arrests nonbailable while all drug-related crimes reclassified as heinous. The newly elected congressman also wanted to strengthen the country’s police organization and police commission. (Republic Act [RA] 6425 was later repealed by RA 9165 or the “Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002.”)

The report likewise noted that Duterte vowed that he would not stop his fight against drugs for the people of Davao City. But he added that he was confident that Mayor de Guzman “can equally do his best for the peace and stability of the city” (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1998a).

As Davao representative, Duterte continued serving the Regional Peace and Order Council as its chair, a post he has held for nine years at the time. In “No Let-up in Drive vs. Drugs—Duterte,” Duterte warned drug pushers that the campaign against illegal drugs “will remain relentless until the city’s drug problems are eradicated.” Duterte’s warning came on the heels of intelligence reports that a suspected drug pusher was allegedly trying to activate his illegal trade in the city (Mellejor 1998c).

Duterte’s proposal to make the illegal drugs law stricter was echoed by then Police Superintendent Rolando Abutay of the Narcotics Command 12, who in one August 1998 *Mirror* report, said that he favors the “no bail bond” recommendation for drug pushing in order to curb the drug problem (PNA 1998a). Abutay said drug pushers were taking advantage of the limitations of the law, which stipulates that drug pushing below 200 grams of any form of prohibited drugs is bailable while drug pushing 200 grams and above is punishable by death.

Abutay reasoned that the typical apprehension of drugs in Davao City ranges from 15 to 30 grams only, which is bailable, but the transaction happens daily, he said. While there are cases of big-time apprehensions, he said suspected pushers usually fight back, resulting in shootouts. He said this was happening because pushers are aware of the legal loophole (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1998a).

In November 1998, Senator Robert Barbers also recommended that no bail must be recommended even for the possession of only 15 grams of illegal drugs. In “Drug Pushers Must Not Be Bailable-Barbers,” the former interior and local government secretary said he filed a bill amending the law which provides that no bail be allowed for having 200 grams of shabu (PNA 1998c). In the bill, he lowered the quantity of shabu to only 15 grams, disallowing any person from being given any bail bond for the crime (PNA 1998c).

Apart from the Regional Peace and Order Council and Narcotics Command 12, several other groups and campaigns were also created for the antidrug campaign:

- Special Operations Group (SOG), an elite unit of the Davao City Police Office;
- Special Mayor’s Anti-Crime Response Team (SMART), another special unit in the Davao City Police Office created by Mayor Benjamin de Guzman to provide an avenue for people’s complaints;
- Regional Anti-Narcotics Office (RANO); and
- Barangay Opisyal at Pulisya Laban sa Druga, a campaign formed by the National Police Commission and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

In the 2001 elections, de Guzman broke away from Duterte’s party and challenged the latter’s bid for mayor. But Duterte defeated de Guzman and went on to complete another three straight terms from 2001 to 2010. In 2010, Duterte endorsed his daughter, Sara, who won and took over as mayor while he served as vice mayor. Duterte was barred from running as mayor in 2010, as he had just completed his three terms. In 2013, Duterte was elected mayor again before becoming president in 2016.

By 2009, drug-related killings would be recorded at 800 since 1998 (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 2009c). From 1998 to 2015, a total of 1,424 cases of killings were recorded by the Coalition Against Summary Execution (CASE), a group that documented cases of human rights violations, particularly the summary executions of civilians, including children (Reyes 2016). In 2012, the CHR’s investigation into the killings in Davao City from 2005 to 2009 shows the deadly operations were a “systematic practice . . . attributed or attributable to the Davao

Death Squad” (CHR 2012, 2). Edgar Matobato, a self-confessed DDS member, later corroborated the commission’s findings and claimed the death squad had killed “more than a thousand individuals from 1988 to 2013” on the orders of Duterte (Gonzales 2016). Indeed, Davao City had become Duterte’s laboratory for killing, a template, a political model for his brand of governance now replicated on a national scale (Miller 2018).

Joseph Estrada’s and Gloria Arroyo’s “War on Drugs”

Duterte’s antidrug campaign in Davao City, along with the trail of deaths known to be the work of the Davao Death Squad, was happening in parallel with well-funded anticrime efforts at the national level led by former presidents Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Both presidents also looked up to Duterte’s style of governance that they, at one point during their respective terms, offered cabinet posts to Duterte (see for example *Philippine Star* 2002). In line with each administration’s stance against crime, several other local officials, cabinet members, and legislators were also then making strong pronouncements against illegal drugs for the most part of Duterte’s rule as mayor. These were also all printed in the *Mirror*. It is crucial to note, however, that none of these officials outside of Davao City openly endorsed the killing of criminals or publicly targeted or threatened individuals for assassination.

Crime stories at the time did gain prominence during Estrada’s abbreviated term (1998–2001) and Arroyo’s nine-year run (2001–2010) with the execution of Leo Echegaray who was convicted of raping his 10-year-old stepdaughter and the arrest and later acquittal of the Alabang Boys who were prosecuted for allegedly dealing drugs in Ayala Alabang, an upscale village in Muntinlupa City (Bernal 2014).

Estrada’s tough stance on criminals did not fall on deaf ears in Davao City. In “Lapeña Warns Drug Pushers to Stay Out” (Josol 1998c), the former city police director told drug pushers not to “challenge” the police. Lapeña was supposedly echoing the words of the newly elected president, who gave a similar warning against criminals in his inaugural speech.

Confirming that drug dealers have resumed activities in the city, supposedly to test the leadership of Mayor Benjamin de Guzman, Lapeña said that the “full force of the law” would be applied to pushers if they would persist in dealing drugs. He also vowed “to crush the illegal drug trade” as he beefed up police intelligence.

As if channeling his inner Duterte, Lapeña went on to make a threat: “It’s up to them (drug pushers) if they want to operate again in the city. *Baka magsisi rin sila sa bandang huli* (They might regret their actions in the end).” “Our effort right now is to eliminate them. The proliferation of illegal drugs will be contained soon,” he added (Josol 1998a; see also Josol 1998b).

By January 1999, the Philippine National Police (PNP) under Estrada officially shifted its anticrime efforts to the narcotics trade. In “Drugs Now PNP’s Number One Problem” (Mundiz, 1999), Davao Regional Police Director Chief Supt. Nicolas Olarte said drugs emerged as the police’s top concern during a command conference held at the start of the year. PNP’s new thrust, he said, was in line with Estrada’s vow to protect the youth against the “drug menace.”

On January 15, 1999, a “massive nationwide antidrug campaign” was launched upon the orders of Estrada. Congress then had also set aside PHP 500 million to fund the campaign. In “PNP Turns Sights on Drug Trade” (AFP 1999), police statistics showed that 1.2 million young Filipinos—or seven out of 100 young people—were hooked on drugs, of which 95 percent use the stimulant methamphetamine hydrochloride or “ice.” Police also seized 73 tons of “ice” worth PHP 274 million in 1998, placing the Philippines second to China among Asian countries with the highest volume of drugs seized annually.

A week later, on January 23, Estrada began offering a cash reward to the regional police command that will achieve the best record in dealing with the “scourge.” In “Cash for Best Anti-drugs Unit” (PNA 1999) then Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF) Chief Panfilo Lacson said the president already gave a bonus of PHP 500,000 to General Reynaldo Acop of the Southern Tagalog Command for being the top regional performer in fighting the illegal drug trade. Lacson said Estrada will give the same amount to the next best performing region.

The Estrada administration, at the time, had adopted a two-pronged approach against drugs, with the PNP going after street-level trafficking and the PAOCTF tracking big-time dealers. The president also created the National Drug Law Enforcement Prevention and Coordination Center to coordinate all government efforts against the narcotics trade. Estrada chaired the body in his capacity as concurrent secretary of the DILG while then PNP Chief Deputy Director General Robert Lastimoso served as vice chairman. Apart from the PNP and

PAOCTF, the Bureau of Immigration (BI) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) were also part of the center.

A decade later, in January 2009, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo will act as the government's "antidrug czar" in the wake of the Alabang Boys controversy. Arroyo, at the time, ordered Department of Justice (DOJ) officials implicated in the alleged bribery in the Alabang Boys mess to go on leave.

"I will temporarily act as the czar, or overseer, of the war against illegal drugs," Arroyo said as she ordered an "all-out war, an unyielding and unrelenting war against illegal drugs and their devil merchants." "Then, I will turn over the job to the tandem [of] Tito Sotto and Jionex Santiago." Vicente "Tito" Sotto III was then chair of the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) while Jionex or Dionisio Santiago was PDEA director general (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 2009a).

Arroyo said the controversy regarding the young drug suspects Richard Brodett, Jorge Jordana Joseph, and Joseph Tecson, collectively known as the Alabang Boys, should serve a lesson to all sectors to intensify the war against illegal drug use. She thus called on the academe, church groups, and nongovernment organizations "to intensify the campaign against illegal drugs" (Sisante 2009).

The president also proposed a "trinity against illegal drugs" as she called on local government units to declare themselves as "drug-free zones" (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 2009a). Drug-free zones will then be granted funding for projects promoting the welfare of the youth (Sisante 2009).

Arroyo further said that "the war shall be waged from three fronts," referring to the "trinity against illegal drugs" composed of law enforcement, judicial action, and policy making.

Ousted president Joseph Estrada, who was convicted of plunder, would later be granted pardon by Arroyo. He has since made multiple pronouncements supporting President Duterte's "war on drugs" (Mangunay 2016; Abanilla 2018).

Arroyo, who was prosecuted for election fraud and fund misuse, currently sits as speaker of the House of Representatives. She and President Duterte are known allies.

The *Mirror's* Coverage of Drug-Related Events in Davao City

To determine the manner in which the *Mirror* covered the "war on drugs" in Davao City, the researchers coded the 256 articles gathered and consulted a statistician to validate the data. The data were clustered

into two parts: (1) treatment of the article using variables such as the subject of the story, number of sources, type of sources, and placement in the newspaper; and (2) type of reporting which was classified as either conventional or contextual.

As expected, the results of the analysis show that the type of reporting employed by the *Mirror* leaned more on the conventional rather than the contextual as majority of the articles relied on single and official sources whose direct quotes made up majority of the articles and focused largely on local police activities and the mayor's pronouncements to fight the illegal drug trade in the city.

Subject

Among the eight subject categories identified, general reports about illegal drugs comprised majority of the articles with 38 percent of the total number or 103 articles. These stories were about the local and national government's antidrug activities, including local and national officials' announcements, agency plans and programs, and amendments to make the Dangerous Drugs Act stricter. Local drug stories were complemented by stories about efforts to fight drugs at the national level.

Next to these general reports are stories about drug arrests (63 articles or 23 percent), followed by investigations and court proceedings once cases are filed against the suspects (37 articles or 14 percent). Various articles about drug killings, drug case investigations, victim's and/or victim's family story, crime reports, and other topics were the subject of the rest of the reportage (25 percent). The results also show that of the 256 articles gathered from the three years, 134 articles (52 percent) were placed on the front page while 122 articles (48 percent) were placed in the inside pages.

The killings of drug suspects in police operations became a staple in the news when Duterte became president, but there were few of these reports in the *Mirror*, at least in the years 1986, 1998, and 2009. In fact, from May to December 1986, only one story about illegal drugs (marijuana) was found. In the succeeding years, suspects reported to be involved in shootouts were not killed; they suffered injuries and were usually brought to the Davao Medical Center. While there were reports of DDS-linked deaths, these did not comprise majority of the news reports either, presumably because 1998 was an election year and 2009 was the year when the CHR initiated its investigation on the summary killings happening in the city. Election years are reportedly

the time when the DDS would slow down. It should be noted, however, that at least 1,400 people have been documented as murdered by the vigilante group from at least 1998 to 2015.

Notable too are stories about murder, rape, and corruption leading the front pages of the *Mirror*. These reports involved civilians, government officials, as well as cops or former police officers being implicated in various crimes. Drug-related stories happening in other countries such as Thailand, China, and Mexico, among others, were also published by the *Mirror*, apparently giving the impression that the illegal drug trade was not just a local and national concern but a worldwide problem.

The subject category given the least prominence by the *Mirror* are stories about the slain victims of the DDS and their families. Before the CHR inquiry in 2009, there were also too few stories of resistance or criticism or even an analysis of the local government's antidrug campaign or the extrajudicial killings taking place in the city.

One such story did come out on May 6, 1998, a few days before the elections. Titled "DDS Victims' Kin Want Duterte Jailed" (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1998b), the report started with a paragraph about the relatives of about fifty victims of the vigilante group banding together to plan legal actions against Duterte and unnamed police officials whom they accused as behind the murders. But the victims' story stops there. The rest of the article goes on to discuss how the move is being orchestrated by a political opponent of Duterte. The information supposedly came from anonymous "sources from a government antidrug agency" who informed the *Mirror* that the politician on several occasions met with the victims' kin and promised them full support for the legal action on the condition that they support his candidacy.

In verbatim, the *Mirror* included a direct quote from the unidentified political opponent as it was supposedly communicated to the families. "Vote for me and I will help you file the case to bring Duterte to jail for these senseless killings," the politician reportedly told the relatives in secret meetings in January and February 1998. The story noted that the relatives since then were "working hard for the candidacy of the politician."

According to the report, too, the Davao Death Squad waged a killing spree at the same time Duterte announced in 1997 that he would "eliminate drug pushers and drug lords." About fifty suspected drug merchants were murdered around this time. The article likewise

noted that it was rumored that the DDS is under orders of the city hall and local antidrug law enforcement agencies.

Duterte and the police had, on several occasions, denied any role in the killings, saying that the vigilantes could be relatives of the victims of drug addicts who were exacting revenge on drug peddlers.

Verification of the information presented in the entire report should have been done, especially since the story was published a few days before the May 1998 elections. The story relied heavily on unnamed government sources; no reason was provided either as to why anonymity was granted. Corroboration was not also done with the victims' families who were essentially accused of conspiring with the politician. Even the side of Duterte and the police, who were the main subjects of the allegations, were not taken. It is interesting to note, too, that this particular story was published without credit; no reporter was named as author of the article yet it appeared on the *Mirror's* front page.

Comment from the Davao City Mayor's Office would come the following day, on May 7, in "Drug Lords, Bet Suspected Behind Plot to Jail RRD for DDS Killings" (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1998c)." Like the previous day's story, the follow-up article was published without an author.

In the front-page report, Mayor Benjamin de Guzman said that a political rival could be using money from drug lords to fund his campaign. Anonymous antinarcotics agents were also quoted as saying that millions of pesos in drug money could have already been funneled to the election campaign of the politician to defeat Duterte and de Guzman. "Politicians who honeymoon with drug lords are themselves drug lords," de Guzman said, pointing out that while the main target of the planned legal suit is Duterte, drug lords would support the politicians running for the top elective post so that they will have a "powerful coddler." According to the report, Duterte "had put a stop to the lucrative drug trade in the city" while de Guzman vowed that he will "treat drug lords as they were treated under Duterte's strong-arm policy on drug peddling." De Guzman declined to identify the politician, but the article hinted that they could be former congressman Prospero Nograles or retired colonel Ernesto Macasaet, who were then both running for mayor in the May 1998 elections.

The article also cited another unnamed agent who claimed that the politician "could be lawyering for some big-time drug peddler." "If this is true that a politician is behind this, this will be a big blow to our antidrug campaign," the anonymous source said. The victims' story

turned out to be a political one, which ultimately became a one-sided report in favor of the officials in position.

Sourcing

Throughout the three years covered in the study, the *Mirror* paid an inordinate focus on single and “official” sources in reporting drug-related stories. More than 60 percent of the reports reviewed had single sources, while 90 percent of the same set of articles used government officials as key sources. Most of these sources included former Davao City Mayors Rodrigo Duterte and Benjamin de Guzman, Superintendents Isidro Lapeña and Rogelio Dy of the Davao City Police Office, and various officials representing the regional police and various antinarcotics groups. Duterte, de Guzman, and Lapeña also graced the front pages of the *Mirror*, often with drug suspects arrested during police operations.

Information from these go-to sources typically went unchallenged, such as when de Guzman, in the March 22, 1998, report “Mayor Vows No Let-up vs Crime” (Mellejor 1998a), said that fighting crime was the “top priority program of the city government with the support of the police and the civilian populace.” The former mayor’s claim to speak on behalf of the people was not verified. By standard, journalists need to ask their sources where and how they get their information. In this case, an obvious question would have been how de Guzman knew what people wanted and whether he can cite polls or studies to support his statement.

The same is true for reports in which Duterte and Lapeña dismissed their supposed links to the Davao Death Squad and instead turned the blame on victims’ kin whom they claimed are the ones responsible for the killings to exact revenge on drug pushers. How Duterte and Lapeña got to this conclusion was never explored.

For the most part of the 1998 coverage of the “drug war” in the city, comments from other people involved in the stories were not included. If they were ever interviewed, these would often appear in the next day’s issue.

Type of Reporting

Because stories had only one source or one set of government sources, the reports were written in a straight news format or conventional type of reporting, which usually answers only the “who-what-when-where-why.” There were no in-depth drug-related stories published in the three years covered.

Conventional stories often inform the public about the official activities of government such as lawmaking and politics, but also public safety, including court prosecutions, police crime reports, and responses to fires and natural disasters. Three features stand out in a conventional story such that (1) it identifies its subjects clearly and promptly, and that it tends to be written in the “inverted pyramid” style, with answers to “who-what-where-when” in the lead paragraph; (2) it describes activities that have occurred or will occur within 24 hours; and (3) it focuses on one-time activities or actions, i.e., planned events, such as public meetings as well as unplanned actions like natural disasters (Fink and Schudson 2013).

Contextual stories, meanwhile, tend to focus on the big picture, providing context for other news reports. Often explanatory in nature, contextual stories are often written in the present tense because they describe processes or activities that are ongoing rather than events that have been both initiated and completed. They may also be written in the past tense if the purpose is to give historical context. Contextual stories may also be explanatory in the sense that they help readers better understand complicated issues. This kind of reporting may be in the form of trend stories, using numerical data that show change over time on matters of public interest (Fink and Schudson 2013).

Nearly 40 percent of the reports reviewed used data or documentary sources. But it is important to note that these records mostly came from government agencies such as the PNP and DDB, officials, or antidrug groups. Asking how these sources were gathered and vetting their data did not seem to be routine in the *Mirror* reporting as well.

For instance, in the February 8, 1999, story titled “Herrera: To Declog Death Row, Go After Drug Ring” (*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1999), then Bohol representative and former senator Ernesto Herrera said that the Leo Echegaray case could have been avoided if the government “bored down hard” against the illegal drug trade. He then cited “informed estimates” that “around 76 percent of convicts now on death row were involved in illegal drugs in one way or another.” Echegaray was executed by lethal injection on February 5, 1999, for raping his ten-year-old stepdaughter. Herrera was one of the main sponsors of the death penalty bill when he was senator. In the report, Herrera also cited data from studies done by the Citizens Drugwatch Foundation, which supposedly found that “most of the 801 convicts on death row were reported to be high on drugs when they committed

the crimes.” Information about how both sets of data were gathered was not included in the report.

Similar to the early part of the media coverage of President Duterte’s “war on drugs,” reporting on drugs and drug-related deaths by the numbers was also a hallmark of the media coverage of the drug war in Davao City. The articles did not delve much—or at all—on the stories behind the numbers.

Drug users most often emerge in the news if it is related to crime, community fear, or revelations about drug use, particularly among the youth. There is very little awareness of the interrelatedness of drug issues and other medical and health issues, and social issues, in news media coverage (Blood and McCallum 2005).

In framing drug-related issues, the news media usually convey the negative characteristics of drugs users and drug pushers. They emphasize how drugs lead to the destruction of the society. Journalists thus tend to amplify antidrug campaigns of the government to draw collective support from the community and the society at large against drug use and drug-related crimes. It shapes a society that has a common goal and that is to eliminate drugs and its harmful effects (Gecer and Mahinay 2018).

The *Mirror’s* coverage of illegal drugs in 1986, 1998, and 2009 almost perfectly fits this depiction of the news media when reporting on drug users in at least 39 articles described in a negative light. In majority of the stories reviewed in this research, the *Mirror* appeared to subscribe to Duterte’s approach in fighting drugs to the extent that in its editorial dated July 23, 2009, three months after the CHR inquiry, the *Mirror* wrote:

The war against drugs should have been mounted a long time ago. There has surely never been a lack of victims, for every single day, illegal drugs damage hundreds of people and their families. Many deaths and injuries are directly attributable to substances that control the mind and make criminals out of otherwise peaceful citizens. And how many women and children have been abused by drug-crazed men? They have all been crying out for justice for a long time, but government has been only half-serious in dealing with the problem. But now a war has been declared, and while it was based on faulty information, it should still be pursued with all earnestness . . . It is also important to remember that the war involves all of us, and that our participation—from simply not using drugs to being vigilant and report those who are dealing them—is vital in winning. This is too important to leave to the

authorities alone; we are all, in a very real sense, soldiers in this war.
(*Mindanao Daily Mirror* 2009b)

IN FOCUS: DUTERTE FACES THE CHR

The reporting in 2009 indicated somewhat of a tide change in the *Mirror's* narrative of the drug war mainly because a formal investigation into the Davao Death Squad by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) was underway. The three-day inquiry triggered a variation in the kind of story being told, the kind that very unusually placed Duterte in the hot seat opposite CHR Chair Leila de Lima, who was grilling him. But a closer look at the articles put out by the *Mirror* during those days also included counter-narratives that challenge the CHR inquiry.

In the March 31, 2009, front-page story “What Peace? What Order? CHR Chair de Lima Asks” (Arguillas 2009), journalist Carolyn O. Arguillas of *MindaNews* wrote perhaps one of the lengthiest articles published by the *Mirror*. (Arguillas was and is not a *Mirror* reporter. The *Mirror* published a *MindaNews* report about the CHR investigation.) The story tackled the meat of exchanges between de Lima and Duterte in the inquiry, zeroing in on de Lima challenging the supposed peace and order claim and low crime rate in Davao City all while suspected criminals were being slain. De Lima likewise interrogated Duterte on why the killings have not been solved. In fact, the same March 31, 2009 issue and the following day’s April 1, 2009 edition carried reports of people being gunned down vigilante style. In true Duterte fashion, the mayor threatened to resign if proven that the killings were state-sponsored.

But it is crucial to note that Arguillas’s story appeared alongside another *Mirror* story which seemed like it was written in defense of Duterte. In “Duterte Assumes Full Responsibility for Killings” (Caduaya 2009a), a *Mirror* reporter, wrote about how it was actually the mayor who asked both the CHR and NBI to conduct an investigation into the killings. Both *MindaNews’* and the *Mirror’s* stories were placed on the front page, but the *Mirror* piece was the banner story; below it was the *MindaNews* report.

In the March 31, 2009 issue, in light of the CHR inquiry, the *Mirror* also published an editorial titled “Public Hearing” that condemned the summary killings: “There is no place in civilized society for the summary killing of even the vilest of criminals; each person

deserves due process, and to accept their being killed unceremoniously in the streets is to dehumanize not just the victims but also the entire community. A city that accepts summary killings as a method of maintaining peace and enforcing justice will soon find itself having neither peace nor justice.”

The message was clear—that killings of any kind must not be condoned—but the *Mirror* did not describe Duterte as a subject of the inquiry or that he is being linked with the DDS. Instead he was written as a government leader who was invited to shed light on the issue.

The editorial also took a swipe at the “so-called civil society” who only condemns the killings when they “come too often and too close to each for comfort.” It also cast doubt on whether the inquiry would do any good because witnesses, it said, would be discouraged to come forward if there is a general belief that the killings were state-sponsored.

The following day, on April 1, 2009, the *Mirror*’s banner headline read: “Duterte Gives Up Control over Police” (Caduaya 2009b). Duterte resigned as supervisor of the Davao City Police and Task Force Davao supposedly to give CHR “a free hand” in its investigation of the unsolved killings in the city.

On page eight of the same issue, the *Mirror* reported that Nograles ordered the House of Representatives to probe the Davao City killings. The then House speaker said that the summary killings were “an international embarrassment,” as it became the subject of Philip Alston’s report. Alston was the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions.

The CHR investigation also paved the way for the *Mirror* to follow up and print other stories such as the Human Rights Watch report about how the killings may be state-sponsored and a report about a barangay official saying that the killings have no public approval.

But stories like “DCCCII Exec Backs Duterte” (Alama 2009) and “Is There Basis for CHR Probe?” (PNA 2009b) also came out. In the first story, Davao City businessmen were reported as standing by Duterte in the midst of the CHR investigation. Davao City Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc. (DCCCII) President Simeon Marfori Jr. says that he has seen the dark days of Davao before Duterte became mayor. “Those were the times of the *Alsa Masa* and when policemen were gunned down in broad daylight . . . Our generation remembered those times,” Marfori said, adding that he believed Duterte was principally responsible in cleaning up the city and that it was enjoying the fruits of his efforts. Lawyer Nonoy Villa-Abarille, another Davao

businessman, said in the same article that de Lima should have seen Davao City in the 1980s in order to appreciate what the absence of peace and order means to Davaoeños.

The stories published after the CHR inquiry largely leaned in support of Duterte, from clearing his name in the killings in “CHR Admits: Nothing Links Duterte to Summary Killings” (Caduaya 2009c), “Activist Says CHR Erred in DDS Probe” (Caduaya 2009e), and “CHR Admits Singling Out Davao City on Killings” (Suelto 2009) to stories that put blame on the CHR investigation in “Crimes on the Rise as Duterte Goes on Leave” (Caduaya 2009d) and “CHR Probe Worsened Crime in Barangay 76-A: Olanolan” (Padillo 2009), among other reports. All these came out in the same year when then President Gloria Arroyo was waging her own drug war.

It can be observed, too, that because the *Mirror* still relied heavily on government sources, the stories tended to shift toward the political side of things—again about the heightened rivalry between Rodrigo Duterte and Prospero Nograles—and not so much about the victims or how the investigation will move forward. Reports about the CHR inquiry were soon followed with articles about then House Speaker Nograles initiating a twin investigation in the House of Representatives and his son Karlo, who had his own radio program, criticizing Duterte and the summary killings (PNA 2009c).

DUTERTE AND DAVAO MEDIA

Senior journalists and media experts say that tracing events taking place inside and outside of Davao City vis-à-vis the state of the community press there, from the economic conditions of reporters and sustainability issues hounding newspapers up to the interests of owners and political actors, is needed to fully comprehend why local papers like the *Mirror* covered drug-related events and Duterte the way it did.

A former Davao-based journalist says it would be difficult to understand how the media there operated if only the Western-inspired view of how reporting should be done is used as a filter. While he does subscribe to these journalism ideals, he says the complexity of the situation in the city must be factored in to appreciate and also learn from how newspapers like the *Mirror* thrives in Davao City.

The Duterte Legend and the So-called Miracle of Davao

The journalist says that if a newspaper's coverage points to signs that might be seen as accepting of Duterte's "war on drugs," it could be because these long-running publications, including the *Mirror*, have seen the city at its worst and its best. Founded in the 1950s by the Flaviano couple, the *Mirror* is one of the oldest newspapers in Davao, as majority of the dailies and online news outlets based in the city now were formed in the last two decades.

Editors of media outlets then had seen the transformation of Davao from a city that was almost on the brink of breaking down into a much stable and vibrant city. Once a peaceful enclave, Davao City became synonymous with violence in the 1980s. Recalls the journalist, violence was all that people read in newspapers every day back then. The situation was so grave that the journalist could not go out at night as a child then. "We're always warned that 'if you'll be late going home, better not go home, stay where you are,'" he says. This was the time when children were supposedly abducted in the streets.

In the 1990s, investments came in to Davao City. Flights increased. Buildings were sprouting here and there. People can already walk down the streets. But then it was also in this decade when reports about extrajudicial killings rose. The journalist says the media kept reporting about the killings while the police could not give any clear explanation. But he notes that the killings at that time were all happening within the context of a city that had just gone through a very violent history. So it was like inertia, he says, that people can live with the killings.

Another journalist who has observed developments in Davao City says it is hard to simplify media coverage then because, in her observation, people really believed in Duterte as the city became progressive economically. With the city's stability came support for Duterte's hardline stance on crime.

The problem with many Filipinos, she says, is its psyche. "Unless he or she is directly affected, he or she won't care. So if the view is the death squad is controlling crime and it doesn't affect you, 'OK lang, gets ko, Death Squad 'yan,'" she says.

Of note, too, is the fact that during Duterte's term as Davao City mayor, he was consistently sought out by whoever sat in Malacañang for his anticrime efforts. The general positioning of the media in Davao City at that time was not surprising, and neither was it an isolated position. It is a position shared by many, including institutions and

past presidents. In the late 1980s, when Corazon Aquino was president, there were bombings in Davao City and elsewhere, so it was par for course when the drug killings happened in the 1990s. A journalist says violence carried on although the difference was that it was the supposed criminals who were largely being killed this time.

As narrated above, a “war on drugs” at the national level was also implemented by every administration, running in parallel with Duterte’s local drug war. None of these presidents, however, explicitly endorsed the killing of criminals. But except for a few media outlets like *The Mindanao Times* and *SunStar*, which monitored and counted the killings for a time, international groups, and the CHR at one point, not many took a serious look at the killings in Davao City. It can be surmised that the media’s failure to cast a critical eye on Duterte’s drug war was compounded by other institutions also failing to investigate and hold actors to account.

A Davao-based journalist points out that while it is true that the media had problems, government officials at the national level, the presidents in particular, tolerated Duterte. “It’s not fair to just put the blame on the people of Davao because it’s not just Davao that made Digong,” she says. The reason why Duterte became Duterte, she explains, is precisely because all the presidents, from Corazon Aquino to Benigno Simeon Aquino III, did not want to touch him. She notes that when the CHR investigated Duterte in 2009, the term used was not even “investigate.” The word commonly used in the reports that came out then then was “inquiry.” “You’re talking of one million votes, that’s why ‘he’s a son of a bitch but he’s our son of a bitch,’” she says, adding that the situation was like the case of the Ampatuan family that ruled Maguindanao for a time. The Ampatuan brothers, namely Datu Andal Ampatuan Jr. and Zaldy Ampatuan were convicted of fifty-seven counts of murder and sentenced to *reclusion perpetua* without parole for the massacre of fifty-eight people on November 23, 2009, where thirty-two who died were journalists (Buan 2014).

All through those years in Davao City, the media’s generally uncritical reportage helped create the legend of Duterte. One journalist says that because there has not been any strong case filed against the president, he has never tried to dispel the accusations or really clear his name. In fact, the summary killings even contributed to the mythmaking—the Duterte legend. It worked to his favor, he says.

At the time, there would always be talks about Duterte running for the senate every elections because of the supposed “miracle of Davao.”

By then, Duterte had already created a sort of a legend, a myth for himself, in dealing with the peace and security situation in the city. The way it was viewed in Davao City, Duterte's way of governance stopped the wanton violence that was once rampant there, but this was, of course, replaced with violence, too—the kind that targeted alleged criminals. The public, then, seemed to have accepted what was going on, he says.

Everyone else is guilty, says a former Davao-based journalist, noting that politicians during campaigns would always align themselves with Duterte because he's very popular and can carry the votes. Presidential candidates courted him and the Dutertes always delivered.

The journalist says he is not surprised that papers like the *Mirror* covered Duterte's anticrime stance the way it did, as evidenced by the findings in this paper. He cannot say that these newspapers supported it, but there was acceptance. Many reporters "need not be bought" because they personally subscribed to the kind of governance that Duterte executed. In his observation, most people in the community press subscribe to the leadership, pointing out that while critical discussions sometimes can be made in community papers, it is not the space wherein one can always be critical. "It's a community, right? It's not a gladiator's arena," he points out.

A Visayas-based community journalist who has been working for more than two decades says that community journalism, by practice, is very local, which has both good and bad sides. The community press, radio especially, is important during natural disasters when people need an instant source of information or if they cannot get access from other platforms. But largely, the community press's agenda, he says, is mainly focused on current and breaking news. In the run-up to or during an election, the reporting is concentrated on political talk, intrigues, gossip, and "he-said, she-said" stories.

Often, the critical view depends on the dominating political party, which heavily influences the slant of reporters and opinion of commentators. There is no "critical" reporting from a true journalistic point of view, the journalist says, while pointing out that being "critical" has been confined to bombastic radio commentaries bereft of research or contextual reporting or the occasional newspaper columns written by paid hacks. "If Manila-based outlets are Manila-centric, reflecting an imperial point of view, the local press also has its own arrogance and barriotic mentality, seemingly immune to change, resistant to improvement," he says.

Economic Pressures

To be sure, significant contributions by the community press have been documented in the case of the *Panguil Bay Monitor* in Ozamis City (Rimban 1999; Florentino-Hofileña 2001), *SunStar* in Cebu (Chua 1999), and *MindaNews* in Davao City (De Jesus 2015), but old issues of limited resources, journalists' cooptation with sources, and media corruption linger (Rimban 1999; Florentino-Hofileña 2001 and 2004).

A veteran journalist says it is typical in the reporting of many news outlets across the country for police stories to be written the way they have been written for many years—the fill-in-the-blanks kind of reporting. In this kind of reporting, reporters and even desk editors tend to accept what the police or authorities tell them and report it as such. The two-source rule is not exactly the practice in a situation where five to six stories are expected of a reporter, says another journalist. Small community papers do not have full-time reporters. Nearly all the reporters in Davao then work part-time except perhaps those who write for *The Mindanao Times*, he says.

The Mindanao Times, another early postwar paper, is published by Jesus “Jess” Dureza who served government in various capacities such as as Davao City representative, press secretary of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and more recently, as peace adviser to President Rodrigo R. Duterte. *Mindanao Daily Mirror* and *The Mindanao Times* are two of the longest running publications in the region. But to many observers of the media in Davao City, *The Mindanao Times*, despite its link to Dureza, has had a tradition of independence.

Because newspaper reporters work part-time, they have other jobs, too, such as radio reporters while some even moonlight as the media person of a politician or a candidate. They do public relations work to make ends meet. As wrong as this sounds, this is actually the situation that makes a community paper survive, says another journalist.

At least three community journalists interviewed for this paper say that until today, it is common practice for journalists to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. One journalist who works for both print and radio says she earns PHP 300 for a story or a photo in the inside pages of a regional paper. The amount goes up to PHP 350 if the story or photo is used in the banner. She estimates that the salary of a print reporter would be around PHP 10,000. She once heard that an editor-in-chief in a Mindanao newspaper earned PHP 19,000 monthly. While

she is able to make ends meet for her family, she wishes that things would be better, as there are cases when newspapers do not pay on time or do not pay at all.

A community journalist based in the Visayas meanwhile says he used to work without pay for at least six months for a radio station, then worked for minimal pay for a local paper. He only received above-standard pay when he worked in a noncommunity news outlets, the ones based in Metro Manila.

Hiring part-time reporters has both advantages and disadvantages. The only good thing, he says, is that it affords a wide reach for a news outlet in gathering information. On the other hand, editorial integrity of part-timers might be in question, as some can be unqualified or untrained. The journalist says he knows of correspondents who are in the payroll of local government units, congressmen, and even the military. They also get little to no protection against libel or physical attacks. Legal defense is mostly shouldered by the journalist or his or her political *padrino* (godfather or patron).

MMUM

Economic pressures can make journalists vulnerable to political patronage as in the case of Davao City where some have been known to enjoy the privilege of subscribing to the dispensation of advertisements, access, and favors offered by local power holders. In fact, there is an expression borne out of the habit of some Davao City reporters who follow then Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte wherever he goes: “Mayor, Mayor, *uban mi* (I would go with you)” or MMUM for short. MMUM or tagging along with Duterte meant that these reporters were going to be fed or be “taken care of” by the former local chief executive.

Journalists interviewed by the researcher for this paper say that it is no secret that some Davao City reporters have been known to receive tokens of appreciation in exchange of a good coverage. These tokens come in the form of food, cash, advertisements, and even jobs. The arrangement has been embedded in the practice of journalism that one veteran journalist says that when Duterte talks about corruption in the media, he knows it too well because that was how he treated the media in Davao City.

Another veteran journalist says there are some reporters in Davao City who apply the journalistic approach to reporting—those who try to get all sides, get as many voices as possible to tell stories, and those

who ask the hard questions. But then, he says, there are those who cover Duterte as if he is God or newspapers whose sensibilities tend to favor Duterte's policies.

This scenario is not unique to Davao City. Elsewhere in the country, a similar relationship manifests between some reporters and politicians. "A lot of media survive because they patronize the mayor or congressman," a journalist says. For example, a mayor or congressman can provide advertisements through the local government unit (often the biggest employer in a city or town) or influence businesses in placing or not placing ads in a newspaper. During elections, the placement of political ads comes with a reporter's access to sorties and events, which later becomes news content. This power, the journalist says, makes newspapers dependent on whoever is "up there" or who has resources.

To illustrate how dependent a reporter can be on politicians, another journalist says that, in one instance, he's been told that a mayor's kitchen can become an extension of a reporter's kitchen, a place where a reporter's children can go and eat. There is also another anecdote of Duterte helping out a reporter when a family member got sick.

"How do you cast a critical eye?" he asks. "It might be easy to say that one has to remain independent but you are talking with an empty stomach, and not just the journalist's stomach but also his children's."

At least four journalists say that Duterte has been known to dole out jobs while he was mayor and even when he became president. One journalist says he knows of at least five reporters who have taken on government posts in Davao City and Malacañang. Another journalist describes the practice as such: if the mayor is no longer the elected leader, the reporters will exit government and go back to private practice until the mayor that they are favoring is back in office. In Duterte's case, he says he has his own set of reporters that support him while Sara, the daughter who took over as mayor when Duterte became president, has her own.

But the journalist explains that the concept of having a revolving door between government and private media is not a secret. In the context of Davao City, because terms in local government posts are limited, a journalist may not stay long in government, so he or she will soon return to private practice. He says this is not really seen as a problem in Davao City because the question of having an independent press is questionable in the first place.

A community journalist who has worked in the province and Metro Manila shares a slightly different perspective. The revolving door dilemma in the community press in his view may not be as big as Noli de Castro (TV anchor turned vice president turned TV anchor again) or Rigoberto “Bobi” Tiglao (journalist turned presidential spokesperson turned columnist). But it does happen in a worse kind of way. There is no revolving door, he says, adding that it is more of a two-door-one-foot-in-each scenario wherein some reporters are casual employees of the local government while others receive money for the occasional interviews with officials.

But what sets Duterte apart, according to many of the journalists interviewed for this paper, is that he has made himself close to reporters at a personal level. There is a sense of camaraderie, he says. The mayor has made himself accessible such that he will sit down and eat at a *panciteria* with them. He treats reporters as equals or friends, and not as journalists who are only after a story.

Duterte as mayor was very media savvy. The access he gave to local reporters, plus the fact that he speaks the local language, made him so endearing. Media relations with the institution or local government was no longer a formal relation; it is a very personal relation, says a former Davao journalist. Because Duterte was the better operator among other politicians, more media would come to him. This is the reason why the journalist says he is so careful not to be associated with any politician. In his view, the media today is being attacked by Duterte and his group not entirely because of their critical reporting but because they are seen as political operators or as entities tied to the opposition.

In Davao City, news outlet *MindaNews* has been known to run critical stories but remains an organization that Duterte has not attacked. Journalists interviewed for this paper say that this group of journalists led by Carol Arguillas, *MindaNews*' editor-in-chief, has established themselves as journalists that cannot be bought by or are not aligned with any politician.

MindaNews is the news service arm of the Mindanao Institute of Journalism (Minjournal), a nonstock, nonprofit media organization registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Started as the Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center in 2001, Minjournal seeks “to promote knowledge and public awareness of Mindanao issues through publication, training, databank, and research services; provide news and information to news organizations and the

general public through its news service, *MindaNews*; and help improve the journalism profession in Mindanao” (*MindaNews*, n.d.).

Fast forward to 2016. Duterte, weeks after winning the presidency, asserted that “corrupt” reporters “are not exempted from assassination” (AFP 2016). This would be one of many more attacks that media organizations and individual journalists would encounter under the current administration. Freedom House’s (2017) latest “Freedom of the Press” report for 2017 cited that Duterte’s hostile rhetoric toward members of the media further exacerbated an already perilous situation for journalists in the Philippines, as the country remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to practice journalism and where violent attacks against media workers usually go unpunished.

CONCLUSION

This paper must be read keeping in mind that *Mindanao Daily Mirror* is only one of many other news outlets in Davao City. But because it is one of the longest running publications in Mindanao, the newspaper offers continuity in the narrative of covering Duterte and drug-related events in Davao City. The findings drawn from its coverage, albeit limited in scope, may point to insights that can help explain the different repertoires of engagement that Duterte employs when dealing with journalists as well as the various factors that underpin these interactions.

Becoming president for Duterte, although not entirely unplanned, signaled an abrupt shift from his local experience to the national and even the international stage. This has exposed him to a media landscape that is wider in scope and more varied in terms of reportage—the kind that is not as easy to navigate and control as the news media that he was used to deal with during his three decades in local office. From the comforts of his bailiwick in Davao City, he took office in Malacañang in Manila where the same kind of patronage dispensed to Davao media cannot exactly be replicated. Turning one’s relationship with a journalist to personal rather than professional as was the experience in Davao City is not entirely possible. This stems from that fact that many major national news outlets, unlike most community papers, operate on a business model that to some extent does not have to significantly rely on political patronage. This, in turn, has created space for some journalists to go beyond conventional reporting on Duterte’s “war on drugs.” Duterte is not used to such kind of reporting, as he has received

little criticism for the most part of his rule in Davao City. However, it is crucial to note that not all national news outlets and journalists, despite having a fairly viable business model and source of income, has done critical reporting on Duterte and his drug war. In fact, there are media outlets and reporters that are known supporters of the administration and would run uncritical stories favoring President Duterte today. For future research, it would be good to study how the patronage dispensed by Duterte in Davao City is being translated at the national level given his access to more resources as president (public and private) compared to being a city mayor.

The media experience in covering Duterte and his hardline stance on crime also allows for some introspection, to examine the contours and cracks in the profession. As narrated above, the local media's failure to cast a critical eye on Duterte's drug war when it started was compounded by other institutions also failing to investigate and hold actors to account. It was not until the CHR investigation when national newspapers started to really look into the killings happening in Davao City. For the most part, the national media, too, were looking at it as a purely local event, with no national implication or without relation to human rights. While it is important to be critical of government actions, it is also important to be critical of how journalism in communities and in Metro Manila is being done, even if the old longstanding issues of reporting remain, i.e., low pay, lack of support for quality reporting, and the appropriation of journalism by partisan ideological or political interests. It would be helpful to extend this research to uncover ways that have made it possible for news outlets like *MindaNews*, the *Mindanao Times*, and other independent news outlets to thrive in the local setting without compromising its independence.

Finally, the way many Davaoeños were not generally outraged by the killings happening in Davao City then is reflective of the way Filipinos, in general, have also become indifferent to the killings caused by the drug war and the attacks against journalists caused by their critical reporting. An assessment of how Filipinos understand the media's role in a democracy and in the context of reporting extrajudicial killings and human rights stories would also be important to analyze. ❀

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