

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

### DUTERTE'S PHILIPPINES IN THE WORLD OF GENDERED POPULISM

In the maiden issue of the *Review of Women's Studies* published in 1990, its first editor UP Professor Emeritus Thelma B. Kintanar proclaimed that the primary goal of the journal is to “serve as a forum where ideas on specific issues and concerns affecting the lives of women may be exchanged as seen from the analytical perspectives of different disciplines.” Now, 30 years after, we are proud to continue this dignified tradition. The resurgence of populism is one of the most significant contemporary developments to have affected the lives of women and other gender minorities in the Philippines and the rest of the world. This *RWS* Special Issue on Gender and Populism in the Philippines critically examines the varied ways the marriage of patriarchal practices and populist politics has reinforced, re-shaped, and retrofitted the contours of hegemonic gender norms in Philippine society. Using a diverse set of scholarly lenses, the special issue pays attention to the pernicious consequences of gendered populism on the everyday experiences of Filipino women and LGBTQ+ communities on the ground.

Populism is a political style that mobilizes popular support by invoking an antagonistic divide in the society between the “good people” against its “evil enemies” in power who have supposedly betrayed and wronged them. In the Philippines, populist politics is most evident in Rodrigo Roa Duterte’s presidency. Through the use of spectacularly crass language, he portrays himself as the leader of the insurgency of the “oppressed people” against the “bad elites from imperial Manila” whose past leadership allegedly coddled criminals, drug addicts, and oligarchs. Duterte is also infamous for his long list of repulsive sexist remarks and

actions, ranging from joking about sexual assaults to kissing supporters, be it in private conversations or state functions. He had also been most hostile to his female critics such as Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo, Senator Leila de Lima, and former Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno—characterizing their femininity as a weakness and even conspiring with his allies to remove them from their positions. Women have not been spared too from the horrors of Duterte’s brutal drug war both as casualties and, most often, as grieving wives, mothers, and daughters left with trauma and without a breadwinner. As many as 29,000 deaths, mostly from the urban poor, have already been documented since the beginning of the campaign. Women, along with other marginalized groups, bear most of the brunt of Duterte’s disastrous presidency. This is the basis of the urgent task that this special issue takes on: to make sense of and respond to the intersecting developments in gender and populist politics in the Philippines.

Populism is a global phenomenon and its gendered nature is one of the elements most common to all cases. Similar to Duterte, casual sexism and promotion of sexual violence against women are prominent features of the speeches of populist politicians. Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro averred that opposition MP Maria Rosário is unworthy of being raped because she is “ugly.” United States President Donald Trump frequently brags that being a powerful man gives him the privilege to grab women “by the pussy.” Populist politicians also empower “anti-feminist crusaders” and “angry old men” who resent public policies designed to improve the lives of women such as equal pay laws, stricter rules against sexual harassment in workplaces, and even affirmative action measures in universities. After closing down gender studies programs in campuses across the country, Hungary Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party have also recently banned legal recognition of trans people. In India, the ruling party Bharatiya Janata led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi refuses to criminalize marital rape despite longstanding recommendations from the United Nations and the country’s National Human Rights Commission. Populists disguise their sexism and misogyny through paternalistic claims of defending cultural and religious traditions especially around traditional family arrangements. Macho politics appears to be a shared disposition among populist leaders too. Latin American

populists in the past including Argentina's Carlos Menem, Peru's Alberto Fujimori, and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez have promoted informal norms around the idealized and stereotypically masculine leader. Despite the diverse socio-political contexts of these countries, a feminist analysis reveals a striking similarity among these populist leaders: a shared and deeply embedded ethos of hegemonic patriarchal norms. As we take stock of developments on issues of gender and populism in the Philippines, we are cognizant too of how these are situated in the map of a global resurgence of populism.

### **THE SPECIAL ISSUE**

This special issue, a first of its kind, brings together a diverse set of emerging scholars to advance our understanding of gender and populism in the Philippines. Each contribution, whether a research article, creative work, or book review, represents the varied range of analytical traditions that can be put to use to interrogate the causes, contours, and consequences of gendered populism in Philippine society and beyond. We introduce these contributions through the three interrelated themes that tie together the entire collection.

#### **Language of/and gendered populism**

The first theme of this special issue recognizes the critical role played by language in the powers and perils of gendered populism. The contributions in the set took the necessary task of unmasking the populist spectacle and unpacking the gendered discourse of Duterte in the context of mediatized politics.

Sharmila Parmanand's (University of Cambridge) lead article shows the use of patriarchal scripts in achieving specific political outcomes. Parmanand argues that "Duterte's use of gendered tropes builds support for authoritarian projects..." In subjecting select speeches and interviews of the president to discourse analysis, her research is broadly situated in the tradition of showing how "linguistic processes construct social realities, establish power relationships, and create regimes of truth..." including that of gendered populist politics.

Jose Mari Lanuza's (University of the Philippines Manila) work analytically complements Parmanand's article. Continuing the use of discourse analysis, his article outlines gendered populist discourses and counter-discourses between Duterte's speeches and the #BabaeAko movement. Lanuza notes the importance of how the women's group "creates a feminist counter-discourse to reposition themselves" contra to Duterte's discourse. More importantly, his article demonstrates how central disinformation strategies are to gendered populism.

Poetry, however short and sometimes impenetrable, has an alluring way of powerfully synthesizing a theme. The Bikol poem "An Kapungawan sa Syudad na Mayong Droga" by Kristian Sendon Cordero (Ateneo De Naga University), skillfully translated to English by Marne Kilates as "Melancholy in the City without Drugs," exhibits a masterful play of words evoking images, to our mind, that show the life/lifelessness of a nation so fixated on the language of drug war.

### **Women as populist publics**

The second theme explores the paradoxical role of women as populist supporters. In surfacing the motivations of different sectors of women in embracing gendered populism, these contributions reveal the complex nature of populist support contra prevailing assumptions of opaque populist demagoguery.

The book reviews by Erron Medina (Ateneo De Manila University) of *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (2017) and Jose Miguel Enriquez (University of the Philippines Manila) of *Populism in Southeast Asia* (2019) confirm our assertion in this special issue that not much has been said, and worryingly, about the intersections of gender and populism. So, while the reach of populism has been visible in the regional and global levels as both reviews noted, gender issues have been made invisible once again.

Veronica L. Gregorio's (National University of Singapore) article fills the gap by examining the responses of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), as the country's de facto overseas ambassadors, to international criticisms of Duterte's misogynistic jokes. The jokes are collectively frowned upon but have been recognized as too familiar by women OFWs.

As Gregorio also shows in her discussion, their social position as migrant workers and being geographically located in illiberal yet safe societies like Singapore play a role in why a sector like the OFWs also took a chance on Duterte.

Gregorio's article is best read along with the co-authored contribution from Cleve V. Arguelles (Australian National University) and Clio L. Pantaleon (Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila). In the article, the authors looked at how ordinary religious Christian women perceive and respond to Duterte's gendered populism. If OFWs are influenced by their socio-geographic locations, these religious populist publics are in turn motivated by religious frames. They draw on gendered Christian theology, both its conservative legacies and feminist potentials, in making sense of their support or rejection of Duterte.

Women are not only populist supporters but also populist leaders themselves. Ica Fernandez's essay accompanied by an illustration co-created with AJ Bernardo, took on the challenging task of facing the powerful women who run Duterteland. They tease out the internalized misogyny that is haunting women of power in Philippine society whether they are visible in public or hidden in the shadows. Fernandez leaves her readers a most needed reminder that it takes women dealing with their own internal misogyny to challenge gendered populism.

### **Resisting populist exclusions**

The last theme asks the classic question of what is to be done? The contributions in this theme exemplify the proud tradition of engaged scholarship, once again demonstrating that the tools of academe can be used to co-create spaces and possibilities to challenge yet another obstacle to the rights of women and other gender minorities.

Athena Charanne R. Presto's (University of the Philippines Diliman) exploratory work makes visible the experiences of young gays in rural Philippines. As Presto shows, the survival and persistence of their unique identities despite being overwhelmingly disadvantaged in terms of gender, class, age, and geography is a story of resistance from society's dominating logics of exclusions. The study, when put into dialogue with other pieces in this special issue, points to the possibilities of harnessing queerness

and other marginalized identities to counter the increasingly exclusive and discriminatory populist wave.

Nursyazwani (University of Pennsylvania) reviewed a book so instructive to the question of the day for many women's movements around the world. Drawing from *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (2019), Nursyazwani highlights the need to build transnational solidarity among women who belong to the 99%. In defeating gendered populism, she re-echoes the book's call to recognize, make use of, and be guided by the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality, and gender.

Presto's article and Nursyazwani's review prepares us for John Andrew G. Evangelista's (University of the Philippines Diliman) poem, "Hindi sa Haba ng Titi." With the use of incorporeal words, Evangelista ironically directs us to paying attention to the physical body. The poem, taking us through a journey of knowing but simultaneously rejecting the might of the penis, demolishes the myth and temptations of hegemonic masculinity that has intoxicated so many in Philippine society. Bodies, as populist leaders have masterfully used to their advantage, are sites of meanings waiting to be further explored by communities of resistance.

### Journal cover

A fitting conclusion to all the contributions in this special issue is the striking piece of artwork that graces the front and back covers of the journal. Created by feminist artist and activist Nikki Luna (University of Goldsmiths, London), it is one among several art installations displayed for her solo exhibition *This is how to be a woman of the world?* in 2018. The perfume made of white marble, called *Fragrant Filipina*, is a minimalist but nonetheless eye-catching material representation of one of the most remarkably vile of Duterte's sexist remarks. He asked a journalist, who he thought to be too critical of him, these questions: "What is the condition of your wife's vagina? Is it smelly? Or not smelly? Give me the report!"— all to the delight of the crowd. The art piece, we are convinced, is a critique of gendered populism: both in terms of how its norms are deeply embedded in the everyday life in Philippine society and how Duterte took advantage of

it for popular legitimacy. In locating the work at the beginning and closing of the special issue, our message is hopefully clear: both aspects of gendered populism must be confronted.

## **ETHICS AND POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION**

In closing, we offer brief remarks on the ethics and politics of producing this special issue. True to our feminist principles, we wish to acknowledge both the visible and the invisible labor that made this daunting process of knowledge production bearable.

The genesis of this project can be traced to the engaging conversations that we had with colleagues and students at the Bukidnon State University and Central Mindanao University when we visited in 2018 for a series of lectures. Exhausted but excited—our brief layover in Duterte’s Davao City turned into a planning session for this special issue. At the onset, we wanted it to be a space for healthy collaboration among junior academics, interdisciplinary fresh thinking, and healthy deliberations among diverse individuals on the subject of gender and populism in the Philippines. Two years after, with the publication of this special issue, we are confident that we have reached those aims.

We are grateful to have worked with a diverse set of contributors. Many are emerging scholars in their respective disciplines who come from different institutions based in the Philippines and other parts of the world. Moreover, we take pride in the fact that most of the authors are women and queers.

We are thankful too to the anonymous reviewers whose intellectual contributions to developing this special issue is as important as the named contributors. Our referees came from the Ateneo De Manila University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, The Raya School, University of Auckland, University of Ljubljana, University of Massachusetts Amherst, University of Melbourne, University of the Philippines Diliman, and the University of Surrey.

The publication of this special issue came in such an uncertain time. It is only because we have robust institutional support in our home departments that we have been able to put this together even

in the middle of a global pandemic. Cleve V. Arguelles benefitted from access to institutional resources at the ANU Department of Political Social Change as well as financial support from the Australian Federal Government's Department of Education, Skills and Employment through its Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. Veronica L. Gregorio was supported by the NUS Department of Sociology and by the Visiting PhD Grant of Sydney Southeast Asia Center (SSEAC) at the University of Sydney.

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