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Duterte as the macho messiah: Chauvinist populism and the feminisation of human rights in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

After his landslide electoral victory in 2016, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte started a violent war on drugs that has led to at least 5,000 "drug suspects" being killed by the police. Duterte's overtly masculinist rhetoric and behaviour are unprecedented among contemporary Filipino national politicians. His crude and aggressive political language regularly attracts negative media attention, but he remains popular and his party maintains a "supermajority" in Congress.

This article uses discourse analysis as a qualitative research method to explore the ways in which Duterte deploys patriarchal scripts to achieve specific political outcomes. Discourse theorising aims to illustrate how linguistic processes construct social realities, establish power relationships, and create regimes of truth while

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rendering other practices unacceptable. Based on an analysis of quotes from Duterte's official speeches and media interviews, mostly during his presidency and the campaign period that preceded it, this article argues that Duterte's use of gendered tropes builds support for authoritarian projects and stigmatises criticism against his administration. In particular, his posturing as a traditional macho male who openly admires beautiful women usually through the medium of jokes, his support for paternalistic policies to protect women and use of rape imagery to justify the war on drugs, and his attempts to feminise human rights advocates and sexualise female political opponents, position him as a tough and benevolent protector of a nation under threat and his critics as immoral, or cowardly and weak, thereby undermining their authority.

Keywords: Philippines, Duterte, discourse analysis, masculinity, gender and populism

INTRODUCTION

> "I hate to respond on questions, issues coming from lady candidates."
>
> – Rodrigo Duterte, during his 2016 Presidential election campaign (Punzalan, 2015)

Despite repeatedly proclaiming his refusal to run for president of the Philippines in the May 2016 elections, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte filed his candidacy just two days before the deadline. His candidacy was framed as a reluctant concession to persistent pleas from his supporters for him to seek the presidency. He ran on a platform of addressing crime and brutally eliminating a "drug problem." As a three-term mayor of Davao City, a booming urban center in southern Philippines, his message of replacing traditional political elites from "imperial Manila" resonated heavily with the electorate. Upon election, Rodrigo Duterte, or Digong, as he is also known, started a violent drug

war that has led to at least 5,000 "drug personalities" being killed by the law enforcement agents, according to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) (Bajo, 2019). These individuals were neither formally investigated nor convicted of the crimes they were supposed to have committed. The Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR), however, suggested that the actual figure could be five times higher (Maru, 2018).

While Duterte's crude and aggressive political language regularly attracts negative media attention, he remains popular among Filipinos after his landslide win in 2016. In fact, voters overwhelmingly backed senatorial candidates whom he publicly endorsed in the 2019 mid-term elections, which expanded his legislative *supermajority*. The cult of personality around Duterte is reflected in his supporters simultaneously references to him as "The Punisher" and as "Tatay Digong" (Tatay means "father" in Filipino).

Duterte's presidency coincides with the rise of *strongman* leaders in other democracies, such as Donald Trump in the United States of America (USA), Narendra Modi in India, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. They are frequently described as *populist leaders*, both in terms of their policies and their general political communication strategies. Populism, however, is a contested concept in political science, and Moffitt and Tormey (2014) make a compelling case for viewing populism as a *political style*. They argue that populist leaders exist across the ideological spectrum, which makes it conceptually problematic to define populism based on political ideologies or specific policies. Instead, they present a way of thinking about populism as a political style, which they define as "the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations" between populist leaders and their followers (p. 387). They differentiate populism from other political styles based on certain prominent elements: populist leaders' appeal to *the people*, usually by deploying *us vs. them* dichotomies and anti-elite and anti-establishment discourses; the evocation of a *crisis* that requires swift and decisive action as opposed to complex and gradual policy solutions; and a coarsening of political discourse, including swearing and political incorrectness, as opposed to polished and technocratic language.

Gender is currently predominantly discussed in the populism literature in the context of far-right populist policies, as a variable in voting patterns, or as a lens through which to view the engagement and involvement of women in populist regimes (Geva, 2018). However, the performance of masculinity has been very prominent in the populist repertoires of leaders such as Russia's Vladimir Putin, Trump, and Bolsonaro which shows a need to examine how notions of masculinity and femininity may structure populism.

Putin, who came to power when Russia had lost its superpower status and was a regular target of humiliation in Western media, has regularly sought political legitimacy by projecting a tough strongman image, from demonising feminism and LGBT advocates and threatening his political opponents with castration to being photographed bare-chested while riding a horse (Sperling, 2014). Trump's deployment of masculinity and white supremacism throughout his campaign and presidency is well-documented. For example, he dismissed McCain as a "loser" for having been captured during the Vietnam War and regularly depicts Mexicans as rapists to justify his anti-immigrant policies (Johnson, 2017). Bolsonaro plays up his brand as a defender of the traditional gender binary against threats from feminists and LGBT advocates. He told a female MP in a parliamentary debate that she was not worth raping and he defended corrective violence against children who showed signs of being gay (Assis & Ogando, 2018). In comparison to Putin, Trump, and Bolsonaro, Duterte's sexism is a bit more complex. He has not displayed any overt contempt towards LGBT individuals and has even suggested his support for measures that would grant them more rights. Nonetheless, masculinity is a core component of his political style.

This article interrogates the role of gendered symbolisms in Duterte's populism and in doing so, contributes to the academic conversation on populism by locating and foregrounding gendered language and discourses in the wider discussion of populist performances of political leaders and their interactions with their supporters. Based on an analysis of quotes from Duterte's official speeches and media interviews, mostly during his presidency and the campaign period that preceded it, this article argues that Duterte's use

of gendered tropes builds support for authoritarian projects and stigmatises criticism against his administration. His posturing as a traditional macho male who openly admires beautiful women usually through the medium of jokes, his support for paternalistic policies to protect women and use of rape imagery to justify the war on drugs, and his attempts to feminise human rights advocates and sexualise female political opponents, position him as a tough and benevolent protector of a nation under threat and his critics as immoral, or cowardly and weak, thereby undermining their authority.

LOCATING GENDERED SYMBOLISMS IN DUTERTE'S POLITICAL REPERTOIRE

There is a growing body of scholarship around Duterte's popular appeal and political style. Most of the existing literature on Duterte's populism focuses on the "language of crisis" he uses in characterising the drug problem, which is regarded as instrumental in displacing his reformist rivals in the presidential race. Where other candidates presented the possibility of a continuation of the Philippines' path to progress from the previous administration, Duterte tapped into the public's anxiety about criminality and the imminence of societal breakdown, which he argued only his tough leadership could prevent (Curato, 2016). It is, of course, likely that populist styles find acceptance in specific publics. Duterte's coarse language, which includes threatening criminals, foreign actors, and local critics, in the name of saving the Filipino people from an oligarchic class and a drug crisis, may be a political style that resonates with many Filipinos. In their discussion of populism in the Philippines, Curato and Webb (2019) argue that Duterte's appeal has roots in the Philippines' colonial history and national anxieties over US interference, and the population's frustrations with liberal democracy's failure to deliver a better quality of life for most Filipinos except the elites. They also situate his populism in the context of class politics within Philippine society, where figures such as former president Joseph Estrada and former vice president Jejomar Binay achieved political success by appearing to display authentic care and compassion for the poor and disdain for the rich and

powerful. Duterte's popularity is also partially explained as a result of the integration of media, melodrama, celebrity, and politics in the Philippines. His charisma and force of personality, the cinematic style of his political speeches, his declaration of open conflict with the Aquino administration, and his celebration of his own frailties, such as his weakness for women, provided an emotional dimension to his campaign that allowed him to connect with voters (Pertierra, 2017).

This article adds to the understanding of Duterte's populism and populism in general by focusing on his use of gendered symbolism in his official speeches and media interviews. While Duterte's political style resonates within a certain constituency, partially because of their historical and political experiences, this article argues that he is not simply representing an already existing public whose worldview completely aligns with his. When he "speaks for the people," he is also "constructing" his audience and shaping their conceptions of the threats they face and their hopes and desires. This argument draws on Laclau's (2005) conception of populist discourse as not simply expressing a certain popular identity that is "already there." For Laclau, populist discourse itself produces "the people" who are being represented by a leader. "The people" emerge through a process by which their various unfulfilled social demands, despite being heterogeneous, coalesce and reaggregate themselves (what Laclau refers to as *equivalential chains*), which transforms these demands from simple democratic requests into a fight between the underdogs and those in power. However, the "equivalential moment" must prevail over the differential nature of the demands. The chain of equivalence, which is the basis of the popular subjectivity, is consolidated through an element that gives coherence to the chain. This element, referred to by Laclau as an *empty signifier*, is used to construct homogeneity from different and particularistic demands. An empty signifier is a demand or an idea that has been tendentially emptied of meaning such that it can come to represent an infinite number of demands. In this article, "gender ideology" is viewed as one of the empty signifiers deployed by Duterte to produce a public that is nostalgic about a heteropatriarchal order that is seen as being threatened by feminists,

the West, and enemies of the state such as drug users. His articulation of gender is largely the traditional and simplistic sense of gender as a binary, where men and women are positioned in a hierarchical relationship in terms of power. This article also briefly explores how Duterte's masculine self-representation provides a framework through which his followers articulate their support and emotional attachment to him and their opposition to his critics.

Gender in this case is not meant as essentialist or possessive. It is performative, or something speakers enact or do, often with consistency and repetition, and not something they inherently "are" (Butler, 2006). This article does not make claims about the "essential nature" of Duterte, or gendered relationships in the Philippines, as much as it argues that Duterte's performance of masculinity and his use of gendered tropes, reify stereotypes and also serve specific political objectives. This article is especially concerned with gender differentiation in Duterte's speech acts—in particular, his deployment of masculinity and femininity to structure his political vision. Masculinity and femininity in this case are referred to in their idealised versions, which often pass for natural, inevitable, or biological, but are more likely traditional and constructed. For example, masculinity is often seen as being displayed by men who act as protectors over women who display femininity in their weakness and need for protection (Enloe, 1990). Conceptions of masculinity and femininity are also localised and contextual, and this article strives to pay attention to these nuances in the Philippines.

Duterte's sexism feels familiar when viewed in the context of historical antecedents for macho behaviour in Philippine political culture and prevalent patriarchal norms more broadly (Evangelista, 2017). Some local mayors mirror elements of Duterte's rough and tough-talking style. Former president Joseph Estrada and popular presidential contender, Fernando Poe, Jr., were both action stars who took on bad guys and protected the weak and helpless in their movies, in many cases playing the role of benevolent outlaws or bandits (Hedman, 2001). Local radio shows in the Philippines are also a common site of sexism. In programs that allow users to call in for advice on dating and relationships or to report crimes, radio hosts regularly crack jokes about tolerating male infidelity and

patronize women who were sexually assaulted while also purporting to help them (Beltran, 2018). Raffy Tulfo's radio program, *Isumbong mo kay Tulfo* (Report it to Tulfo), is an example of strongman justice: where Tulfo assumes the role of an investigator and judge at the same time, listens to complaints from victims and encourages them to recount their suffering on air, publicly ambushes and reprimands alleged perpetrators, and pontificates at both the victims and accusers about his solutions to their problems. The appeal of *complaints programming*, where audience members complain to media anchors in the hope of having their grievances addressed, is based on the popular perception that the state institutions are too weak (or corrupt) to deliver justice and that media messiahs are a good substitute (Claudio, 2014).

Overall, however, Duterte's overtly masculinist rhetoric and behaviour are still unprecedented among contemporary national politicians. Estrada, Poe, Jr., and even Binay railed against elites and emphasized a strong pro-poor agenda, but they remained deferential to human rights organisations and the Catholic Church. They used to be powerful players in Philippine politics, as demonstrated by their central role in toppling the Marcos dictatorship in the EDSA revolution of 1986. Estrada's mistresses were an open secret that he never explicitly acknowledged, but Duterte flaunted his. During his presidential campaign, he was photographed on multiple occasions with women on his lap, and sometimes kissed them on the cheek or lips. Under Church pressure, Estrada refused to endorse artificial contraception. Duterte, however, has publicly criticised and threatened Church leaders, accusing them of hypocrisy, corruption, and child abuse. Estrada used bombastic language when he warned in his inauguration speech that he should not be crossed, and that family ties and friendship did not matter in his campaign to stamp out corruption, but Duterte is in a league of his own as he promised mass killings, cracked rape jokes, and cursed US President Obama and the Pope, even before he was elected.

Some of the gendered tropes that appear in Duterte's official statements that are explored in this article are his jokes about his attraction to women, even to the point of rationalizing sexual assault, his use of physical objectification and sexual humiliation against female

opponents, and his accusations of homosexuality as a pejorative against male critics. These are juxtaposed against his broadly benevolent and paternal approach to women who do not represent a direct threat to his power: Duterte professes to revere them, to be drawn to them, and to be driven by a mission to protect them. He has spoken about female victims of domestic violence and rape who came to see him when he was the mayor of Davao City and how he threatened their abusers. His regular use of rape imagery—of the need to protect women and children from crazed drug users—in justifying his violent war on drugs, is also interrogated.

METHODOLOGY

This article conceives of discourse not just as formal language, or even just language as it is used in social situations (or *language above the sentence*). It relies on thinking from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis approaches (FPDA). For both approaches, discourses are a social practice. Discourses cannot be neatly separated from the "things" they represent. Discourses operate as "practices that systematically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). FPDA and CDA differ in terms of how they view *text and context*. Baxter (2003) explains that CDA assumes discourse and materiality to be mutually constitutive or dialectical: discursive events are shaped by *material realities* but also continuously shapes and reconstructs these realities or structures, while FPDA adopts an anti-materialist position in its view that social realities are always discursively produced and speakers do not exist outside discourse. From birth, we enter a social world that is infused by competing discourses, and so we make sense of our existence through interdiscursivity—where one discourse always interacts with other discourses.

Without wading into this theoretical discussion at length, this article situates itself more closely with the CDA view that there are material structures and conditions that shape Duterte's gendered discourses, but that his speech also reifies and reinforces these restrictive stereotypes. At the same time, the article also makes use of

interdiscursivity as an approach and recognises ways in which Duterte's gendered symbolisms in his speeches are inscribed and inflected within traces of other discourses, such as anticolonialism and antielitism. Both CDA and FPDA consider gender differentiation to be among the most pervasive discourses across many cultures, and are concerned with examining how modernist thinking that structures thoughts in oppositional pairs, often in a hierarchical fashion, with one idea being seen as superior to the other (e.g., males/females, weak/strong, etc.), constitute identities and social relations (Baxter, 2003). In line with this tradition, this article is especially interested in gender differentiation in Duterte's political performance.

Discourse theorising is predicated on the assumption that no inquiry is ever completely value-free and no researcher possesses a "God's eye standpoint" in viewing social reality, and it places a high demand on researchers for reflexivity. This is because researchers themselves are embedded in a particular cultural context and are also socially and historically produced. It should be emphasised that the claims made in this article are partial and provisional, and undoubtedly colored by the researcher's own subjectivity.

Drawing on Milliken's (1999) work, this article uses qualitative methods to demonstrate how Duterte's masculinist language is a system of signification that has implications on how his audience thinks and acts and how his language "produces" his audience as well. This article examines the processes by which his language creates what seems like common sense expectations from the public about how their leaders should act—for example, how his language establishes a relation of power that positions him as an authority and savior, and his critics as weak and obstacles to national security. Milliken (1999, p. 228) explains that "discourses make intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world, and of operationalizing a particular 'regime of truth' while excluding other possible modes of identity and action."

The researcher drew on Duterte's publicly available speech transcripts and media interviews until July 2018 and referenced only major relevant incidents after. All the quotes from Duterte's official speeches as president that are referenced in this article can be found,

in fully transcribed form, on the Republic of the Philippines Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) website. Duterte speaks in a combination of Tagalog, Bisaya, and English. All the relevant original quotes have been documented and were translated into English for this article.

Based on Milliken's (1999, pp. 231–234) discussion, the researcher made use of several strategies: loose predicate analysis, which consisted of noting words that modified or described the specific nouns referenced in the speeches to assess how the subjects were constructed as having specific traits or identities; and metaphorical analysis, which focused on figures of speech that represented one thing in terms of another as a way of suggesting a comparison or ascribing attributes to a subject or an action. The article also made use of narrative analysis as a method of discourse theorising. Bottici (2010, p. 920) argues that "narratives are ways to connect events in a nonrandom way, and therefore they are powerful means to provide meaning to the political world we live in." Politicians increasingly use narratives as an immediate way of connecting with audiences and readers because "they are seen as representing a non-argumentative, more common-sense and therefore more grass-roots inspired mode of conveying political views" (de Fina, 2017, p. 239). CDA is especially concerned with the imposition of frames of understanding by powerful actors, and often focuses on "master narratives" or dominant discourses about particular social issues.

Based on this analysis, the researcher derived categories of dominant gendered representations from the speeches. There was an analytical focus on Duterte's self-representation, his portrayal of male and female critics, and his representation of "enemies of the state," including drug users and sellers, communist insurgents, and rebel groups in southern Philippines. Finally, Duterte's masculinist language was situated in the broader context of his political projects, such as distinguishing himself from reformist predecessors and implementing a violent drug war.

In the next sections, a small sample of quotes are referenced in the discussion and an analysis made of the categories of dominant gendered representations that emerged from the review of his speeches and media interviews.

CATEGORIES OF GENDERED SYMBOLISMS IN DUTERTE'S SPEECHES

Weaponising jokes: sexual banter and anti-establishment politics

Duterte frequently mentions his admiration for women and openly displays his desire for them. In a speech during his visit to a police station, he joked about asking a policeman to "share" a local pageant winner, Ms. Ozamiz, with him because he was the president. "Who's sexist?," he asked. "Who doesn't want a beautiful woman? Sometimes, this is what is lost. We can no longer tease beautiful women" (Presidential Communications Operations Office [PCOO], 2017e). At a news conference, when asked by a female reporter about how he will treat non-performing cabinet secretaries, Duterte responded with, "You keep trying to get my attention" and wolf-whistled. When she firmly asked for an answer, he began singing a love song (Tan, 2016). He eventually answered the question. His supporters later defended his wolf-whistling as a sign of flattery and not disrespect (Danao, 2016). At the Philippine-India Business Forum (PCOO, 2018a), he spoke about the threat of ISIS and joked, "And the come-on is that if you die a martyr, you go to heaven with 42 virgins waiting for you. I'd like to have the virgins here, not in heaven. God may not allow it," he added.

Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo, who belongs to the opposition party and is regularly critical of Duterte's violent drug war and sexist language, is also a common target of Duterte's overtures. During the campaign period, he said, "If she doesn't win, maybe Leni Robredo would want to be assistant president." When pressed for why, he responded with, "She is beautiful. She is really beautiful. Just that she is beautiful" (Ranada, 2016). He eventually explained that he had no other position to give her. In a speech (PCOO, 2016d) delivered to survivors of super typhoon Yolanda after they were both elected, Duterte remarked, "I was going to come here because vice president is here. Wherever she goes, I follow. Because she's a widow. I am annulled from my wife anyway. But I have a child—for as long as I support my child, it's okay." Addressing Robredo, he said, "Ma'am, I heard you have a

boyfriend already. Don't be shy. Do not be offended, but that is what they say. If it is true, Ma'am, there will be a new dead Congressman. So you can be a widow again." In the same speech, he admitted to staring at Robredo's legs during cabinet meetings and that he lost his view because she started sitting in front of him in succeeding meetings. It is worth noting that Robredo's deceased husband was a well-loved government minister who died in a plane crash in 2012 and that Robredo continues to publicly remember him.

His jokes about the irresistibility of women have also found their way into speeches where he broadly condemns rape and sexual assault, but rationalises these actions based on the attractiveness of the women involved. In reference to being charged with acts of lasciviousness in his younger years, Duterte defended himself, "But you know the woman was really very, very beautiful that if you do not touch her, you will die. I was just saving my life" (Macas, 2016). When narrating a story about an Australian missionary who was taken hostage, raped, and killed by prisoners during his term as mayor, he said, "There was this Australian lay minister ... I saw her face and I thought: Son of a bitch. What a pity ... they raped her, they all lined up. I was mad she was raped but she was so beautiful. I thought, the mayor should have been first" (Burgos, Jr. & Silva, 2016). Despite criticism from the Australian government and the Filipino press over his rape joke, Duterte cracked several more in his speech at a reception for ambassadors: "What I don't like are kids (being raped). You can mess with, maybe Miss Universe. Maybe I will even congratulate you for having the balls to rape somebody when you know you are going to die" (PCOO, 2017c), simultaneously implying that any rape will be punished but some forms are more acceptable than others. In a speech to soldiers, he reassured them of his full support in the war against insurgents in Southern Philippines and reiterated his commitment to maintaining martial law in the region despite concerns raised by human rights groups about the potential abuses that can be committed by the police and military. He also added a joke, "If you rape up to three women, I will take responsibility" (PCOO, 2018e).

He has also signaled his support for male sexual entitlement. In a speech to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) (PCOO, 2018c), he implored

them to have fewer kids and to use contraception, but not condoms, as he mimed eating candy with a wrapper to demonstrate how condoms "don't feel good." Instead, he recommended pills or injections, which puts the burden of family planning entirely on women, regardless of ease of access, personal comfort, and medical circumstances.

The celebration of mistresses is also a common theme in his speeches. "Cut the hypocrisy. Who among us has no mistresses here?," he said, in defense of his ally, then Speaker of the House Pantaleon Alvarez, who was being criticised for adultery (PCOO, 2017a). In a speech to soldiers fighting a war in southern Philippines, he promised them a reward trip to Hong Kong, where he suggested, "You should not be bringing your wives, just your mistresses. Wives will fight with you. But with girlfriends, it's a real honeymoon" (PCOO, 2017i). However, Duterte had a different conception of adultery when he alleged that Leila de Lima, a vocal female opposition senator was having an affair with her driver in his speech at the police service anniversary, "Here is an immoral woman flaunting—well, of course, in so far as the wife of the driver was concerned, it's adultery" (PCOO, 2016b).

Duterte's jokes about how he cannot resist women or his encouragement of adultery just for men position him as a traditional macho male who is unapologetic and proud of his sexual entitlement and desire for women in an era where establishment-endorsed norms of decency disallow it. However, because they are "just jokes," they disarm his audience and reposition his critics as prudish disciplinarians, but still portray him as a transgressive hero who restores respect for the desires of ordinary men.

He has also framed criticism against his objectification of women as a form of Western "political correctness" that threatens male freedom, while also accusing Western critics of hypocrisy in their own commitments to gender equality. For example, in response to criticism of his rape remarks from former US first daughter Chelsea Clinton, Duterte accused the US of hypocrisy, and noted that American soldiers stationed in foreign bases have raped local women. In his speech at the Philippine Navy Anniversary Celebration, he referred to the case of a U.S. soldier who killed a Filipina transgender, adding that, "They killed the gay man, when you could have

just kicked them or pushed them out of the room. You didn't have to kill the transgender" (PCOO, 2017b).

When Duterte was criticised by some Filipinos for soliciting a kiss from an OFW in South Korea, his defenders argued that there was no malice in his actions and that, if anything, his kiss demonstrated his affection for OFWs and his willingness to engage with a segment of Philippine society that is often seen as inferior and neglected by elites (Morallo, 2018). Critics argued that Duterte abused his power because the woman was not in a position to provide meaningful consent: the most powerful man in her home country had asked for a kiss, in front of cameras and a crowd, and she had only a few seconds to decide. However, according to the presidential spokesperson, it was but "a playful act" (Lopez, 2018). Duterte's allies in government also countered that despite being ambushed with a request, the woman could easily refuse, thereby shifting the burden on her to avoid her own potential abuse.

The appeal of Duterte's humor has roots in broader Philippine society, even if it is not as commonly deployed by other national politicians. For example, many Filipino films feature male action stars who are often rough-talking bad boys but have a soft side for women. Male television show hosts give away big prizes to indigent participants while flirting with scantily dressed women dancing on stage and these acts are regularly received as benevolent and charitable (Legaspi, 2013). Duterte's jokes, too, are often defended by his supporters as "playful and harmless" (Lopez, 2018). They are also read as a sign of Duterte wearing his heart on his sleeve—an authentic expression of his emotional frailty and powerlessness against women's charms, which is a popular form of rationalising male sexual entitlement. It is easy to see how his constituency can view his jokes as a form of flattery and regard as a malicious overreaction any interpretation of them as patronizing or sexist. Further, by conflating political correctness and Western imperialism, Duterte is also able to mobilise racial insecurities and resentment to weaken the appeal of feminist critics in a nation that otherwise has a relatively strong base of support for women's rights.

Duterte's use of sexist jokes allows him to use "endearing" irreverence to self-define as being outside of the political establishment his

supporters seek to displace, and construct his opponents as agents of that establishment, who should be mocked or dismissed. His engagement with Robredo, who is the highest-ranked member of the opposition party, involves aggressive flirting and physical compliments. This robs her of political agency in the process, because it minimizes her political authority and refocuses the public conversation on her physical attractiveness. It also sets up a classic trap of requiring her to either publicly call him out and appear as a "feminist killjoy" or ignore his banter, thereby allowing him to get away with it, and confirming his power over her.

Drug users and communists and the rape threat

Apart from violently cracking down on drug users and sellers, the Duterte government is also officially fighting a war against Islamic State-affiliated groups in southern Philippines and separately, communist insurgents (the New People's Army [NPA]), after initial attempts at brokering peace fell through. In many of Duterte's speeches, identified "enemies of the state" are regularly characterised as violent rapists and murderers, which constructs them as threats to public safety, and legitimises violence against them.

In his State of the Nation Address (SONA) in 2017, he defended his violent approach to drugs: "There is also the theory that you can nurture a criminal into goodness provided he goes to prison for two years; three years, he's released, he's a sex offender. When he goes out, he rapes again, kidnaps another girl and makes her a hostage for so many years. Admit it. You are too lenient about this son of a bitch, a human being that has a virulent brain and his enemy is society" (PCOO, 2017d). He made similar comments in his speech to the ASEAN Law Association Governing Council : "It is only during the advent of drugs that you see infants one-year old, 18 months old. They just pick them up roaming around and taken into a corner, a building that's vacant and they're found dead. And when they commit a crime, they rape the blind mother, rape the daughter, then stab the one-year-old. Now, if you are the President, how would you feel? Then how now you would—the sense of responsibility of preserving the Filipino, protecting them" (PCOO, 2017g).

Duterte's relationship with the communists in the Philippines is more complex. Apart from cracking down on drugs, he also ran on a platform of reconciliation between the national government and communists, and was backed by significant quarters of the communist movement in his campaign. However, this arrangement was short-lived and the ceasefire between the government and the NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), broke down because of differences in both sides' understanding of the terms involved (World Politics Review, 2018). Duterte has used rape accusations to justify his political turnaround against the communists in a speech to the LGBT community in Davao City: "I do not want to talk to the communists anymore. I have been receiving reports that you communists, you're roaming around everywhere and some of you … you are into molesting or sexually abusing people who live in the mountains. You grope women and steal men's wives" (PCOO, 2017j).

In her critique of discourses around war, Butler (2006, p. 41) argues, "The question, though, of whose lives are to be regarded as grievable, as worthy of protection, as belonging to subjects with rights that ought to be honored, returns us to the question of how affect is regulated and of what we mean by the regulation of affect at all." Duterte's portrayal of women and children victims brutally raped and murdered by drug users produces a context that legitimises the killings in his drug war, often by representing the population as helpless and vulnerable, the drug users as violent criminals, and himself as a tough and benevolent protector. Duterte's rape metaphor is a fairly common discursive device to establish a crisis or a threat that needs swift resolution. Peterson (2010) explains that women, partially because of their dominant reproductive roles, are often seen as a metaphor for the nation, which makes the rape of women in war an expression of conquest by one group over another. Therefore, once women are "conquered" or "dishonored" by rapists, this also represents an emasculation and humiliation of the nation. Duterte's deployment of the threat of rape is essential to his "performance of crisis," which signals to the nation that they have been unable to protect their women and that he can provide this protection through his political manhood. Das (2006, p. 19) discusses how the deployment of the figure of the abducted woman in state discourse during the 1947 Partition of

India and Pakistan created panic and anxiety around threats to women's sexual purity and "constructed the state as a rational guarantor of order." Once specific groups of people are pathologised as rapists, they represent a threat to the social order and violence against them is legitimised. The liberation of women from rape (and the connotation of broader rights for women) was often cited as a justification by the US for directly intervening militarily in other countries. For example, the "rape of Kuwait" (i.e., its women) by Iraqi soldiers was a justification for US attacking Iraq in the early 90s (Boose, 1993).

In the Philippines, the narrative that drug users are likely to commit violent crimes has resonated with a significant portion of the population. A quick look at the online public conversations around reports of violent crimes, especially rape, reveals that many commenters, without any confirming evidence, assume that the perpetrators were drug users. The need for the war on drugs to prevent future crime is often asserted. Duterte's supporters also accuse mainstream media and Duterte's critics of highlighting the rights of drug users and criminals instead of the victims and would-be victims of drug suspects (Simangan, 2017). Online conversations around the war on drugs also reveal the popularity of the nation-as-family metaphor, with Tatay Digong (as he is fondly called by his supporters) seen as the strict father, who needs to punish truant children, for their own good.

Feminisation as undermining of opponents and human rights discourse

Duterte has referred to male opponents and critics, including self-identified heterosexuals, as "bakla" or "bayot" (homosexual) in a derisive manner. In his speech to the Central Command of the Armed Forces, he called the US Ambassador "gay" and a nuisance for condemning his rape jokes during the presidential campaign (PCOO, 2016a). In his speech during his meeting with a Philippine soldier who had been previously taken prisoner by communist rebels in the Philippines (PCOO, 2017f), he accused the head of the CHR of homosexuality and pedophilia when the latter criticised the killings of male teenagers in Duterte's war on drugs, "Why is this guy so pre–suffocated [sic] with

the issue of the young people, especially boys? Are you a pedophile?" During the presidential campaign, when rival candidate Mar Roxas questioned Duterte's promise to end the drug problem in six months, Duterte responded with, "Mar is gay. He can't do it. I can because I am a man. He isn't a man, so how will he do it? He is afraid to kill, he is afraid to die. But try me. Hold shabu in front of me, and I will blow your head off" (ABS-CBN News, 2016).

In Duterte's political project, concepts such as due process, human rights, and gradual institutional reform are seen as obstacles to solving the nation's problems. Strong and heavy-handed leadership is needed. His response to criticism from both the US Ambassador to the Philippines and the head of the Philippines' CHR, which was to derisively accuse them of homosexuality, casts them as weak and cowardly and allows him to define himself in contrast as a brave leader who understands what is required to fight crime and has the political will to do it. In his speech at the general assembly of the League of Cities, he lambasted human rights groups and the CHR Commissioner, Chito Gascon, over their criticism of his declaration of Martial Law in Southern Philippines, "In Marawi—you human rights groups, you need to listen—there were about 30 people taken hostage by the Maute [ISIS affiliate] group. During the hostages' last day on the planet, they were raped. Now we have their skeletal remains. Human rights? Gascon, if I see you, you are in trouble. I will slap you. I can't tell if you're gay or what. I may kick you" (PCOO, 2017h). Enloe (1990, p. 31) argues that political contests over masculinity usually leads to rival men trying "…to tar each other with the allegedly damning brush of femininity," with the intent to "to rob the opposing man of his purchase on such allegedly manly attributes as strength, courage, and rationality." The feminisation of individuals who advocate for compassion and caution is reminiscent of the strategy of the Iraq War proponents to cast anti-war protestors as "pussies" and obstacles to the national interest (Cohn, 1993).

This masculinised rivalry that Duterte sets up as "the rules of the game" also significantly undermines his female opponents. In a speech to the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) Alumni Association, Duterte said he wished he could resign, but he refuses to because next in line is

the vice president: "I do not mean to offend the lady. She's very good. She's gentle. But Leni is really weak" (PCOO, 2018f). There has been significant scholarship on the double bind women face in politics: women leaders who conform to stereotypical femininity are often represented as weak and lacking in leadership, but women who adopt masculinised political styles are also punished for transgressing perceived cultural norms and expectations (Romaniuk & Ehrlich, 2017). Duterte's masculinist strategies creates a rigged game that narrows her space for engagement.

Personalisation of conflict

Conflict and war are also regularly characterised as aggressive and masculine battles in Duterte's rhetoric. When comparing his approach to the Philippine-China territorial dispute to that of his predecessor in his speech at the Philippine Navy Anniversary, Duterte said, "They want to go to the [United Nations] UN for enforcement. But this is how it works—it's a conversation between men, this dispute. I will tell him, 'Son of a whore, leave, this is mine!' And he will respond, like a real man, 'Son of a whore, why will I leave? This is ours!' That's how it works. They say we should use dialogue, peaceful resolution, when will it end? Until when will we talk? Until Samal sinks?" (PCOO, 2017b). A personalistic form of chauvinist posturing is on display in his responses to international actors who have criticized his human rights violations. He told US President Obama to "go to hell" and the European Union (EU) that they are not to "tinker with the sovereign nation … with my sovereignty" in his speech to the ASEAN Law Association Governing Council (PCOO, 2017g). To the UN, he said, "I am a member state, a sovereign state. Please shut up because you are stupid" (PCOO, 2016e). Further, Duterte's reduction of international disputes into a conflict between himself and other men leads to a distorted view of the state. His constituency is primed to expect international relations to be conducted by "men," rather than states, in a way that privileges "masculine" impulses such as pride, aggression, and competition.

Laclau (2005) argues that subverting popular discourse involves changing the political sign of the central signifiers. This still includes an acceptance that these signifiers will continue to divide society into camps,

but that their political meanings shift. Duterte's critics regularly attempt to rearticulate masculinity to challenge his popularity, while still upholding masculinity as a basis of popular radicalism. This can be seen in the responses to his political backpedaling on the issue of disputed territories between the Philippines and China. Despite an international ruling in the Philippines' favor, Duterte has chosen to remain silent on the Philippines' claim in his interactions with China. In the 2019 midterm elections, opposition candidates took Duterte to task for his unfulfilled bombastic 2016 presidential campaign promise to personally jet ski to parts of Philippine territory to protect these islands from China and drive away Chinese presence and, with much fanfare, attempted to visit these territories themselves (Cepeda, 2019). One common response of critics has been to attack Duterte's masculinity, for example through memes that depict him as being walked on a leash by China's President Xi Jinping (We The Pvblic, 2016). In so doing, the master signifier of a tough protector is still being deployed as the basis of popular subjectivity, but in a way that seeks to foment public anger at Duterte's failure and position the opposition as better placed to embody this role. So far, these attempts have been unsuccessful at damaging Duterte's overall popularity.

The myth of benevolent sexism

Duterte's engagement with gay rights, women's rights, or even the issue of rape, is complicated. He has not overtly defined himself as oppositional to women's rights or gay rights. In fact, the often-cited defense of Duterte's commitment to gender equality are his achievements in improving maternal health care provisions and access to support for victims of domestic violence when he was mayor of Davao City. Under Duterte's watch, Davao had access to free contraceptives long before a national reproductive health law was passed. Davao was one of the first Gender and Development Local Learning Hubs certified by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), leading the way in developing best practices for other local government units to learn from. The Davao City Council passed the Women Development Code, an ordinance protecting women against discrimination. In keeping with Duterte's paternalistic approach towards women, this ordinance also banned swimsuit segments in local beauty pageants. He established Davao's 911

hotline, which received and acted quickly on domestic violence reports. The Davao City Government established Child Minding Centers for its working parents. Duterte has also openly expressed support for same-sex marriage and publicly spoken against bullying gay people (Tan, 2016).

However, Duterte's concern for women appears to be contingent on women adhering to their culturally prescribed roles and not threatening his power. In dealing with female political opponents who threaten to destabilise the political order he established, he has used sexual humiliation or the threat of sexual violence. When addressing former communist rebels, he recounted his instructions to soldiers, "Are there women? Are they holding guns? Shoot them in the vagina" (PCOO, 2018b). In response to criticism, he defended his comments, "You female rebels, you keep having children, then you abandon them to fight for the insurgency. You don't want to stop? I'll tell my soldiers to shoot your vaginas" (PCOO, 2018d). His preferred method of sexual violence against female rebels is explicitly intended to punish them for transgressing their role as mothers, which, based on his speeches, seems to be his primary criticism of their participation in an armed struggle against the state.

Female opposition senator de Lima, one of Duterte's most vocal critics, was arrested in 2017 on drug-related charges filed by the Department of Justice (DOJ). Duterte publicly accused her of having an affair with her driver when she served as Secretary of Justice for the previous administration, and using her driver as a courier to claim money from "drug lords." "What is really sad for this country: Here is a woman, posturing to be a crusader for good government. But because she couldn't control her immorality … her sex escapades led her to commit several serious violations of law" (PCOO, 2016c). He repeatedly threatened to expose her sex tape to the nation to prove their relationship. This is a potent threat because the Hispano-Catholic morality imposed on the Philippines by Spanish colonisers and the aggressive promotion of icons such as the Virgin Mary, whose purity, chastity, obedience, and devotion as a wife and mother were idealised, has led to women in the Philippines being predominantly judged as "good" or "bad" based on their sexual behavior (Brewer, 2004). He has also highlighted the vice president's attractiveness, while punishing

her for her criticism of his administration by disinviting her from cabinet meetings. These strategies of drawing attention to the physical appearance or sexual practices of female leaders are disciplinary tools in the immediate sense of silencing dissent, but also in the way they undermine the authority and agency of otherwise powerful opponents.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, Duterte's masculinist language helps enable his populist authoritarian projects. He has strategically deployed the language of women's rights against feminists and human rights advocates, and to establish women's need for protection from violent threats as a proxy for the nation's vulnerability in the face of a "drug crisis" or threats from insurgents. In so doing, he has legitimized his violent wars and broad powers given to the police force and the military, both heavily masculine institutions. At the same time, he also uses sexual banter and gendered moralization to discipline women who threaten his authority and reduce their public credibility. He has defended gay rights, especially against the Catholic Church which has been critical of the human rights abuses under his regime, but also deployed homosexuality as an insult against male critics of his policies, drawing on and reinforcing deep-seated stereotypes about homosexuals as cowardly. These gendered tropes are instrumental in constructing an image of a benevolent patriarch (Daddy Digong) who cares deeply for his people, unlike the detached and callous technocrats that governed before him. However, also unlike the weak-willed leaders before him, the tropes also construct him as a strong leader with no patience for slow reforms in the face of a looming crisis (The Punisher) and who understands the Philippines' problems far better than the "obstructionist" human rights defenders or feminist critics.

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