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Unholy alliance? Ordinary religious Christian women's responses to Rodrigo Duterte's gendered populism

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ABSTRACT

An unholy alliance between populism and patriarchy is on the rise. As populist leaders gain power, they also use it to invoke patriarchal norms aimed against women and other gender minorities. Gendered populism manifests worldwide but most especially in the Philippines. Since Rodrigo Duterte's electoral victory in 2016, his speeches and actions have deepened patriarchal, sexist, and misogynist norms embedded in Philippine society. Despite this, he continues to enjoy a high level of public support even among women. Scholars have offered various explanations for Duterte's popularity. This exploration of how different publics perceive and respond to Duterte's populism serves as the take-off

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point of this research. This study extends existing conversations by focusing on two presently underexplored areas: women in the religious sector and the gendered nature of Duterte's populism. This article pays attention to this particular question: how do ordinary religious Christian women perceive and respond to Duterte's gendered populism? In this article, we show how gendered Christian theology informs how they embrace or reject the president's sexist and misogynist rhetoric. Ordinary religious Christian women draw from diverse and conflicting traditions of church and biblical teachings to either legitimize or protest Duterte's gendered populism. In embracing gendered populist politics, they find justifications from traditional gender roles prescribed by Christian doctrines. In rejecting it, they draw from the same doctrines espousing the equality of sexes. But despite this difference, they similarly endorse a "spiritual" rather than a "public" response from their churches. Personal spiritual interventions are believed to be the most effective way in influencing the president's behavior. The choice of religious frames matter in the responses of ordinary religious Christian women to gendered populism.

Keywords: Rodrigo Duterte, populism, religion, women, Christianity

INTRODUCTION

An unholy alliance between populism and patriarchy is on the rise. As populist leaders gain power, they also use it to invoke patriarchal norms aimed against women and other gender minorities. This "gendered populism," as we call it, manifests worldwide but most especially in the Philippines. Since Rodrigo Duterte's electoral victory in 2016, his speeches and actions have deepened patriarchal, sexist, and misogynist norms embedded in Philippine society. Among the worst of these are his public confessions of repeatedly sexually assaulting his maid while he was a teenager, his order for the military to shoot female communist rebels in the vagina to make them "useless," and his remark that he should have been first as mayor in reference to an Australian missionary who was

raped and murdered in 1989.[2] He had also been most especially hostile to his female critics. Duterte successfully used the resources of his office to have senator Leila De Lima sent to jail in 2017, former chief justice Maria Lourdes Sereno removed in 2018, and journalist Maria Ressa repeatedly charged and arrested in 2019. Despite these, he continues to enjoy a high level of public support even among women (Arguelles, 2019a; Social Weather Stations [SWS], 2020).

Scholars have offered various explanations for Duterte's popularity. They have explored how widely resonant his twin narrative of anxiety and hope is among disaster survivors (Curato, 2017), the representational, experiential and action-oriented logics of urban poor support for him (Arguelles, 2019b), and the Christian theological underpinnings of the public enthusiasm for his campaign against illegal drugs (Cornelio & Medina, 2019; Cornelio & Marañon, 2019). This exploration of how different publics perceive and respond to Duterte's populism serves as the take- off point of this research.

This study extends existing conversations by focusing on two presently underexplored areas: women in the religious sector and the gendered nature of Duterte's populism. This article pays attention to this particular question: how do ordinary religious Christian women perceive and respond to Duterte's gendered populism? In this article, we show how Christian theology informs how they embrace or reject the president's sexist and misogynist rhetoric. Ordinary religious Christian women draw from diverse and conflicting traditions of church and biblical teachings to either legitimize or protest Duterte's gendered populism. In embracing it, they find justifications from traditional gender roles prescribed by Christian doctrines. In rejecting it, they draw from the same doctrines espousing the equality of sexes. But despite this difference, they similarly endorse a "spiritual" rather than a "public" response from their churches. Personal spiritual interventions are believed to be the most effective way of influencing the president's behavior. Given these, we argue that the choice of religious frames matter in the responses of ordinary religious

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[2] For more examples of his offensive speeches, see this list of sexist and misogynist remarks by Duterte compiled by one of the founding activists of Babae Ako movement: https://blogwatch.tv/2018/05/duterte-sexist-remarks/

Christian women to gendered populism. Some frames enable them to confront gendered populist politics while other framings constrain them into accepting it.

In the first part of this article, we develop the concept of gendered populism. The toxic mixture of the two, gendered biases and populist politics, has come to define contemporary populist movements. The second part of the article maps gendered Christian theology and assesses its feminist credentials. Like many religions, it has contradictory feminist credentials. The third part of the article discusses the methodological foundations of this research. We unpack in detail how interview data from a diverse set of ordinary religious women from different Christian churches in the Philippines were systematically collected and analyzed for this study. In the last section, we share the major findings of our study. We discuss in-depth why religious frames matter and how they facilitate certain kinds of responses from Christian women of faith as they interact with gendered populist politics.

GENDERED POPULISM

Populism is gendered. We conceptualize gendered populism as a distinct form of political mobilization that primarily uses "charismatic authority" as mobilizational strategy and "sexist rhetoric" as mobilizational discourse. There are three important elements in this conceptualization. First, gendered populism is primarily a practice of "political mobilization": it is a particular set of political activities, from election campaigns to street rallies, that individuals or groups rely on in the pursuit of political power (Jansen, 2011). Second, drawing from the organizational theory of populism (Weyland, 2001), the mobilizational strategy of gendered populism relies heavily on charismatic authority—a type of leadership that is highly personalistic and whose legitimacy is derived from the extraordinary qualities of the leader and his/her desire to challenge the status quo (Pappas, 2016). Populist leaders usually circumvent traditional forms of party-voter linkages by appealing to the voters in a direct and unmediated fashion (Kenny, 2017). And third, modifying the ideational approach to populism (Mudde, 2004), gendered

populism adopts a rhetoric of sexism and misogyny as its mobilizational discourse. It seeks to mobilize its constituency by invoking the legitimacy of patriarchal norms against women and other gender minorities. Sexist rhetoric is one that promotes prejudice and discrimination based on gender differences. It may be benevolent or hostile but nonetheless still sexist (Glick & Fiske, 2011).

Duterte is a paradigmatic example of charismatic leadership. In gaining power, he has mostly relied on his mass appeal rather than the traditional electoral machines (Curato, 2017; Arguelles, 2019b; Kenny, 2019). His electoral campaign used social media to mobilize votes (Sinpeng, 2016; Ong & Cabanes, 2018) and largely centered on his "spectacular appeal" as a leader (Rafael, 2016). As Kenny (2019, p. 48) points out, "Duterte, given his controversial and often crude behavior, commanded extensive airtime"—both in television and social media. His use of direct and indirect violence is another indication of his reliance on charismatic appeal. Until now, he exercises presidential power not through official channels but through issuing direct threats to those who he sees as the "enemy of the people," usually on national television (for recent examples, see Romero, 2019; Sternlicht, 2020). His focus on tough punishment for criminals fits well in the populist mobilization strategy, labelled as "penal populism" (Curato, 2017), as this is likely to generate support from a broad constituency of voters (Kenny & Holmes, 2020).

Duterte is also a classic patriarchal politician. He uses both benevolent and hostile forms of sexist rhetoric in his discourse. Benevolent sexism is usually committed when men objectify women often disguising its sexist intents in seemingly positive remarks. Duterte is known to compliment women leaders, especially during official functions, as having "sexy legs" that "he cannot resist ogling at it" in the case of vice president Maria Leonor Robredo (see Ramos, 2016) or as "being too beautiful" that "he would grab and hold on to her panty" in describing Bohol mayor Tita Baja Gallentes (see Merez, 2019). Although this may sound that Duterte is only appreciating the beauty of women's bodies and faces, these pronouncements carry a sexist attribute as it diminishes women to just their bodies. It is especially pernicious when used against female leaders. The other form of sexism is more overt and hostile. It reflects

straightforward hostility towards women. Duterte also did this when he once ordered the military to shoot women rebels in their vaginas. Such a remark is rude and derogatory to the dignity and personhood of those women.

Along with Duterte, populist leaders in many parts of the world are also known to portray themselves in masculine terms and their enemies in feminine images. This is part of the standard gendered populist mobilizational discourse. Some call themselves "fathers" of their nations like Getulio Vargas of Brazil. Others like to be photographed with traditionally masculine symbols like Russia's Vladimir Putin riding horses. Many also assume a military image like Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Argentina's Juan Peron. In feminizing their enemies, populists are known to ridicule their critics as physically weak, gay, too emotional, or even sexually repressed. Chavez accused the US Secretary of State as suffering from "sexual frustration" (see Zúquete, 2008) while Duterte suggested that the successor of former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales "should not be a woman" (see Esmaquel, II, 2018).

In invoking patriarchal norms, they seek to legitimize traditional-conservative values in family, work, and even politics and be legitimized as its primary defender. As Michael Conniff (1999, p. 199) has noted, "virtually all populists assumed roles as paternal figures to their followers: National leadership metaphorically mirrored familial relationships... the president was father, the first lady mother, and the citizenry the children."

In conceptualizing populism as gendered, the framework of this research argues that both elements of charismatic mobilizational strategy and sexist mobilizational discourse are central to successful populist mobilization. We, however, do not argue that all populists are either sexists or misogynists. Although many are (Kampwirth, 2010), our claim that populism is gendered shows how a political mobilization like populism is conducive to a mobilizational discourse that is patriarchal. We further argue that this is why we are observing that the recent rise of populism is coupled with a similar rise in forces invoking gendered norms.

In the next section, we develop our conceptualization of gendered Christian theology.

FEMINIST POTENTIALS OF GENDERED CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY?

Religion has been traditionally considered to be inhospitable to women's interests (Ozorak, 1996). Many religions are known to hold patriarchal beliefs and practices. The prejudice against women, argues some, is "within the very fiber of the religious establishment" (Rayburn, 1992, p. 7). Religion not only marginalizes women inside the church and in the broader society but also fundamentally denies women of the "special joy of praying to someone like themselves... something that men do all of the time and take for granted" (Rayburn, 1987, p. 141). Scholars have observed the various ways religious women respond when confronted by patriarchy in their religious organizations. Some willingly adhere to be consistent with their religious identities (Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Chen, 2005; Chong, 2006) while others resist patriarchal dogma in the church through selective compliance (Pevey, Williams, & Ellison, 1996) and individualized interpretations (Gallagher, 2003; Hartman, 2003). Over time, women have found ways to embrace, reject, and even instrumentalize the patriarchal foundations of many religions (Burke, 2012).

The shifts in the relationship between the feminist agenda and religion also reflect historical developments in feminism (Woodhead, 2003). First wave feminists extended their criticism of a male-dominated society to religions also long dominated by men. Christianity was particularly criticized not only because of the inferior role given to women in church but also how Christian churches have worked to constrain women's choices and actions beyond church doors (Stanton, 1985). In the Philippines, for instance, the Catholic church has long used its influence to impose limits on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (Ruiz Austria, 2004; Bautista, 2010). The second wave feminists took the patriarchal foundation of religions seriously. In rejecting mainstream religions as fundamentally sexist, they have attempted to cultivate alternative religions conducive to "feminist spirituality" (Daly, 1973). They emphasize social practice, advocate "de- churching," and thrive on relational approaches (Aune, 2015). The arrival of the third wave of feminism transformed critiques of religion beyond seeing women only as victims of patriarchal-religious oppression (Woodhead, 2003). Instead,

women's agency is recognized in terms of negotiating the empowering/disempowering elements of religions. Women, for instance, may choose to become part of conservative religious societies because of the privileged status they gain compared to being members of secular societies (Davidman, 1991; Kaufman, 1991; Ahmed, 1992). In current conversations on religion and feminism, what is clear is that women may choose to appropriate religion to pursue extrareligious ends including that of the feminist agenda.

Mapping the development of feminist critiques of religion, this article sees Christian theology as having two broad contradictory legacies for feminism. While Christian theology remains gendered, some women find in the same feminist potentials. On the one hand, conservative Christian theology idealizes a traditional and patriarchal society in which individuals are supposed to respect and promote gendered roles in the family, church, and society. Women and men are expected to perform distinct roles in dedicated spaces. Any disruption to this idealized traditional society, especially towards a more egalitarian and feminist society, is seen as a move to deviate from biblical teachings as well as the God-given natural order of things (Ruether, 2001). On the other hand, progressive Christian theology recognizes the patriarchal legacies of Christian institutions (Ruether, 1998; Attoh, 2017) but finds inspiration from church teachings and doctrines to challenge these legacies (Wallace, 1992; Quinonez & Turner, 1992). The tradition of feminist liberal theology, in particular, calls on women to "reclaim their faith" by correcting biased interpretations of Christian theology long dominated by men (Walker, 1999). In this article, we refer to these two broad conceptions when we talk about "conservative" and "progressive" Christian theology, respectively.

These two broad contradictory feminist credentials of gendered Christian theology, we argue, significantly shape how religious Christian women perceive and respond to Duterte's gendered populism. Religious Christian women will have differences in how they perceive and respond to gendered populism according to their theological leanings. Those who lean towards a more feminist Christian theology are likely to perceive inequities between the sexes and therefore also reject its

manifestations both within their respective religious organizations as well as in the broader public sphere. Those who lean to the contrary are more likely to perceive no such thing and may be more motivated to accept gendered situations as legitimate. In this research, we investigate how this is practiced among ordinary religious Christian women in the Philippines in negotiating with Duterte's gendered populism.

It is important to note that we do not see these two traditions of gendered Christian theology as static. Instead, we argue that ordinary religious Christian women may have been shaped by these discourses but they, in turn, may have also shaped both traditions. Religious discourses, as expected, evolve over time in response to changes in the wider social contexts. These changes include the rise and fall of different political systems and ideologies such as gendered populism. As many scholars of religion argue, secular ideas also play a role in shaping religious ideas and vice-versa (Fenn, 2001). In this article, we see too a glimpse of how these long traditions of conservative and progressive Christian theology, and its women believers and shapers, have responded to the rise of gendered populism.

In the following section, we discuss the methodological background of this study.

INTERVIEWING ORDINARY RELIGIOUS CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES

At the center of this study are ordinary religious Christian women in the Philippines. By this, we mean Christian women who self-identify as "religious" and who do not occupy a leadership position in their church before or during the time this research was conducted from August 2018 to end of March 2019. Christianity, aside from being the country's most dominant religion, plays a significant socio-political role in the life of the nation. The Catholic church, most known for its historical intervention in the 1986 people power revolution, has been vocal in their opposition to specific government policies including Duterte's war on drugs and the Reproductive Health Law (see Ofreneo, 1987; Cartagenas, 2010; Leviste,

2011). Protestant groups including the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines have been similarly protesting the police-perpetrated killings in the government's anti-drug campaign (see Esmaquel, II, 2017; Aquino, 2017). The fast-growing Christian megachurches, however, are noticeably silent (Cornelio & Marañon, 2019). But whatever the response is, there is an expectation that religious groups, from big to small, lead in shaping public responses to national issues. Other than religion being a social institution, social scientists have also long considered it as one of the most significant cognitive lenses that many individuals and societies rely on in understanding, interpreting, and even changing reality (Jensen, 2010). One of the broader interests of this study, then, is how religious institutions and believers have been responding to a political development such as gendered populism.

The focus of this study is novel for several reasons. First, existing research has been so far focused on responses of religious leaders, if not institutions. This article shifts the focus to ordinary religious individuals and investigates to what extent responses from the leaders parallel that of their members. Second, many studies have also paid attention, rightfully so, to public responses to Duterte's war on drugs. This study scrutinizes responses to less explored gendered dimensions of Duterte's populist politics. And lastly, the study privileges women's voices in a primarily patriarchal space by paying attention to religious Christian women. Putting the spotlight on them is still a needed intervention in the study of religion (Woodhead, 2003). The respondents for this study are nine ordinary religious Christian women from three Christian churches: the Roman Catholic Church, the mainline protestant United Methodist Church (UMC), and the evangelical protestant Greenhills Christian Fellowship (GCF). The latest official country statistics shows that these three, along with Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC), are the biggest Christian denominations in the country (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2019). INC, however similarly big and influential, was unfortunately not included in the research. The diversity of Christian churches engaged in this study allows the researchers to explore how various doctrinal beliefs and traditions of biblical

interpretation influence ordinary religious women's responses to gendered populism. For instance, mainline and evangelical protestants are primarily distinguished from each other on the basis of their fundamental differences on the role of the bible in their church doctrines. While evangelicals generally rely on literal interpretations of the bible, mainline protestants are more contextual in their interpretations. As we are interested in how religious beliefs shape the responses of ordinary Christian women of faith to gendered populism, doctrinal diversity is an important consideration in sampling.

Women who do not occupy leadership posts from the chosen churches who self-identify as "religious," mainly because of their regular attendance in their church services, were chosen as respondents for this study. These respondents, whose ages range from early 20s to late 50s, were recruited through a snowball sampling technique. All respondents were asked to provide free, prior, and informed consent before the conduct of the interviews. The selected respondents were individually interviewed using a standard questionnaire on gendered practices in religion and Duterte's politics. The audio recording of these interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed. The insights presented in this study draw heavily from the themes generated from these interviews.

In the subsequent sections, we unpack the findings of our research in detail.

IS THE CHURCH SEXIST?

Do ordinary religious Christian women consider their churches sexist? Consider the differences in the responses by Louise and Aubrey[3].

Louise criticizes her church for having "sexist tendencies." She complains that "priesthood is exclusive to males" despite the church having "many females who can also preach, who are devoted, and who can sacrifice for the love of God." She argues that this may be rooted in the fact that some biblical contents "propagate sexism." To her mind, these include

[3] These are pseudonyms. Throughout this article, we will maintain the confidentiality of the identity of our respondents.

stories such as the "The Fall of Man" and those that show that "Christ gathered only men as his apostles." The former story, she argues, is used by members of her church community to label "women as temptress" comparing all women to "the sinful Eve who tempted Adam." The latter stories, on the other hand, are used "to justify male-dominated leadership" of the church. If Christ only gathered men as his apostles, his church must also be led by men exclusively. To Louise, these sexist traditions both in her church and Christian theology are "unreasonable" and "should not be followed."

Aubrey finds justification in Christian theology for the gendered division of roles in the church by comparing it to the "ideal family" in which the "men are expected to be the head of the household and wives should be submissive to their husbands." She claims that this is perfectly acceptable because this is "God's plan to build a harmonious marriage and family relationship." Aubrey compares this to the running of the church which requires that "God's plan" be similarly applied. She further argues that Christians must follow this "biblical teaching" "with all [one's] heart" despite "not being always easy." To her mind, there are "no religious practices in [her] church that are sexist or misogynist" and that "the Bible does not propagate sexism." For example, in defending prescribed gendered roles in the family, she claims that she was taught in her church that:

> ...men as head of the family means they have the burden to lead the household, love his wife, and provide for the needs of his family... [while] on the other hand, being submissive to your husband as a wife does not necessarily mean that you will consider yourself as inferior to your husband, rather, wives should see it as a privilege and opportunity to show their love through serving and taking care of their husbands.

Mirroring these different responses by Louise and Aubrey, our respondents are also broadly divided on the question of whether their churches are sexist. Those who recognize the gendered nature of Christian theology are likely to acknowledge the similarly gendered practices in

their churches. To the contrary, those who refuse to acknowledge it find justifications in how Christian theology promotes and idealizes gendered divisions in society.

As shown in Louise's response, some consider the male dominated leadership in their church as a sexist practice. Their religious leaders are mostly, if not all, composed of men—deacons, pastors, priests, and even church board members. Even in a church in which a male and a female leader are supposed to sit co-equally on the highest position, women leaders are observed to be treated as inferior to their male counterparts. In some Christian churches, the highest male leader is named "president" while the female counterpart is only called "senior sister." Sexism is not only a problem in church leadership. In other Christian churches, women are even prohibited from leading "praise and worship" activities of the congregation. This means that the particular role of leading one of the most important activities of the church is reserved for male members of the church community.

For this set of respondents, sexism in the churches is strong: there is a prejudice against women in terms of exercising their roles as leaders and sometimes even as members of their religious groups. They attribute these sexist practices in their churches to the gendered biases of the bible and other Christian beliefs. They point, for example, to the emphasis on gender roles as well as the general invisibility of women in biblical stories. Men, unlike women, were portrayed to be individuals occupying significant positions—the apostles, pharisees, and government authorities. One of our respondents, Liz, was also reminded of how women were made invisible in one of the most popular stories in the bible. In the story of the "feeding of the 5000," Liz remembered that only men were counted in the census. And this invisibility of women, according to her, is quite common in both popular and little known biblical stories. The foundation of sexist practices in Christian churches is, they argue, its gendered theology. What is apparent here is that it is one's awareness of the gendered nature of Christian theology that allows them to perceive sexism and misogyny in their churches.

Belonging to the other camp, earlier discussed through Aubrey's response, were those who refuse to acknowledge that sexist practices

in their churches exist. They appeal, for instance, to using historical contexts to justify their position. To them, biblical stories and the way women were portrayed in those stories only reflects specific historical contexts of that time. While sexist culture existed in the past, this does not mean that Christian teachings should be considered as sexist. They claim that nowhere in the bible is sexism idealized but the bible does provide context regarding prevailing cultural beliefs and traditions during the time of Jesus Christ. More importantly, they argue that these traditions are no longer seen by present believers either as ideal or justified.

Others take an even more conservative position by emphasizing that gendered roles, regardless of whether they are perceived to be sexist at present, are God-ordained. Christian churches, therefore, are limited by God's teaching as to the practices that may be allowed to thrive or otherwise. To them, biblical teachings must be interpreted with care and, more importantly, religiously followed. As Robin explains: "When God commands, it is not a mere suggestion. It is His word and every word that comes from Him is true and an order."

What we can learn from these responses is how contradictory the feminist potentials of gendered Christian theology can be: women find inspiration in the same Christian teachings to justify dissimilar positions on the gendered, if not sexist, practices in their churches.

That women do not always perceive sexism as such is a well-established fact in the literature (Glick & Fiske, 2011). Some women perceive only overt kinds of sexism (Fasoli, Carnaghi, & Paladino, 2015) and others do not necessarily consider sexist views as personally offensive (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). What we have learned from this study is how these previous findings may also be true in church spaces. Ordinary women of faith rely on the same Christian doctrines both to accept and protest sexism in the church. In the case of our respondents too, it does not matter what particular tradition of Christian faith they practice—whether Catholicism, mainline Protestantism, or Evangelicalism. What spells the difference is whether they broadly adopt a conservative or progressive reading of Christian theology in general. Religious framing plays an important role in shaping their perceptions even of their own church.

IS DUTERTE SEXIST?

Ordinary religious Christian women, as in the previous question, are also divided on whether Duterte is sexist. While it is widely shared among respondents that many of Duterte's remarks on women can be characterized to be sexist and misogynist, they differ on whether this necessarily means that the president himself is sexist. Those who believe that the president is not necessarily sexist find justifications in how women themselves participate and welcome Duterte's rhetoric and actions. Religious frames play, again, a significant role here. In refusing to recognize Duterte as sexist, they find support in their religious beliefs that gendered practices are not always necessarily sexist. This means that practices may be gendered without necessarily being discriminatory and harmful to women.

To them, one is only sexist or misogynist when prejudice against women exists. By prejudice, they mean a specific belief that women are not of equal status to men. This, they think, does not characterize the president. What others mistake for as sexism is what they see as harmless expressions of everyday masculinity. They claim that men around them have also been joking about women for so long. It might be offensive or insensitive but it is a stretch to consider it as sexist. For instance, they claim that Duterte's recognition that women leaders like the late senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago can be an excellent politician is proof that he harbors no prejudice against women. When he makes fun of other women politicians, it is not because they are women but because Duterte does not consider them to be effective in their leadership roles.

More importantly, they see women's participation and acceptance of Duterte's rhetoric and actions as ultimate proof that the man is neither sexist nor misogynist. Ordinary women willingly participate in a public kiss with the president or laugh as a response to his rape jokes because they think that these women know that the president means no harm. His expressions of everyday masculinity, including the practice of making fun of people around them, is a practice that they have been long familiar with and used to being surrounded also by men in their lives.

They justify this position by drawing parallelisms to the situation of women in the church. Once women participate and accept church practices, they legitimize these beliefs and practices—no matter how sexist or misogynist they appear to outsiders. As Diana remarks, "if women themselves are embracing the church and its practices, how ican it be sexist?" Some respondents also argue that there may be gendered practices in different churches but there is no prejudice against women's participation. The same, as Olivia points out, is "true for the Bible." She insisted that "while there may be biblical stories in which women appear to be given less significant roles... this does not necessarily mean that [the Bible] is sexist." Instead, as some of our respondents would say, what is being demonstrated in this case is there are different roles to be fulfilled and obligations to be respected by men and women—all voluntarily. These respondents appear to draw from the same religious frames, that of gendered Christian theology, in refusing to acknowledge both the sexism of their churches and Duterte.

The other set of respondents identify Duterte as sexist without much difficulty. They complain about how the president publicly kissed a married woman without her consent, how he reduced women as mere laughing stock through the use of rape and gendered jokes, and the way he trivialized the public role of women leaders. They feel personally offended but also socially concerned that this might encourage sexist practices among the public. The shared worry is that the position he occupies enjoys so much power and influence that his words and deeds are taken as a command for the rest of the Philippine society.

They also consider Duterte's sexism as an affront to the Christian faith. As Bella rhetorically asks, "do you think a man of God would utter those words?" How he degrades women publicly, the disrespect he gives them every now and then, and the remarks he frequently makes against women easily characterizes sexism and misogyny. But it is, as they say, also "un-Christian." They can find no justifications for it, especially in their religious convictions. Louise, for example, asserts that "the church denounces his behavior... [because] to think of bringing harm to anyone can never be tolerated [in the church]." Many of our respondents appeal to the idea of "equality of the two sexes" and refer to it as a "fundamental

Christian teaching." Again, what sets this group of respondents apart from the other one is their rejection of the sexist legacies of Christian theology. To them, whether in the church or in the broader society, there is "a need for Christians" to "turn their backs against sexism" and other beliefs and actions that are harmful to women. As Liz says, "[she] feels responsible as a Christian to denounce those who degrade other people... including and most especially, women." Their denunciations of sexism in public and private life is motivated by, as they say, the basic Christian doctrine of "loving one another just as Christ did."

That some Christian women may find some forms of sexism harmless and acceptable, particularly benevolent sexism, is consistent with other previous studies of women in other spaces (Kilianski & Rudman, 1998; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Many women too who subscribe to highly gendered prescriptive roles for women, including women's role in churches, are known to likely practice self-silencing when confronted with everyday sexism (Swim, Eyssell, Murdoch, & Ferguson, 2010). What this study contributes to further understanding this phenomenon is the role of religious frames in excusing, and sometimes even legitimizing, some forms of sexism including that of gendered populist politics.

It is important to note that we also find our respondents drawing from their understanding of the logics of everyday life in perceiving whether the president is sexist. The religious frames they adopt are interspersed with lessons drawn from their experiences including prevailing notions of masculinity and femininity in the broader society. This finding speaks to the deeply personal character of contemporary religious identity in which believers draw as much from their everyday beliefs as from religious doctrines in shaping their religious identity with the self as the final arbiter of what is meaningful. Conceptualized as "reflexive spirituality," contemporary religious identity is shaped through both religious and secular influences (Cornelio, 2016). After all, religion is a social institution that cannot be separated from the entire "connections and context of human relationships" (Besecke, 2014, p. 15).

HOW SHOULD THE RELIGIOUS RESPOND TO GENDERED POPULIST POLITICS?

What unites the two divided camps, however, is their take on how the religious sector should respond to Duterte's gendered populism. Ordinary religious Christian women endorse a common strategy of "spiritual" intervention contra "socio-political" interventions. This may be expected from those who embrace gendered populism. However, even those who protest the president's sexism and misogyny interestingly endorse the same form of response. These personal spiritual interventions may come in the form of reaching out to the president's religious adviser or to his family as well as praying for and with him.

Our respondents adopt two broad ways of justifying a spiritual response. First, public responses are seen as too confrontational and potentially divisive. They reject church-led street mobilizations and other forms of public responses. They find this way inconsistent with their religious beliefs as they believe that they are called to respect authorities and promote unity among other people as Christians. Robin, for example, considers Duterte's presidency "as an appointment from God" and, therefore, the proper intervention is that "we should continuously pray for him." She also thinks that the president's remarks about women "should neither be tolerated nor accepted but should be prayed for." As God placed Duterte in that position, an appeal to the same God is needed if particular interventions are warranted. Christians, as they argue, are expected to "build unity" rather than "sow division" among leaders and the people. Olivia says that "as a woman of God," she should try her best to "create unity in the country." Rather than "criticizing leaders," her responsibility is to "pray for [the leaders]."

And second, spiritually intervention particularly in the form of prayer is seen as the most effective means of dealing with intolerable behavior. This is only expected given how religious individuals strongly believe in the power of prayers as an intervention in one's life. Asking divine intervention, or to have someone seek divine wisdom, is what they do when friends and family are in trouble and this is what they also ought to do if the president is in trouble. As many of them told us, "praying

is asking for God's help." This is effective because "[God] knows us, [God] created us... [God] holds the blueprint of our life... [God] designed us." The most that the church can and should do is to offer collective prayers, private counselling, and fellowship with the family. For our respondents, this is a response consistent with Christian values.

Religious beliefs are used in embracing or rejecting Duterte's gendered populist politics, as it is also used to justify the response that they endorse. As they commonly argue, Christian theology is founded on compassion and mercy even for those who are most harmful to many. They claim that this belief applies to everyone, most especially to the president. As Robin explains, "there are no perfect leaders... even our heroes, or even us... praying for our leaders is the most essential thing that we [Christians] could do." Bella adds, "we are all equally fallible and unworthy of forgiveness... but God's grace also extends to all."

If we consider what responses their own church leaders have taken, stark differences appear in terms of the preferred response. Broderick Pabillo (2018), the Roman Catholic's auxiliary bishop for Manila, claims that "God did not give us President Rodrigo Duterte." He reminds Catholics that "leaders are not divinely ordained" in democracies but rather "elected by the people." This is in stark contrast to what many of our respondents claim about how national leaders were chosen by God. In line with previous public statements and actions by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) protesting Duterte's war on drugs (see Villegas, 2017a; 2017b), Pabillo (2018) also strongly prompts his fellow Catholics that "subordination to civil authority is secondary to subordination to God... especially if the civil authority is no longer serving truth, justice, and peace." Again, this specific religious framing and public response endorsed by the Catholic leadership does not resonate with many of our respondents. The same can be said for other Christian groups including the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches which calls on Evangelical Christians to "denounce the unlawful and brutal killing of drug suspects, which demonstrate utter disregard for human life" under Duterte's administration (see Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches [PCEC], 2016; 2017). The responses of these religious institutions have been both

public and, in some cases, also confrontational. This is far from the preferred personal and spiritual intervention that many of our respondents are endorsing.

Jayeel Cornelio and Ia Marañon (2019) have previously observed that some Christian groups have also resorted to a similar "spiritual" type of response to Duterte's war on drugs. We observe the same thing in the case of ordinary religious Christian women and their responses to Duterte's gendered populism. They have argued that churches should take a more public response akin to public theology. What we wish to draw attention to is how certain prevailing religious frames motivate ordinary religious Christian women to endorse personal spiritual responses, instead of confrontational socio-political interventions, to a political development such as gendered populist politics. That individuals draw from their particular understanding of the world in responding to social and political developments is a widely shared sociological fact. Our specific contribution is surfacing its particularities.

In our concluding section, we discuss in broad strokes what the findings of our research can contribute to current conversations and questions on the intersections of gender, religion, and populism.

CONCLUSION

The power of populism, as noted by Laclau (2005), is that it appeals to a diverse and unrelated set of constituencies while making their distinct demands and interests equivalent. No matter how different they are from each other, they unite behind the populist. Duterte's populist politics appeals to a variety of groups for different reasons. He is a penal populist restoring law and order for an anxious middle class (Teehankee, 2017), he fulfills the illiberal aspirations of overseas Filipinos (Gregorio, 2020), he is an empathetic leader capable of restoring dignity and agency to disaster-affected communities (Curato, 2019), his war on drugs is a righteous intervention to save the country from crime and illegal drugs (Cornelio & Marañon, 2019; Cornelio & Medina, 2019), and many more. In this article, we further contributed to unpacking the appeal of Duterte by interrogating the religious responses to his gendered populist politics.

So how do ordinary Christian women of faith interact with Duterte's gendered populism? Our research provides several answers to this question. First, religious frames matter to them in forming their responses. In embracing or resisting Duterte's gendered populist politics, they find justifications from gendered Christian theology. Those who acknowledge, and consequently, challenge the sexist legacies of Christian doctrines rely on the same doctrines to reject gendered populism. But those who promote Christianity's traditional-conservative notions of gender roles in society are likely to find support in their religious doctrines to excuse the president's sexist and misogynist rhetoric and actions. Second, despite these differences, there is a shared belief that a spiritual rather than a public response is the most effective way of dealing with gendered populism. Personal spiritual interventions in the form of praying for and with the president are widely preferred options of influencing the president's behavior. And lastly, while religious doctrines are undoubtedly a significant resource in the formation of their religious frames, secular influences may also play a role including their everyday life experiences.

Our findings also raise new issues waiting to be further explored. The unholy alliance between gendered populism and religion is supported by religious frames that embrace patriarchal norms. But only some women of faith are inclined to adopt this frame. Age and church affiliation do not explain the difference, but we have yet to investigate whether other factors including socio-economic background and political socialization play a role in it. With the self being increasingly at the center of religious identity formation, the contemporary rise of spiritual reflexivity points to the emerging significance of the wider social contexts of the individual in shaping religious frames. In closing, we return to the broader claim of this study regarding the diversity of motivations by different publics in engaging populist politics. Contrary to mainstream public conversations, the country's populist turn cannot be captured by a single narrative of either pathologized fanaticism or the stupid voter trope. Different publics are drawn to populist seductions in their own ways—including, at times, religious reasons.

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