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POPULISM AND THE CIVIL SPHERE: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE “WAR ON DRUGS”
IN THE PHILIPPINES

by

Nathaniel Lubanga, B.A., S.T.B.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Communication

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 2021

ABSTRACT
POPULISM AND THE CIVIL SPHERE: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE
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IN THE PHILIPPINES

Nathaniel Lubanga, B.A., S.T.B.

Marquette University, 2021

A poignant photograph on the front page of a leading newspaper in the Philippines showing a woman cradling the lifeless body of her dead partner drew both local and international attention and outcry over the new president’s approach to the “war on drugs.” The purpose of this study was to determine the overarching story told by the photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines. A textual analysis drawing upon both narrative and semiotic analysis was used to examine the settings, characters, plots, and symbolism in 143 photographs of “Killings” and “Protests” drawn from various news media agencies. Key findings of this study, shown by the photographs, shed light on the overarching story of the brutal “war on drugs” that is devastating the Filipino nation and has met a strongly protested disapproval by the community. In understanding the interaction between populism and the civil sphere, populism cannot afford a destructive intrusion. Instead, it can combine with substantive policies that work to integrate the community in a more expansive equitable way and inspire hope for democratic life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On July 24th, 2016, the front page of the *Philippine Inquirer*, a leading newspaper in the Philippines, printed an image that would be hard to forget. Above the headline, there was a poignant photograph taken by Raffy Lerma, a leading photojournalist. The photograph showed a woman cradling the lifeless body of her dead partner Michael Siaron, who had been fatally shot by motorcycle-riding men the night before. The same photograph contained on-lookers and a cardboard sign, left next to the victim's body, with the words "*Pusher ako, wag tularan* [I am a pusher, do not imitate]." The photograph, which resembled the famous Pieta sculpture by Michelangelo, drew both local and international attention and outcry over the new president's approach to the "war on drugs." In the days that followed, more photographs of victims started to emerge. With an increase in press coverage came more condemnation leading to protests by citizens denouncing the murders of suspected drug offenders as extrajudicial killings.

For the last five years, the Philippines has continued to gather national and international headlines due to President Rodrigo Duterte's "war on drugs" policy. Press coverage, investigations, scholarly research, and other human rights assessments indicate that thousands of deaths have been related to the bloody policy. There have been many attempts at understanding this phenomenon by journalists and academicians alike. The dominant discourse includes condemnation of the extrajudicial killings and an explanation of the rise and dominance of Duterte as a populist due to the failure of elite democracy to fulfill the promise of social justice and sustainable development. The discourse also includes how a section of the Filipino community has come out to protest Duterte's administration and his murderous "war on drugs" policy. There have been news stories, investigations, and

research studies into Duterte's populism and condemnations of his "war on drugs" due to the emerging images showing bodies of victims. Nonetheless, no research has explicitly focused on the news photographs of Duterte's "war on drugs" and the role the images of these killings and protests play in understanding Duterte, his populism, and life in the country during this "war on drugs."

In this thesis, a textual analysis of the photographs will be undertaken, drawing upon both semiotic and narrative analysis to understand the meanings of the photographs of the "war on drugs" in the Philippines. This analysis will provide insight into understanding the relationship between Duterte's populism, the human condition, and the desire for relief. To this end, the research asks the following questions: What story do the photographs of the "war on drugs" in the Philippines tell? What can we learn about what it means to live through a "war on drugs" under a populist regime in the Philippines? What are the viewers encouraged to think about this "war on drugs" and those who experience it?

This research highlights the contributions of communication studies both in theory and practice by examining the role photographs play in constructing our understanding of society, most notably here the Filipino society during a time of social and political turmoil. It also contributes to civil sphere theory by considering semiotics as a way of inquiry and understanding of communication and social movements and communication's role in democratic struggle. Since the photographs propose a particular view of the events, thereby encouraging a particular positionality toward populist regimes, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing conversations on human rights, social injustices, and possible efforts towards civil repair.

This thesis has four parts. Chapter 1 contains a review of relevant literature on the sociopolitical history of the Philippines that grounds the understanding of

populism there and the theoretical background based on the civil sphere theory. The methods used in the study are then discussed in Chapter 2, beginning with a view of photographs as historical evidence, followed by narrative and semiotics as theories of analysis. The findings are presented in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapter 4 presents the discussion, identifying both limitations and recommendations for future research, and outlines the main conclusions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As evidenced from the discussion in this chapter, studying history, in general, has proved to be informative, formative, and transformative. A look at the sociopolitical culture of the Philippines, for example, reveals an environment that enabled the rise of Duterte. While failed “elite democracy” fueled his rise, populism played a crucial role in Duterte’s election. This thesis views populism not as an ideology but as a spectacle, a means to gain power. An examination of Duterte’s “war on drugs” through the lenses of both populism and civil sphere theory provides the possibility of viewing what has happened in the Philippines as a failed attempt at civil repair. This chapter consists of four parts: (1) the sociopolitical history of the Philippines; (2) President Duterte and his Rise to Power; (3) Populism and its Philippines Variety; and (4) The Civil Sphere Theory.

Sociopolitical History of the Philippines

Importance of History

James W. Loewen (1995) asserted, “History is important. More than any other topic, it is about us. Whether one deems our present society wondrous or awful or both, history reveals how we got to this point.” While playing a central role in human thought, the concept of history attracts the idea of “learning from history” with the “notions of human agency, change, the role of material circumstances in human affairs, and the putative meaning of historical events” (Little, 2020, n.p.). Though from a utilitarian perspective, the effects of studying history might be less tangible or less immediate, history is nonetheless useful and indispensable. The study of history helps us understand people and societies and helps us understand the change and formation of society. Thus, examining past historical phenomena that have shaped both the socio-cultural and political aspects of the Philippines, including the

intersection of its culture, colonial past, and religious background, will help us understand the sociopolitical phenomenon of the Philippines in 2021.

Social and Political Culture of the Philippines

The Philippines is a country with a long history of colonial occupation. Between 1565-1898 the country was under Spanish rule, which established a sociocultural environment that prized subjugation of the locals to work in agriculture, townscapes that replaced rainforests, a feudal system with powerful *datus* (rulers) as heads, and forced Roman Catholicism intended to replace animism (Woods, 2011; Library of Congress, 2006). The American occupation then followed between 1898-1946, interrupting the short-lived Philippine independence from the Spanish when America annexed Spanish colonies, including the Philippines. This annexation provoked the Philippine-American War in 1899. The American occupation introduced American-style democracy with a shift from Spanish subjugation to political participation of the Filipinos in matters of economy and governance by establishing the Philippine Commonwealth with an elected president, self-governance, and with legislative power that needed the approval of the United States' president (Library of Congress, 2006). This American occupation also reinforced a mentality that foreign cultural values are superior, resulting in socioeconomic dependency (Woods, 2011; Hernandez, C. G., Borlaza, G. C., & Cullinane, M., 2021).

The American occupation was followed by a brief but brutal occupation of the Japanese during the Second World War between 1942-1945. The Japanese occupation did not bring about many cultural influences apart from the emergence of the Filipino Japanese population, which became a constant reminder of the great loss of life and significant destructions brought about by the liberation war between Americans, in collaboration with Filipinos, and the Japanese (Ara, 2011; Library of Congress, 2006).

The United States granted the Philippines its independence through President Truman's issuance of "Proclamation 2695 of July 4, 1964" (Library of Congress, 2006).

The Filipino culture is a melting pot of its colonial past intertwined with its long indigenous history. The colonial intrusion resulted in sociocultural changes, most of which were chosen and not imposed, resulting in modern hybridity (Woods, 2011). Bonn Juego (2017) argues that these local-colonial interactions resulted in four major social and cultural problems persistent to date. First is the culture of violence, where individuals employ aggression, physical harm, or death to solve conflicts or differences. Second is the culture of impunity in which the rich, influential, politically connected, and the powerful easily get away with crimes or are even exempt from punishment. Third is the culture of machismo and sexism through which men look down upon women subjecting them to inferiority and violence both in act and speech. Last is the disregard for human rights for which the principles exist, although they are ignored or suspended in practice (Juego, 2017).

In addition to these significant socio-cultural problems, it is essential to consider the subsequent political culture in the Philippines; prominent families dominate politics of patronage, elected lawmakers are driven by personal gains rather than service, and there is personality politics with celebrities-turned-politicians (Hays, 2008; Teehankee, 2012; David & Atun, 2015). With politicians behaving like gladiators, one can describe the general political atmosphere in the Philippines as rough-and-tumble where, to settle scores, politicians kill or get killed, coup attempts are common, political protests and impeachment efforts are the order of the day, and any development performances are curtailed or frustrated by the ruling elites (Conde, 2005; Hays 2008).

One significant political phenomenon that defines the Philippines and its modern history is the February 1986 People's Power Revolution, also known as the 'EDSA Uprising' or EDSA Revolution. Years of repressive and autocratic rule of President Ferdinand Marcos under Martial Law, the disputed 1986 snap elections, and the assassination of the opposition figure Benigno Aquino, Sr. triggered the peaceful demonstrations. The major players included the Catholic Church and most Filipinos who supported the opposition Liberal Party (Library of Congress, 2006). EDSA Revolution saw the ouster of dictator Ferdinand Marcos and the installation of Corazon Aquino, the first woman and the 11th president of the Philippines. The post-martial law era, beginning with Aquino, saw the rise of oligarchies with over 250 powerful political families dominating politics. For example, the Aquino family has produced three presidents, a mother, her son, and grandson; and the Arroyo family has had two presidents, a father, and his daughter. Similarly, the Marcos family, produced Marcos as president, his wife as a member to the Philippines House of Representatives, his son as a senator before his failed run to be vice president to Duterte, and Marcos' daughter as governor. The Marcos family still exerts political influence with patronage over the current president Duterte (Conde, 2005; Hranjski, 2013). Finally, another example is the well-known boxing legend and celebrity, Representative Manny Pacquiao. Although Pacquiao and his brother and his wife are not members of the traditional elites in politics, they are now working to establish a new political dynasty.

Even with the emergence of the examples above of political dynasties and their related corruption, the EDSA revolution restored liberal democracy with speech and press freedom, civil liberties, and elections, but only for a short period (Curato, 2017). Many political scientists and political history writers argue that though the

ouster of dictator Marcos restored democracy, it failed to address the nation's severe social and economic problems (Hranjski, 2013; Heydarian, 2018). It is as if instead of a revolution, the country restored the pre-martial law era with the democratic political system disguising an oligarchic society.

While some scholars point to the Spanish influence as to why a powerful family and patronage system endures in the Philippines, others blame the damage done by dictator Marcos and his 20 years of martial law that effectively suppressed any emerging leaders (Juego, 2017). Still, others think that the United States is to blame since their Philippines' occupation and aftermath imposed a political structure that took advantage of the social patronage system and gave rise to the sociopolitical phenomenon that identifies the Philippines today (Conde, 2005). The United States, for example, supported regimes of powerful political families, like dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who furthered their anti-communist interests in the region. In addition to these foreign influences, Filipino politicians have included school dropout movie stars like Joseph Estrada, inexperienced comedians, former military figures, and even petty criminals, gambling lords, and former convicts like Edward Hagedorn (Conde, 2005).

The Catholic Church and Politics in the Philippines

It is nearly impossible to discuss any political topic concerning the Philippines and not talk about religious institutions, in this case, the Catholic Church. Before the United States occupation that led to the official church-state separation, the Spanish colonialists involved the Catholic Church in the administration of the Philippines (Library of Congress, 2006). With the country's population being mostly Catholic, it is essential to note that the Catholic Church was and continues to be a very significant player in the Philippines politics, exerting influence whenever it has wanted. For example, Jamie Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila between 1976-2005, was a critic

of the Marcos administration and played a significant role in his ouster (Library of Congress, 2006). The Catholic Church was part of the “EDSA Uprising” and continued to exert its influence over future administrations and political outcomes in what the Church termed “critical solidarity.” (Library of Congress, 2006; O’Donnell, 2005). This “critical solidarity” meant that although the Church did not categorically condemn administrations, they reserved the right to criticize them. The Catholic Church also directly influenced some constitutional matters like those barring abortions in the 1987 Constitution, and similarly, it called for the president to repeal or revise the government family-planning programs in 1988 (Library of Congress, 2006).

As a vital institution and a major player in politics, the Catholic Church in the Philippines did not avoid the political arena through its social advocacy work. Religious leaders reiterated and decried the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the post-Marcos Philippines. With a mounting tension between nonperforming governments and the Catholic Church, a need for revolutionary change was inevitable (Library of Congress, 2006). The Catholics in the Philippines, however, have never been homogenous in their political positions as they span the spectrum of either conservatives, moderates, or progressives. These groups contributed to mounting divisions in one of the strongest institutions in the country and are present even now. While suspicious of social action, the conservatives believe it is best to express Christian love within existing institutional structures. The moderates, a majority, support social action in collaboration with the government. A small group of progressives are skeptical of the government and push for drastic changes (Library of Congress, 2006). As later discussed, these aspects come out more clearly in the differing attitudes towards president Duterte and his “war on drugs.”

As shown below, with not much progress in the country even after the 1986 Revolution, Filipinos quickly became disillusioned with Marcos' overthrow due to the instabilities and lack of progress by subsequent governments in tackling the socio-cultural and economic problems of the country (Sipress, 2005). Paradoxically, even though many Filipinos were losing hope and trust in revolutions in the post-Marcos era, a series of political protests and impeachments laid the foundation for new revolutionary changes leading to the rise of Duterte.

Duterte and his Rise to Power

While many historical reasons enabled the need for revolutionary changes in the Philippines leading up to the 2016 general elections, what stands out is the failed “elite democracy.” Heydarian (2018) defines “Elite democracy” as:

the oxymoronic label attached to the political system installed by the 1986 people power revolution which saw the removal of one-man dictator supplanted by the reign of a liberal oligarchy, which has hijacked democratic institutions and occupied almost all relevant elected offices. (p. 10)

Throughout the 30 years after EDSA Uprising, the Philippines failed to realize the promises of a just and humane society. It is the failure of successive administrations that saw the 2016 rise of populist Rodrigo Duterte to the presidency by promising “overnight national salvation for a broken society” (Heydarian, 2018, p. 10; Bello, 2019). In his book, *The Rise of Duterte* (2018), Richard Heydarian, a leading political science academic, posits that Duterte's rise was because the people had lost trust in “elite democracy” that failed to deliver the promises of the revolution, i.e., popular empowerment, social justice, wealth redistribution, and sustainable development. There have been other populist figures in the Philippines' political history, but as political analyst Walden Bello (2017) asserts, it is Duterte who campaigned using the anti-crime, anti-elite, and anti-liberal discourse. Bello (2019) points out that,

Duterte's discourse—a mixture of outright death threats, coarse street corner language, misogynistic outbursts, and frenzied railing, coupled with disdainful humor directed at the elite, whom he calls “coños” or cunts—was a potent formula that proved exhilarating to his audience who felt themselves liberated from what they experienced as the stifling political correctness and hypocrisy of the EDSA discourse. (p. 259)

Rodrigo Duterte gained attention as the provincial mayor of Davao City in Mindanao, in the southern periphery of the Philippines. His father was a governor. It is not surprising then that he grew up in a privileged milieu and ended up in politics, typical of the Philippines' political situation with political families, patronage, and dynasties (Coronel, 2019). Ironically, though Duterte still presents himself as “anti-elites,” his eldest son is a congressman, his daughter and younger son are currently both the mayor and deputy mayor respectively of Davao City. Serving as a mayor for two decades, Duterte became known as the vigilante mayor, who went out gunning down criminals and bullying the city into law and order (Cook, 2017). He thrust himself onto the national scene in 2013 with his comments criticizing President Benigno Aquino III's response to the city of Tacloban after hurricane Yolanda hit it. He took it upon himself to intervene in recovery efforts, a push that was an ambitious move since he had no authority to intervene directly (Lacorte, 2013; Theriault, 2020). He would later accuse the Aquino administration of a failed response and misuse of relief funds in his presidential campaign trail.

Duterte campaigned on the idea of bringing about country-wide sanity as he did to Davao city, which he termed as the ‘cleanest and safest’ city in the country. This campaign platform earned him admiration and popularity among the Filipinos, rising quickly as a preferred presidential candidate in the 2016 general elections. With his victory, winning with only 39% of the popular vote due to the electoral system where the candidate with a plurality of votes wins, Duterte's murderous “war on drugs” came to life (Chen, 2016; Pernia, 2019). This victory ushered in a new era,

which was nothing like the Philippines has ever seen before. Duterte's promise of change has manifested itself through new exclusions, including marginalization, imprisonment, and killing of drug users and pushers, as well as government critics like the clergy, journalists, and human rights activists.

It is important to note that the populist orientations expressed by Duterte were already taking shape in the years before Duterte's win, with each successive leader becoming more populist than their predecessor. In 1998, President Fidel Ramos branded himself as a 'military reformer' and brought economic success to the Philippines by using manipulative old-style patronage politics (Thomson, 2010). Ramos was then replaced by a 'populist aggrandizer,' the former movie star Joseph Estrada, who managed to forge a deep connection with the Filipino masses (Hutchcroft, 2008). After his short-lived presidency that saw him impeached due to corruption, Estrada was replaced by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who was sworn in as president until the general elections were called. Gloria Arroyo was then narrowly elected to a full term in the controversial 2004 elections, bolstering a populist appeal among voters. Corruption, protests, and a failed coup attempt defined her administration that ended in 2010 (Curato, 2017). It is in this context that saw the rise of Benigno Aquino III in 2010, who promised a reformist agenda to end government corruption and end poverty (Curato, 2017). The presidency in the Philippines has a single six-years term limit. Thus, in 2016, there was another shift with all the top three presidential candidates Roxas, Poe, and Duterte, employing various populist tropes to gain voter support (Curato, 2017). It is Duterte's brand of populism that carried the day. To better understand why Duterte was so successful, the next section will explore the concept of populism and how it is made manifest in democratic countries such as the Philippines.

The Specter of Populism in the Philippines

Although populism dates to the 19th century, the recent rise of populist figures and agendas worldwide makes it hard to ignore. From Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Xi Jinping in China, Recep Erdogan in Turkey, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and Donald Trump in the United States to the Brexit vote in the U.K., populism remains a critical phenomenon to attend to in contemporary politics. Devinney and Hartwell (2019) argue that populism takes advantage of various economic, social, and political contexts. As such, it is not far-fetched to claim that we live in ostensibly populist times; the only worry is if this will turn into a “populist age” (Moffit, 2016; Mounk, 2018). This section grapples with the definitions of populism to better understand its unique manifestation in the Philippines.

The Contestation of Definition[s]

In the social sciences, populism is one of those terms that attract many definitions and is “marked by high degree of contestability” (Moffit & Tormey, 2014. p. 382). It remains not only ambiguous but can also be loosely employed, politicized, misunderstood, and thus contentious (Canovan, 2004; Comroff, 2011; Brubaker, 2017). The absence of a single, all-encompassing, and widely accepted definition of what entails populism across disciplines is a challenge that warrants better attempts at understanding the phenomenon. Before delving into the most common definitions of populism, it is worth mentioning the various depictions that scholars have given to populism, including: as a mirror (Panizza, 2005), a populist ideology of democracy (Canovan, 2002), the logic of the political (Laclau, 2005a, 2005b), specter and internal periphery (Arditi, 2007). These descriptions highlight the slippery morphological debate of the concept of populism among scholars. While there are few

commonly used definitions, this thesis will employ Rode and Revuelta's (2015) definitional structure that sees populism as a composite of ideology, tactics, and strategy, giving rise to four varieties of populism, i.e., structural, economic, ideological, and political-institutional.

In the *structural* variety, populism is a social call to arms using large-scale cross-class coalitions. Structural populism is used as a platform to implement reformist policies to drive economic developments while avoiding social conflicts (Rode and Revuelta, 2015). In the *economic* variety, which is the most common definition, populists exploit the fears of the least economically secure groups in society. Since they are vulnerable, it is easy for people to accept the rhetoric of scapegoating elites, immigrants, the rich, or any identified as "the other" (Madrid, 2008; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Populism as an *ideology* divides society into two major groups, "us" and "them," and is based on conceiving society as a representation of good and evil integrated into the political process (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Stanley, 2008; Hawkins, 2009). These antagonistic groups are essentially identified as 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite' (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Mudde (2004) posits that as an ideology, populism calls for politics as an expression of the general will of the people. Lastly, *the political-institutional* variety posits that populism is a sustained, large scale political project or strategy to mobilize marginalized groups into prejudiced political action that is mainly anti-elite (Weyland, 2001; Jansen, 2011; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011).

While these structural categories help define the varieties of populism, it is not clear precisely when one can label a leader as a populist (Devinney & Hartwell, 2020). In this way, it is imperative to note that populism is not only contextual to a particular time and space but is also a continuum in which individuals are compared

as more or less populist or emphasizing one set of characteristics more than others. This complexity and plurality are not reasons to resign and deem populism as uselessly vague, a cliché, or a political epithet (Brubaker, 2017). There are many definitions, but this research adopts populism as a performance and a spectacle, as will be explained below.

While some scholars argue for populism is an ideology, others from the social scientific perspective propose it as a means to an end, a strategy (Debord, 1994; Laclau, 2005a; Sutherland, 2012; Moffitt, 2016; Brandt, 2020). The argument rests on the idea that populism is not an ‘actor-level’ but a ‘speech-level’ phenomenon since populism is the means through which a politician will gain and maintain power. Bonikowski (2016) argues that politicians contextually and selectively, depending on the audience, employ populist language. The same idea can be described either in populist or non-populist terms. In this sense, populism is a discourse, a rhetorical strategy, a style, a stylistic repertoire, or a frame (Aslanidis 2016; Bonikowski 2016; Brubaker 2017; Ekström et al. 2018; Aslanidis 2018). While it has no specific ideological content, populism is how politics is *done*; it is related to appearance, impression, aesthetics, and performance (Moffitt, 2016). This perspective helps this research not focus on the content of populism as such, but rather the context or environment in which it occurs, the civil sphere.

Understanding populism as a performance ties it to another significant term, *spectacle*. Laclau (2005a) defines *spectacle* as something that has an irresistible visual appeal to the viewer or spectator and is rendered as a generality, and in so doing draws attention, consciousness and as such a tool for ‘unification.’ As an eye-catching dramatic public display, populism as a spectacle emphasizes emotional engagement and relation. A spectacle must attract attention and spectators, and since it competes

with other phenomena and is generally replaceable, it has to visibly stand out and demand spectatorship (Sutherland, 2012). Despite the attention it accrues, Laclau (2005a) contests that a spectacle is an empty signifier like a circus performance, freak shows, or a reality TV show like *The Bachelor*, that rather than being inspirational, it only emphasizes personal conflicts, emotions, and drama. As a strategy or a frame – a way of conceptualizing and communicating politics for strategic purposes, populism is a communication phenomenon, a political communication style (Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003; Waisbord, 2019). In an age of sensational media or the spectacle, populism as a performance or spectacle finds a perfect environment.

Before discussing how Duterte's form of populism is both a performance and a spectacle, a brief history of populism will set an essential background on understanding its current manifestation in the Philippines.

A Brief History of Populism

As noted earlier, populism is not a new occurrence, nor is its current manifestation more sophisticated than in its early emergence in the 19th century. Populism exists as an idea in individual voters, and it is also a political behavior with both positive and negative impacts on democracy. The earliest manifestation was in the United States and Russia in the second half of the 1800s, and both gave rise to revolutions (Moffitt, 2016). In Tsarist Russia, populism was used to describe the unsuccessful effort at mobilizing peasants against feudal exploitation. In the United States, farmworkers via the People's Party rose to challenge those they considered elites; bankers, railway owners, and the two-party system of government (Morgan, 2020). The 20th century saw a contextualization of the idea of populism (Moffitt, 2016; Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2017). For example, in Latin America, there emerged three forms: right-wing populism, neopopulism, and left-wing populism (Mounk, 2014;

Brubaker, 2017). Meanwhile, Europe saw the rise of radical right-wing populism with xenophobic and anti-establishment tendencies in Germany and Italy, for example (Caramani, 2017; Galston, 2018). Asia, on the other hand, has mainly seen a non-structural use of populism, resulting in movie-hero populism in the Philippines, agrarian populism in Thailand, religious populism in India, and nationalist populism in Indonesia (Hellmann, 2017).

Populist Publics

Populist leaders are not the only phenomenon in the global surge brought by populism. What we also witness is what Curato (2017) defines as ‘populist publics.’ In the countries mentioned with a populist leader as president, one can see a group of energetic, passionate, and agitated supporters rallying behind the said leaders. The same characteristics applied to populist leaders describe the supporters, i.e., populist publics. Trump, Duterte, and their supporters, for example, reflect each other’s characteristics, from foul language to aggressive behaviors at rallies (Clement, 2016). These characteristics have earned the populist supporters the title of fanatics, with Duterte supporters called “Dutertards” a contraction of Duterte and retard or “Trumpists” and “deplorables.” While some scholars associate populist attitudes with the inability to rationally engage, brought about by economic vulnerability or social status, some link it to personality traits or predispositions (Schönfelder, 2008; Bakker, Rooduijn, & Schumacher, 2016; Chattopadhyay, 2018).

Voting for a populist, however, is not just a plain pathologized populist support. Arguelles (2019) argues that populist publics have reasoned out their support whether they are different or misunderstood motivations from the other opposing voters. As such, populist publics are not just passive victims of populist demagoguery, but instead, these voters are active agents of their own reasoned choices (Arguelles,

2019). In the next section that explores Duterte as a populist, one realizes that populist publics desire changes in their representation in public, how politics are conducted, and how the government is managed (Arguelles, 2019). Populist publics offer their support to populists to gain these changes. It is in this line that this research argues that the populist publics in the Philippines voted for populist Duterte.

Duterte as a Populist

While the terms populism and populist are fluid, this research attempts to establish and characterize Duterte as a populist. For a hegemon and a tough-talking politician like Duterte to come into power and retain it, he has employed populist rhetoric. Duterte used both the economic and ideological varieties of populism, discussed earlier (Devinney & Hartwell, 2019). He exploited the fears of the economically insecure populace by scapegoating elites and the rich (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Duterte tapped into the moral realm of the Filipinos and framed the perception of society as a representation of good and evil. He politicized this notion by scapegoating the drug abuse problems (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Duterte's campaign discourse weighed in on 'change,' a classic messianic approach that would stand against the elites, the corrupt, and societal disorders. Through a democratic process of election, Duterte acquired power on a populist philosophy of law and order and stability with a populist agenda of anti-state posturing and fighting drug abuse through a violent, bloody, and genocidal "war on drugs" (Curato, 2017; Heydarian, 2017; Bello, 2017; Devinney & Hartwell, 2019).

Duterte is also a populist, for he has fulfilled the main characteristics of a populist, supporting the notion of 'us' versus 'them' in his election campaign and through into his fifth year of presidency. First, he emphasized the sovereignty of the people. He presented himself and continues to present himself as a leader who would

restore Filipinos' sovereignty over the country's affairs while emphasizing that the Philippines is not a puppet of any foreign country anymore (Esguerra, 2019; McKenzie & Liptak, 2016). Second, he presents himself as being one with, and advocating for, the people, effectively utilizing the rhetoric of the poor versus the elites (Paris, 2019; Webb & Curato, 2019; Dollanganger, 2018). Third, as an 'anti-system man,' he has attacked and blamed the country's elites in economic, political, and social realms, thus fulfilling one of the fundamental traits of a populist (Punay, 2018; Holcombe, 2019). Fourth, Duterte ostracizes others, distinguishing the ones he calls 'dangerous' from the 'virtuous people.' This exclusion is evident in his controversial yet popular "war on drugs," which is discussed below. Lastly, Duterte invoked the heartland by proposing to bring an ideal societal change to a profoundly unequal and corrupt society, something that the middle-class and the poor can only dream about (Bowring, 2019).

In an article "12 Elements of a Rodrigo Duterte Campaign Speech" Pia Ranada (2016) lists 12 things that Duterte never fails to mention or insinuate in his speeches. These include elements of being a socialist, being angry at the government's oppression of the people, drugs' proliferation, suppressing crime corruption in six months, employing the police and military (doubling their salaries) to crack down on drugs lords, dismissing human rights violation allegations as unproven, having pro-poor programs, calls for equal treatment of all regions of the country, and making fun of other presidential candidates. In addition, no matter the audience, Duterte has always pointed out his fights against crime, drugs, and corruption. He also includes jokes, sarcasm, and uses props like the national flag or photographs (Ranada, 2016). Duterte's campaign trail characteristics are typical of populists who rely on endearing themselves to their audiences rather than on policy.

In short, I argue that Duterte is a populist because his political style contains all the traits that make up a populist leader.

Duterte's Populism as a Performance and Spectacle

The presentation of Duterte's populism shows it as deeply entrenched into the world of media. From his campaign trail to his fifth year of presidency, Duterte's populism has heavily relied on the political style that Moffit (2016) calls the "repertoire of performance." As noted earlier, his language, devoid of political correctness, resonates with the dominant discourses among the Filipinos. His rhetoric includes notions of masculinity, chauvinism, violence, disregard of human rights, the desire for social order and discipline, which are common themes in both local television shows and social settings (De Chavez & Pacheco, 2020). As argued earlier, populism, as a performance, reveals a *performer-audience* relationship between the leader and the citizens. This relationship is made possible due to the mediatization of politics. To make a spectacle of himself, Duterte chose a campaign strategy of a populist nature embedded in a hypermasculine discourse punctuated with violence and vulgarity (De Chavez & Pacheco, 2020). This strategy won him attention, supporters, and, in the end the presidency.

To retain power, remain relevant, and maintain the show performance, Duterte must perpetuate a state of crisis, a vital characteristic of a populist regime. To this end, he has relied heavily on political theatrics and communicative efforts where media is the stage of performance (Curato, 2017; Molloy, 2018). Dubbed as 'The Punisher' on media, Duterte promised on the campaign trail to be tough, decisive, and swift in addressing the problems of crime and insecurity. The "war on drugs" was his chosen means to deliver his election campaign promise. Reyes (2016) argues that

tapping into the deep-seated culture of violence, Duterte's "war on drugs" is a spectacle of violence:

The spectacle is "performed" by reducing the body to an object that carries political messages, by politicising the body to boost popularity and as means to acquire votes, and placing the body at the centre by making political decisions on whose life has value and whose does not. (p. 128)

As a spectacle, Duterte's "war on drugs," its violence, and deaths have been visually compelling through the associated images and news stories. In this way, populist Duterte has proof that he kept his word and that the 'change' he promised is happening. This perspective describes what Debord (1997) calls the political appropriation of the spectacle; Duterte discourses endlessly upon himself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise. The "war on drugs" is at the heart of Duterte's presidency and his populism spectacle, and it is worthy of examination.

While the "war on drugs" defines Duterte's presidency, the rhetoric surrounding this phenomenon is what drives its essence. In the next section, we grapple with the description, operationality, and framing of the "war on drugs." This endeavor is essential for a better understanding of the spectacle of the "war on drugs," which has widespread support in a majority Christian country even though it is an ineffective punitive approach to solving social problems.

War on Drugs

The "war on drugs" phenomenon is a complex issue that has received much attention in academic, social, and political settings (Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe & Andreas, 1996; Tupper, 2012; Romero, Magaloni & Díaz-Cayeros, 2016). According to Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe, and Andreas (1996), in what can be called politics of denial, one of the most salient issues related to the "war on drugs" is why governments still wage it. Historically it has proven to be an unworkable policy with phenomenal failures across the globe. In competition are two politics: one of fear,

insecurity, and intolerance versus one of reason, care, and collective responsibility.

When a government seeks to address social problems through fear, coercion, and force, failure and further problems are bound to happen (Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe & Andreas, 1996). For example, for a policy like the “war on drugs” to work, the government needs citizen support (Romero, Magaloni & Díaz-Cayeros, 2016).

Studies show support to be high among citizens with low media consumption and those who strongly identify with the leader. Romero, Magaloni, and Díaz-Cayeros (2016) argue that once citizens directly suffer the condition that the policy is claiming to fight against, for example, drug-related problems, they become desensitized to pro-government messages that claim success of the intervention. In the “war on drugs,” when the citizens believe the government is failing, they lose trust and decrease support. To compensate, most governments seek to ‘get tougher,’ further escalating the problems of violence and crime related to the “war on drugs” other than seeking reevaluation (Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe & Andreas, 1996; Romero, Magaloni & Díaz-Cayeros, 2016).

While the “war on drugs” does not do much to curtail the supply of drugs, billions of dollars go to waste, and the war undermines democracy and human rights (Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe & Andreas, 1996). Rather than tackling problems of drug abuse or addiction, the “war on drugs” deepens health and crime problems related to drug use. The argument here, according to Bertram, Blachman, Sharpe, and Andreas (1996), is that “war on drugs” makes no distinction between the injuries caused by drug abuse and those of the war, and does not attend to the reasons of use and abuse, instead focusing only on suppression of drug use.

The definitions and framing of the drug narratives furthermore allow governments to resort to such strategies as the “war on drugs” and informs the

citizens' support for these tactics (Tupper, 2012; Orsini, 2017). Tupper (2012) argues that language use concerning drugs is crucial. Of the three definitions of drugs, as medicine (Drug₁), as a substance that alters consciousness and might be legal or illegal (Drug₂), or a substance that alters human consciousness and has been criminalized (Drug₃), the latter is wrongly used by communicative institutions such as the media. Instead of using the second definition of drugs as psychoactive substances, the third definition is usually used in association with words like 'dealer,' 'trafficking' and 'war.' This is especially true in the news media, which informs public perceptions of social problems and public policy, and results in stigmatizing representations of drug use as a deviant behavior (Orsini, 2017). This framing of drug narratives also sees the use of phrases like 'ongoing fight,' 'dangerous use,' 'violent traffickers,' and 'fallen stars.'

The third definition of drugs and drug narratives gained traction in the 19th century and into the 20th century, and have informed public discourses and sustained an ideological "war on drugs" in political discourses (Tupper, 2012). Consequently, the notion of drugs as malevolent agents and pathogens, which is a stereotypical portrayal of psychoactive substances, informs responses inconsistent with human rights. In the end, the language we use to address, talk, or think about drugs may not be ideal for crafting sound public policy (Tupper, 2012). More so, the populist use of the third definition of drug and drug narratives presents a "sick" society, dehumanizing and "othering" users and dealers.

There have been calls, however, for changing the perception or reframing the "war on drugs" as a humanitarian crisis (Carpenter, 2019; Sandvik & Hoelscher, 2017). Drawing from the "war on drugs" experience of Mexico, Carpenter (2019) argues that "war on drugs" frames have left little to no rhetorical and operational

room for creative multisectoral strategies to tackle the violence linked to the “war on drugs” and address the violence it causes. Proposing *Plan Mérida* as a model of a more holistic peace-building approach with social and economic development initiatives, Carpenter (2019) strongly argues that governments should stop framing policies of dealing with drug abuse as “war on drugs,” which will, in turn, open up better ways to deal with the issue. This change would be welcomed by Sandvik and Hoelscher (2017), who view the “war on drugs” as having dire humanitarian consequences. They define the “war on drugs” as an overly militarized and unsuccessful approach to drug control that only leads to violence, displacement, and human suffering (Sandvik & Hoelscher 2017). It becomes a humanitarian crisis due to the human cost of the “war on drugs.” Going on is a battle of two usages, all referring to the same drug abuse phenomenon: the rhetorical and normative use of “*war on drugs*” by media and society versus the strategic and moral use of *humanitarian crisis* by humanitarian actors. To reiterate Tupper (2012), the language we use determines which definition prevails along with its consequences.

It is to this end that one would wonder why a mostly Christian country, such as the Philippines, would support the “war on drugs.” Cornelio and Medina (2019) argue that part of the answer lies in how the drug user is defined and understood. While a drug user can be seen as a victim of wider social injustices like poverty and thus would need help like rehabilitation or solving socioeconomic problems, a drug user can also be seen as a sinful human. Borrowing from and wrongly applying a Christian idea of sin, eradicating a sinful human being is deemed necessary to rid the society of the sinful human behavior. Duterte has explained this eradication using rhetoric and policies that legitimize violence, and the populist public believes he will deliver swift justice (Arguelles, 2019). Thus, Duterte’s Christian framing of the “war

on drugs” as a means to eradicate wickedness and criminal acts partly explains why the murderous “war on drugs” that has defined his presidency continues to gain the widespread support of many Filipinos. What sets Duterte apart among modern populists is his attack on human rights through the controversial, violent, and murderous “war on drugs” (Pernia, 2019).

There are many ways to explain or investigate the intersectionality of populism and the “war on drugs.” However, a consideration of society as a civil sphere in which this intersectionality occurs is essential.

The Civil Sphere Theory

This thesis draws on Alexander’s (2006) theory of the civil sphere as a theoretical tool to study the role of communication in a democracy, and more specifically, Duterte’s “war on drugs” as a performance and spectacle. By exploring the “boundary relations between the civil and noncivil spheres” (Alexander, 2006, p. 24), in this case, Duterte’s populism and the Filipino society, the theory concerns itself with the possibility of justice and how democratic institutions and beliefs sustain justice in a world that is complex and stratified. The Philippines ought to tackle the drug abuse problem while maintaining justice and solidarity. Thus, it is contradictory for Duterte’s policy to claim to champion justice or eradicate crime and drug abuse for the nation by marginalizing and killing some members of society, the drug users, and peddlers. According to Alexander (2006), justice depends on solidarity, a collective feeling of being part of a whole with obligations. In this endeavor, culture and communication play a central role in the struggles of justice in democratic life since solidarity is exhibited and sustained by communication and regulations.

The civil sphere theory considers the real vis-à-vis the ideal and is thus empirically grounded and offers a conceptual framework for studying the role of

communication in social struggles like the human rights abuses in the Philippines in connection with solving the drug abuse problem (Forde, 2015). The following section concretizes the context in which the spectacle of the “war on drugs” occurs, highlighting why it becomes problematic in solving a societal problem like crime and drug abuse in a democracy.

Civil Sphere

Understanding society is at the heart of understanding the civil sphere, the Civil Sphere Theory, and the research at hand. John Dewey (1916, p. 5) explains that “society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication.” Thus, society is made possible through the distribution of information. From James Carey’s (2009) perspective, communication is crucial to culture so much that one can say that culture is communication. As a way of definition, “communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (Carey, 2009, p. 19). The symbolic reality here means that the construction of the real is, through symbols and language, a constant meaning-making process. As creatures of their own making, human beings fabricate reality. For it to be real, it must be produced and communicated and, in turn, be comprehended or at least apprehended (Carey, 2009). As such, the reality produced and within which a society lives depend on language.

According to Alexander (2006), the essence of the language through which society constructs reality is binary codes. While the meaning is relational and relative, language is oppositional, i.e., us versus them. Intrinsic to the construction of reality are moral codes of good versus evil. We derive meaning through such binaries. The binary codes, pure and impure in civil discourse, are structured categories into which civil society members have to fit (Alexander, 2006). For example, in traditional

communitarian societies, those considered misfits were exiled; today, society incarcerates lawbreakers. In Duterte's "war on drugs," for example, the misfits are the drug users, pushers, and anyone who dares to criticize his policies. The impure people, like drug users and pushers in the Philippines, are a threat to be kept at bay, for they do not deserve freedom or support. They are unworthy, amoral, and uncivilized (Alexander, 2006).

While the use of binary codes is inevitable, solidarity within a civil sphere depends on agreeing to binaries either consciously or unconsciously. This agreement to binaries depends on communicative institutions like public opinion, mass media, polls, and associations (Alexander, 2006). In the Philippines, Duterte used social media platforms like Facebook and pro-Duterte news channels to reinforce binaries favoring his spectacle of the "war on drugs," which was the perfect machinery of opinion formation. The communicative institutions articulate the inclusive or exclusive relationships established by any civil society (Alexander, 2006). Once in office, Duterte worked to silence any media sources that challenged his narratives. Consequently, people only gained access to news through pro-Duterte Facebook's algorithm-driven news feeds and pro-Duterte media. The public opinion supporting the "war on drugs" and determining whom to exclude is formed through exposure to fake news, propaganda, manipulation, and brainwashing (Alba, 2018).

The same binary language at the core of communication and perception within a society can also explain populism.

Populism as a Binary

As noted above, defining populism is seen as a knotty endeavor. However, scholars still agree that at a minimum, populism is a politics that concerns a dualism that is oppositional or antagonistic between "us" and "them," i.e., 'people' versus

‘elites’ where the people are or ought to be the rightful holders of democratic power (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). In populist claims, one can see a binary structure in society with either poor and middle-class versus the upper-class, or populists versus elites and a minority group (Judis, 2016). For example, in the Philippines, one sees Duterte and his low and middle-class supporters as one group in opposition to the elites and drug users/peddlers. At the heart of this binary definition of populism is the construction of the “people.” The “people” can be used to exclude a group of society as not part of the main group (Morgan, 2020). As highlighted before, however, societies rely on binary codes, and so does a democracy that translates into “us” and “them.” This awareness is crucial; that our discourses of civil society construct realities of who or what “is” and who or what “is not” (Alexander, 2006; Morgan, 2020). These binaries are present and functional both in politics and everyday group identities and can be seen in Duterte’s distinction of the “dangerous,” the drug users and peddlers *who do not belong* to the “virtuous people,” equated with him and all who support him and *worthy* of being the core group.

Civil Repair

While binary codes open up universal possibilities like solidarity, they too provide exclusions and limits. Since civil societies are not perfect, there are contradictions in time and space (Alexander, 2006). For example, democratic societies are premised upon doing work for the ideal of equality, yet there are justified ideas that some people are ‘less’ equal than others. There is a tension between the core group who want to keep things for themselves and the marginalized fighting for the right to be in the core group. For example, the poor in the Philippines can be ignored by the rich and elites, and they ought to be included in the nation’s benefits. It is to this tension that civil repair is needed and emerges as a response. Civil repair

entails integrative definitions via legitimate procedures, communication, and regulative institutions that can integrate the community in more expansive equitable ways (Alexander, 2006). Civil repair can be seen as attempts to rectify incurred injustices that have led to the marginalization of certain groups in society, such as calling for gender equality through women's rights activism or the Civil Rights Movements calling for the recognition of African Americans.

Populism as Civil Repair

The Philippines' governments before Duterte needed to pay attention to the forgotten population that was getting poorer at the expense of the rich and the elites. The Philippines, in this sense, needed civil repair to rectify the unequal distribution of wealth that was pushing the poor into drug abuse as a place of solace or drug peddling to earning a living. Populism was a possible strategy to use despite its negative outlook. As noted above, populism has acquired negative connotations as dangerous, distorting, and reductionist. Explanations ignore its virtue as a means to working out social grievances (Bonikowski, 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Morgan (2020) argues that while it can be a threat to civil solidarity, populism has the potential to be an agent of civil repair.

While not all populism guarantees civil repair, some populist movements can combine with substantive policy to address grievances in the following ways: first, the binary categorization of "us" versus "them" is not unique to populism but is part of the discourse of civil society (Morgan, 2020). For example, the Civil Rights Movement used such binaries portraying civil repair as good and those against the movement as polluted or evil. As such, populist politics can do a better job of highlighting inequalities. Civil repair, however, cannot rely on scapegoating social ills on communities that are neither responsible nor can defend themselves. Populism

must be open and inclusive and willing to listen to the other parties involved. “Any populism that defines the frontiers of political life in essentialized and closed, and primordial terms is, by its very nature, non-universalizing and anti-civil” (Morgan, 2020 p. 16). Second, populism capable of civil repair ought to be culturally creative with dynamic narratives capable of inspiring hearts and minds into expanding civil inclusions. Lastly, populism must be both agonistic and pluralistic to act as a force for civil repair. Morgan (2020) argues that populism must handle its opponents as adversaries to be struggled with and, in the end, persuaded, rather than enemies to be silenced and ultimately eradicated.

Duterte’s “War on Drugs” as a Failed Civil Repair Attempt

For this thesis, the civil sphere theory helps to understand that any democratic society such as the Philippines simultaneously struggles to realize social solidarity and struggles with oppression and exclusion (Forde, 2015). According to the civil sphere theory, Duterte holds an office as the president, a regulatory institution through which the civil society concretely exerts its influence. Furthermore, Duterte, as the president, uses the police, another regulatory institution through which societies sanction and enforce civil obligations, to advance a repressive agenda (Alexander, 2006). While the Philippines’ populist publics offer their support to populist Duterte to gain changes like popular empowerment, social justice, wealth redistribution, and sustainable development, Duterte’s resort to the “war on drugs” as a means of civil repair fails to realize these socioeconomic aspirations. This failure is because it is scapegoating social ills on drug users, a group of people in the society, because its language is excluding, and because it treats its opponents as enemies to be silenced and eradicated. Additionally, Alexander (2006) would view the protests against Duterte’s murderous “war on drugs” and his efforts at repression as a social

movement, that is, as efforts by members of society to resist repression and engage in civil repair to put an end to the injustices of the “war on drugs.”

This chapter considered the historical background of the Philippines that has proved informative, formative, and transformative in understanding the current state of the country. A look at the sociopolitical culture of the Philippines, for example, has revealed that the post-Marcos governments failed to solve pertinent problems of the country, prompting a need for change and the environment in which populism flourished, leading to the rise of President Duterte. Duterte’s populism was that of a spectacle, a means to gain power. Through the lenses of both populism and the civil sphere theory, an examination of Duterte’s “war on drugs” as a means to solve socio-economic problems in the Philippines has indicated a failed attempt at civil repair. In view of this failure, this thesis consequently seeks to articulate a different story as told by the photographs of the Philippines “war on drugs” and to also make sense of Duterte’s “war on drugs” within a society driven by populist publics.

Chapter 3: Photographs, Theory, and Methodology

In the previous chapter, a historical background study explains the rise of populist Duterte to the presidency and his failed attempt at civil repair through his “war on drugs.” This chapter defines and analyses the key theories of analysis that inform the research methodology and explains the research steps. I begin by establishing photographs as a means of providing unique historical and social information into the “war on drugs” in the Philippines, followed by a look at how to interpret these photographs. As a qualitative research, this thesis seeks to describe, interpret, and understand the content of communication from a textual analysis perspective. As a research method commonly used in cultural and media studies, this thesis utilizes the narrative and semiotics approach as the best approaches to interpreting photographs as cultural artifacts. The narrative approach, considering the narrative elements of scene, character, and action, emphasizes that we always look for meaning in a photograph, that which the photographer intends. Semiotics then argues that it is within these elements that one finds signs and symbols which help shape the interpretation of these narratives. This chapter consists of five parts: (1) Photographs as Historical Evidence; (2) Textual analysis; (3) Narrative theory and analysis; (4) Visual semiotic theory and semiotic analysis; and (5) The Philippines “war on drugs” photographs: A textual approach.

Photographs as Historical Evidence

With the invention of photography came the unique historical potential of providing information that one could not find elsewhere. Every moment around the globe, individuals, professional or amateur photographers capture thousands of photos, some of which end up uploaded on to the internet or displayed in newspapers. This phenomenon affords people from faraway places the opportunity to know what

events happen outside their areas and even countries (Greenwood & Smith, 2007). The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, once said “It is the photographs that gives one vivid realization of what actually took place. Words don’t do it.” This take on photographs echoes American author Oliver Wendell Holmes describing photographs as being more vivid than words could achieve and resonating with the common saying “a picture is worth a thousand words” (Schlereth, 1996). An image from Auschwitz, the 9/11 aftermath, or Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing presents an idea so complex that it will require hundreds of words to attempt to do justice in describing the events and the different emotional impacts. Sheryl Silver Ochayon (2013) argues that since photographs are direct and pure expressions of reality as captured by the camera, they present an unparalleled and unique medium of expressing truth, including historical truths.

Walter Lippman, a two-time Pulitzer winning journalist, and writer is quoted by Barbie Zelizer (1998) saying:

Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us, without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable.... The whole process of observing, describing, repeating, and then imagining has been accomplished. (p. 9)

Now, more than ever, photographs are memory aides, alternates for direct observation, and even reliable duplicates of essential documents. In this way, photographs express truth since they capture the scene and present a reality through which one can understand and believe that what is captured happened (Ochayon, 2013). For example, photographs from Auschwitz, of the 9/11 aftermath, or Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing express truths of the Holocaust, Islamic extremism, and the destructive nature of nuclear weapons. If “seeing is believing,” then photographs of events aid the viewers’ interpretation and understanding of what

happened, including historical events. The visual representations, therefore, help in shaping attitudes and opinions about the events and the people involved (Greenwood & Smith, 2007; Ochayon, 2013). It is the intention of this thesis to evaluate photographs of Duterte's "war on drugs," but it is important to consider the limitations of this choice of materials.

The Limitations of Photographs

With digital media, we now grapple with living in a world saturated with images, which often meets criticism that images are deceptive and though they stand-in for reality, they are not real (Linfield, 2010; Hariman & Lucaites, 2016). The usual question is whether a given picture presents a fair representation on which one can draw a sufficient understanding of a people, culture, or events recorded by the camera (Greenwood & Smith, 2007). Accepting photographs as representing reality as recorded looks like an antithesis of understanding that requires scrutiny or critique. Taking examples from media framing, some aspects of perceived reality are more salient, which influences how writers present and readers understand and evaluate an issue (Entman, 1993). Western international newspapers tend to photographically present developing nations as countries in crisis and conflict, presenting doubts in believing episodic photographs, those with a pattern (Horvit, 2003; Langton, 1991). Furthermore, accepting photographs in media as reality could lead to a distorted awareness of events.

Hariman and Lucaites (2016) argue that "photographs are inchoate fragments of the events they purport to record, essentially meaningless without verbal contextualization. They depict only the surface features of the world, its sheer particularity, rather than structure, complexity, or depth." In this sense, photographs can quickly become political manipulation tools of converting citizens into spectators

overwhelmed by performance spectacles. As will be discussed about Duterte's "war on drugs," one aspect of photography is that visual media can easily become means of distraction, deception, and domination (Sontag, 1977; Hariman & Lucaites, 2016). Another aspect of photography is that photographs not only reflect reality, but they also interpret it (Levin & Uziel, 1998). Photographers may capture an event with authenticity. The same photographers, however, can also manipulate the scene they are capturing through what they emphasize or omit and consequently suggest a particular interpretation from an observer (Ochayon, 2013.; Levin & Uziel, 1998).

Usage and Importance of Photographs

To use photographs as historical evidence, one needs to be always aware of aspects that influence how a photograph looks and what it is saying (Levin & Uziel, 1998; Ochayon, 2013). When using photographs as historical evidence, it is essential to engage the photographer, why the photograph was taken, where it first appeared, what is missing in the photograph, and whether the photograph was staged (Levin & Uziel, 1998). As such, photographs are historical, but careful evaluation is necessary for knowing if they contain bias and what bias it is. This evaluation is vital for understanding the image as a historical source. Photography, especially photojournalism, presents a vital communication culture in modern liberal democracies. Despite their limitations, photographs are a means towards understanding how we interconnectedly live as a society of individuals (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016).

Though photographs can easily mislead human beings, scholars Hariman and Lucaites (2016) argue that they can also enable a more profound human understanding and solidarity. Keen on evaluation and interpretation, in this thesis, we move beyond the binary tensions of image versus reality or documentary truth versus

visual artistry. This step moves us beyond mere spectatorship into a reflection of the objects of photography, how the viewer is actively participating in the captured image intending to bring about an active response. An endeavor this thesis will engage involves investigating the “war on drugs” in the Philippines. For this thesis, the evidence available for the Philippines’ “war on drugs” is the photographs of the killings and related protests. As texts and narratives that can be used to make sense of our lives, these photographs provide unique historical and social information into Duterte’s “war on drugs” (Hall, 1975). Thus, a textual analysis of the photographs drawing upon both semiotic and narrative analysis fits as a means of understanding the meaning of these photographs and making sense of Duterte’s “war on drugs” within a society driven by populist publics.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a term used to describe a research method that seeks to describe, interpret, and understand the content of communication or texts. As a methodology, it analyses *language* in texts to reveal literal meaning, symbolism, assumptions, and communication values. According to Brennen (2017), human beings use *language* to make sense of their lives, and it is a general understanding in textual analysis that human beings create their social realities. Language is a primary component in not only describing lives or realities but also in creating realities. Raymond Williams (1977), a cultural theorist, argues that the dialectical process, social in nature, between life and the sense we make of it enables human beings to create and understand the world in which they live. While most people do not directly experience events but through abstractions, people in each society understand events through personal and shared experiences, including experiences with texts.

What is a text?

Understanding the concept of “text” is essential for textual analysis. The term “text” is a word with broad meaning that captures more than just the printed documents, textbooks, or written messages (Brennen, 2017). The textual analysis considers texts as “cultural artifacts, material documentary evidence that is used to make sense out of our lives” (Brennen, 2017 p. 204). This definition will include any object whose meaning and significance a researcher seeks to interpret in depth. In this line, Stuart Hall (1975) defines text as “literary and visual constructs, employing symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions, and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in its broadest sense (p. 17). As such, texts are things that we use to make meaning, not only books, newspapers, magazines, blogs but also films, artifacts, images, websites, commercials, TV programs, video games, and even pop music. In analyzing a text, the method used depends on the type of object and the purpose of the analysis. For example, to analyze a TV show like *The Queen’s Gambit*, one can focus on the dialogues or cinematography, or to analyze a game like chess, one can analyze the rules of the game and the behavior they elicit from players.

Textual analysis in cultural and media studies

Textual analysis, as a key component of cultural and media-related research, is a method that can be applied to understand cultural and media objects like music, videos, social media content, commercials, and photographs as text. In this way, a researcher seeks to evaluate meanings found in texts and how they help create our social realities or how people use texts to make sense of their lives (Brennen, 2017). The researcher might look at word choice, target audience, location of image or photograph, and a text’s relationship with other texts. According to Brennen (2017), this is a qualitative approach that examines social practices, representations, assumptions, and stories about our lives revealed in the texts.

This thesis treats photographs as texts to be analyzed and considers the photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines as historical documents containing narratives. Thus, as pointed out above, a textual analysis drawing upon both semiotic and narrative analysis fits as a means of understanding the meaning of these photographs and making sense of Duterte’s “war on drugs” and life in a society driven by populist publics. Researchers usually work within theoretical frameworks to connect their texts with contemporary societal issues (Brennen, 2017). This thesis will utilize the narrative theory and visual semiotics theory.

Narrative Theory and Analysis

At the word *narrative*, what comes to mind are stories and storytelling. We encounter stories in songs or music, dance, TV shows, and in pictures. As Alasdair MacIntyre would say, all human beings are story-telling animals; it is a universal human behavior. More importantly, a good story makes good sense of the world, and storytelling affords us a means to the way things are or how they could be. This engagement is essentially a way of meaning-making and defining the world (MacIntyre, 1981; Barbatsis, 2017). As Walter Fisher (1987) suggests, if a story presents accurate assertions about social reality, it presents good reasons for belief or action. When we look at a photo or listen to a story, for example, we assess its truthfulness by referring to what we know in the real world, lived experience, or other stories that we have accepted as true (Fisher, 1984, 1987; Barbatsis, 2017). In other words, we can understand pictures in the same way we understand stories that are written and read.

Narrative analysis looks at the structure of stories, the organization of a story to create a particular experience “about” something (Fisher, 1984). Any narrative has a descriptive structure, *what* a story says, or its content, and literal structures, *how* it

says it, or its form (Fry, 1957; Barbatsis, 2017). This structure applies to how images make meaning. The descriptive aspect imitates the real-world events, while the literal aspect is syntax. It is important to note that the formation of the descriptive structure is key to that content's meaning.

All stories are characterized by elements in a causal sequence leading to a peak. It is this sequence that yields meaning. Through Bormann's approach to narrative analysis, one can analyze narratives using elements of the scene, character, and action (Foss, 2004). First, the setting themes are where the characters act out their roles or where the action takes place. The elements of the scene are closely interrelated with characters and action and are given presence through them. Second, the character themes describe the agents or actors in the drama, ascribe qualities to them, assign motives to them, and depict them as having specific characteristics. Third, the action themes or plotlines deal with characters' actions within the drama that create the central theme. Lastly, one can focus on causal relations, i.e., cause and effect relationships established. To get at the setting, character, or action themes: one looks at the words, phrases, statements, or images used to interpret or present the events (Foss, 2004). When studying related material, the researcher considers not just each story's unique content and structure but also recurring characters and subplots across all evidence.

We learn things through the stories that we tell. We also come to know things through observation, where we visually take in information and assess them through the lens that seeing is believing (Goodnow, 2017). Often, this is via photographs, and their accompanying captions always place the photographs into a larger context and make the photograph part of a narrative (Berger, 1992). Thus, news photographs and the accompanying captions provide evidence for our belief.

Given what we know about narrative theory, this thesis will examine photographs of Duterte's "war on drugs" for their setting, character, and plot, taking into consideration provided captions. It is important to recognize that the narrative elements of scene, character, and action play a key role in interpretations. It is within these elements that one finds signs and symbols which help shape the interpretations of these narratives. Consequently, semiotic analysis becomes essential and can provide not only an accurate definition of meaning but also representative or connotational meanings (Brennen, 2017). This step leads to possible meaning-making and making sense of our lives.

Visual Semiotic Theory and Analysis

"Semiotics is the study of signs that exist in our social lives" (Brennen, 2017 p. 207). This thesis covers both signs used in producing, conveying, and interpreting messages and codes that govern the use of signs (Moriarty, 2017). While messages are made of signs and conveyed via codes, the meaning is derived only if the receiver understands the code. It is how visual communication functions. In visual communication, Arthur Asa Berger (2012) proposes three points to remember; first, we must recognize that we do not just *see* but have to learn *how* to see and *what* to see. Second, what we decide to see is determined by what we know, what we believe, and what we want. Last, the way we think is affected by what we know. However, we rarely think about how we know what we know. According to Hall (1999), there are three essential principles linked to semiotics, representation, and social construction of reality. First, for semioticians, all people see the world through signs. Second, people create the meaning of signs, which does not exist separate from them and the life of their sociocultural community. Third, semiotic systems provide people with a

variety of resources for making meaning. We will now delve into the communication aspects of a sign, especially nonverbal signs, and their role in communication.

What is a sign?

A sign is anything that stands for something else, be it an object, action, or a concept (Hoopes, 1991; Brennen, 2017). In an explication of semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), the European father of semiology presents semiotic theory or each sign as a system of two elements: a signifier and a signified. The signified refers to the concept behind the object within the image, while the signifier denotes the image attached to that signified. For example, a tree and a drawing of a tree both function as signifiers for the concept of “treeness.” When a driver sees a stop sign and responds to it, they respond to the standard sign system that makes up their environment. It is important to note that, while these two elements, signifier and signified, cannot be separated from each other, Saussure (1966) notes that their relationship is conventional. This relationship means that the understanding of codes is based on factual information and is dependent on culturally specific knowledge (Strinati, 1995; Brennen, 2017). This relationship between signifier and signified also applies to other things we learn that signifies or stands for something else, e.g., a word, a facial expression, an object. It is noteworthy, however, that the examples previously used deal only with simple signs.

Peirce on Semiotics

American Charles S. Peirce (1931, II) argued that the signifying activity could best be explained through a three-part model of sign, interpretant, and object. While the *sign* and *object* are equivalent or similar to Saussure’s signifier and concept, respectively, the *interpretant* is the idea aroused in a person’s mind by the sign (Moriarty, 2017). For example, at the mention of the phrase “Christmas tree,” an

American will interpret it as a pine tree, but a British will think of a cypress tree. The basis of difference in interpretation is the personalized or lived experience of the interpretant. These differences affect the interpretation of a sign and its objects and lead to individualized interpretations (Moriarty, 2017). It is this work of Peirce that later came to be known as *semiotics* with its emphasis on representation, particularly key in visual communication.

How does something come to stand for something else? To the question of how the signifier is connected to the signified, Peirce offers a perspective on the nature of the *sign relationship*. According to Peirce (1931), the relationship between the signified and the signifier can be iconic, indexical, and symbolic.

Icon

According to Peirce (1931), the icon is the most basic type of a sign. An icon is a sign that looks like or resembles the thing it stands for, making icons easy to interpret like a photograph (Berger, 2012; Moriarty, 2017). Icons mimic or imitate the signified, i.e., recognizably looking, being similar in having some of its traits like a portrait or a cartoon. For example, most of the airport signs are often icons, images that most people, regardless of language or background, should understand. Other examples of meaningful icons include photographs of family members and landmarks, representational painting, and the depictions of gender in public restrooms. Every encounter with a sign, the viewer will recognize the object; a photograph of the Eiffel Tower represents Eiffel Tower and proof that the photographer was present at the monument. In culturally specific public restrooms, a subtle change of the icons is easily recognizable and accordingly responded to; male, female, or unisex.

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An indexical sign is logically linked to what it represents; an indicator or material trace of its object such as smoke indicates fire (Berger, 2012; Moriarty, 2017). With indexical signs, there is a cause-and-effect link, a connection that is learned and is an everyday phenomenon. A sign is indexical if its elements provoke past experiences in association with an object or meaning that is not explicit (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Even though one does not see the actual element of fire that caused the smoke they see, for example, the viewer can still make the leap because there is a clear connection between what we see, the smoke, and what caused it, the fire. The depiction of a dead deer with a bullet hole suggests the presence of a bullet, a gun, and a hunter. The same applies to the relationship between a medical symptom and a disease. Peirce's idea of the index is that they point to but do not explicitly tell.

Symbol

A symbolic sign has a conventional meaning, but there is no logical connection between the meaning and the symbol. The signifier does not resemble the signified but only "stands for" and is understood through convention (Berger, 2012; Moriarty, 2017). In this sense, the symbol is the most abstract of Peirce's sign, and its meaning is purely learned. For example, language, numbers, morse code, traffic lights, and national flags. The cross or crucifix is an object that we have learned, and there is no logical connection between the object and what it stands for in the same manner we think of smoke and fire. The cross or crucifix is associated with Christianity and symbolizes Christ's crucifixion or, even further, God's love for humanity. This connection is historical or theological but not logical.

Peirce's semiotic theory indicates the key role of interpretation and the conventional or social constructions in sign meaning. Peirce's ideas are also benefiting from Berger's (2012) further articulation that the meaning is determined

not by content but by relationships. Meaning in a complex message arises by looking at the relationship of the signs to their signifieds and the relationship among the signs. This perspective yields the intended meaning (Berger, 2012). Peirce's semiotic theory is of great use in visual communication. We all recognize the power of symbols on people, for example, a flag or a crucifix, that often generate robust emotional responses in people. Berger (2012), quoting Peirce, says that there are signs everywhere, and human beings are sign-producing and sign-analyzing beings.

Through narrative and semiotic theory and analysis, we can decipher the relationship between the visual and its meaning. We can also get at the heart of the visuals of the Philippines "war on drugs" times. When one encounters an image or a photograph, it instantly speaks to them since it can tap into the viewer's system of signs and symbols. Consciously or not, we always look for meaning in a photograph, that which the photographer intends. Within a civil sphere, individuals and the community try to make sense of their everyday life towards social solidarity. One way to examine meaning-making is by looking at the narratives people tell through photographs and the signs and symbols they use. Narrative and semiotic theory, together with the civil sphere theory, are essential tools to not only understanding how real individuals live together in real societies with its conventions but also in thinking about the idea of social solidarity.

The Philippines "War on Drugs" Photographs: A textual Approach

For centuries now, one way people have made sense of history and human experience is through encountering captured and preserved images. Today, some of what we know about the past is stored as photographs. It is in this context of photographs as unique storytellers and avenues into historical and cultural issues that this thesis decided to interpret the photographs of the "war on drugs" in the

Philippines. From a narrative and semiotic perspective, this thesis explores meaning in the photographs taken during a populist regime, supported by populist publics within an emerging democracy that aspires to realize social justice and solidarity. There have been news stories, investigations, research studies, and condemnations of the “war on drugs.” Nonetheless, no research has explicitly focused on the news photographs of Duterte’s “war on drugs” and the role the images of these killings and protests play in understanding Duterte, his populism, and life in the country during this “war on drugs.” Linking this study of the news photographs of the “war on drugs” and the role the images could play in understanding the Philippines phenomenon, three research questions emerge:

RQ1: What story do the photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines tell?

RQ2: What can we learn about what it means to live through a “war on drugs” under a populist regime?

RQ3: How are the viewers encouraged to think about this “war on drugs” and those who experience it?

The Sample

The “war on drugs” phenomena in the Philippines, as portrayed in the photographs, mainly manifests in two categories of images I call : the “killings” and the “protests.” While the killing of suspected drug offenders is the direct means of implementing the policy taken by the government, some demonstrators protest this approach to solving the drug problem in the country. It is because of the killings that there are protests. These two categories of photographs are mutually dependent, and one cannot explain one category exclusive of the other. Thus, I select these categories

of the phenomena as two clusters of photographs for analysis to understand the whole picture of the “war on drugs.”

This thesis analyzed photographs of the Philippines “war on drugs” in the first year of President Duterte’s “war on drugs” between July 2016 and June 2017.

Additionally, this thesis analyzed the photographs of protests between July 2019 and June 2020.” For the first group of photographs, I did a Google and Bing search with the keywords “Philippines “war on drugs” pictures” and selected the first five hits from each result, disregarding sites that required paid usage of their photographs. It is important to note that my search results were influenced by search algorithms based on my location among other things and thus could be biased. I then dropped four of the ten websites selected due to repetition, missing photographs, or broken links. I narrowed down the sample to photographs in special featured articles in newspapers and news magazines. I found 66 photographs: 27 from two issues of *Time* magazine, 19 from *The Guardian*, and 20 from *The New York Times*. While these are Western sources, the photographs, with the exception of those from *The New York Times* are by local Filipino photojournalists including Raffy Lerma, Dondi Tawatao, Noel Celis, Kimberly dela Cruz, Hannah Reyes Morales, among others. Some of the photographs in *The New York Times* by Australian Daniel Berehulak are comparably of the same scenes as some from the local photographers. The photographs included crime scenes with extrajudicial killing victims’ bodies, police processing crime scenes, mourners, funerals and burials of victims, crime scene on-lookers, and drug offenders in jail. For the second group of photographs, I also did both Google and a Bing search with the keywords “Philippines war on drugs protests” and with the filter “past year.” This search filter and sampling yielded in photographs between July 2019 and June 2020, which happens to be the fourth year of the “war on drugs” campaign. Of the first 100

photographs, I selected only those involving crowds of protesters of the “war on drugs” killings. I found 77 photographs from both local and international news agencies.

Method of Analysis

This thesis sought to understand what story is being told through the 143 photographs of the Philippines “war on drugs.” For this thesis, a textual analysis of the photographs was undertaken, drawing upon both semiotic and narrative analysis to understand the meanings of the images from the “war on drugs” in the Philippines that could provide insight into the relationship between Duterte, populism, the human condition, and the desire for relief or change. This qualitative examination of representational images focused on a careful narrative and semiotic reading of Duterte’s “war on drugs” drawn from various photographs to give a notion of what constitutes life in the society under a populist agenda. The analysis emphasized what is being said and shown and what we can learn about what it means to live in a populist society with a waged “war on drugs.”

In this thesis, the photographs are understood from the narrative perspective that in telling a story using an image, a particular point of view must be taken by the photographer, which in turn creates a particular position of viewing for the viewer. The analysis begins by focusing on what is shown within each image. By examining each photograph, I can explicitly outline the overall compositions of the photographs. This composition allows me to identify the signs and symbols used. After analyzing the images for their compositional elements, I will then link the symbols to the narrative elements of scene, character, and action.

The Photographs are also understood in a *Peircian* sense to resemble other objects (icon), be casually and logically connected to other objects (index), and be

conventionally associated with other objects (symbol) (Berger, 2012). Thus, the interrelatedness of these sign functions creates meanings. The analysis will not only examine images for signs (iconic, indexical, symbolic) but also the relationship of images within a photograph and across the set of photographs under study. Cultural and historical context, in this case the Philippines under a populist regime, will be necessary. Doing so allows assessing the meaning of these signs and symbols and how the representative communication reflects what is happening in the Philippines.

This chapter has defined and analyzed the key theories of analysis that inform the research methodology and explains the research steps. Establishing photographs as a means of providing unique historical and social information into the “war on drugs” in the Philippines was followed by a look at how to interpret these photographs. As a qualitative research, using the narrative and semiotics methods is the best approach to interpreting photographs. Within the narrative elements of scene, character, and action, one finds signs and symbols which help shape the interpretation of these narratives.

In the next chapter, we present the findings and interpretations of the photographs of Duterte’s “war on drugs” based on the narrative and semiotic analysis. It will help us understand the overarching story, what we can learn about what it means to live through a “war on drugs” under a populist regime, and how the viewers are encouraged to think about this “war on drugs” and those who experience it.

Chapter 4: Findings

This thesis set out to understand the overarching story being told by the photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines. This meaning-making process includes what we can learn about what it means to live through a “war on drugs” and how viewers are encouraged to think about this phenomenon and those who experience it. The “war on drugs” phenomenon in the Philippines, as portrayed in the photographs, mainly manifests in two mutually dependent categories of images I call: the “Killings” and the “Protests.” The two groups of photographs include those depicting the killings soon after their occurrence and those depicting their effects, such as funerals and related protests.

In employing narrative theory, interpretation focuses on the elements depicting where characters act or action takes place, describing the agents in the drama, and dealing with characters’ actions. To analyze these narrative strategies of setting, character, and actions, I will examine the images looking for common patterns or themes across all evidence. I will also employ semiotic theory to analyze these photographs, considering the elements of settings, characters, and actions, examining them for signs and symbols. The question or task is to tell the over-arching story using both the images and the signs and symbols found within as evidence. I will separately present each group’s elements, starting with the “Killings” photographs followed by the “Protests.” After identifying the narrative structures and symbolic clues, I will outline a larger coherent vision of the shared reality of the Filipino people as a rhetorical vision. This vision pulls together the various elements (setting, characters, actions) from the narrative and semiotic analysis to tell an overarching narrative.

The “Killings”

Setting Themes in the “Killings” Photographs

There were three main scenes in the “Killings” photographs. These were “By the Roadside” scenes where the killings took place, scenes showing the “Aftermath” of the killings, or “Arrest & Jail” scenes showing what happens to suspected drug dealers who are not killed. As will be shown, the “Roadside” setting has three visual elements or subthemes describing where the killings took place: “at night,” locations considered “crime scenes,” and “in poor neighborhoods.” The “Aftermath” setting included depictions of the funeral parlor, wakes and funerals, burials, and cemetery. Finally, the setting “Arrests & Jails” mainly depicts the rounding up of drug suspects and overcrowded jails.

“By the Roadside.” The setting theme of the “Killings” photographs was mainly on the road or by the roadside. Photographs show that the bodies are dumped or left on the streets signifying that the killers want the public to know about these deaths. In one of the iconic photographs of the “war on drugs,” a woman is shown sitting in the middle of the road cradling her dead partner’s body (Lerma, 2017.). There is a warning sign behind her prohibiting dropping off and picking up passengers or pedestrian crossing. Other scenes similarly show crime scenes in narrow and dark alleyways. Dead bodies are also photographed on sidewalks or near the curb and under the bridge. The main issue emerging from these “roadside” settings concerning the “war on drugs” is that these “roadside” settings indicate public space. The bodies and crime scenes are in public spaces where anyone can see them. This openness signifies an effort to make people aware of death and associate death with being a drug pusher or offender, thereby sending a warning message.

Some of the bodies appear dumped by the roadside. In some “roadside” scenes, though the victims appear to have fatal gunshot wounds, there are no blood spatters or no pooling of the blood at the scene. This evidence suggests that the bodies

had been moved to a new location after death. Some bodies appear near garbage sites, sidewalks, or curb in a “nonviolent” posture, like the body appearing lying “calmly,” having hands placed by the side of the bodies. These appearances give the impression that the killings happened somewhere else and in private. The disposal of the bodies in public spaces, however, signifies that the perpetrators want the public to know these deaths occurred. Some scenes indicate that the shootings occurred at these very locations. Evidence for this can found within the photographs depicting bloodied spots or pools of blood and bodies next to a motorbike.

“At Night.” The “Roadside” photographs indicate that “death” in the “war on drugs” mainly occurs at night since the photographs are predominantly taken at night. The scenes appear dark with illumination from artificial sources like streetlights, car or motorcycle headlights, and police flashlights. Some of the night scenes are under bridges and in narrow alleyways where it is either dark or dimly lit. In some photographs, the dim illumination is from yellow-orange lights. The night scenes and the associated darkness evoke hopelessness, uncertainties, fear, and loss of life. Here, darkness symbolizes pessimism. There is possibly nothing positive that can come out of these killings. This gloomy feeling is also portrayed in the empty streets devoid of living human beings. The yellow-orange attention-demanding illumination in one of the photographs gives the back-alley scene an ominous feeling, which sets the tone of the story told by the photographs (Berehulak, 2016a). Darkness is also symbolizing the evil and mystery surrounding these deaths and killings.

The narrow and dark alleyways also evoke resemblance with people’s experiences with dark and small enclosures like claustrophobia. They signify restricted choices, difficult decisions to make or sort out, a forewarning of cautiousness and carefulness in what to do. Night scenes could symbolize a sort of

detachment or anonymity that goes with darkness. The “war on drugs” is carried out in the guise of darkness when it is difficult to see who committed the killing. Coupled with the element of unknown killers and the signs they leave behind, night and darkness signal fear and a forewarning of what could happen anytime, anywhere, and possibly indiscriminately to anyone. Death is also associated with darkness and lights going out. In most cultures, black or dark reflects the dimming of life, usually associated with the luminous soul fading into the afterlife. This meaning will also be reflected in the black clothes of mourners to reflect inner feelings of turmoil.

“Crime Scenes.” While the violence and brutality of the killings that happened at night attract the viewer’s attention, the main symbolic clues signify that they are crime scenes, as evidenced by the presence of law enforcement and yellow crime scene tape. It is conventional that police regard scenes where dead bodies are found as crime scenes since they might contain evidence that could assist with the investigation into the cause of death. The uniforms signify the officials as crime scene investigators, for they contain the acronym “SOCO.” SOCO stands for “Scenes of Crime Officer,” an official in charge of gathering forensic evidence. The SOCO officials also have gadgets like cameras, gloves, clipboards typically associated with evidence collection. In one of the photographs, the police are gesturing to on-lookers directing them away from the yellow-taped crime scene. The police at the scenes appear to be engaged in an investigation, as evidenced by a chalk body outline commonly used to indicate the place the body once rested, serving simultaneously as evidence found at crime scenes.

Another visual indicator that this is a “crime scene” setting are the dead bodies that appear to have either gunshot wounds or some signs of torture or death-causing trauma. It is noteworthy that nearly identical scenes play out in most of the

photographs, and they reveal a pattern of similar locations of dark and desolate alleys, with dead bodies by the roadside with gunshot wounds and the clues left behind like cardboard signs. From most of the captions, we learn that these murders are carried out by unknown masked men, giving the scenes an aura of vigilantism. Cardboard signs left at some of these crime scenes label the victims as drug offenders and criminals as a way to justify their violent deaths.

“Poor Neighborhood.” The photographs also indicate that the settings for these deaths are mainly poor neighborhoods, as signified by shots of shabby houses, shanties, or slum dwellings with dilapidated buildings in dimly lit surroundings. Typically, one does not find such structures in upscale or affluent neighborhoods. The photographs further illustrate this scene by shots of disorganized electricity and telephone lines over the dark alleyways. This unaesthetic feature is commonplace in the slums. Other photographs that picture *sari-sari* stores, kiosks that sell essential items in the slums, also reaffirm this setting. These stores occupy the sidewalks for commercial activities and are common in poor areas. Another typical poor neighborhood indicator is the cheap wire mesh that acts as makeshift demarcation and verandas barriers in some photographs. In other photographs, houses have election campaign posters on the walls of the houses, another common feature in the slum areas.

Another signifier of a poor neighborhood is trash littering the streets. One “Killings” photograph shows a body dumped next to a garbage heap in a residential area, metaphorically signifying that the viewer should equate the body with trash (Berehulak, 2016b). Other indications of poor neighborhoods include photographs of dirty roads, disrepair or poorly done roads, exposed water pipes, and poor drainage systems. These photographs also indicate the common association of poor areas with

social decay. Slums are commonly seen as “breeding grounds” for social problems like crime and drug addiction. Photographs of crime scenes and the victims labeled as drug suspects fit this common stereotype associated with poor neighborhoods.

The “Aftermath.” The “Aftermath” photographs also provide other settings linked to the “Killings” setting. The “Aftermath” settings are mainly scenes depicting a consequence of the killings or deaths. They depict funeral parlors, wakes and funerals, burials, and cemeteries. These photographs signify the new realities associated with the deaths brought about by the “war on drugs.” A photograph inside a van shows a black body bag and a grieving woman (Berehulak, 2016c). The body is being transported to a funeral home. In another “Aftermath” photograph, relatives of the victims are hysterical and emotional with hands over their mouths and eyes as they look inside a van containing the bodies of five people killed on the eve of Halloween, according to the caption (Gabuco, 2017). In other photographs, we see scenes of mourning as indicated by the people wearing both black and white clothes. Black and white are colors associated with death and mourning. There are also coffins bearing the remains of the victims. The mourners stand around the coffins, some touching the corpses or the coffins. Another “Aftermath” setting is the funeral parlor. One funeral parlor photograph shows bodies stacked up like firewood with nothing separating them, an indication that the funeral parlor is in a low-income area (Berehulak, 2016d). This unusual scene signifies a lack of space due to many bodies from the killings. These filled-up morgues also signify the financial struggles that the low-income families find themselves in due to the “war on drugs.” To obtain the bodies, the families have to pay to cater for wakes, morgue, and burial fees. Without donations, families have to rely on loans.

To further illustrate the “Aftermath” of the killings, there are photographs of wakes and funerals. Photographs show sidewalks turned into makeshift funeral homes to hold wakes and funeral gatherings. The makeshift funeral homes have white coffins, garlands, streamers, funeral lights and candles, and a funeral book by the roadside of the narrow slum roads (Nachtwey, 2017). These scenes signify sorrow or sadness as reflected in the dejected faces and clothing of the mourners wearing black. Other “Aftermath” photographs show cemeteries with vertical graves common for the poor. At the cemeteries, there are burials taking place. In one photograph, the coffin of a suspected drug pusher and a victim of the killings is placed in a tomb as grieving relatives participate in the burial ceremony (NurPhoto, 2017). According to captions connected to other cemetery photographs relatives were also shown visiting the graves of their dead on November 1, All Saints’ Day (Berehulak, 2016e).

“Arrests and Jails.” Another common scene related to the “Killings” includes photographs of arrests and inside overcrowded jails with iron bars at the police headquarters. These photographs are grouped here since they are scenes showing what happens to suspected drug dealers who are not killed. According to the captions, those arrested are suspected drug pushers or users, but some do not know why they are in jail. The arrest scenes show suspects in handcuffs and squatting or the police holding their hands (Tawatao, 2017a). In the jails, there are crowds of men behind bars (Nachtwey, 2017). Some are sleeping, packed close to each other, and half-naked (Berehulak, 2016f). Basketball courts are turned into sleeping areas. These overcrowded jails signify mass arrests linked to the anti-drug operations by the government.

The “roadside,” “aftermath,” and “arrests and jails” are settings in the “Killings” photographs. The “roadside” setting has elements that depict the killings

took place at night, at locations depicted as crime scene and in poor neighborhoods. The “aftermath” includes settings associated with the consequences of the killings including funeral parlors, wakes and funerals, burials, and cemeteries. Lastly, the “arrests and jails” setting depicts the rounding up or arrests of drug suspects and the overcrowded jails. These setting themes of the “roadside,” “aftermath,” and “arrests and jails” depict where the characters act out their roles, or where action takes place. The next section contains the description of the agents or actors in the drama of the “Killings” ascribing qualities to them, and their characteristics. The section also contains the action themes dealing with the characters’ action within the drama of the “Killings.”

Character and Action Themes in the “Killings” Photographs

The narrative of all the “killings” photographs involves a link between the main characters who are the victims, their mourners, the spectators, and supporting characters who are either invisible (i.e., unknown killers and their signs) or are the police. The narrative draws its weight from these intertwined relationships. The primary victims symbolized by the dead bodies are either mourned by relatives and friends or turned into spectacles for the on-lookers. As will be explained below, these character themes are further made complex by the roles played by cardboard signs, police officers, and the unknown perpetrators of the vigilante-style crimes. The main and the supporting characters of the “war on drugs” engaged in five main action themes that correspond to character groups and are presented here alongside the character themes. While there is victimization, those left behind engage with death as mourners or engage the spectacle as on-lookers. Furthermore, while the media and police engage in the documentation, the cardboard signs send out chilling messages.

Victims and Being Victimized. The “war on drugs” narrative, as depicted in the “Killings” photographs, is anchored on the main characters who are the victims, the dead bodies, many of whom included suspected drug offenders singled out for cruel and unjust treatment, including death. The victims’ bodies are lying dead on the streets, on stretchers wrapped in white cloths or black body bags, piled up in funeral parlors, or in coffins, and at burial sites. The brutality and pain come out significantly through the photographs. The photographs depict gunshots as the leading cause of death. The bodies have gunshot wounds either in the head or the chest, making it an effective way to kill. Some bodies, however, have evidence of torture, like the wrists and legs restrained and bound by tape. Others have marks around their necks indicating strangulation or blunt force trauma to the face. Other victims have their heads wrapped with packaging tape, which might have caused their deaths due to suffocation. These torture marks purport that the perpetrators took their time and later hastily dropped the bodies in public.

Apart from being shot or suffocated to death, the victims’ bodies are left in the rain, dumped next to garbage heaps, on the roadsides, and under dark bridges. In one photograph, for example, two bodies lie next to each other on the roadside, one facing up and the other facing down (Ongcal, 2017). Their legs are tangled, making for unusual postures for someone who was shot and indicating someone placed the bodies in a posed position. One photograph depicts a staged body of a teenage girl by the garbage (Berehulak, 2016b). The body “calmly” lies on its back and her hands on the sides. Her head is resting on a garbage sack as if on a pillow. In her hand, there is a barbie doll. The photographs, however, do not point to any gender disparity in how the victims were disposed of or displayed in public. In other roadside scenes shown in the “Killings” photographs, though the victims appear to have fatal gunshot wounds,

there are no blood spatters or no pooling of the blood at the scene. This lack of blood gives the impression that the bodies had been moved after death, and the killings happened somewhere else and in private.

Some crime scenes indicate that the shootings occurred at the very locations where the photographs were taken. Evidence for this can be found within the photographs depicting bloodied spots or pools of blood and bodies next to a motorbike.

Photographs show streets and floors stained by the blood of victims signifying horrific deaths, the violence, and suffering at the hands of their killers. Some bodies are tied up and faces taped using packaging tape. This treatment of the victims embodies a disregard of human life, and it is disrespectful to the human body. These disturbing images stand in stark contrast to the victims' bodies shown in the coffins, which are seen as calm, disguising the probable violent deaths they encountered. These photographs represent how horrible the "war on drugs" is and foreshadow how many scars are left behind.

Most, but not all, of the photographs are of dead bodies of middle-aged men. From the captions, we learn that these middle-aged men were husbands and fathers to wives and children that are now left, widows and orphans. In a few other photographs, the victims are women, mostly killed alongside their husbands or partners, as seen in one photograph of a couple shot dead while riding a motorbike together (Berehulak, 2016g). The captions indicate the partners were killed together. From other captions, we learn that the body of a woman dumped by a garbage heap is a 17-year-old girl. She was killed alongside her boyfriend and dumped, or that the partners were killed together. In other incidences, we encounter bodies of victims who are teenagers. One of the photographs shows a torso of a victim with a label on it indicating he died while undergoing surgery due to multiple gunshot wounds. The label on the body

reads 15-year-old male. Victims also include children. In a photo that shows a wake scene, one of the coffins is small-sized to indicate a child's body. The caption identifies that shots fired at their home killed a 5-year-old alongside his dad.

It is also important to note that the photographs suggest that the victims are poor. The victims are barefoot, shabby, with ragged and dirty clothes signify their status as poor. As noted above, the victim's bodies are found in poor neighborhoods suggesting they are residents. Linked to their status as poor is the idea of the victims being dispensable. Their bodies discovered at night, in the dark, bound, and faces taped symbolize victimhood and vulnerability, robbing them of identity and thus humanity. In the case of the 15-year-old who died undergoing surgery, he is labeled as a "John Doe," indicating that he is unidentified, or no one came out to claim him (Go, 2017). The photograph not only points to poverty but also to the fear of being associated with the victims, and especially the burial expenses. Critically, the cardboard signs left at some scenes label the victims as drug offenders signifying that they deserve their deaths.

Mourners and Dealing with Death. The killings and the victims are directly linked with the mourners. The mourners are portrayed mainly as relatives and friends of the victims. The photographs generally depict mourners as in grief, dejected, pensive, sad, and in tears. Photographs showing mourners proximity to the victims, being at the crime scenes, close to the coffins, or touching the bodies, indicates close relations. The mourners are either at the scene of the crime where the bodies were discovered, at social gatherings associated with death or wakes, or at cemeteries where burials take place. As noted above, in one photograph, a woman is cradling a dead body (Lerma, 2017). The photograph is iconic since it conjures other images of mothers holding their dead children, like the pietà sculpture by Michelangelo of Mary

holding Christ's dead body after the crucifixion. A mother cradling her baby creates a sense of security; it is calming and relaxing. However, it can also signify loss and grief.

Cradling a dead body in the dark on the street evokes hopelessness, uncertainties, fear, and loss of life; it symbolizes grief and sorrowfulness. With her eyes closed and facing the dead partner that she is cradling, a sorrowful, distressed, and grief-stricken look appears on the woman's face. Her demeanor signifies resignation to the many tears of the "war on drugs." With her eyes closed, the face also signifies anonymity, which means any Filipino woman can take up her place. In another photograph, a 6-year-old child cries in anguish, symbolized by the wide-open mouth and teary eyes on the little girl's face (Berehulak, 2016h). The girl is looking up to the other grown-up lady, seemingly seeking attention and an explanation of what is happening. Additionally, the children in the photographs are shown engulfed in tears and confusion, representing the many children left behind with bleak futures of uncertainties.

The mourners are identified in the photographs through their black and white clothing; in the Eastern world, both black and white are colors associated with funeral dress. The photographs show the general simplicity of the clothing of the mourners with some in shabby and dirty clothes, shirtless and even barefoot, another indication of poverty. Most of the mourners are women and children, which suggests either widows or orphans left behind. In one photograph, a visibly pregnant woman is sitting on cardboard on the floor (Nachtwey, 2017). She sits next to the coffins of her husband and child. At the cemeteries, the photographs show, yet again, that the mourners are mainly women and children. Women are shown either mourning the death of their husbands, children, or grandchildren. While the photographs show most

of the victims being middle-aged men, it is not surprising to observe more women mourners. There are, however, occasional men shown as mourners. One photograph, for example, shows a man crying, the caption telling us he is mourning a dead girl who was raped and killed by a friend of her father who was drunk and an alleged drug addict (Lopez, 2017). Another man, a father to a victim, is also seen crying and being comforted at a burial scene (Sepe, 2017). The caption indicates that he was shouting, “It can’t be my child. It can’t be!” In another photograph, a man appears to be in tears as he holds a video call with another mourner who, according to the caption, could not be there in-person since she works abroad (Morales, 2017).

Spectators and Engaging the Spectacle. In the “Killings” photographs, we also encounter individuals or groups of on-lookers, especially at the crime scenes and funerals which are treated as spectacles. The spectators are a diverse group of both men and women, old and young, and even children. These spectators include family members and strangers who witness the killings or are drawn to the scenes where dead bodies are left or dumped. Most of the spectators in the “Killings” photographs look on in emotional shock, fear, or cluelessness. They stand in groups with hands over their mouths or over their faces as a sign of processing difficult experiences like witnessing a murder. Some are visibly dejected, sad, and in tears. While some appear keen and look inquisitive, other on-lookers exhibit signs that things seem pointless as they are either laughing, smiling, or continuing with their business as if nothing is happening. In one photograph, a group of mostly young people stands with hands over their mouths; some are laughing and smiling (Celis, 2017a). They are all facing one direction where, according to the caption, lie three bodies of alleged drug dealers killed in a police raid. Like the victims and mourners, their clothing reveals that they are from poor areas.

Generally, smiling and laughing signifies happiness and that a person is comfortable with a given situation. From my experience of four years living among the Filipinos, my observation is that they tend to put on a happy face even in difficult times. Filipinos have also described themselves as both happy and sad at funerals. As shown in some of the photographs, smiling faces and laughter at horrific scenes of murder are conspicuous. These smiles and laughter could signify a way to cope with the deaths or signify detachment from the reality of the deaths, lack of empathy, or a normalization of the murders.

This engagement with the spectacle of the crime scenes is further evidenced by spectators shown staring at dead bodies and talking to the police. In one photograph, people standing behind a yellow crime scene “do not cross” tape, appear to be watching the woman at the center of the frame cradling her dead partner (Lerma, 2017). Some are talking to each other. One has his hand over his mouth, and another is shown taking a photo from his cell phone. In another photograph of a “Killings” crime scene in front of a 7-Eleven convenience store, the store workers, identified through their uniforms, appear to have suspended their work, as they are staring at the body being taken away by funeral parlor workers (Berehulak, 2016i). Others at the scene look along with pensive faces, while others appear to busy themselves with taking photographs of the scene in order to codify the spectacle.

Finally, a particular scene in one photograph shows three children, two squatting and one sitting on the doorstep, staring at a bloodied spot with candles lit on the ground (Berehulak, 2016j). From the caption, we learn that the three kids, one boy, and two girls, are inspecting a spot where their uncle was shot and killed. The photograph shows the children scared and apparently lost in their thoughts while staring at a bloodstained murder spot. As spectators, these children also signify the

many other children whose families and relatives are victims, whose blood is on the streets of the neighborhood, and who have to endure painful farewells. This idea is reinforced through other pictures, showing children staring at mourners who are in tears or hysterical. The seeming unawareness signified through the puzzled faces of the children represents their innocence in the face of misery. The lack of joy on their puzzled faces is an outward manifestation of the grief and pain deep inside them. In this sense, they are also victims.

Invisible Characters: Unknown Killers, Cardboards, and Sending a Message. Another major group in the narrative is the invisible characters. They are the unknown killers; whose sole identifications are the dead bodies on the streets and the signs they leave behind. The captions indicate that many witnesses claim the killers are masked men who are challenging or impossible to identify in the darkness of the night where they operate as vigilantes. The standard descriptions are “unknown motorcycle-riding men” or “unknown men riding in tandem.” The killers leave behind cardboard signs which are considered as non-human characters. The cardboard signs at the crime scenes contain messages suggesting the victims are drug offenders. These cardboard signs are a common feature at the crime scenes, and they reinforce the victimization theme. The messages, for example, translate as “I am a drug pusher, do not imitate,” “Don’t be a pusher and an addict like him,” “A pusher who won’t stop will have his life ended,” and “I am a drug pusher, drug addict and thief. Imitate me, and you will die.” The messages are clear; the victims are dead because of their association with drugs as addicts or pushers. Those who continue with such behavior will also end up dead. Therefore, the message left is clear: the drug suspects should stop their business, or the unknown killers will stop them.

The Police and their “Call to Duty.” The character and actions of the police in these photographs present a notable theme. Official decrees from President Duterte signal that the police are the primary personnel tasked with enforcing the “war on drug” policy. Police are featured in most of the “Killings” photographs either as crime scene investigators, or as controlling crowds of spectators, or effecting the anti-drug operations with raids, or finally, as making a “buy-bust operation” arrest. According to captions, the police also shoot those whom they claim resisted arrest. In one photograph, the police are shown at a checkpoint checking identifications during a night-time raid on a suspected drug den in Manila (Tawatao, 2017b). In another photograph, a big-bodied police officer is shown holding the hand of a shirtless man, who, according to the caption, is a drug suspect (Tawatao, 2017a). A police officer is also shown in another photograph removing a bag of marijuana from the pocket of one of two unidentified drug suspects after they were reportedly shot dead by police as they tried to evade a checkpoint in Quezon city (Favila, 2017). Taken together, these photographs signify that the police are executing Duterte’s call to duty and are the face of the “war on drugs.”

In another photograph, there are four law enforcement officers portrayed, one of which is shown holding a high-powered gun (Acayan, 2017). Two of the officers in the photograph are shown checking their phones while the other two appear to be looking at something. From the caption, we learn that the police officers stand guard near a crime scene where a suspected drug pusher was shot dead in Manila. According to the captions in these photographs, there have been witness accounts that blame police officers for extra-judicial killings of drug suspects. As such, the photographs convey the idea that police do not hide their involvement, that they too send the same message as the unknown killer; namely, drug suspects should cease to

operate, or they will be killed, even by law enforcers. As depicted in these photographs, the police signify impunity and human rights violations perpetrated by those meant to protect the people.

In essence, the character and action themes are descriptions of the agents and their actions in the drama of the “Killings.” The photographs of the “Killings” depict dead bodies of suspected drug offenders, mourners including relatives and friends, spectators who are community members, invisible actors like the unknown killers and their signs, and the police. While the dead victims met cruel deaths, mourners are left behind dealing with deaths. Others in the community are reduced to engaging the spectacle of the scenes with dead bodies and the memorials. The invisible actors are engaged in the killings as seen in the dead bodies and the cardboard signs they leave behind bearing warning messages to drug offenders that they should stop, or they will also be killed. The police in these “Killings” photographs are mainly depicted as processing the crime scenes and carrying out their duties as law enforcement. The next section deals with the “Protest” photographs. According to this study, the protests are mutually dependent on the killings; the people are protesting the killings.

The “Protests”

Setting Themes of the “Protest” Photographs

The setting for the “war on drugs” protests are the places where the community responds to the overall deaths and killings. “Protest” photographs show the protests mainly took place on the roads and parks locally in the Philippines and foreign countries like in the U.S. and Hong Kong. These protests were organized rally events taking place alongside other events or on important commemorative dates. Protests were also pictured as occurring in poor neighborhoods.

“On the roads.” The “Protest” photographs show public disapproval of the “war on drugs” occurring on the streets. These settings include roads leading to or near government or cultural institutions as identified in the photographs or the captions. One of the main settings in the “Killings” photographs was public streets and alleys where bodies of victims were left or dumped. In contrast, “Protest” photographs show demonstrators protesting the “war on drugs” killings in key locations where previous protests had taken place. For example, in several photographs, demonstrators are shown on the road named EDSA. The EDSA road is legendary because of the protests 35 years ago, leading to Ferdinand Marcos’ fall. Other photographs show protests next to the People Power Monument, a sculpture by Ed Castrillo in 1993, which commemorates the EDSA revolution. The sculpture, a three-layered pyramid formed by different kinds of people, signifies the involvement of people from all walks of life in the protests then and now.

Another group of “Protest” photographs shows demonstrators marching on the roads leading to a gate named “National Headquarters; Philippine National Police” or gathering in front of “Caloocan City Police Station: Police Community Precinct 7.” From the caption, we learn that the Caloocan City police station is where police officers allegedly shot dead a teenage boy named Kian (De Castro, 2017). According to the captions in other “Protest” photographs, protests took place on other roads, including those leading to or in front of the Department of Justice and Camp Crame Police Headquarters; the latter place known for holding high-profile critics of the government’s “war on drugs.” The roads next to or leading to the Presidential Palace are also not spared from the actions of the protesters.

Protesters are also depicted as gathering and marching in school compounds such as St. Paul’s University, a leading Catholic school in Malate district of Metro

Manila according to the captions, and the University of the Philippines, Diliman campus located in the suburbs of Quezon City, Metro Manila. Protesters carry placards with the letters “UPD,” which, according to the caption, stands for the University of the Philippines-Diliman (“Student protest,” 2018). In other photographs, according to the captions, the Church organized protesters to march through the roads of Rizal and Luneta parks, which are major recreational parks in Manila. The photographs show terraces for sitting along the main road that cuts through the parks, a landmark feature of the parks. Protester banners and placards are signed with names like “Nativity of the Lord Parish,” “The Lord’s Flock Catholic Charismatic Community,” and “Diocese of Cubao,” which, as per the captions, are associated with the Catholic Church.

“Protest” photographs also show protesters’ actions at rallies that did not occur on roads. The protesters are shown at funerals or burial events that are also turned into a platform to voice dissent. In one “Protest” photograph, relatives, and friends at a burial of a drug-related killing victim are shown marching at a cemetery. Other “Protest” photographs show similar protests occurring at a funeral of Kateleen, who, according to the caption, was a 3-year-old victim (Lopez, 2019). Protests also are depicted at the wake of the aforementioned 17-year-old student named Kian, who, according to the captions, was shot by the police in an anti-drug operation. Protesters are also shown at candlelight vigils of other victims with placards bearing their names and photographs. The Church also organized other rallies at parish grounds. For example, from the caption of one photograph of five women holding portraits of victims, we learn that it was a rally after the “Lord, Heal Our Land” Mass at a local parish (Tawatao, 2017c).

Alongside Other Events. The “Protest” photographs also indicate that the “war on drug” protests also took place alongside other events. Evidence for this was found in the placards, banners, and captions shown in the photographs. In one photograph, the banners and placards say, “Yes to Life, No to Culture of Death.” According to the caption, this was a church event organized to denounce the government’s decision to reinstate the death penalty for criminals (Celis, 2017b). This prayer rally called “Walk for Life” also disapproves Duterte’s bloody “war on drugs” with placards that read “stop the drug-related killings.” At another event, Protesters were shown alongside relatives hunching over tombstones during the annual All Saint’s Day tradition in Manila that falls on November 1. The “war on drugs” protesters were also depicted, according to the captions, at the commemoration of the anniversary of the EDSA Uprising on February 25; at student gatherings on a school day; and near the Presidential Palace when the U.N. Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review that was taking place in Switzerland. Other “protest” photographs show the “war on drugs” protest coinciding with an AIDS conference in Amsterdam; with International Human Rights Day; with Global Day of Action to Free All Political Prisoners in the Philippines; and the day after the arrest of the highest-profile critic of Duterte’s drug war, Senator Leila de Lima.

In Foreign Lands. While protests mainly took place in Manila, the Philippines’ Capital, photographs also indicate protests in other cities in the Philippines and foreign countries. In one scene of protesters marching and holding placards, the caption indicates the location as Baguio, which is a city north of the Philippines. In another photograph, demonstrations are in Hong Kong (Yu, 2018). The placards are signed HKCAHRPP, which stands for Hong Kong Campaign for Human rights and Peace in the Philippines. From captions, we learn other protests

took place in Amsterdam at an AIDS conference and also in front of the Philippines Consulate General in New York City.

Poor Neighborhoods. It is worth noting that several of these protest rallies involving funerals and wakes are in poor neighborhoods. One of the featured neighborhoods is the Caloocan City, which according to the caption, is a poor slum area in Metro Manila where the police murdered the 17-year-old student named Kian. Several dilapidated buildings are shown in the photographs, including the police stations and the shabby residentials, and a sari-sari store. Most of the protesters in these photographs hold placards with the phrase “justice for Kian,” a name associated with a poor slum area. In another “protest” photograph, mourners march at a cemetery with derelict buildings and vertical graves, a scene typical of the poor urban areas (Ranoco, 2017a).

In brief, the “Protest” photographs depict the demonstrations took place mainly on the roads in the Philippines and also abroad. These protests occurred alongside other events like the Human Rights Day. Some events also took place in the poor neighborhood where many of the victims live. The next section describes the main agents of the “protest” drama as human activists with a goal, while the non-human characters are in a supporting role.

Character Themes of the “Protest” Photographs

The characters in this group of “Protest” photographs fall into two main groups, human and non-human characters. Human characters, the activists, or protesters with an agenda, are supported by non-human characters like hashtags and placards. The placards are characters because, though inanimate, they engage in human-like actions like “saying,” “speaking,” or disseminating information, and animating or inspiring crowds. The activists or protesters include people from all

walks of life and of various ages. The non-human characters play a central role in conjunction with the human actors, like echoing the message of the protesters.

Purpose-filled Activists or Protesters. The photographs show a diverse group of people publicly standing or marching, shouting, and carrying signs. In the photographs, we see men and women, old, young, and even children. The EDSA monument, near which some of the demonstrations take place, reflects the age and gender diversity of the Filipinos demonstrating in the Philippines. The photographs with settings in foreign countries like those at the AIDS conference in Amsterdam or the Philippine consulate in New York City show ethnic or racial diversity among the demonstrators. From the various placards and captions, we learn that the protesters consider themselves human rights activists who promote or protect human rights.

In the “Protest” photographs, the demonstrators are women with either white or black mourning veils. No veils of other colors were notable beyond these two. Wearing veils at protests invokes a familiar sight of women wearing dark lacy veils as a sign of mourning at funerals or out of respect for the dead. In the “protest” photographs, the veils are a sign of mourning the victims of the “war on drugs.” In Eastern Asia, white mourning clothes are a symbol of rebirth, purity, and a sign of respect for the life lost. White is also associated with bereavement. At a protest, white clothing not only signifies respect for the lost lives but also signifies the desire for a better and fresh start that dispels the evil of darkness. The demonstrators, especially those identified by the captions as relatives and friends, mourners, those at funerals marches, wakes, and burials, are visibly sad, with dejection on their faces and in grief and tears. Some protesters are wearing yellow in a photograph of a protest rally that coincided with the EDSA uprising commemoration (Bernal, 2017). Yellow is the party color of the Liberal Party, the opposition movement that led to dictator Marcos’

ousting. Their presence at this rally is a clear political message to the Duterte administration that repression has no place in the post-Marcos Philippines. Some protesters in the poor neighborhoods are shabbily dressed, some bare chests and in sandals.

From the banners, we learn that many of the protesters are Filipino Catholics. Photographs show protesters observing All-Saint's Day and participating in the "Walk for Life" protest organized by the Catholic Church. "Protest" photographs also depict relatives of victims carrying portraits of their loved ones at a "Lord, Heal Our Land" Mass at a Shrine in Manila. The continued assertion of Catholic Christian involvement in Filipino politics is also seen in pictures of activists inside Churches. Captions indicate protesters include Catholic students from Catholic schools and universities like St. Paul. In other "Protest" photographs and captions, we learn that other demonstrators are students from the University of the Philippines protesting at the gates of the Department of Justice; student activists of the university student council protesting at the school grounds, and students from the Ateneo de Manila University protesting at a college basketball halftime show.

The "Protest" photographs also show that there are more notable demonstrators, including indigenous people, church workers, religious nuns and sisters, priests, and a catholic cardinal. Others include delegates at a conference, police officers, and riot police. Some protesters are shown seemingly cheerful with smiles, while some are wearing flat, expressionless faces or appear to be indignant.

Non-human Characters. This character theme comprises various props, tags, or group names used by the protesters that contribute to the protests by supporting or echoing the protesters' messages and giving groups an identity or cause. "Protest" photographs, for example, show a pile of effigies with bloodied clothes made to

resemble the bodies of the victims found along the streets (“Philippine activists,” 2017). In all the photographs, there are demonstrators holding placards and banners which carry various messages such as “Stop the Killings,” “Oust Duterte,” “End Impunity!” and “Human Rights for all.” Some placards are made of cardboard to resemble those found at crime scenes that labeled the victims as drug suspects but now carrying opposite messages like “thou shall not kill” and “justice for all victims.” In a photograph at a healing Mass, the caption indicates the people are holding photos of the victims of the “war on drugs” (Tawatao, 2017c). At other protest vigils, photographs show the activists also displaying the names of the victims. The black ribbons on clothing and placards of some demonstrators shown in the photographs are a sign of remembrance or mourning.

Among the characters in these photographs are various hashtags, acronyms, initials, and group names signifying participants in the demonstrations. These are not to be confused with the physical groups of people protesting but rather seen as the driving force that gives the people a purpose. At the top of this list is the hashtags. While hashtags are typically found and used on social media, they have found their way into everyday lives, and they are a source of purpose or unity for a particular cause. In this context of the “war on drugs” protests, the placards contain hashtags like “#StopTheKillings,” “#ShoutForLife,” “#youthresist,” and “#RememberKIAN.” There also other well-organized and recognized groupings like the PHIL-UPR watch, which is the Philippines branch of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council, and “Rise Up for Life and for Rights,” which is an alliance against the drug-related killings due to the “war on drugs” policy, as well as the Diocese of Cubao, and Voices of Community Activists & Leaders. Other groups include “Stop the Killings Network,” “Sentro,” “Kabataan PL -NCR,” “Kadamay,” “PCPR,”

“iDefend,” “Bayan Metro Manila,” “Karapatan (rights),” “Akbayan Youth,” “APL Youth Sentro,” “Bayan-ST,” “anakbayanKalookan,” and “women wmm-Pilipinas.”

In short, the character themes depict the qualities of the human agents as purpose-filled activists and protesters, from a diverse group of all ages, gender, and race both locally and abroad. These human agents are either organized by Churches or civil groups. The non-human characters play a supporting role to the human agents echoing their message. They include props, hashtags, group names, and placards. The next section delves into the actions of these characters that brings about the drama of the “Protests:” protesting a culture of death and impunity enabling the killings and calling out for justice.

Action Themes of the “Protest” Photographs

With the narrative pointing out the actors as purposeful, what emerges as the actions of the main characters is a two-fold idea of protesting an emerging culture of death and impunity and sending out a strong message against the injustices of the “war on drugs.” These are accomplished by demonstrations on the streets and using dramatization and props to deliver a message to whom it may concern.

Protesting a Culture of Death and Impunity. Various activists and demonstrators participated in publicly organized rallies to express their strong objection to the “war on drugs” policy by the Duterte Administration. The “Protest” photographs indicate that the remonstrance is against the vigilante-style killings and the support thereof of the state-sanctioned policy. Some photographs show people demonstrating and marching on the streets, holding rallies at recreational parks, occupying roundabouts, the Philippines Consulate General in New York City, the gates of the Police Headquarters, and the Department of Justice in Manila. Other photographs show the demonstrators forming human chains in confrontation with the

riot police. At these demonstrations, there are dramatizations and props such as the aforementioned placards, banners, and effigies. In one photograph, for example, we see activists protesting with effigies piled up on the street, signifying the anger and indignation regarding what the “war on drugs” has turned the streets into, namely a dumping site for bodies of victims (“Philippine activists,” 2017). Other actors are mimicking victims by lying on the streets in the manner of the crime scenes. In another photograph, protesters march on the streets, carrying a mock coffin to protest the continuing killings (Marquez, 2017).

The photographs also show that the protesters took other means to stand up to the atrocities. In one of the photographs, a young man is shown using a megaphone to amplify his voice (“Teen Killings,” 2017). This use of a megaphone not only symbolizes amplification of the message against the “war on drugs,” but it also evokes a sense of activism, demonstration, human rights, and freedom of speech. Raised fists are another special gesture in the photographs. The raised fist is used as a symbol of the struggle of the people, *for* the people. According to Heraldo Filipino (2020), in the political history of the Philippines, the fist symbol was used by the Katipuneros in the 1892 anti-Spanish defiance. In the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, the fist symbol stood for the power of the people and thus a symbol of movement and solidarity for a cause. In the context of protesting the brutality of the “war on drugs,” the clenched fist is a symbol used by human rights activists fighting the oppressive and weaponization of the “war on drugs” and a symbol of resisting a growing culture of death and impunity. In another “Protest,” photograph students protesting the “war on drugs” are shown making a Hawaiian shaka hand sign which is a symbol of friendship, understanding, or compassion (Ranoco, 2017b). The message

the students appear to be trying to convey is a more compassionate dealing with those affected by drug abuse problems.

Sending Out a Strong Message of Justice. Apart from other protest-related actions like visibly crying at funeral marches, chanting, holding candle-lit vigils, showing portraits, tying red ribbons on the fence, visiting the dead, holding banners and placards, another prominent feature found in the “Protest” photographs is the overall need for justice. While some placards bear messages that translate as “justice!” or “Fight for justice,” some are more specific to individuals or a group of victims. For example, “justice for all the victims of extra-judicial killings,” “Justice for Kian, justice for all victims of Duterte’s drug war!” “Justice for Jee ICK Joo and other victims” and “Justice for Kateleen Myca Ulpina!” specifically refer to the individual victims Kian, Jee, and Kateleen, who in turn are representative of all those unjustly killed by Duterte’s “war on drugs.”

Calling for justice, in this case, calls out those responsible, like Duterte being the perpetrator, for sanctioning the killings through his policy. “AFP-PNP murderer” in one “Protest” photograph (“Philippines Church,” 2017) points to the Army and Police as guilty for following through with the President’s command. Understandably, the photographs show that the protesters see the killings as a “Massacre!” and that they want to “Hold the culprits responsible” and to “End impunity” for “we want justice, stop the killings.” Photographs show others seek international help saying, “ICC prosecute Duterte,” and “UNHRC pursue investigation of human rights violations in the Philippines! You are welcome. You are needed.” Still, other “Protest” photographs show that the protestors want to “oust Duterte” to “end state fascism,” an assessment that appears to be based on their view that “Duterte is a dictator” who is suppressing “press freedom.” Photographs also show that protesters

are issuing a call for “Duterte resign now,” and picturing Duterte with Hitler-mustache inside a mock dartboard that reads “dictator,” “lapdog,” and “fascist.” In sum, the actions of the protesters calling to “stop Duterte tyranny” identify Duterte as a symbol of fascism that has to be stopped.

The action themes as identified in the “protest” photographs also strongly call to end the killings and the violence the “war on drugs” promotes. As evidenced by the banners and placards shown in the photographs, there are direct calls to “stop the violence!” The urgency is stressed, “If not now, when?” As per the placards shown in the “Protest” photographs, there are already “12000+ related cases” and “war on drugs, born: 2016, dead: 13,000,” effectively conveying the idea that the numbers keep growing. Other placards indicate that protesters see this policy as a “deadly operation” that is violating fundamental human rights. The protesters, as signified through their banners and placards, are demanding “human rights for all,” “uphold human rights,” “stop the killings and other HRVs,” “stop drug-related extra-judicial killings,” “stop drug-related killings,” and “stop drug-related human rights violations.” In one photograph of the protesters in Amsterdam, a placard points out the violations in the words, “In the 5 days of this conference 150 people have been killed in Duterte’s drug war” (Jeffrey, 2018). This placard, along with others, issue calls “injustices must end now,” for “Duterte [to] stop killing people who use drugs,” for “...the killing has got to stop,” and “Yes to life, no to a culture of death,” which when taken together send a clear message against Duterte’s “war on drugs.”

Through the writings on the placards, the protesters also call for better tackling of the social problem of drug abuse. They are asking for “jobs not caskets,” “Mass housing, not caskets,” for “Justice and livelihood, not massacre,” and for efforts to “address the roots of drug addiction,” and to “suppress illegal drugs, save the

victims.” While the “Protest” photographs setting themes revealed that the “war on drugs” disproportionately affected the poor, the demonstrators warn, “Stop killing the poor! Rehabilitation, not persecution.” They also call to “end poverty, don’t end lives,” “Duterte’s war on drugs is anti-poor,” and “Fight anti-poor policy of Duterte.” The protests are a “struggle for just and lasting peace in the Philippines,” which can only be achieved by calls to “punish the big drug lords and protectors.” For example, according to the captions, “#jailforPaolo,” refers to Paolo, Duterte’s son, who was linked to an impounded drug shipment but went unpunished; he is the President’s son. Protestors in the “Protest” photographs signaled a better way could be to “#ProcessNotAbuse” alleged drug offenders.

Another action conveyed in the “Protest” photographs is a show of solidarity with the victims. Students’ placards read, “We were triggered. If not us, then who?” in response to the deaths. They came out “From social media to the streets of Manila,” with a message that “I hate drugs” and “All of us can possibly be drug pushers” in an attempt to delegitimize the killing of drug offenders without due process. Students also called upon others to join them through “the youth resist” and “Who will fight?” placards. “Protest” photographs showed that other students had a similar message “thou shall not kill” and “Paulinians stand against the culture of death.” In a show of solidarity, the Church organized rally had placards with the following message, “the life of every person comes from God,” “we in the church will continue to speak against evil even as we acknowledge and repent of our own shortcomings,” and “every person has a right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.” “Protest” photographs show more messages of solidarity that included “truth will set you free,” “protect life, life is sacred, yes to life, no to euthanasia,” “we lose a lot of young people on the street,” and “respect the life and dignity of the poor.”

The actions of the characters in the drama of the “Protests” include protesting a culture of death and immunity which has enabled the killings and messaging the need for justice to apply in the society. The “Protest” photographs show that demonstrations are against the approach taken to implement the policy. The protesters in these photographs denounce the perpetration of the vigilante-style killings and the state-sanctioned policy. They are calling for a more humane means of tackling the drug problems. From the banners and placards, a message is sent out that echoes the call for justice for the victims and the address of the real problems of the nation. In the next section, the patterns that emerge from these two groups of photographs are put together to tell an overarching narrative in the form of a rhetorical vision. This is done by linking the major setting theme identified as the “public” where both the “Killings” and “Protests” take place to the characters, the community, who are shown depicted in these “public” settings and the actions the characters are shown to carry out.

A Rhetorical Vision of Awakening

After identifying the common patterns and themes from the images and symbols, narrative theory requires forming a larger coherent vision of the shared reality of the community in the form of a rhetorical vision. This vision pulls together the various stories from the narrative and semiotic analysis to tell an overarching narrative, thereby giving the characters in the drama a broader viewpoint of things in their social reality.

The photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines comprised two types of photographs – the “Killings” and the “Protests.” While there are more possible interpretations, in this thesis, I argue that to those who reside outside the Philippines, they present the following rhetorical vision: the brutal “war on drugs” is devastating the Filipino nation, and there are calls for change. In this “war on drugs” drama, the

setting is ultimately public. The photographs indicate it is on the streets that some killings occurred. It is, however, mainly on the streets that bodies of victims of the killings were found dumped at night and in poor neighborhoods. In protest, the community and activists took it to the streets to demonstrate against the “war on drugs” killings. The public setting is also depicted in photographs showing memorials, burials at cemeteries, and other protest rallies at various places both locally and abroad.

The characters are the victims, unknown killers, and the community of mourners and spectators. The victims are men, women, and children who are brutally murdered and left or dumped on the streets. They are mostly labeled drug suspects deserving the deaths by cardboard signs left at the crime scenes. While there are mostly unknown killers acting in vigilante-style in response to the President’s call to “kill them all,” some photographs and captions point at the police as perpetuating the extra-judicial killings. The rest of the community members are either mourners or spectators. Relatives and friends are now mourners dealing with death, and the spectators are engaging in the spectacle of death and mourning. The community is witnessing these killings and having to deal with the deaths. In the photographs, the action for the community is more than just spectating and mourning the deaths. The community seeks an end to the killings, and they desire change. The action theme is coming out in protest at the brutal killings in direct conflict with human dignity. Purpose-filled activists and protesters from all walks of life are protesting a culture of death and impunity and sending out a strong message of justice.

The rhetorical community emerging through this vision is awakened. The killers and their victims are part of the community. The larger community, however, is a group who commonly experience grief and are living through the brutal and

murderous “war on drugs,” yet they emerge with the common purpose of fighting for justice in the country. These mutually dependent features are the two most interesting and significant of the narrative. In this narrative of a suffering nation, the photographs present an inhumane treatment of fellow citizens by unknown killers or police officers responding to the President’s “war on drugs.” This aspect is at the center of the narrative playing both a determining and controlling role. In the narrative of resistance, the photographs present a determined nation seeking to end the inhumane “war on drugs” policy.

The photographs of the “Killings” and “Protests” present a picture where the killings and human dignity are incompatible so that one cannot justify the killings, not even for the sake of combating crime and drug problems in the community. There emerges a shared vision of putting to an end and departing from the state-sanctioned culture of death perpetrated by the killings of drug offenders in the “war on drugs.” It is not just individuals or the relatives and friends of the victims that come out in protest. The whole community develops a collective interest against the atrocities of the “war on drugs,” not just of individual victims but of all those affected, the victims and the community. The “protest” photographs emphasize shared consciousness of “silent no more” and “no to the culture of death.” The photographs of the “Killings” and “Protests” are both a manifestation of collective consciousness and an act central to consciousness-raising. Therefore, the growth in disapproval of the killings and the planned protests inspire dedication to the cause, the new meaning of the life of the community, and further raising and sustaining this awareness.

The killings and the signs left behind are done at night but left in public, intending to silence the community through threats and fear. The response, however, is the opposite. It occurs in the open and in broad daylight. Duterte’s “war on drugs”

is a brutal policy with atrocious human rights violations. It is met with resistance and indignation of the masses protesting the killings for all the world to see. It is a realistic depiction of the actions and the community. They have awakened to protest and try to end the killings. The drug offenders are no longer just the dehumanized objects. They are community members, human beings who deserve respect and due process and not brutally killed. According to the vision, killings are not the way to combat crime and drug abuse. Ultimately, the rhetorical vision presented in these photographs is one of awakening: the overarching story being that of the brutal “war on drugs” that has met the disapproval of the community.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study intended to understand the overarching story being told through the news photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines. In the process of making sense of the photographs, the study grappled with two issues. 1) what we can learn about what it means to live through a “war on drugs” under a populist regime. 2) how viewers are encouraged to think about both the “war on drugs” and those who experience it. The photographs were in two categories: the killings of suspected drug offenders soon after they occurred and other aftermaths like funerals and the protests of these killings. Analysis shows that the “Killings” photographs indicate locations deemed crimes scenes with bodies of victims left mostly by the roadside, at night, and in poor neighborhoods. They also include photographs indicating mourners at funerals and on-lookers at the scenes dealing with deaths and overcrowded jails full of drug offenders and surrenderees. The “Protests” photographs show places where the community responded locally and abroad to the overall deaths and killings. The demonstrations took place as organized rallies on the streets, in poor neighborhoods, and alongside other events.

The rhetorical vision presented in the photographs of the “Killings” and “Protests” is one of awakening in which the brutal “war on drugs” is devastating the Filipino people, and there are calls for change. In this drama, the setting is public: on the streets where bodies are found, funeral parlors and cemeteries where memorials take place, and where demonstrations take place. The characters are victims labeled drug offenders whom unknown people kill. While family and friends mourn the victims, these deaths and aftermaths are a spectacle for others. The community not only bears witness to the killings, but they also have to deal with the deaths. The community also seeks to end the brutal murders through protests that aim at speaking

against the killings and seeking change. As such, the rhetorical community is awakened, and with a shared vision, they are determined to end the inhumane policy of the “war on drugs.” According to this vision, killing is not the way to combat crime and drug abuse. The overarching story is that the brutal “war on drugs” has met the community’s disapproval.

Before delving into a discussion on civil repair, it is important to note one issue that the “killing” photographs do not explicitly show but the “protest” photographs hint. The issue is the involvement of the police in the killings related to the “war on drugs.” A “protest” photograph with a placard bearing the phrase “AFP-PNP murderer” points to the Army and Police as guilty for following through with the President’s command (“Philippines Church,” 2017). The police carry out the “war on drugs” campaign as a mandate from the Commander-in-Chief, who is reported promising pardon and cash rewards to police officers who get more kills. Some reports claim that the unknown killers carrying out the vigilante-style killings are the police. While the government denies the involvement in the vigilante killings, it does not condemn them. Against reports of civilian witnesses, the police reports include a standard line of “nanlaban,” which purports that the suspects resisted police arrest and engaged in gunfire exchange, and that is why they were killed. Human rights watch places most of the killings on the police, calling them extrajudicial killings even though the government denies the killings by the police are illegal. In this “war on drugs,” the focus on law and order outweighs calls for human rights, due process, the rule of law, and accountability. This issue becomes more problematic when viewed from a civil sphere perspective of the “war on drugs” as an attempt at civil repair.

The “War on Drugs” Photographs and Civil Repair

In his book, *The Civil Sphere* (2006), Alexander argues that gross exclusions and inequalities plague civil spheres or society. Based on binary codes that are oppositional, these exclusions are considered destructive intrusions that eventually become part of the construction of civil spheres. In the end, we have distorted discourses, institutions, and interactions. In this study concerning the Philippines, the photographs point to Duterte's populism and his "war on drugs" policy that destructively intruded the Filipino society. The "war on drugs" is based on and thrives on marginalizing and killing drug suspects, whom the president has defined as misfits and the "them" who are to be eradicated. While all the top three presidential candidates deployed various populist rhetoric, Duterte's rhetoric on the "war on drugs" carried the day with 39% of the total votes and winning the presidency. As argued earlier, this society can be seen as populist publics voting for, supporting, and enabling the enactment of Duterte's "war on drugs." However, this same society is seen coming out to protest the manner of enactment of Duterte's "war on drugs" and therefore also protest his populist rhetoric of the "war on drugs." As such, there is still a possibility of civil repair. Even so, this raises the following questions: Is it not Duterte's claim that he is acting in the interest of the people neglected by the elites and thus driven into poverty? That his "war on drugs" will bring about an end to drug problems and crime, leading to a prosperous nation?

The findings support the idea that while these photographs provide unique historical information, they also show a struggle over the nature of civil repair that is envisioned: Duterte's vision vis-à-vis the protesters. As such, the Philippines, as a democracy, simultaneously struggles to realize social solidarity and struggles with oppression and exclusion. Civil repair is an attempt at rectifying incurred injustices that have led to the marginalization of certain groups in society (Alexander, 2006).

Historically, the Philippine civil sphere has grappled with populist rhetoric with the removal of populist President Joseph Estrada in 2001. It is not clear if they rejected populism; however, it appears they thought they were fixing the nation's socioeconomic problems by electing another populist in President Duterte.

President Duterte campaigned on a populist platform, promising that he would realize popular empowerment, social justice, wealth redistribution, and sustainable development. This plan was Duterte's attempt at civil repair, to bringing about inclusions and solidarity among the Filipino people who had been excluded and marginalized into poverty and social problems by the elites. Given that the "war on drugs" disproportionately targets the poor people, it is impossible to reconcile Duterte's rhetoric and promise of emancipation with the material consequences of the policy. While the poor voted for improved socioeconomic status, the change brought about by the realization of the "war on drugs" is furthering the very socioeconomic problems they had hoped to escape. Therefore, I argue that the protests of the "war on drugs" are another attempt at civil repair to rectify the incurred injustices of the "war on drugs."

From a social scientific point of view, this is a classic populist position brought about by a genuine concern of the failure of elite democracy at realizing justice for the Philippine civil sphere. How President Duterte chooses to address this social concern, however, is problematic. The photographs of the "Killings" and "Protests" indicate that Duterte's resort to the "war on drugs" as a means of civil repair is highly unpopular and could even be viewed as a failure. These photographs also indicate a resistance or counter narrative to any attempts to success narratives that the government might advance. As far as the people affected are concerned, as shown in the photographs, there cannot be any claims of success by Duterte or the

state. Civil repair was meant to expand inclusions, lifting Filipinos out of poverty and its social effects, including drug abuse and crime. While the elites continued enriching themselves at the expense of the Filipinos, Duterte had promised change. This change, civil repair, was meant to bring about change in helping more Filipinos into the circle or state that they can identify themselves as decent participants in the Philippines civil sphere and not as the marginalized or excluded poor.

However, the photographs of the “war on drugs” show a dispute to the nature of Duterte’s civil repair claim. The photographs have allowed us to understand that the Filipino people are devastated by the part of the leadership of Duterte, characterized by the “war on drugs.” The photographs show violence, killings, disregard of human life, effects of the killings on children and women, disrupted life and spectatorship, and poverty. In other words, Duterte’s vision of civil repair via “war on drugs” leads to further exclusions and inequalities. Not only are the drug suspects defined and labeled as the “other.” Consequently, all those related to them, including the society at large, are also affected by the newly reinforced exclusion of a part of the community made up of drug suspects.

These new exclusions and inequalities are shown in the photographs as brutality and pain, murdered bodies dumped along the dark streets, their personhood and bodies are like trash and not human beings. To further these exclusions, the photographs show overcrowded jails. The “war on drugs” not only reinforces past exclusions affecting women and children into poverty, but it also brings about new exclusions by turning women and children into widows and children with killed fathers. New exclusions are the cause of children permanently robbed of their childhood. These children will only know of grief and pain as exhibited in the crying child, and this will dwell deep inside of them, as shown in the puzzled faces. Further,

the dead teenage girl signifies the denial of adulthood for many young girls. Since adulthood signifies wisdom and femininity as a source of love and tolerance, the lifeless body of a young woman next to the garbage suggests that there is no chance or place for wisdom or love in such a community.

While civil repair is meant to uplift the Philippines civil sphere out of poverty, the “war on drugs” counters these attempts by disruption of life. Filipino society is preoccupied with the spectacle of murder scenes. Wakes, funerals, and burials are now an everyday activity at a rate that disrupts lives. The photographs show that those most affected by the “war on drugs” are the poor Filipinos. How will the low-income families fund burials of their loved ones without forcing them into debt and perpetuating the cycle of poverty? In the “Killing” photographs, the community members are turned into mourners who sit, crouch and stand by dirty roads. However, the “Protest” photographs show that grassroots solidarities and organizing are also happening in the Philippines, even against incredible odds.

The photographs also show the struggle over the nature of civil repair through the “Protest” photographs that aid in understanding that the Filipino people are standing up to Duterte’s populism and his repressive policy. According to Alexander (2006), these protests must be seen as movements of civil repair. The civil repair here entails redefining those labeled misfits to be eliminated as part of the Philippines civil sphere worthy of human dignity and rights. This redefinition is shown in the protesters’ placards calling for justice for all the victims of the extrajudicial killings. In other words, the current need for civil repair entails expanding inclusion, all people as human beings with rights and dignity, even to the drug suspects.

The struggle over the nature of civil repair reiterates the notion that civil repair is a complicated affair. Based on binary codes, different groups in society arrive at

meaning differently, even contradictory in some instances, as shown in the “war on drugs.” In this meaning-making process, the “Killing” photographs show how Duterte’s violence and policy invade the civil sphere, resulting in new exclusions. The “Protest” photographs show a social movement, efforts of the members of society engaging civil repair by resisting Duterte’s repression. Even with these protests, these killings in the Philippines have continued. Despite this tension in the Philippine civil sphere, civil repair is not entirely impossible. On the contrary, the tension presents the idea of the possibility of justice.

Civil repair aims towards civil society, which Alexander (2006) defines as solidarity, a feeling of being connected to others despite fragmentations and tensions due to our binaries and modern dualities. For any democracy, civil society ought to be a restless aspiration. Since ideal inclusions can get polluted by destructive intrusions like populism, we can only achieve civil repair and civil society to a certain degree. Civil repair is nonetheless an essential aspect of democracy. The “Protest” photographs have opened up this possibility, and they reflect the desire for and possibility of solidarity or justice. Human society may not be able to overcome binarism, but we can fundamentally change its referents (Alexander, 2006). The tenets of resolving the tension between the vision of Duterte and that of the protesters are embedded in the protesters’ message. The message is that Duterte and society should not refer to drug suspects as the enemies of the nation and indeed, treat them as such.

This context is where populism can act as an agent of change. Populism should not be a means to power or a means through which to maintain power. This kind of populism is a spectacle that contradicts its very claims of being the voice of the people. Populism arises in democracies and can be seen as an effect of politics and a way of doing politics. Applied in the Philippines case, Alexander (2006) and

Morgan (2021) would argue that better populism should combine substantive policy to address grievances.

First, binaries of “them” and “us” are not unique to populism; they are used in cultural discourses, politics, and democracies. Populists use these binaries to highlight inequalities but ought to avoid relying on scapegoating social ills on a particular group. The drug suspects are not the cause of poverty or crime; drug problems are by-products of poverty. Duterte and populism must be open and inclusive, willing to listen to other parties involved including government critics and those suffering. Second, Duterte and populism can only be capable of civil repair if they are culturally creative and present narratives that will inspire hearts and minds into expanding civil inclusions. We cannot rely on rhetoric that demonizes drug addicts and rallying society to “kill them all.” Finally, Duterte and populism ought to handle opponents as adversaries to be struggled with, and in the end, persuaded, rather than enemies to be silenced and ultimately eradicated.

The photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines present an avenue through which we understand the interaction between populism and the civil sphere. That on one level, populism used to gain and maintain power leads to further exclusions and oppression through the destructive intrusion into the civil sphere by suggesting excluding binaries. On another level, the desired level, populism can be a means or an agent of civil repair. Not only by raising social grievances that need to be addressed but by also combining with substantive policies that work to integrate the community in a more expansive equitable way (Alexander, 2006). In the end, hopes for civil repair will remain just as civil society is a project that inspires hope for democratic life. Thus, better populism is possible, and populism as civil repair is a possibility.

Limitations

It is essential to note some limitations to the study. First, it is beyond the scope of this study to fact-check the photographs with respect to whether they were staged and investigate the bias the photographs may contain thereof. Though generally checked, there might have been subtle or underlying biases in the photographs that the study did not detect, affecting the general interpretation of the findings. Search algorithms, biased based on my location, among other things, influenced the internet results. The photographs in the internet search results are targeted at a particular audience and can point the viewer toward a particular interpretation. That said, there is no known reason not to accept their veracity as multiple photographers at different moments encountered and photographed very similar “Killing” and “Protest” scenes. Secondly, this study considered only photographs from mediated sources like the news media outlets. Consequently, the generalizability of the results is also limited. To answer the research question, however, the findings nonetheless provided data upon which one could infer what life is like living in the Philippines at a time when a populist regime has waged a brutal “war on drugs” campaign. The findings are also consistent with past research that shows human rights abuses linked to the Duterte’s administration efforts to combat drug problems and the community’s efforts to protest the associated killings.

Recommendations for Future Research

It would be noteworthy to analyze photographs by other photographers and even state agencies in order to have multiple perspectives on the issue at hand. Further research is needed to determine the stories of the various players in the community, from the administration, government-friendly newspapers, the police, religious leaders, friends and relatives of the victims, and foreigners living in the country. This

take would enrich this research by giving other multiple perspectives to the story told by the photographs of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines. Moreover, the analysis could go beyond photographs and utilize in-depth interviews to establish whether Filipinos agree with the anti-drug campaign’s general description as brutal and murderous. Besides, further research can seek to examine whether this critical view of the “war on drugs” impacts the president’s approval and calls for a rethinking of how to tackle the drug problems in the country.

Conclusions

This research set out to add to the news stories, various investigations, research studies, and condemnation of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines by focusing on the news photographs of President Duterte’s “war on drugs.” The idea was to grapple with the role the images could play in understanding the “war on drugs” phenomenon in the Philippines. Through this exploration, the research aimed to highlight the story the photographs tell, what can be learned about what it means to live through a “war on drugs” under a populist regime, and how viewers are encouraged to think about this “war on drugs” and those who experience it. Keeping in mind that the “war on drugs” was a popular idea that fueled President Duterte into power, the photographs were taken within a context of a populist regime in the Philippines. Based on a textual analysis of the “Killings” and “Protest” photographs, it can be concluded that the Filipinos are living through a brutal “war on drugs” that has met the resistance of the community through protests calling to an end to the killings. This thesis has shown how we learn of the interaction between populism and the civil sphere in the Philippines through photographs.

It is essential to note the contributions of this study in highlighting and reinforcing communication studies’ contributions to theory and practice. Photography

or photographs remain uniquely positioned to provide historical information. Photographs present an opportunity for those far away to experience what is going on in a different time and space. In this study, we understand the devastating effect of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines through photographs. The photographs can transport the viewer into the Philippine civil sphere and aid the meaning-making process of the Philippine phenomenon. The findings of this study further a larger narrative and understanding of the construction of the civil sphere. We can suggest that the photographs tell a story of the injustices and the resistance because the photographs aid in understanding what happens when leaders use particular rhetoric. We not only know about leaders or what happens when they use particular rhetoric. Through photographs and this study, a different layer is added about those living the “war on drugs” experience. This research shows how photographs, in the context of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines, highlight the role of communication in democratic struggle. We get an insight into the civil sphere: who and how they engage in civil repair and struggles of the marginalized groups. Through this study, communication and civil sphere theory combine to highlight how the photographs suggest an awareness of the devastation of policies like the “war on drugs” framed through populist rhetoric.

The “war on drugs” photographs were analyzed as two mutually dependent categories of the “Killings” and “Protests.” The “Killings” photographs depicted the killings soon after they occurred and the related aftermaths like memorials and burials. In these photographs, we learn that some of the killings took place at night, corpses were *presented* at night, and the bodies dumped by the roadsides and in poor neighborhoods. By unknown killers, the gunned down victims were labeled drug offenders who deserved their fate leaving behind a trail of mourners dealing with the

deaths and on-lookers engaging the spectacle of deaths and burials. The “Protests” photographs depicted the community’s response to the atrocities of these killings. Demonstrators, mainly in the Philippines, took to the streets, protesting a culture of death and impunity. They also called for justice in the face of extrajudicial killings in a bid to put to an end the killings associated with President Duterte’s “war on drugs.” Overall, these photographs present an image of an awakened community with an overarching story of the brutal “war on drugs” being resisted by the disapproval of the community.

The research raises several issues drawn from the photographs. First, there is the disregard of human life and dignity linked to the brutal killings and violence targeting mainly the poor. Not only are the killings dehumanizing but also the manner of killing. The bodies are then dumped, like garbage, in public as a warning and silencing. Second, those mainly affected are the children and women whose childhood joys are shattered with grief and pain and left behind to mourn and fend for their fatherless kids, respectively. Young girls being killed is adulthood denied with no place for wisdom and their contribution to the larger society. Third, in such times, lives are disrupted through untimely deaths and the fixation of the community on the spectacle of dead bodies, deaths, memorials, and burials. Last, the victims are mainly the poor or in poor neighborhoods giving the impression that they are an easy target and expendable. Despite this gloomy picture, there is a glimpse of hope that the community desires change and an end to the killings through the protests.

As pointed earlier, populism as a spectacle played a crucial role in Duterte’s election. Once in power, as indicated by the photographs, the spectacle of the “war on drug” was employed to maintain power by giving the illusion of performance. By this, I mean the suggestion of a successful “war on drugs” campaign, whereas it has not

done much in combating the importation and distribution of drugs. This need to show performance is a typical route by populists who perpetuate crisis that makes them relevant. As all these happen within a society, the civil sphere theory perspective gives a lens to view what has happened in the Philippines. The “war on drugs” is a failed attempt at emancipating the Filipino people out of crime and drug abuse. Instead, the policy has led to even greater exclusions through silencing of critics, killing drug suspects, and terrifying the populace. Now there emerges another civil repair attempt with protesters denouncing the president’s murderous efforts. Society is resisting repression and working to end the injustices of the “war on drugs.”

Insight into what is happening in the Philippines is drawn from the “war on drugs” photographs as unique historical sources of information. No prior research had focused on the contribution of the photographs in understanding Duterte, his populism, the “war on drugs,” and the emergence of the protests. The preferred narrative and semiotic theories fulfilled the task of bringing out this understanding by providing a means into the narrative elements of the setting, characters, and action. It is in these elements that we find signs and symbols that shaped the interpretation of these photographs. The research answers the central question of the overall story being told by the photographs of what is happening in the Philippines. The research points out that the Filipino people are not only living through a brutal “war on drugs” that is devastating, but they have also come out in denouncing the killings. As evidence, the photographs point to a larger discourse about President Duterte, populism, and his rhetoric on the “war on drugs.” The “Killing” photographs signify Duterte’s “war on drugs” as murderous, while the “Protest” photographs indirectly point to the failure of the “war on drugs” in not tackling the people’s real issues,

rather aggravating the problems. The protests are an indirect way of signifying the failure of Duterte's populism and his rhetoric on the "war on drugs."

We cannot remain silent in the face of injustices, even those perpetrated by populist regimes. These photographs invite us to engage populist regimes to uphold human rights and dignity, implement humane policies to tackle real issues that benefit communities, and in so doing, champion the possibility of populism as a means of civil repair. The question is, what will the future generations make of this society with so much brutality? The current generation cannot afford to lose interest and see the "war on drugs" or any other killings as normal. One thing we can learn is that we can never afford to remain silent at injustices lest they keep happening and reemerging.

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