

Pisting Yawa

Rodrigo Duterte and the Language of the Street

JOURNAL DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944>
ISSUE DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944/20229502>
ARTICLE DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944/2022950208>

Patricio N. Abinales

University of Hawaii-Manoa

Abstract

The essay explores the role that language plays in explaining the consistently high popularity of President Rodrigo Duterte. It argues that far from being fearful of or threatened by the President, Filipinos find themselves in affinity with Duterte because both share the same languages of the street. The essay does so by looking at the effectiveness of Visayan and its variant “Davao Tagalog” in keeping the crowd and Duterte bonded together, and the different meanings Filipinos attribute to everyday obscenities that are generally missed by the “Duterte Studies Industry.”

Keywords

Bisayang Dako, Davao-Tagalog, *putang-ina mo*, Rodrigo Duterte, Visayans

Laughter does not possess a single rhetorical force even within the context of humor. It can be the laughter of hostile ridicule or the laughter of friendly appreciation: one can laugh *with* others and *at* others. As such, laughter can join people together and it can divide; and it can do both simultaneously when a group laughs together at others. (Michael Billig 2005: 194)

It's like, you can crack green jokes with your close friends. So the people feel that Digong is close to them because he cracks green or *bastos* jokes with them (Anonymous Dabaweno, April 5, 2022)

Introduction

In an online search under the category “President Rodrigo R. Duterte” at the University of Hawai'i Hamilton library's on-line catalog, the first 5 pages alone yield 15,798 citations. This makes Duterte the third most studied president of the Philippines after Gloria M. Arroyo (22,229 entries) and Ferdinand E. Marcos (18,135), and just slightly ahead of Joseph P. Estrada (15,377).¹ Arroyo and Marcos have more citations, given that their rule extended beyond their constitutionally mandated presidential tenure. The rest lagged far behind: Corazon C. Aquino (9,237), her son Benigno C. Aquino III (5,519), and Fidel V. Ramos (3,836). When broken down into separate categories, the list included 8 books (including a bizarre piece titled *Samurai President of the Philippines: Spiritual Interview with the Guardian Spirit of Rodrigo Duterte* by a certain Ryuho Okawa), 2 book chapters, 1 dissertation, 103 journal essays, 4 films, and a conference devoted solely on Duterte. This virtual “Duterte Studies Industry” (DSI) signified an academic shift into “new directions in their analyses” (Thompson 2019) of Philippine politics with the rise of a seemingly idiosyncratic president. With a few exceptions, the DSI's intellectual curiosity is generally oddly personality focused. If the sociopolitical contexts are added to the analysis, these are often more recent (the start of his presidency), national (Manila), and related to refining concepts (“fascist,” “federalism,” “illiberalism,” “neo-bossism,” “populism”). The moral anger is palpable in many of these writings; some are openly contemptuous of Duterte's demeanor.

There is also that lingering puzzle behind his popularity, which is dealt with in several ways. Duterte is supposed to be a “fascist original [and] father figure who will finally end...the ‘national chaos,’” by leading an “electoral insurgency against the country’s elite democracy” (Bello 2017, as quoted by Curato 2019, 1). He is the Marxist-nationalist radical who would end “U.S. imperialist” control of the country (Maboloc 2020) and destroy the oligarchy (Maboloc 2020a). An anthropologist refers to Duterte being inspired by a Hobsbawmian “social-bandit morality” when he uses state power to correct the social wrongs of society (Kusaka 2017), while a historian calls him the “sovereign trickster” who “endears himself to his supporters as a dissipator, one whose performative excess gives expression to what is at once forbidden and desired” (Rafael 2018,155). Political scientists trace Duterte’s fame to voters’ desire “to reject aspects of democracy... they consider inconvenient or ineffective in exchange for Marcos-era ‘discipline’ and ‘stability’” (Thompson and Teehankee 2016, 133). They find solace, according to a sociologist, in his “penal populism,” where “the language of toughness, control, and immediate gratification is prioritized over the long-term but the tedious strategy of building an effective justice system” (Curato 2017, 150).² Policy analysts agree, stating that Duterte has successfully tapped into a lingering “anti-elite sentiment” of Filipino towards “the way the post-EDSA governance favoured the political and economic elite” (Casiple 2016, 180).

These works have considerably deepened our knowledge of Duterte and his atypical presidency. Yet significant gaps remain. First, there is a predisposition in many of these studies to assume that Duterte’s callous language and boorish behavior were unprecedented in the history of Philippine politics. Second, Duterte’s acceptance may have come from his adept exploitation of anti-elite and anti-Manila sentiments, but precisely how these are conveyed to voters and produce an avid response is unnoticed or ignored.

This essay addresses two aspects of these gaps in the DSI literature by “bringing the local back in” (a nod to Theda Skocpol). It hopes to show a more nuanced picture of Duterte’s politics that may help us understand why—despite his brutality—he is still highly regarded by Filipinos. Finally, one needs to examine how Duterte and his advisers are able to successfully

transmit their messages to the public. I would suggest that the transformation of mass media in the 1980s, particularly the nationalization of television, laid the groundwork for Duterte to reach a wider audience while “consolidating” his influence among the largest voting bloc—the Visayans.³ But more importantly, if we shift our lens away from Duterte and focus on “the crowd”—the mass of supporters who listened to his campaign speeches and television appearances—we find little attention in the DSI. This is because the effort to seriously put the “crowd” in the picture involves being literate in Duterte’s and his supporters’ languages.⁴ Many of these writings also start from the assumption that the crowd—the ordinary people, as it were—appears not to share his bile.⁵ But the laughter and cheering are there, shown in hundreds of television segments and social media uploads. We therefore need to explain *how* this political rapport came about and why, far from being hoodwinked by Duterte’s diatribes, Filipinos see themselves as actively engaged in conversation with their president. I would argue that this has something to do with a street-level argot that both the President and the public share and are comfortably at ease with.

Scholars of various political colors—from the Marxist social historians George Rude (1995) and E.P. Thompson (1963), and the Catholic-conservative historian Eugene Genovese (1976), to the anarchist political anthropologists James C. Scott (1987; 1992), and the left-wing historical anthropologist Eric Wolff—have underscored the importance of *mentalité populaire* and a history from below when explaining rebellions, protests, and resistance. If we assume Casiple (2016) is right in his observation that a large number of Filipinos still hold this strong “anti-elite sentiment,” then there is also a basis for arguing that these millions of “Dutertards” represent some form of popular protest that would draw the attention of these scholars.⁶ Thus it is in the spirit of these “pro-people” scholars that this essay seeks to explain why, in understanding Duterte’s popularity, the crowd must always be considered an embedded part of the analyses. And the best place to start is at Davao City’s Crocodile Park, where then-president-elect Rodrigo Duterte gave his “thanksgiving speech,” and the reaction of his supporters and observers like myself to some of the things he said.

Chico de Calle

As he was closing his long-winded monologue, Duterte vented his ire on the persistent inquiries by journalists into his health.⁷ He said he became more incensed when his rival, Secretary of Local Government Manuel “Mar” Roxas, took advantage of this query and mocked Duterte for his non-response. Roxas further stoked the fire by expressing doubt that Duterte could last in a fistfight. Below is the segment of the address in which Duterte ranted.⁸

Table 1. President Rodrigo Duterte Speech at Thanksgiving Party, 4 June 2016⁹

<p>“Naa pay usa ka reporter ngari <i>DotDot</i>, ikaw pay ngil-ad. Nangutana ug, ‘How is your health? Ingon nako, ‘I’m fine, I’m good.’ Sagot pa naman sa ako, putang ina, ‘Saan yong medical report mo?’</p> <p>Binastos gani...Eh di giingnan nako, ayaw na lang...ako, himatyon. Pag-gawas ako’y kontrabida. Maayo ba na ana-on nimo ang tawo?</p> <p>Ug ingnon ta ka ‘kumusta and kondisyon sa bisong sa imong asawa, dawbi? Unsa man ang iyang...naay vaginitis o wa, kay baho ra ba na!’</p> <p>Eh...ganoon eh. Binastos man ko... Kapila na gud sa eleksyon gipangutana ko, kaming Roxas. Miabot pa mig sinagpaay...</p> <p>Unya ingon siya nga medical report. Ayaw na lang, maghubo na lang ta, padak-anay tag otin, gusto ka? Gamay man tug otin, kay igwat mag lubot. Bayot!!” (<i>Rappler</i> 2016).</p>	<p>And here was this reporter, DotDot, who wanted to portray me as a charlatan. He asked me, “How is your health?” I replied, “I’m fine, I’m good.” Then that son-of-bitch added, “But where is your medical report?”</p> <p>That was so insulting...So, I told him, forget about it, yeah I’m dying. And now he’s making it appear that I am the villain. Is that a proper way to treat a person?</p> <p>So, what if I ask you, “How is the vagina of your wife?” What’s happening to it...does it have vaginitis or not, because that would make it smell!”</p> <p>Ehhh...that was it...That was so rude... I remember the countless if times I was asked that question...Even by [Manuel] Roxas, and so we almost ended up slapping each other...</p> <p>He also asked me for the same medical report [and I said] Let’s stop playing this game. Let us just drop our pants at the same time and see whose penis is bigger...That fellow has a small penis, you know, because he has a flat ass... that homosexual!!</p>
--	---

If one watches the video closely, one cannot help but notice that the crowd erupted in laughter at what Duterte said, while his Manila allies—notably the vice presidential candidate Alan Peter Cayetano—looked clueless. The president-elect and the crowd did not mind. This image also shows Duterte’s uncanny ability to switch audiences with very little effort on his part. He prefaced his tirade against the media by addressing “DotDot.” We do not know who “DotDot” is, but we can surmise that he (she?) and Duterte are close friends. Duterte then immediately turned to the public to heap insults on the journalists and Roxas to the delight of the crowd.

Duterte is, of course, not unique. Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon was known for his proclivity to use the curse word *puñeta* (Doronila 2011; Guingona 2013, 21). But Carlos Quirino recalled that Quezon’s foul mouth went beyond his use of this Spanish word that either meant having sex, moving one’s bowels, or expressing anger by clenching one’s fists at someone you hate. In his article “Anecdotes about Quezon,” the historian wrote:

When [then Senate President] Quezon was campaigning against the H-H-C Act in Tanawan, Batangas (country dominated by Jose P. Laurel, of the OsRox faction), he was greeted coolly. Quezon spotted a cross-eyed man and said, “Hey, *putang ina mong duling*..What are you doing here?” (italics mine)

Quezon, according to Quirino, then “placed his arm around the shoulder of the cross-eyed man who smiled broadly in return” (recall Duterte and DotDot). This touch of friendliness thawed out the crowd, and good-natured laughter erupted, followed by cheers and applause. Needless to say, the political meeting was a success. “‘Who was that cross-eyed man you greeted, Mr. President?’ asked one of his henchmen after the meeting. ‘I’ll be damned if I know his name,’ replied Quezon. ‘This is the first time I’ve ever seen him in my life!’” (Quirino 1962, 239-243).

Other politicians were more cautious with their use of profanities or were able to express these with no historian like Quirino within earshot or journalist willing to commit them to print. In another politician’s biography,

Quirino appended a list of the colorful Senate President Eulogio “Amang” Rodriguez’s “mangled” English that included an incident in which an increasingly irritated Amang muttered angrily while waiting for his driver to pick him up: “Where could the *kalahating hindut* have gone?” (Quirino 1983, 41). *Kalahati* means “one-half,” while *hindut* is the Tagalog slang for sexual intercourse, which, unlike the other slang word *kantut*, means the “gentle and careful” insertion of the penis (Tan, n.d.). Incensed as he was, Amang remained fond of his driver, the half-fucker incapable of completing coitus.

Quezon, Amang, and others fastidiously kept separate the language of the state and the language of the crowd, conscious of the dignity of their offices. Even local bosses conformed to this protocol. A classic example was the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) relationship with the late Ronaldo Parojinog, who was mayor of my hometown Ozamiz City but known more as the head of the *Kuratong Baleleng*, a “dreaded Mindanao mafia” that began as an anticommunist vigilante group but would later “become a diversified kidnapping, smuggling and extortion syndicate with close links to officials in Northwestern Mindanao and elsewhere” (Torres Jr. 2004). Among the accomplishments the ADB’s 2010 Report listed included the completion of a PHP161-million “glitzy new mall” in Ozamiz City that “can accommodate up to 955 stalls and 14 rentable spaces in addition to offices, banks, food chains, a recreational area and a stage.” A grateful Parojinog declared that “With full occupancy, and with efficient collection and use of fees, the public mall can be a good source of revenue for the city” (Mangahas 2010, 13). What the glossy left out were Parojinog’s criminal connections. The mayor and 14 others would later be killed in a police raid on 30 July 2017, after President Duterte accused him as one of several local officials involved in producing and distributing drugs. Mikhael Bakhtin eloquently put it when he observed: “Profanities and oaths were not initially related to laughter, but they were excluded from the sphere of official speech because they broke its norms; they were therefore transferred to the familiar sphere of the marketplace” (1984, 17).

This divide between the official language of the nation-state and the language of local power continued unnoticed or ignored by the media.

However, by the late 1990s, there were indications that this had weakened. Signs of this intermixing became evident during the short reign of President Estrada when his campaign team came up with a brilliant tactical plan to get voters to his side. They published a collection of his alleged quotes that supposedly “massacred” the English language. *ERAPtion: How to Speak English without Really Trial* (Jurado 1994) became a national bestseller, and Estrada—action star, tough city mayor, confessed womanizer, lackluster senator, and vice president—won by a huge margin of 10.7 million votes over the intelligent, savvy, and polished Speaker of the House of Representatives, Congressman Jose de Venecia, who only received 4.2 million votes.

Rodrigo Duterte went one step further, not only refusing to keep the language of the state and the language of local power apart; he brought in the coarseness from the gutters of the provincial towns and small cities to the presidential palace. And unlike Estrada, Duterte was enabled by revolutions in media technology and a capacity to switch and mix languages to reach a wider audience which responded by giving him the kind of support that would be the envy of his predecessors. This atypical posturing was what attracted DSI observers. His profanities either would preface or justify what happened next - the extra-judicial killings (EJK) of thousands, the majority of the victims from the poor. Yet, viewed from below, these obscenities are also a perfect explanation as to why Filipinos, *especially the poor*, adore their President.

Appropriating Chairman Mao

In a peculiar but perhaps not unexpected way, most Filipinos saw themselves as members of specific ethnolinguistic communities and as citizens of the Republic, with the former often taking precedence over the latter. Hence Tagalogs (the language of the lower part of Luzon) were as conscious as the Visayans (the language of most of the Visayas and Mindanao provinces) and the Ilocanos (of northern Luzon) of this linguistic divide. This gulf, however, began to narrow with the advent of broadcast media, beginning with the transistor radio. The radio became a household necessity in 1959

when electric grids spread nationwide, thereby allowing Filipinos, especially those in the rural areas, to listen to a wide range of programs, from music, radio-plays, and news (Mojares 1998, 338). A decade later, 62 percent of Filipino households owned transistor radios, and even if the distribution was uneven, this new household necessity could be found in areas as far-flung as the Sulu archipelago. This high demand in turn increased the number of stations nationwide and turned radio into “the freest mass media *system* in Asia if not the world” (Lent 1968, 176, italics mine). The Marcos dictatorship took over the radio and television networks, but in 1986, after driving Marcos to exile, President Corazon Aquino returned these media establishments to their owners. These media moguls would then pour considerable investments on expanding the reach of their telecommunications. By the 1990s, there were 338 stations across the country, with 78 percent of households having access to their programs; in 2013, 65.6 percent of Filipinos were listening to the radio, 41.4 percent of them at least once a week (Vera Files 2020).

Radio, however, played second fiddle to television. In 1960, there were only three television stations whose coverage was mainly in Manila, while outside the national capital, Cebu and Dagupan cities each had a station. It took another seven years for television to grow gradually, with the Lopez family-owned ABS-CBN (color television came in 1966) leading the way. By 1971, ABS-CBN and its rivals were broadcasting in full color. ABS-CBN would also demonstrate its power to shape public opinion when it helped get Marcos reelected as president, with Fernando Lopez winning the vice presidency for the third time. During martial law, the government took over ABS-CBN and converted it into a public corporation whose function was to broadcast propaganda on behalf of the Marcos dictatorship. The Lopezes regained control of the company in 1986 after Marcos’s ouster and family enterprise growth continued (Enriquez 2006, 134–135).

In 1998, Duterte, then a congressman representing the 1st district of Davao City, did something no other Mindanao politician before him had ever done. He produced his own Sunday talk show on ABS-CBN’s Davao channel where, for an hour, he would respond to the “concerns” of his constitu-

ents. Carolyn Arguillas, Davao journalist and editor of *Mindanews*, wrote that the show would “ensure his continued presence among the Dabawenños whom he had served as mayor from 1988 to 1998.”¹⁰ Duterte called his show “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*,” which was a Visayan translation of Chinese leader Mao Zedong’s famous slogan “From the masses, to the masses.” Every Sunday morning, Dabawenños would watch in delight as Duterte discussed local and national issues, spewed bile, hurled threats, smeared his political rivals, shared funny asides, and dispensed fatherly advice to his audience. Each episode may start with Duterte sharing his political insight, which would soon degenerate into loutishness. Here, for instance, is a segment of a YouTube video of “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*,” where Duterte’s thoughts on illegal drugs turned into a vow to do heinous things to captured members of drug syndicates. This came in at the 8:40 mark of the interview, lasting until 9:50:

Table 2. Rodrigo Duterte, “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*,” 1 November 2014 (as quoted in Abinales 2015)

<p>“Ako, wala gyud ko mang-ambisyon sa tinuod lang. Pero kung ako’y president, ipatulon gyud nako nang bala sa inyo, mamatay man. Ipatulon ko na ug mobabag na sa inyong butbot dinha pa-operahan ta mo. Padak-an nako nang inyong buslot diha sa lubot aron moagas na lang nang hugaw diha...”</p>	<p>“In truth, I am not aspiring [for the presidency]. But if I become president, I will make you (... members of drug syndicates) swallow the bullet. I will make you swallow it, and if it gets blocked inside your anus, I will have you operated on. I will widen the hole in your anus so that whatever dirt is inside you will easily flow out [of it].”</p>
---	---

“*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*” gave the National Telecommunications Commission headaches, but the government body regulating the media could do nothing to the “must-watch show for [Dabawenños] for or against Duterte” (Arguillas 2020). Ratings for the program easily topped the Sunday television edition of the Catholic Mass and prayer sessions of the non-Catholic ministries. For over a decade, Dabawenños eagerly watched the show, and when “Mayor Digong” (Duterte’s nickname) missed one, a collective sigh of lament was palpable (Abinales 2016). Politicians in other provinces saw the show’s propaganda power and began to produce their versions of the

program. While nowhere near as colorful as Duterte, they knew that, thanks to the local channel station, voters would get to hear their voices and recognize their faces—a “recall” that came in handy on election day (Back 2001, 14).

In 2016, Duterte’s advisers attempted to nationalize the talk show, this time launching the presidential version, “*Mula sa masa, para sa masa*” (the Filipino translation of Mao’s slogan), on 18 August 2016. This one did not have the same impact as the Davao version and lasted only for a year. But it was enough to shock Filipinos—especially those in Metropolitan Manila—who were suddenly confronted with this kind of street talk from the highest office in government. To the people of Davao City and adjacent provinces, however, the shock value of Duterte’s rhetoric had all but dissipated as they’ve heard Duterte lash out before. The failure of “*Mula sa masa, para sa masa*” would be more than offset by the ubiquity of the “texting culture,” (Soriano et al. 2015), the appearance of YouTube in 2005, and Facebook’s video platform in 2007. Scholars have argued that his camp’s adept use of social media won Duterte the presidency (Aguirre 2017; Curato 2017). This is quite true, but one can also make the case that Duterte had successfully tapped into these new technologies, with “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*” as his dry run. Besides, despite the brief and unlamented life of “*Mula sa masa, para sa masa*,” it was unlikely that most households missed the talk show because of television’s omnipresence.”¹¹

Bisayang Dako, Tagbis and Bislog

The problem with finding a plausible explanation for Duterte’s appeal is that the DSI relies a lot on the mechanics of the poll survey. This methodology may be a useful way of tracking public sentiment, but it does not delve deeper into the reasons behind Filipinos’ high regard of the president.¹² This essay suggests that a possible answer may be found in the languages that Duterte and his fans share. Far from seeing him as a huckster, Visayans associate Duterte with familiar characters they simultaneously love and worry about.¹³ He is “your drunk *lolo* (grandfather) or uncle,” who is the *bugal-bugalon* (naughty) because he is *buguy* (a rascal). Women are called *bugay* and

men *bugal-bugalun*. Duterte is prone to engage in *yaga-yaga* (ridiculing) and can manipulate people with statements that are both funny and insulting. (“*Pagkatawa dala binoang pero tungod kay mag-una ang pagpakatawa dili kaayo sakit paminawon o dibdibon. Sa binogoy pa nga panoltihon, maayo mo-cooking ug tao*”).¹⁴

Then there is this feeling among Visayans that they “own” Duterte. A Davao friend pointed out that Visayans are charmed and shocked at the same time at the sight of Duterte eating with his hands at a food stall in Davao City (“*nagkinamot lang kaon sa carinderia*”), saying that in doing this he has proven himself “one of us” (“*Kini! Ato gyud ni. Bisaya gyud!*”). Activist Mindanao priest Fr. Amado Picardal, who went into hiding in 2018 after Duterte supporters threatened to assassinate him, lamented how much many of his fellow religious had campaigned and voted for Duterte in 2016. When he asked a fellow cleric serving the Davao community the reason why he supported Duterte, the answer echoed what one hears on the street (“*ato ni bay*”) and was often even couched in religious idioms: “My classmate who told me he voted for Duterte *after a process of discernment* was most likely influenced by regionalism rather than the Holy Spirit” (Picardal 2020).

Subsuming religious beliefs under the rubric of “*ato ni bay*” resonates with the reorientation someone makes once one joins the *barkada* (the in-group, the gang, the clique, or, in millennial terms, the squad). Jean-Paul Dumont observed this change when a group of “young adolescents...solidified their mutual friendship into a *barkada*.” He writes:

What has changed was the way in which they spoke of those who had been so far their *higala* (“friend”) and who now became their *barkada*, since each individual member of a collective *barkada* was also called a *barkada*. In other words, the word designates in general the group, that may be used as well to refer to any and each member of that group. [People] did not relate to each other anymore as persons but as members of a male *barkada*, that is, acted as a group (1993, 427).

Among the Visayan *barkada*, Duterte is not only *ato ni*, but he is also *Bisayang Dako* (which literally translates to the “Big Visayan), which refers to either

the leader (*dako* being big; hence big man) or someone who truly is Visayan to his core (*dako* here now means wide *and* deep).

Yet, the question remains: how do we explain Duterte’s draw among non-Visayans who also laugh at his rants? Again, I think it has to do with language, precisely what we Visayans call “Davao Filipino” or “Davao Tagalog.” In a short, odd essay on the topic, linguistic scholars Feorillo A. Demeterio and Jeconiah Louis Dreisbach (2017) cite an M.A. thesis describing “Davao Tagalog” as a “Filipino creole continuum consisting of two segments: the one being used by the city’s Cebuano population, which is sometimes called *Tagbis* (a portmanteau for Tagalog and Visayan) or *Bislog* (a portmanteau for Visayan-Tagalog), and the Davao Filipino that is being used by the city’s Tagalog/Filipino population.” It was, argues the authors, akin to (similar to Singlish (Platt 1975, 363-374). Table 3 lists examples that distinguish Davao Tagalog from Cebuano and Tagalog and how proximate they are to each other.

Table 3 lists examples that distinguish Davao Tagalog from Cebuano and Tagalog, and how proximate they are to each other. Demeterio and Dreisbach rely mainly on the study of Jessie Grace U. Rubrico, who calls *Tagbis* and *Bislog* a “Filipino Variety of Davao City” (FVD) and describes it as one of many “emerging varieties of Filipino which developed from the grammatical properties of Tagalog” by being “influenced by non-Tagalog speakers whose native language competencies interfere with their usage of Filipino” (2012, 1).¹⁵ If Manileños are comfortable with *Taglish*, Rubrico argues, so are Davao City residents with their seamless mixing of English, Visayan, and Tagalog. She classified FVD into two types—the first, which closely “resembles the Metro Manila variety of Filipino” (2012, 8) and the second, which is indigenous to the Dabawenios: “a blending of Bisaya and Tagalog” (Tables 4 and 5) (2012, 9). To Rubrico, FVD’s “variety allows its speakers to freely explore Filipino without the hindrance of ‘correct grammar’ as defined by the Filipino language authorities in Manila” and thus “empowers non-Tagalog Filipino speakers to actively participate in its evolution, and to bring about the de-Tagalization of the national language” (2012, 1, as quoted by Dolalas n.d.,7).

Table 3. Davao Tagalog compared to Tagalog/Filipino and Cebuano, with corresponding English translations (Demetrio and Dreisbach, 2017, 3)

Davao Filipino	Visayan/ Cebuano	Tagalog/Filipino	English
Kainit masyado ngayon uy!	Kainit kaayo karon uy!	Masyadong mainit ngayon!	It's so hot today!
Manghiram ka gud ng pala, doon sa kapitbahay.	Manghuwam ka gud ug pala didto sa silingan.	Humiram ka nga ng pala doon sa kapitbahay.	Go borrow a shovel from the neighbor.
Ka-cute gud masyado nitong bag nagibili ni Mama para sa akin.	Cute gud kaayo kining bag nga gipalit ni Mama para nako.	Masyadong cute itong bag na binili ni Mama para sa akin.	This bag that Mama bought for me is so cute.

Table 4. Tagalog-English Code Mix (Taglish) (Rubrico 2012, 8; FVD italicized)

English	FVD
Pretending to be serious at work and keeping busy at the internet.	Nagpapakas <i>erious</i> sa <i>work and</i> naglilibang sa <i>net</i> .
Why did I have to fall in love?	Kung bakit pa kasi ako <i>nainlove?</i>
Brother...our friend Bobby Alvarez is relaxing, you know.	<i>Bro, don't do that...</i> naglilibang si Pareng Bobby Alvarez eh.
Come now, let's go to your favorite (place)!	<i>Let's go na po, sa paborito nato.</i>
Dad, I love it here, buy now, this instant!	Dad, I love it here, <i>buy na, now na!</i>
Recycle now.	<i>Mag-recycle na.</i>

Table 5. Tagalog, English and FVD (Rubrico 2012, 10–13; FVD italicized)

Tagalog	English	FVD
Totoong mabait si Weng.	Weng is really good-natured.	Mabait <i>bitaw gyud</i> si Weng.
Sinabi nang huwag!	You shouldn't do that!	Huwag <i>lagi</i> ba!
Ang galing niya talaga!	She really is excellent!	Galenga talaga niya <i>gyud uy!</i>
Aanhin natin yan?	What shall we do with that?	<i>Anohin</i> man natin yan?
Anong nangyari sa iyo diyen, Bryan?	What happened to you there, Bryan?	<i>Na-ano</i> ka diyen, Bryan?

Hindi pa siya dumarating kasi.	S/he has not arrived yet. (What's taking her/him so long?)	Hindi pa <i>man siya nag-dating, uy.</i>
Ayaw kasi nilang lumapit sa akin, eh di ayaw ko ring lumapit sa kanila.	Because they don't want to come near me, so I also don't want to go near them,	Ayaw kasi nilang <i>mag-lapit</i> sa akin, di ayaw ko na ring <i>maglapit</i> sa kanila.
Sinabi kasi ni Helen na mag-absent si Bernard bukas.	Because Helen said that Bernard will be absent tomorrow.	<i>Gisabi</i> kasi ni Helen na mag-absent si Bernard bukas.
Nakakainis talaga siya!	S/he really makes me mad!	<i>Makainis</i> man yan siya, uy!
Alam ko na man yan.	I already know that	Alam <i>man nakin</i> yan <i>ba!</i>
Saan nga ba kita nakita?	Where have I seen you before?	Saan <i>nakin</i> kita nakita <i>gani?</i>

Bislog and *Tagbis* were indeed hardly ever heard beyond the Davao provinces for the most part of the 20th century, thriving in themselves because of the constant flow of migrant-settlers from central and northern Philippines to the Davao frontier.¹⁶ Their opportunity to become nationally known, as it were, came in the 1980s, with the nationalization of television. With greater frequency the rest of the country began hearing these FDV varieties, especially when ABS-CBN and GMA 7 made regional reports part of their daily evening news. An illustrative case is this excerpt from the Mindanao segment of ABS-CBN's national evening news on 24 September 2012, which Dolalas quoted in her essay:

Interviewee: “Walang sistema ang PRC sa pagbigay ng numbers tapos kami kanina nag-initiate na kami na magpila, maglista [...] kay wala mang announcement na retakers lang ang i-ano nila [...] ngayon.” [Translation: “The PRC [Professional Regulatory Commission] had no system of giving numbers so earlier we ourselves initiated the lining up and listing...because there was no announcement as to whether they would only consider retakers at the.”] (n.d., 4).

Dolalas then breaks down the interview into its various FDV components, eruditely explaining it as follows:

In the interview, the Tagalog verb *pagbigay*, although correct in form, but in the context it should be *pagbibigay*. (Binisaya: *paghatag*). *Tapos* is also borrowed from Tagalog (Binisaya: *dayon*). *Kami kanina* is a literal translation of the Binisaya *kami kaganiha* although it would be more appropriate if *kanina kami* was used in the sentence. The Tagalog verb *pila*, when used as a past tense, should be affixed by *-um-* in proper Tagalog grammar (Binisaya: *nilinya*). However, in accordance with the Binisaya morpho-syntax *mag+verb*, the *-um-* affix is non-existent in Binisaya and is generally replaced with *mag*. In the phrase *kay wala mang*, *kay* is the Binisaya equivalent of *kasi* or *dahil*, while *mang* is a shortened form of *namang*. Moreover, the Tagalog verb *kunin* used in the context should be *kukunin* in proper Tagalog. *I-ano* is not really a word but because the Binisaya language also uses the verb form *i+verb*, it can be presumed that the interviewee must have reverted to her native language's grammar. It can also be noted that "Davao Tagalog" also code-switches to English" (n.d., 4–5).

Dolalas has only this 2012 episode to cite, but it is safe to assume that Davao correspondents would regularly *and unconsciously* shift to FVD in their accounts to the nation since regional reports became a part of the nightly news. Thus, in a way, by the time Duterte assumed the presidency, Filipinos were ready to "hear" him.

Duterte could go completely Visayan when addressing his audience in central Visayas and most of Mindanao. But because of *Bislog* and *Tagbis*, he can likewise reach out to non-Visayan-speaking communities. FDV has allowed Duterte to occupy this liminal space where he can effortlessly mix both languages and slip from Visayan to a Tagalog that is impure because it is unlike the language in Tagalog-speaking provinces in Luzon. This is because Davao Tagalog, according to Demeterio and Dreisbach, has "clauses where most words are from the Tagalog-Filipino language, and where such Tagalog-Filipino words are processed using the Cebuano language morphosyntactic rules." Today, Filipinos will continue to remain loyal to their regional lingua franca where languages intermix, but they have learned enough Filipino vocabulary *to be at once local, regional, and national*.¹⁷ And all this is enough to keep a crowd attentive, especially when spiced up with vulgarity. Duterte may still have a local boss's mentality, but, thanks to FDV, the nationalization of the television industry, and now social media, those

provincial thoughts—which include his death threats—can now be heard across the archipelago.

The Richness of *Putang ina mo*

A final point on language. As a child in 1964, I remember listening to a campaign ditty directed against the candidate for vice-president Fernando Lopez. The singers changed the lyrics of the American scout song “On Top of Spaghetti” with these lines: “*Si Fernando Poe Lopez, walay karsones, ang otin talinis sa public service.*” Roughly translated the new version goes: “Fernando Poe Lopez, has no pants, his penis is so sharp, for public service.” His middle name in this ditty, “Poe,” is not his—it is the surname of action star Fernando Poe Jr. In hindsight, something in the campaign version was quite significant: it was sung in unison by the candidates and the crowd. This act of “upset[ting] conventions” (Rafael 2018, 153) was, therefore, not exclusive to Duterte; it was an “insurgent energy” that both candidates and supporters expended against the elite and the establishment. This, in turn, was the result of a shared political affinity between listeners and candidates. In Duterte’s case the “vulgarity embedded in a public political speech, even though socially sanctioned, is able to *positively affect receivers’ behavioral intention*” (Cavazza and Guidetti 2014, 544) because Filipinos also identify with these argots.¹⁸ Every Duterte curse is every Filipino’s expletive, and as Nick Joaquin eloquently put it:

Ultimately, it’s slang, Tagalog slang, that builds, extends, and enriches the national language. It, in fact, is the national language, not Pilipino, though academicians may be horrified by its vulgarity and shocked by any suggestion to dignify, by inclusion in their lexicons...Yet these are the words that Filipinos use, and these are the words that are fusing our various dialects into one. (Joaquin 1980, 4)

Hence the cuss phrase “*putang ina mo*” (son of a bitch) is something one hears not only from Duterte but also from the most devout of Catholics. It is, in fact, the most offensive and most popular three-word expletive “used to show anger, shock, frustration, joy or surprise” (Berowa et al. 2019, 166). The range of emotions that employs *putang ina mo* also indicates that the

phrase's connotation could vary depending on the social and situational contexts. In Crocodile Park, Duterte's string of *putang ina mo*'s was strikingly monotonal. Still, the crowd's reaction differed based on what story their former mayor was talking about and how the audience, including his friend DotDot, interpreted each outburst. Rafael may have noticed fear in his listeners' eyes whenever Duterte made a threat, but while this feeling may have prevailed that night, there was "anger, shock, frustration, *joy or surprise*" too (Berowa et al. 2019, 167, underscoring mine).

The notoriety and waggish character of *putang ina mo* are reinforced by the diversity of its interpreters. At one end is the blog by millennial Isabelle Laureta whose list of "Totally Useful Filipino Swear Words and How to Use Them" tagged *putang ina mo* as both a derisive comment and a sign of affection. Alongside the most repulsive variations of the phrase (*Tangina, Taena, Anak ka ng puta, Puking ina, Kingina, Amputa*), sit departures showing appreciation (*Putang ina, ang gwapo ni Piolo,*" or "*Tanginang subject 'to, feeling major amputa!*"), again indicating how context matters (Laureta 2015).¹⁹ At the other end are Santiago Kapunan, Reynato Puno, and Consuelo Ynares-Santiago, members of the first division of the Supreme Court, who in 2000 overturned a lower court decision declaring *putang ina mo* defamatory (and hence criminal). Their ruling was written in legalese, but the justices' opinion clearly recognized *putang ina mo*'s reputation (Geronimo 2021: 52). The justices wrote:

[The] expression *putang ina mo* is a common enough utterance in the dialect that is often employed, not really to slander but rather to express anger or displeasure. In fact, more often, it is just an expletive that punctuates one's expression of profanity (Supreme Court of the Philippines First Division 2000).

Caught in the middle are a whole bevy of writers, including American Filipinos like Mike Alvarez whose fluency in Filipino is suspect but who unproblematically writes this sad scene in his short story:

Nana Ming never doled out punishment, but grandma did, and I was worried she might tell her. Grandma once caught me yelling *Putang ina mo*

(“Your mother is a whore) at my eldest brother Mark, who was taunting me...She removed one of her wooden shoes and struck me in the buttocks with it. When I said that I’d heard her say those exact words to a neighbour, she struck me again with impudence. It wasn’t so much the pain that I dreaded, but the humiliation accompanying it (2016, 291).

These multiple connotations assigned to *putang ina* likewise indicate one other thing: when due consideration is given to the context in which these are used, one encounters a lively elaboration, revision, and even redefining of cuss words and images by both the speaker and the receiver. Take Duterte’s other favorite profanity, *pisting yawa*, the Filipino equivalent of “dammit” or, if used as a noun, refers to an imp, a devilish person (Berowa et al. 2019, 166–167; Laureta 2015). In his extensive *A Dictionary of Cebuano Visayan* (1972), John Wolff shows the many different ways in which Visayans use *yawa* depending on the contexts and to whom it is addressed (Table 4).

Table 5. Variations in the use of the word “yawa” (Wolff 1972, 1202-12-03)

Word	Meaning	Usage
<i>Yawa</i>	Devil; a devilish person	<i>Ag yawa, mudayig nimu sa atibangan unya mang libak sa luyu.</i> (The devil praises you to your face but behind your back she stabs you.)
	Expression of anger, annoyance, frustration	<i>Yawa! Pukawun ta aning maayung pagkahinanuk.</i> (Hell! I was just sleeping nicely, too!)
<i>Litsing yawa</i>	Expression of extreme irritation or frustration	<i>Litsing yawa. Imu na pud nang gibali.</i> (God damn! You broke it again!)
<i>Yawa ra</i>	Expression of strong disbelief	<i>Yawa ra! Di giyud na musalir!</i> (Hell! That’s not going to work!); <i>Yawa ra! Tinuud ba nga gitirahan ang Prisidinti?</i> (Really? You mean they shot the President?); 2. Exclamations [of surprise]: <i>Yawang ninduta ning imung balay, Siyung!</i> (Jesus! What beautiful house you have, Siong!)
<i>Yawang</i>	Pause word used when one cannot find the right term	<i>Kanang yawang, kuan unsingalan?</i> (That damn, what do you call it?)

<i>Giyawaan</i>	Be possessed with blinding and uncontrollable fury	<i>Sa iyang kasuku giyawaan siya.</i> (He was possessed of a blinding, uncontrollable anger.)
<i>Mayawaan</i>	Be inspired by the devil	<i>Ayaw pagduwa ug kutsilyo kay tingalig mayawaan ka.</i> (Don't play with the knife or else the devil will bring something bad to you.)
<i>Muyawa</i>	Ruin; cause to flop	<i>Mga dulun nga muyawa sa tanum.</i> (Locusts that utterly destroy a crop.)
<i>Nayawa</i>	Caught in or be in a bad situation	<i>Nayawa na ta ani nga nahutdag gasulina nga layu sa istasyon.</i> (We are in for it running out of gas from the station)!
<i>Nayawaan</i>	Be made devilish	<i>Pari ang maghingilin sa panuway sa tawu nga yawayawaan.</i> (A priest exorcises evil spirits from a person's body.)
<i>Yawaun</i>	Castigate severely, get hell	<i>Yawaun (yawaan) ka run naku ug dili mu pasagdan nang makinilya.</i> (You will get hell from me if you do don't let that typewriter alone.)
<i>Giyawaan</i>	Be possessed of a blinding and uncontrollable fury	<i>Sa iyang kasuku giyawaan siya.</i> (He was possessed of a blinding, uncontrollable fury.)
<i>Muyawa</i>	Ruin; cause to flop; be ruined	<i>Mga dulun nga muyawa sa tanum.</i> (Locusts that utterly destroy the crop.)
<i>Yawa-yawa</i>	Be or become a hell (hellish)	<i>Nayawayawa ang ilang pagpuyu tungud sa pagkabisyusu sa iyang bana.</i> (Their home life has become miserable because of the husband's excessive indulgence in vice.)
<i>Yawayawaan</i>	Be made devilish	<i>Pari ang maghingilin sa panuway sa tawu nga yawayawaan.</i> (A priest exorcises evil spirits from a person's body.)
<i>Kayawayawa</i>	Be somewhat spoiled	<i>Nagkayawayawa ang atung pangaligu kay nalimtan ang sud-an.</i> (Our picnic was kind of spoiled because we forgot the food.)
<i>Yawan-un</i>	Devilishly evil	<i>Yawan-unn nga mga panghunahuna</i> (Diabolical thoughts)

This everyday term therefore assumes different connotations, based not only on feelings, but also on contexts. It could be used to make light of the moment (*Nagkayawayawa ang atung pangaligu kay nalimtan ang sud-an*),

describe a dreadful process like exorcism (*Pari ang maghingilin sa panuway sa tawu nga yawayawaan*), signify anger (*Sa iyang kasuku giyawaan siya*), express frustration or regret over being caught in a tight situation (*Nayawa na ta ani nga nahutdag gasulina nga layu sa istasyon*), and show admiration (*Yawang ninduta ning imung balay, Siyung*). The last example is quite interesting because *yawa*, which is generally associated with the devil, morphs into Satan's antipode, Jesus, when expressing surprise.

Yawa's mélange of meanings exists, because all Visayans consider it part of their everyday conversations—as a malicious word, a playful reminder, an impish description, and, of course, as an epithet used by someone expressing her hate at another person. Take that instance when a teary-eyed Duterte murmured to himself while in a campaign stop in his family home of Danao City, Cebu, 1 minute and 43 seconds into his speech, “*Yawa, gisipon man ko*” (“The devil in me, I’ve got this running nose.”).²⁰ In Wolff’s lexicon, Duterte used *yawa* here after being “in or caught in a bad situation” (1972, 1202) or when acting fatherly. And in both cases, there was no apprehension in the faces of his listeners; they simply howled in laughter.

In short, *yawa*, as well as *putang ina mo*, are *inato* (ours)—*ato ni!* One must add here, however, that vulgarities are not exclusive to Tagalog and Visayan. Crudities permeate Visayan as much as they do other language groups, including Hokkien (Fujianese) in which swear words of the southern Chinese language have become regular fare in conversations in homes and the marketplace. Growing up in Misamis Occidental in northwestern Mindanao, I would regularly hear *piaosi* (*putang inal!*); *lan jiao* (penis); *twa-lan-jiao* (big dick); *lanchiaubin* (dickface); *chao-chee-bai* (smelly pussy); *chai-chee-bai* (kiss your pussy); *gonggong* (fool); and *hausiau* (something fishy; up to no good!). *Gonggong* and *hausiau* have entered everyday Filipino vocabulary.²¹

Rafael’s (2018) use of the Visayan words *pusong* and *bugoy* to describe the extent of Duterte’s big act as a “sovereign trickster” may hew closely to the Visayan definitions of these terms, but his textual analysis also missed something. And this is how much *bugoy* and *pusong* are quotidian expressions whose interpretation could be extended beyond their original meanings. *Pusung/pusong*, for example, refers to someone who “is good in putting

up a front of innocence when committing mischief” (Wolff 1972, 859); a rascal or a rogue, as it were. Yet *pusung* in everyday Visayan can also show some grudging acknowledgment, even respect, toward not the mischief, but the displays of arrogance that one who has reached a certain level of success would typically exhibit. This is one meaning that did not make it to Wolff’s book, but one that I encounter *and even use* with some regularity (as in “*Labihang ka-pusung na ana niya human madatu siya*”—He has become so *pusung* after he became rich). Dumont notices something similar in his study of the Filipino word *barkada* which Wolff defines as “people one goes around with.” Dumont states:

It [*barkada*] appeared in Wolff’s compilation [1972] where it receives a thorough and perhaps overdignified treatment. As a noun, it refers to ‘people one goes around with,’ while as a verb, it is translated as ‘to go around together.’ Had I been a little less unsuspecting in my initial consultation, I would have noticed that Wolff’s examples also gave more alarming glosses, not only ‘gang mates’ but also ‘cronies,’ with whatever supplementary context during the Marcos years. I should also have noticed under the same rubric Wolff’s [1972] mention of the adjective *barkadur*, truly a giveaway that he translated as ‘fond of going around with one’s gang’ (Dumont 1994, 403).

Conclusion

Are the millions of Duterte supporters a mob or are they representatives of “the people”? Patricia Chiantera-Stutte argues that the term “the people” could either be “taken to mean ‘people in movement,’ whether by violently claiming a place in history and politics in opposition to the political order or by irrationally supporting a leader” (2018: 157). These “people in movement” may have dissimilar demands based on different analyses of society, but this “plurality” of “protest issues” would eventually be condensed “into a single common denominator” depending on how protest leaders or vanguard parties redefine and explain them to “the people.” The election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 was that “single common denominator” that brought together a variety of demands and desires, including contradictory ones. These ranged from Visayans and Mindanawons feeling “aggrieved” at Manila’s corruption

and apathy toward their regional aspirations (Valdehuesa 2014; Yusingco 2016; Lorenzana 2018) and Manila’s vicious war against the Moros (Vitug and Gloria 2000; Coronel 2005; Jubair 2007). Duterte’s large pool of supporters includes those from the lower classes who intensely dislike the dishonesty and trickery of the elite (Reyes 2017), especially their betrayal of the spirit of people power (Bautista 200, 8–26); poor and middle-class communities fearful of the “drug scourge” (Abinales 2016a; Cabato 2019; Petty and Schuettler 2019; *The Economist* 2020); and elite hypnotic attraction to Duterte’s no-nonsense approach to politics and his strong-arm tactics.²²

Nicole Curato and Jonathan Ong attribute this widespread popularity to “a rejection of professionalized and hyperstylised political performance in favour of performances of ‘authenticity,’ more resonant with the vernaculars of reality television and social media” (Curato and Ong 2018, 4). They drew their conclusions based on a “grounded, ethnographic perspective” that focused on “particular practices of speaking and listening in Duterte’s populist politics [and thereby] bridge perspectives in the political sociology of populism...and everyday politics...with work in media and cultural studies on voice and listening” (2018, 2). Curato and Ong’s essay is, therefore, an essential corrective to the tendency of scholars to just treat Duterte’s populism as uni-directional, i.e., he curses and cajoles, and his supporters laugh and applaud.²³ This essay goes up a notch by examining Visayan and Davao-Tagalog—the language and the dialect—that Duterte and his supporters (sans the elite) use to interact with one another. In so doing, it hopes to provide readers a closer glimpse of how exactly Duterte and three-quarters of adult Filipinos “talk to each other” (Lema and Kasolowsky 2021).

Despite the complete domination of political dynasties, the more frequent use of state violence, including legal prosecution of critics and the return of crony capitalism, the consensus of scholars and pundits is that the Philippines remains a democracy.²⁴ This may be true given how much politicians and Filipinos still consider a democratic ritual—elections—critical in the nation’s life. Filomeno Aguilar Jr., however, cautions that elections were also “a time of tension between the sacred and the profane, the ideal and the expedient” (Aguilar 2005, 92). This was the case from 1986 to 2010, but by

the second decade of the 21st century, the “sacred” side seemed to have relinquished a lot of space to the profane.

Here is where Chiantera-Stutte’s study can fill in the gap. She calls Bonapartism the “suicide of [a] democracy” that has “degenerate[d] into a system that is controlled by the few but nonetheless supported by the masses.” In this debased form, the leader—“the new prince”—becomes “the symbolic catalyst of the masses’ hope” and comes “to enjoy an unlimited power between the masses and public opinion.” Furthermore, Bonapartism is a “dynamic [that is] possible only after the democratic revolutions have made the political ambitions of the people into legitimate claims and given away to the masses’ demands to be the protagonists of political life. Only democratic masses can be so blind as to insist on their central role in politics while at the same time remaining unconscious of the degeneration of democratic institutions; only they can believe in their participation in politics, and at the same time, trust completely the ‘new Caesars’” (2018, 170). Chiantera-Stutte had European neopopulism in mind, but this could very well apply to the Philippines. And a crucial factor in Duterte becoming that “symbolic catalyst of the [Filipino] masses’ hopes” is the shared love for the language of the street.

Is Duterte portentous of a new kind of political leadership as Philippine democracy stands at death’s door? His provincial origins may not be different from those of other strongmen, especially when it comes to the use of coercion (see, for example, the story of Luis “Chavit” Singson, as narrated by Robson 2002). Yet, in many senses, Duterte is also distinct if we see him as representing a new source of strength in local politics. And this is the role that language has played in amplifying his “performance” as mayor, whose local credentials and competencies had been enough to launch him to the presidency instead of taking the longer, if customary, Congress-Senate-Vice President-President path to national power.²⁵

Notes

This essay has been vastly improved by the comments of Carolyn S. Hau, Jowell Canuday, Caroline Arguillas, Gou de Jesus, Estella Estremera, Joel David, Leia Castañeda-Anastacio and two unknown reviewers. I am extremely grateful to their comments, criticisms and advice. All other shortcomings are my own.

1. This comparison must be taken with a grain of salt. I only listed 15,978 by the fifth “page” of the online search, but the search for the other presidents went beyond five “pages.” That said, this unevenness still highlights the inconsistency of academic, pundit, and activist interests in Philippine presidents.
2. According to Curato (2019, 117), Duterte’s campaign “laid bare the hidden injuries in people’s esteem, which in turn, emboldened his constituencies to demand recognition for their latent suffering.” Political scientist Cleve Arguelles agrees (2019).
3. I am aware of the variations in the Visayan language and non-Visayan languages as well as who is considered Visayan and the diversity of non-Visayan Filipinos based on location and histories. A part explanation of this is in the section on the Davao-Tagalog below.
4. For an example of the powerful relationship between language and political mobilization see Gerald M. Platt and Rhys H. Williams, “Ideological Language and Social Movement Mobilization: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Segregationists’ Ideologies,” *Sociological Theory* 20, 3 (November 2002): 328-359.
5. The exception here is Kusaka (2017). A derivative argument is to (unconsciously, if not hesitantly) regard Filipinos as dupes who could be easily conned by a populist trickster, by laying on their supposed anger toward “hypocritical elites in the center by those in the peripheries” (Kusaka 2017, 67).
6. “Dutertard,” the sobriquet given to a Duterte supporter, combines the first two syllabus of the president’s last name and the last syllable of the word “retard” has been added to the *Urban Dictionary* website.
7. Duterte was 70 years old when he ran for the presidency.
8. Roxas was also known to have cursed in several rallies but his attempt to imitate Duterte backfired, as it was seen by many as hypocritical. Kinder critics traced his *faux pas* to an over two decades of erratic messaging (Cupin 2016).
9. “President Rodrigo Duterte Speech at Thanksgiving Party, 4 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4fbVlrpRDI>. The entire speech had been cut into different segments. The same lines can be found in *Rappler*, “Thanksgiving party for president-elect Rodrigo Duterte,” 4 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SNrbJqmwZk>. The cursing starts at 5:20:44 in the *Rappler* stream.
10. In addition, Arguillas pointed out that “the three-term limit had caught up with Duterte, hence the decision to run for Congress, an elective post he found

- boring, but which gave him time to bond with daughter Sara, then a law student in Manila.” Personal communications, 18 January 2022.
11. In 2013, 4 out of every 5 households owned a television and 81 percent of Filipinos between the ages of 10 and 64 were inveterate television watchers (Philippine Statistical Office 2013, 41). The percentage continued to rise, and in 2016, a private media survey revealed that 96.6 percent of Filipinos were watching television.
 12. The polling body Pulse Asia does provide some context before presenting its findings, but this is often only related to the main events of the month, or between two surveys. See for example, Pulse Asia, “February 2022 Nationwide Survey on the May 2022 Elections, March 14, 2022, <https://www.pulseasia.ph/february-2022-nationwide-survey-on-the-may-2022-elections/> (accessed 15 March 2022).
 13. I would like to note here that first language is Visayan. And it is a particular “variety” of Visayan that has some degree of coarseness in it, no different from President Duterte’s Cebu Visayan.
 14. The English term that best describes these portraits is “charientism,” an insult disguised as a jest or a compliment to fool people. Translated: “He mixes being funny and being indiscreet, but because the laughter comes first, [it] absorb[s] the insults from his indiscretions [which are then taken] lightly. Or in the language of the local thugs, he is good at *frying* [metaphor for fooling] the people.”
 15. Davao-born anthropologist Jowell Canuday has reminded me that the “transmutation and therefore shifts in [the use of Davao Tagalog] does not only apply to Tagalog *but also to Visayan*” (italics mine), explaining: “*Daghan og ‘mag’ ang Davao Tagalog ug Davao bisaya: Magpunta man tayo doon, magkain na tayo, magpa-Manila ka? Unya sa Bisaya mag, mag-adto ta, instead sa Cebuano nga mangadto ta, magtan-aw ta instead sa manglantaw ta or motan-aw ta. Unya mga words na ‘alangan!’ to stress a matter of fact [Davao Tagalog and Davao Visayan use the syllable “mag” a lot: Let’s all go (magpunta) there, let’s eat (magkain), are you going to Manila (magpa-Manila)? A Davao Visayan will say mag-adto for “to go,” while a Cebuano says mangadto ta; the former will say mag-tanaw ta (let’s see, let’s watch), while the latter, manglantaw ta or motan-aw ta. Then there is the frequent use of the interjection “alangan!” to stress a point of fact].” Personal communication, 18 March 2022. I thank Canuday for pointing out this important feature of Davao Tagalog.*
 16. This linguistic by-product of the region’s relative isolation from the rest of the country had its precedence in the colonial period, when Japanese/Okinawan, Tagalog, Visayan, Spanish and American interaction led to the emergence of what Shinzo Hayase calls “Abaca Japanese” (1984, 218), a patois similar to *Bahasa Malayu*, the market language in the Dutch East Indies. “Abaca Japanese”

- disappeared after World War II when the Americans repatriated the Japanese/Okinawan community. *Bislog* and *Tagbis* would take its place.
17. I am extremely grateful to Caroline S. Hau for this insight.
 18. The contradictions that Rafael notices, however, remain valid. In their “experimental study [on] the effect of [Italian] politicians’ profanity and gender,” (2014, 537), Cavazza and Guidetti also discovered that the “the vulgar message delivered by the male politician was at the same time the most influential and the one considered least persuasive” (2014, 544).
 19. These nuances are not exclusive to *putang ina mo* alone. Other aspects of Filipino sexuality, including lust and desire, have a collection of terms and phrases (Tan .n.d.).
 20. The video can be found in the Facebook page of someone who calls him/herself “Duterte Social Media Supporter, and who posted it on 24 February 2016.
 21. I thank Carol Hau for an engaging and fun conversation on these Hokkien cuss words.
 22. As one mesmerized medical activist-turned-Duterte supporter put it, Duterte had done “amazing things” and “got things done that other presidents haven’t.” Lorraine Badoy added snidely, “The didn’t even try” (Quiano and Perry 2016).
 23. Just how important are “laughter” and “vulgar” in the study of Southeast Asian populism? The highly useful overview by Paul D. Kenney (2019) only mentions the word “laugh” once, and this from a quote by Casiple (2016). “Profane” does not appear in the text.
 24. Thompson calls it “bloodied democracy” (2016), “Illiberal Democracy” (2019a), and “Oligarchic Democracy” (2020); Teehankee and Calimbahin, “Patronage Democracy” (2022); Kreuzer “strongman-democracy” (2019).
 25. I am, again, grateful to Carol Hau for this connection between language and (local) power.

Works Cited

- Abinales, Patricio N. 2016. "Bisayang Dako," *Rappler*, (July 30), <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/141416-bisayang-dako-language-philippines/> (accessed February 25, 2022).
- _____. 2016a. "Why acceptance of killings is at all-time high," *Rappler* (July 28), <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/141084-abinales-duterte-drugs-killings-acceptance/> (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Aguilar, Filomeno V. 2005. "Betting on Democracy: Electoral Ritual in the Philippine Presidential Campaign," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 53, 1: 91-118.
- Aguirre, Arjan. 2017. "Social Media and Election Campaigning: How Social Media Won the Philippine Presidency in 2016," *International Political Science Association Conference*, Hanover Gerrman.
- Alvarez, Mike. 2016. "Two for the price of one," *New Writing*, 13, 1: 291-296.
- Arguelles, Cleve V. 2019. "'We are Rodrigo Duterte': Dimensions of the Philippine populist publics' vote," *Asian Politics and Policy* 11, 3: 417-437.
- Arguillas, Carolyn. 2022 Personal communication (18 January).
- _____. 2020. "Once upon a time, Duterte was a 'Kapamilya' star," *Mindanews* (March 1), <https://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2020/03/once-upon-a-time-duterte-was-a-kapamilya-star/> (accessed January 16, 2022).
- Back, Anna 2001. "Battle of the beep in the Philippines," *Asiaweek* (September 14): 1,4, 14.
- Bautista, Cynthia Rose B. 2001. "The Revenge of the Elite on the Masses", in Amando Doronila, ed. *Between Fires: Fifteen Perspectives on the Estrada Crisis*. Pasig. Anvil Publishing.
- Berowa, Annie Mae, Jeninbelle R. Ella, and Rochelle Irene G. Lucas. 2019. "Perceived offensiveness of swear words across genders," *The Asian EFL Journal*, 25 (5.2): 164-187.
- Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London. Sage.
- Cabato, Regine. 2019. "Thousands dead. Police accused of criminal acts. Yet Duterte's drug war is wildly popular," *The Washington Post* (October 23), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/thousands-dead-police-accused-of-criminal-acts-yet-dutertes-drug-war-is-wildly-popular/2019/10/23/4fd-b542a-f494-11e9-b2d2-1f37c9d82dbb_story.html (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Canuday, Jowell. 2022. Personal communication (18 March).
- Casiple, Ramon C. 2016. "The Duterte presidency as phenomenon," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Studies* 38, 2 (August): 179-184.

- Cavazza, Nicoletta and Margherita Guidetti. 2014. "Swearing in Political Discourse: Why Vulgarity Works," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 33, 5: 537-547.
- Chiantera-Stutte, Patricia. 2018. "Mob, people, crowds, and masses: Mass psychology and populism," *The Tocqueville Review* 39, 1: 156-176.
- Coronel-Ferrer, Miriam. 2005. "The Philippine State and Moro Resistance: Dynamics of a Persistent Conflict" in Kamarulzaman Askandar and Ayesah Abubakar (eds). *The Mindanao Conflict*. Penang Malaysia: Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network.\
- Cupin, Bea. 2016. "What's not working for Mar Roxas?" *Rappler* (February 9), <https://r3.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/121793-mar-roxas-problems-campaign> (accessed April 5, 2022).
- Curato, Nicole. 2017. "Flirting with Authoritarian Fantasies? Rodrigo Duterte and the New Terms of Philippine Populism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, 1: 142-153.
- _____. 2019. *Democracy in a Time of Misery: From Spectacular Tragedy to Deliberative Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Curato Nicole and Jonathan Ong. 2018. "Who laughs at a rape joke? Illiberal responsiveness in Rodrigo Duterte's Philippines," in Tanja Dreher and Anshuman Mondal, eds. *Ethical Responsiveness and the Politics of Difference*. London. Palgrave.
- Demeterio, Feorillo A., and Jeconiah Louis Dreisbach. 2017. "Disentangling the Rubrico and Dolalas Hypotheses on the Davao Filipino Language," *Recoletos Multidisciplinary Research Journal* (December): 1-15.
- Dolalas, Leslie . 2012. "Davao Tagalog: Endangerment of Binisaya Language." Unpublished manuscript.
- Doronila, Amando. 2011. "Manuel Luis Quezon s strongman Filipinos need," *Inquirer.net* (August 18), <https://opinion.inquirer.net/10215/manuel-luis-quezon%E2%80%94strongman-filipinos-need> (accessed January 15, 2022) .
- Dumont, Jean-Paul. 1993. "The Visayan Male 'Barkada': Manly Behavior and Male Identity on a Philippine Island," *Philippine Studies* 41, 4 (Fourth Quarter): 401-436.
- Duterte, Rodrigo. 2016. "Rodrigo Duterte's speech at his thanksgiving party," *Rappler* (June 4), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXNv7qetYKA> (accessed January 14, 2022).
- The Economist*. 2020. "Rodrigo Duterte's lawless war on drugs is popular" (February 22), <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/02/20/rodrigo-dutertes-lawless-war-on-drugs-is-wildly-popular> (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Enriquez, Elizabeth L. 2006. "Media as Site of Social Struggle: The Role of Philippine Radio and Television in the EDA Revolt of 1986" *Plaridel* 3, 2 (August): 123-138.

- Genovese, Eugene. 1976. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York. Vintage.
- Geronimo, Luis Jose F. 2021. "Facing the facts: confronting legislative facts in Supreme Court adjudication," *Philippine Law Journal*, 94: 41-93.
- Guingona, Teofisto "Tito," Jr. 2013. *Fight for the Filipino*. Palm Springs, CA. Dr. Kenneth Mills Management Consultancy.
- Joaquin, Nick. 1980. *Language of the Street and Other Essays*. Metro Manila. National Book Store.
- Jubair, Salah. *The Long Road to Peace: Inside the GRP-MILF Peace Process*. Cotabato City: Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, 2007.
- Jurado, Emil P. 1994. *ERAPtion: How to Speak English Without Really Trial*. Manila (?). Emil P. Jurado and Reli German.
- Kreuzer, Peter. 2019. "Populism, executive assertiveness and popular support for strongman-democracy in the Philippines," *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Blog* (17 January), <https://blog.prif.org/2019/01/17/populism-executive-assertiveness-and-popular-support-for-strongman-democracy-in-the-philippines/>
- Laureta, Isabelle. 2015. "16 Totally Useful Filipino Swear Words And How To Use Them," *Buzzfeed*, August 17, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/isabellelaureta/anak-bad-yan> (accessed February 3, 2022).
- Lema, Karen and Raissa Kasolowsky. 2021. "Satisfaction with Philippines' Duterte fell 21 pct from Nov-June despite strong majority support – poll," *Reuters* (September 24), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/satisfaction-with-philippines-duterte-fell-21-pct-nov-june-despite-strong-2021-09-24/> (accessed March 12, 2022).
- Lent, John. 1968. "Philippine Radio—History and Problems." *Asian Studies* (April): 49-60.
- Lorenzana, Lito Monico. 2018. "A View from the Center: Is Federalism Dead?" *Mindaneews* (January 26), <https://www.mindaneews.com/mindaviews/2018/01/a-view-from-the-center-is-federalism-dead/> (accessed March 10, 2022)
- Maboloc, Christopher Ryan. 2020. "President Rodrigo Duterte and the birth of radical democracy in the Philippines," *International Journal of Politics and Security* 2, 3: 116–132.
- _____. 2020a. "Fighting the oligarchs: President Duterte and the argument against elite rule – a perspective from the academe," *Jurnal Pengajian Umum Asia Tenggara*, 21: 34–46.
- Mangahas, Joel. 2010. *Making a Difference in Mindanao*. Manila. Asian Development Bank.
- Mojares, Resil. 1998. "Talking Politics: The Komentaryo on Cebu Radio," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 26, 3-4 (September-December): 337-362.

- Petty, Martin and Darren Schuettler. 2019. "Filipinos give thumbs up to Duterte's 'excellent' drugs war: poll," *Reuters* (September 22), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-drugs/filipinos-give-thumbs-up-to-dutertes-excellent-drugs-war-poll-idUSKBN1W803M> (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Quiano, Kathy and Juliet Perry. 2016. "'Why I still support Duterte,'" *CNN World* (October 18), <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/18/asia/philippines-duterte-supporters/index.html> (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Quirino, Carlos. 1962. "Anecdotes about Quezon," *Historical Bulletin* 6, 3: 239-243.
- _____. 1983. *Amang: The Life and Times of Eulogio Rodriguez, Sr.* Quezon City: New Day Publishers.
- Philippines, Republic of. 2013. *Philippine Statistical Authority*. Manila: Government of the Philippines.
- Picardal, Amado. 2020. "Why did priests and religious vote for Duterte?" *Rappler* (July 3), <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/265507-opinion-why-priests-religious-vote-duterte/> (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Platt, Gerald M., and Rhys H. William. 2002. "Ideological Language and Social Movement Mobilization: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Segregationists' Ideologies," *Sociological Theory* 20, 3 (November): 328-359.
- Platt, John T. 1975. "The Singapore English Speech Continuum and its Basilect 'Singlish' as a 'Creoloid,'" *Anthropological Linguistics*, 17, 7 (October): 363-374.
- Pulse Asia. 2022. "February 2022 Nationwide Survey on the May 2022 Elections, March 14," <https://www.pulseasia.ph/february-2022-nationwide-survey-on-the-may-2022-elections/> (accessed 15 March 2022).
- Rafael, Vicente. 2018. "The Sovereign Trickster," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78, 1 (February): 141-166.
- Robson, Alan. 2002. "Patrimonial politics in the Philippine Ilocos," *Pilipinas*, 38 (March): 1-26.
- Rubrico, Jessie Grace U. 2012. "Indigenization of Filipino: A Case of the Davao City Variety," *Language Links Foundationm, Inc*: 1-18.
- Rude, George. 1995. *Ideology and Popular Protest*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press.
- Scott, James C. 1987. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- _____. 1992. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Soriano, Cheryll Ruth R., Sun Sun Lim and Milagros Rivera-Sanchez. 2015. "The Virgin Mary with a Mobile Phone: Ideologies of Mothering and Technology Consumption in Philippine Television Advertisements," *Communication, Culture and Critique* 8: 1-19.

- Supreme Court of the Philippines First Division, “Rogelio Pader, Petitioner, v. People of the Philippines, Respondent,” G.R. No. 139157, February 8, 2000, Chan Robles Virtual Law Library, https://www.chanrobles.com/scdecisions/jurisprudence2000/feb2000/139157.php#_edn14 (accessed 13 March 2022).
- Tan, Michael L. n.d “Filipino Keywords Related to Sexuality,” <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/31518626/filipino-keywords-related-to-sexuality-michael-philippine-culture> (accessed February 1, 2022).
- Teehankee, Julio and Cleo Anne Calimbahin. 2022. *Patronage Democracy in the Philippines: Clans, Clients and Competition in Local Elections*. Quezon City. Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Teehankee, Julio and Thompson, Mark. 2016. “Duterte and the politics of anger in the Philippines,” *East-West Forum* 8 May. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/05/08/duterte-and-the-politics-of-anger-in-the-philippines/> (last accessed November 2, 2020).
- Thompson, Edward P. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. 1963. London. Victor Gollancz Ltd.
- Thompson, Mark. 2016. “Bloodied democracy: Duterte and the death of Liberal Reformism in the Philippines,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 3 (2016): 39–68.
- _____. 2019. “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy in the Philippines: Duterte’s Early Presidency,” Imelda Deinla and Björn Dressel, eds. *From Aquino II to Duterte (2010-2018)*. Singapore. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- _____. 2020. “Explaining Duterte’s Rise and Rule: ‘Penal Populist’ Leadership or a Structural Crisis of Oligarchic Democracy in the Philippines?” *Philippine Political Science Journal* 41: 5-31.
- Torres, Jose, Jr.. 2004. “The making of a Mindanao mafia,” *Behind the Stories* (June 29), http://josetorres.blogspot.com/2004_06_01_archive.html?m=1 (accessed January 16, 2022).
- Valdehuesa, Manny. 2014. “The Worm’s Eyeview: Blaming Manila,” *Mindanews* (August 21), <https://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2014/08/the-worms-eyeview-blaming-manila/> (accessed March 10, 2022).
- Vera Files. 2020. “Media Ownership Monitor: Philippines,” <https://philippines.mom-rsf.org/en/media/radio/> (accessed March 4, 2022).
- Vitug, Marites & Glenda Gloria. 2000. *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*. Manila: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs and Institute for Popular Democracy.
- Wataru Kusaka. 2017. “Bandit grabbed the state: Duterte’s moral politics,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 67, Special Issue: 49-75.
- Wolf, Eric. 1982 (reprint edition). *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley and London. University of California Press.

- Wolff, John U. 1972. *A Dictionary of Cebuano Visayan*. Ithaca, NY. Cornell University Southeast Asia Program and the Linguistic Society of the Philippines.
- Yusingco, Michael Henry. 2016. "Commentary: What 'Imperial Manila' really means," *Mindanews* (August 19), <https://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2016/08/commentary-what-imperial-manila-really-means/> (accessed March 10, 2022).