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A DUTERTE READER: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency

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A DUTERTE READER: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency. Edited by Nicole Curato. Ithaca, New York: SEAP Publications [an imprint of Cornell University Press], 2017. ix, 337 pp. (Tables, graphs.) US\$23.95, paper. ISBN 978-1-5017-2473-2.

In June 2016, Davao City mayor Rodrigo Duterte was elected president of the Philippines. He was the first politician from Mindanao to claim the seat at Malacanang Palace. He vowed to "kill them all," alluding to anyone involved in the trade and consumption of drugs. He promised that the fish in Manila Bay would fatten up from feeding off the bodies of drug addicts that would be dumped into the water. Within the first quarter of his rule, Duterte made derogatory comments about US President Barack Obama, the Pope, the European Union, and the United Nations, at the same time expressing his admiration for Adolf Hitler. To the horror of many observers around the world, Duterte committed himself to extinguishing drug addicts in the Philippines on the same scale as the Holocaust. In response to such grotesque and macabre promises, Duterte's supporters in the Philippines and beyond cheered enthusiastically.

The 16 contributions in the collection *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency* step into the world of Duterte's outrageous logic, which nonetheless offers its supporters what the book's editor, sociologist Nicole Curato, calls a "compelling fantasy" (17, emphasis in original). This first collected commentary on "Dutertismo" was published a little more than a year after Duterte's victory. Unlike other edited collections, which are often organized into themes, the curated essays appear to have no clear trajectory, as they touch on a diverse range of topics: political commentary, social justice and human rights discourse, communication studies, cultural theory, etc.

Award-winning investigative journalist Sheila S. Coronel's essay unravels the "No Man's Land where policing and criminality become indistinguishable" (168). In this uncharted territory of "extortion, theft, abduction, and murder in which the police are both enforcers of the law and its worst offenders," the police emerge as "entrepreneurs looking for maximum gain" (189). Political scientist and activist Nathan Gilbert Quimpo argues in his essay that this ensanguined war on drugs is only possible due to the return of the Marcosian "national boss rule" (160). Quimpo critiques Duterte's vision of national development as hinged on a brand of security that interrupts law and order itself. Walden Bello supports Quimpo's insights, adding that the ongoing war on drugs could only be executed by a "fascist original" such as Duterte. Bello points out that unlike other fascists, Duterte does not target the Left, but liberal democracy itself.

Cleve Kevin Robert V. Arguelles presents an illuminating discussion of Duterte's "other war"--the one that seeks to strike down the democracy fought for in the EDSA revolt of 1986 by "promoting public amnesia over collective remembering" (265). While Arguelles raises the importance of memory in critically assessing Duterte's regime, Jesse Angelo L. Altez and Kloyde A. Caday curiously offer a sympathetic tone, arguing that the solid support for Duterte in the South "emanates from a legitimate longing for inclusion among the diverse people of Mindanao" (111). Altez and Caday take the route of telling the other side of the story, dangerously crafting a romanticized version of indigenous Mindanao's support for Duterte.

Ideological contestations based on different political persuasions occasionally simmer between the different essays. Patricio N. Abinales and Leloy Claudio point out the "fraught alliance" between Duterte and the Communist Party of the Philippines who, they write, "have been jubilant over their political windfall of having elected an anti-imperialist, supposedly left-wing president" (98). This alliance, they argue, cannot be sustained as the Communists will eventually return to their call for a national democratic revolution, while on the other hand, Duterte will show more prominently his allegiance to former dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos' family, "the original sworn enemy of the CCP" (102). However, Abinales and Claudio do not seem to make a distinction between the "communist" and the critical "Left," which in the context of the history of red-baiting in the Philippines could inflict harm by endangering the lives of those at the forefront of political critique. Nonetheless, Abinales and Claudio's essay offers a captivating conversation with that of

Emerson M. Sanchez, whose essay presents a "cursory inventory" of actions by militant leftist groups, arguing that "the left's voice has not been muffled but has always been critical" and that they have not let their guard down as other commentators suggest (289-290). These two essays will be of interest to readers who are looking to balance competing discourses among commentators in Duterte's time.

Editor Curato is correct to point out that today's political machinery in the Philippines is no longer composed only of guns, goons, and gold, but now includes gigabytes as well (6). The rise of vitriolic political trolling in the Philippines is addressed in the contributions of Jason Vincent A. Cabanes and Jayeel S. Cornelio. They propose that it is no longer tenable to reclaim the spaces of communication now infiltrated by political trolls--professionals or everyday loyal supporters of Duterte. Anthropologist Anna Christina Pertierra discusses how the media, celebrity, and popular entertainment press upon the "melodramatic dimensions of Philippine politics" (227). She argues that the emotions generated and stirred by political drama, which are now more visible than ever before, are "serious business" and cannot be ignored as "these moments generate the emotional ties that push people to support politicians in times of tension and transition" (227). The above-mentioned essays will be of interest to media practitioners who are seeking to reimagine ways of mass mediation and engagement, amid the persistence of trolls and fake news.

The authors in the collection suggest in different ways that Duterte's rise to power, the popular support he has gained, and his instrumentalization of drugs (and the fight against them) to attain his promised change, did not happen overnight. We see an attention to structure and consciousness in John Andrew G. Evangelista's essay, in which he argues that Duterte's homophobic and sexist tirades are all too familiar in the systemically hetero-patriarchal Philippines. Readers will also sense this attention to historical continuity leading to Dutertismo in the essays by Carmel Veloso Abao, Jayson Lamchek, Julio C. Teehankee, and Adele Webb. Overall, the collection provides needed critical commentary at a time of accelerated political crisis.

Duterte's war has only become bloodier. Many accounts as of the time of writing (March 2019) indicate that the death toll has reached over 27,000. Future conversations could go beyond articulations based on Western social science frameworks. What do we make of the "drug war" and lifeworlds linked to it when viewed through the lenses that are contingent upon the experience of communities, whether in Manila or beyond? Many authors in the collection call for the need to reimagine people's investments in political and critical action in the time of Duterte. What creativities exist in today's expanding modes and spaces for protest and critique? These questions are not yet deeply addressed in the contributions but a second installment will hopefully address these in due course.

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