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Who laughs at a rape joke? Illiberal responsiveness in Rodrigo Duterte's Philippines

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Abstract

When a presidential contender makes a joke about lusting over a dead Australian missionary, calls the Pope the son of a whore, and confesses to killing criminals during his tenure as city mayor, one could expect that this candidate would not go very far. But not in the year 2016. Dubbed as 'the year of voting dangerously,' the Philippines rode the tide of global discontent and gave landslide victory to the controversial Rodrigo Duterte. This chapter examines the discursive underpinnings of Duterte's rise to power by focusing on the process in which his supporters made ethical calculations from listening to his official speeches, live performance on television debates, and broader discussions in news and social media during the campaign period. We argue that Duterte's 'crass politics' is a push back to the dominant moral politics perpetuated by institutions associated to the Philippines' liberal democratic elite. While we condemn the Duterte regime's disregard for human rights and due process, especially in the context of his bloody war on drugs, we also advocate a closer look at the ethics of Duterte's responsiveness to deep-seated injuries endured by his constituencies both among marginalised and middle-class communities. Through a careful yet critical unpacking of his 'crass politics of responsiveness' from ethnographic research with Duterte supporters and media analysis of Duterte's public performances, we hope to put forward a precise understanding of the emerging moral politics that underpins this unorthodox regime.

It was twenty-seven days before the elections. Rodrigo Duterte—the frontrunner in the Philippines’ 2016 presidential race—was in Amoranto Sports Complex, making a big speech in front of an adoring crowd. He talked about a hostage incident in Davao City. He recalled how, as city mayor, he took a close look at the face of one of the casualties, an Australian missionary, whom the hostage takers raped and then killed by slashing her throat. ‘What a waste. She was so beautiful,’ Duterte said in a gentle tone, only to be followed by a punchline of a sick joke. ‘The mayor should have [raped] her first.’

Such a gaffe could have spelled the end of Duterte’s political career. Insofar as it involved moral transgression by a political leader, the event had the hallmarks of a political scandal that could quickly and acutely damage the reputation of the transgressor (Thompson 2000). But to the bewilderment of many, Duterte remained unscathed. He delivered a convincing win in what started as a tight presidential race. After threatening to slaughter drug addicts, cursing the Pope, calling Barack Obama a son of a whore, and literally raising the middle finger to the European Union for meddling in the country’s human rights situation, the President enjoyed an 84% popularity rating a year into his Presidency. At the height of a war against ISIS fighters in Southern Philippines, Duterte told the troops that they could rape up to three women. One could only surmise that this is the commander-in-chief’s way of assuring his men that he has their backs.

How can Rodrigo Duterte get away with this? What kind of public continues to support a controversial leader? Who laughs at a rape joke?

We answer these questions by recording the perspectives of Duterte’s supporters in relation to Duterte’s political performance. We provide a grounded, ethnographic perspective to particular practices of speaking and listening in Duterte’s populist politics. In this way, we bridge perspectives in political sociology on populism (Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Panizza 2005) and everyday politics (Kervliet 1995, 2006) with work in media and cultural studies on voice and listening (Couldry 2011; Dreher 2009; Madianou et al 2015).

We develop our argument in three parts. We begin by characterising Duterte’s rise to power in the context of the Philippines’ elite democracy that has long denied recognition to voices from the margins. We then argue that Duterte’s electoral success is hinged on two axes of responsiveness: responsiveness to latent anxieties, and responsiveness to stylised politics. Duterte, we find, was able to give voice to concerns of the public previously unspeakable and delegitimized, and has provided a counter-narrative to the stylisation of politics that has defined contemporary political campaigns. What comes out of this responsiveness is a transgressive form of politics that coarsens political discourse (Ostiguy, forthcoming) but it nevertheless exemplifies a particular kind of listening in the Philippine public sphere that, as Tanja Dreher (2009) develops in her analytics of listening, challenges entrenched hierarchies of voice.

Through this case study, we hope to illustrate the ambivalent character of responsiveness. Responsiveness can be used for democratic or authoritarian purposes. It can pursue liberal or illiberal projects. To characterise the normative logics underpinning performances of

responsiveness, we find it necessary to ask three critical questions: responsiveness for whom, responsiveness how, and responsiveness for what. We find that in Duterte's case, his performance of responsiveness takes an illiberal character—a kind of selective responsiveness that restores the esteem of many, but simultaneously thrives by denying the humanity of others.

Obstacles to listening in Philippines' elite democracy

Before the 2016 presidential race, Duterte was largely invisible in the national public sphere in the Philippines. As talks of a possible run began to gain traction, the mayor categorically rejected calls for his candidacy. 'Too old, too tired, and too poor' was Duterte's response when asked about a possible presidential bid. At the same time, he was spotted going around the country, engaging in 'listening tours' including among impoverished communities. Many interpreted this as a tease—a way to intensify public clamour for the mayor to throw his hat into the ring. But political insiders recognize that the rise of Duterte and his specific brand of populist politics emerged less from mass manipulation than from actually responding to widely shared anxieties of local communities. As Walden Bello (2017) points out,

I think we should avoid accounts that promote the understanding of this movement as one created by manipulation from above. I am disturbed by the Duterte movement and fear a Duterte presidency, but we risk gross misunderstanding of its dynamics and direction if we attribute its emergence to mass manipulation. It is, simply put, a largely spontaneous electoral insurgency.

While undoubtedly the Duterte campaign employed attention-hacking strategies and disinformation campaigns not unlike other populist leaders such as Donald Trump (Marwick & Lewis 2017; Woolley & Guilbeault 2017), his early grassroots popularity and continued support have much less to do with systemic manipulation and more to do with his active responsiveness to latent anxieties. Previously, we have defined latent anxiety as a sense of distress but one that remains in the background; it is 'present but not central, mundane but still worrisome, publicised but not politicised' (Curato 2016: 98-99), often pertaining to wide-ranging issues from drugs to criminality. In our view, Duterte's responsiveness to the Filipino public's latent anxieties constitutes a form of political listening by offering new opportunities for publicity and recognition of poor people's anxieties that other leaders have often silenced or delegitimized.

Silencing and delegitimizing the poor have been longstanding practices of the Philippines' political elite that have historically muted poor people's capacities for claims-making. The ethnographer Ben Kerkvliet reviews the common operations of Filipino elite democracy in local politics and elections: 'violence, intimidation, monetary inducements and the considerable autonomy elites have to manipulate formal democratic procedures to their liking' (Kerkvliet 1995: 405). At the national level, leadership by the Philippines' reformist elite has also undertaken various campaigns of 'good governance' that aim to discredit the pro-poor populist narrative of their political rivals (Teehankee 2017: 5). In their strategies of negative campaigning as well as their technocratic leadership and management styles, the reformist elite exemplified by previous president Benigno S. Aquino III and his political allies have

accentuated the perception that these political elites are unsympathetic to the voices of disadvantaged communities. For instance, in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan levelling the city of Tacloban and causing massive loss of life in November 2013, Benigno S. Aquino III was quoted as responding to a grief-stricken businessman's appeal to hasten city recovery and clean-up of corpses that littered the streets with the dismissive retort, 'You're still alive, aren't you?'

Political leaders' dismissiveness to the poor and their uses of violence and manipulation capture dynamics of what Nick Couldry (2011) calls 'voice-denying rationalities.' This refers to logics and processes that mute ordinary people's capacities for storytelling and claims-making. By muting ordinary people's voices, state actors thus evade accountability (Keane 2012). The intense mediatisation of the political sphere and the increased focus on style, image, and personality, while having potential to revivify interest in politics at a time of increasing political cynicism (Penney 2017), have often only led to limited forms of storytelling and gestural forms of listening that achieve public visibility but fail at receiving official response from political leaders (Curato & Ong 2015).

We approach Duterte's populism as representing a rejection of professionalized and hyper-stylised political performance in favour of performances of 'authenticity,' more resonant with the vernaculars of reality television and social media. By giving voice to latent anxieties in language that resonates with poor people, he offers a promise to overcome historical obstacles to political listening in Philippine elite democracy. By political listening, we refer to the appearance and audibility of ordinary citizens in official political spaces—spaces which are increasingly oriented to and shaped by media institutions and platforms. Among the achievements for political listening is *accountability*, where powerful individuals are made to take responsibility for their actions and their consequences by ordinary people.

The observations we put forward in this chapter are based on three years of collaborative ethnographic work among vulnerable communities in the Philippines. The focus of our research are communities that have been affected by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Haiyan is one of the strongest storms that made landfall in recent history, which resulted in more than 6,000 casualties and displacement of thousands of families. Tacloban City, the ground zero of the disaster, has been our field site from November 2013 to present. Our original research project aimed to examine communication processes in disaster recovery. Our various papers have addressed different aspects of how communities engaged in acts of protest (Curato, Ong & Longboan 2016) or fundraising (Madianou et al 2015). From the original project, we have pursued other lines of inquiry that include democratic deliberation in disaster zones (Curato 2016; Curato forthcoming) and the social and cultural transformations experienced by sexual minorities (Ong 2017).

During this period, we have witnessed the rise of Rodrigo Duterte, particularly the ways in which local communities—those who lost everything less than three years ago—have come together to also raise funds, volunteer, and campaign for the controversial leader. We have interviewed over 100 respondents during this period and participated in town hall meetings, fiestas and religious celebrations, and house visits. In the following sections, we aim to recount narratives of poor people's perceptions of Duterte and their specific rationalities of

supporting a leader despite of—or sometimes even because of—scandals such as his rape joke. Following protocols of ethnographic research, we have anonymised the names of respondents and communities in which they live.

Responsiveness to latent anxieties

‘My only wish’ said Marites, ‘is for my son to stay in school and not do bad things.’ Marites said this in our interview, two years before Rodrigo Duterte entered the political centre stage. Marites and her family used to live in a slum community before the storm. She describes herself as ‘fortunate’ to have been selected as beneficiary of a housing program led by a local NGO. From her shanty made of drift wood and recycled tarpaulin, Marites now lives in a concrete home, with her own toilet, a garden, and, most importantly, security of tenure. To receive this home, she had to render dozens of hours of ‘sweat equity’ – a term the NGO uses to refer to the hours beneficiaries spent as volunteers in homebuilding. She was dutiful in attending values formation programs and community meetings, as part of the requirement of receiving a house.

When Marites expressed her wish, she was referring to her son who just turned thirteen. It was not immediately clear what she meant by ‘not do bad things.’ Only when probed that she said *droga* (drugs) as her source of anxiety. A few blocks away from where she lives are teenage boys notorious for selling *shabu* (crystal methamphetamine). She is worried that if her son becomes a friend or an enemy of these boys, her family’s future will be in jeopardy.

What Marites demonstrates is what we refer to as ‘latent anxiety.’ It is a sense of discomfort that is ‘present but not central, mundane but still worrisome, publicised but not politicised’ (Curato 2016: 98-99). Marites’s story is common in our ethnographic work. From a respondent who missed our interview because her husband got high and smashed her jaw the previous night, to a group of fathers laughing nervously when a drug addict approached us and said something incoherent, the issue of illegal drugs has been present in everyday life. The problem was widely acknowledged for creating unpleasant experiences but this topic is rarely in the centre of political conversations. Often, solutions to the drug problems are privatised, whether it is through neighbours who break-up fist fights among addicts, or priests who provide counsel to parishioners with family members who have fallen through the cracks.

To say that the issue of illegal drugs in the Philippines has caused anxiety, however, is not to say that the Philippines can be considered a narco-state based on empirical data. Government’s own data demonstrates that drug use in the Philippines is less than 2 percent of the population (see Dangerous Drugs Board, 2008). A US State Department report states the Philippines has one of the highest use of crystal meth in Asia but nevertheless commends the Aquino regime (Duterte’s predecessor) for its special effort in taking on transnational drug trafficking organisations (United States State Department 2015). What Duterte masterfully builds is a resonant narrative of injury that pits the anxieties of citizens who consider themselves to have played by the rules versus those who did not know better and fell into the cracks.

The angle of virtuous citizenship is central to this narrative. Marites's example demonstrates how she distinguishes her family from the troublemakers around the corner. Integral to her self-identity is the hard work she put in to deserve her home. She finds little sympathy for addicts that get in to trouble for these are the same people causing stress in her daily life. Other respondents articulate this in various ways. One construction worker considers it his personal shame when he recommends his mates for a job to his employer, only to find out they would show up late for work because they 'snorted something.' A school teacher finds it unacceptable that some of her neighbours fall in the bait of the drug trade, while she had to find creative and 'decent' ways to make money, such as selling macaroni or plastic pails in the market during weekends, when her pay check could not last another week. Marites's community leader considers 'troublemakers' (*pasaway*) as burdens in community building. Unlike Marites and her neighbours who pull their weight in organising livelihood projects for the community, the troublemakers are liabilities—the 'do nothings' who act like thugs (*sigá*).

It is this context of virtuous citizenship, coupled with the latent anxieties caused by illegal drugs, that Duterte's campaign effectively politicized. The populist logic of portraying addicts as 'the dangerous other' is a response to a citizenry that already considers addicts as 'the other' but did not have the confidence to name and shame the enemy (see Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). Duterte rendered visible the sense of unfairness that virtuous citizens had endured. His brazen articulation of the problem—from calling the Philippines a narco-state to his campaign promise of dumping bodies of addicts in Manila Bay—establishes the gravity of these anxieties and provides recognition of the legitimacy of citizens' anxieties. Other presidential candidates proposed technocratic and humane ways of addressing the drug problem. One advocated a geotagging technology as solution to crime, another proposed an intensified yet compassionate rehabilitation program. These solutions are undoubtedly reasonable. However, they failed to accurately speak to the injuries a frustrated public had to endure over years of a reform-oriented, technocratic yet often callous politicians associated to Duterte's predecessor and other 'progressive' political elites. Duterte, in other words, responded to a particular kind of voice, a voice that demands quick solutions using the language of retribution. As historian Vicente Rafael (2016) puts it, what Duterte shares with the crowd is 'not any sort of policy proposal or political vision, but the residues of an injured pride and a frayed ego.'

This observation is reminiscent of Arlie Hochschild's (2016) findings in her ethnographic work with the American right. Hochschild finds that support for Donald Trump is not surprising, when viewed from the perspective of Americans who feel that immigrants are 'cutting in line.' Trump, like Duterte, recognised the anxieties of those who feel that they have been patiently waiting for their break for a better life, only to be taken over by unscrupulous others (criminals, drug dealers, etc). Populist personalities provide a sense that the virtuous people are getting their dues by clamping down on undeserved beneficiaries of a failing system. In Duterte's case, this takes the form of what Wataru Kusaka (2017) describes as bandit-like morality, where compassion and violence co-exist under a patriarchal boss. Walden Bello, similarly, characterises Duterte's responsiveness as 'cariño brutal' or a 'volatile mix of will to power, a commanding personality, and gangster charm that fulfils his followers' deep-seated yearning for a father figure who will finally end what they see as the 'national chaos'" (Bello

2017b: 78). For John Andrew Evangelista (2017), Duterte's hyper-masculine performance serves to legitimise his tough-handed approach to governance. By performing the role of the 'father of the nation,' he can justify his enforcement of curfews, limit the sales of alcohol, and demand full obedience for he is ready to beat up those who misbehave. Duterte, as Evangelista argues, is 'the intersection of many forms of strong masculinity—the strongman leader, the disciplinarian father, the punisher, the womanizer' (Evangelista 2017: 258).

At the height of the electoral campaign, it became increasingly apparent that Duterte's supporters have been emboldened to call out addicts. 'You better change now, Duterte is going to win,' said one of our key informants to a neighbour known to be a bully—the kind who pinches cigarettes from the village store. Others have expressed their support for Duterte's language of killing, for they feel that arresting criminals, especially the rich ones, will only receive plush treatment in prison. In the headlines two years before the elections were photographs of drug lords' prison cells that looked like high-end hotels, with jacuzzi, private gyms, a recording studio, and their very own drug laboratory. It is not an overstatement to say that the system is beyond repair. What Duterte brought to the conversation is a refreshing, responsive, albeit morbid take on an everyday issue.

Responsiveness to aversion towards stylised politics

How was Duterte able to pull this off? Elections in the Philippines are often described as a battle of guns, goons, golds, and, belatedly, gigabytes. How can an 'outsider elite' (Mudde, 2004), one who does not hail from the lineage of sugar barons and business empires, mount a credible political campaign?

Part of the reason, we find, relates to Duterte's responsiveness to the public's increasing aversion to stylised politics. Political campaigns in the Philippines have always been spectacular affairs. Elections have a carnivalesque character, where candidates are expected to take the stage, woo the audience through song, dance, and a couple of jokes in a speech (Hedman, 2010; McEnteer 1996; for similar comparison, see Banerjee 2014). In recent decades, however, campaigns have become stylised to respond to the demands of a mediated political landscape. This means carefully curating images of politicians by a professional team of public relations consultants, spin doctors, and political operators. Sleek posters, color-coded t-shirts, and highly manufactured campaign ads with melodramatic storylines characterized earlier Filipino political campaigns until Duterte came along. Duterte offered a stark contrast to earlier styles due to his particular performance of 'authenticity' that resonated with reality television and social media vernaculars that converge around 'really real' moments, or what Laura Grindstaff (2002) calls 'the money shot.' Duterte's shock value—from his rape joke to the cursing of the Pope—became the reliable emotional climax to television news and social media chatter in the election season.

People 'idolise his style' because he displays conviction, says Chris, an activist working with transport groups. Chris is critical of Duterte, but he also understands why the firebrand has gained appeal among his comrades. Unlike politicians running on populist clichés of caring for the poor, calling out the greed of the rich, and promising a better life, Duterte's populism

appeals to the visceral and unspeakable. Prize-winning writer Jessica Zafra best describes this political style. 'Of course, you love Duterte,' she says, 'he is your id' (Zafra, 2016).

You wish you could point to the criminal scum and order them to be shot. Someone cuts ahead of you in traffic? Bang! You wish you could make rape jokes. They're just words, right? Why don't these wimps get how funny it is to say you want to violate a woman? Your mother, your wife, your sisters, your friends: why don't they get it? Duterte's words are not calculated to impress the voters. He doesn't have to calculate. He's just saying the words that are already in your head. He is your walking, talking, preening, strutting id.

Duterte deviated from what is expected of presidential candidates. Instead of making a case for his presidency to the economic elite, he arrived in a business forum wearing a polo shirt with sleeves rolled up, delivered a speech peppered with curses, anecdotes about his exploits as city mayor, and jokes about Viagra. Instead of getting the Catholic Church's support, he slammed the bishops for failing to act on sex abuse scandals. There are no sacred cows in Duterte's Philippines is the message of this performance. During Presidential Debates, Duterte took control of the podium not by engaging with policy debates. He said he would gladly copy the platforms of his opponents such as the expansion of conditional cash transfer programs. He distinguished himself by exposing his opponents' weakness. His closest rival Grace Poe, for example, was gaining steam for counteracting the impression that she is merely a neophyte senator ill-prepared to be president. Pristinely packaged for the television debate with her shiny hair pulled back and white shift dress, she explained her policy solutions backed with statistics and expert evidence. Yet it took one question from Duterte to expose her political naivety, when he asked her what she would do if China bombs two of the Philippines' Coast Guard cutters. Poe gave a meandering answer to a straightforward question. Duterte, faced with a similar question in a press conference, said he would jet ski to disputed territories and plant the Philippine flag.

To say that Duterte responded to people's aversion to stylised politics is not to say that he did not engage in stylisation himself. After all, the affective foundations of Duterte's dark charisma is anchored on the 'visual, performative, and aesthetic elements' of populism (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014: 386). For Ana Cristina Pertierra (2017), Duterte's stylised politics builds on the long line of actor-politicians in the Philippines who are adept at embracing elements of melodrama. There is consistency in Duterte's political style—from his crass language to joining formal events wearing everyday clothing, from his tardiness in his appointments to his flirtatious banter with beautiful women. Duterte's 'authenticity' is a performance of his identity as a 'small town mayor,' one who makes simple solutions to complex problems, has little patience for formalities, and shuns 'Imperial Manila's' elitist circles, and demonstrates compassion to virtuous citizens.

More than this, however, we argue that Duterte's political success goes beyond the strongman's performance. Central to his campaign is the active participation and mobilization of his supporters in online spaces, where latent anxieties were organically shared and exchanged yet at the same time strategically channelled toward electoral mobilization. Online spaces such as Facebook groups and news blogs gave home to diverse feelings of resentment

and disenfranchisement coming from various communities and constituencies. For instance, the Facebook groups of survivors of Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda that we have longitudinally observed produced memes and digital posters that pledged support to Duterte anchored specifically around his qualities of leadership in contexts of emergency. Facebook groups of overseas Filipinos who fear the spread of the drug epidemic to their left-behind children similarly produced their own campaign materials demanding ‘strongman’ leadership. As we elaborate in a separate paper (Ong & Cabañes, forthcoming), social media opened up spaces for communities of discontent where like-minded people gathered to exchange and affirm each other’s grievances, in the process giving people confidence to voice out the unspeakable and making uncivil expression acceptable.

Outside the digital public sphere, support is manifest in tens of thousands of Duterte volunteers raising small pots of money to design, print, and disseminate Duterte t-shirts, bracelets, and banners. In Tacloban, we saw teenagers spending time in internet cafes using Microsoft PowerPoint to design a Duterte banner they would hang outside their front door. Some of them are taking orders from their parents or aunties working as nurses in Jeddah or construction workers in Dubai whose latest remittance was slightly higher to allocate budget for Duterte paraphernalia. In a country where the poor are often dismissed as voters who can be bought, the 2016 race illustrated how a strongman can harness political participation. Duterte disrupted the Philippines’ elite democracy by energizing citizens who have felt beaten up for decades.

Responsiveness and democratic imagination

We conclude our chapter by putting forward three questions that we take away from our observations of Duterte’s crass politics and ethical responsiveness. Our goal is to prompt conversations about the emerging legacy of Duterte’s politics and the tensions it creates with democratic ethics. We are using the vocabulary of democratic ethics in our conclusion not only because Duterte operates in a context of a formally democratic political system, but also because democratic ethics provides a normative lens by which we can examine the relationship of responsiveness of an elected leader to his constituents. Responsiveness is an ambivalent concept. It can be used for authoritarian or democratic purposes, liberal or illiberal projects, inspiring or disempowering functions. And so we ask: responsiveness for whom, responsiveness how, and responsiveness for what?

Responsiveness for whom?

Duterte was successful in bestowing attention to the deep-seated injuries of virtuous citizens. For this, he was rewarded with electoral support. While there is little doubt that Duterte energized a constituency that has felt marginalized in the Philippines’ elite democracy, there is also little doubt that Duterte displays no interest in responding to his critics. From calling United Nations Special Rapporteur on summary executions Agnes Callamard a fool to imprisoning his top critic Senator Leila De Lima for trumped up drug charges, the regime’s responsiveness, is, at best, selective.

Selective responsiveness is corrosive for democratic politics. It perpetuates political polarization which creates a toxic environment for public deliberation. A quick glance at the

quality of discourses online demonstrates this, especially as various political parties have harnessed affordances of social media for attention-hacking, including hiring fake account operators to lobby for different politicians (Ong & Cabañes, forthcoming).

Responsiveness how?

Responsiveness is a relationship of power. The powerless seeks recognition, while the powerful can bestow it. Democratic politics tames this relationship of power by institutionalising mechanisms of accountability. The exclusionary potential of responsiveness can be held in check by providing spaces for the public to demand attention to those who are getting left behind.

And so alarm bells go off when the President declares ‘what’s important is I did what I want’ in his State of the Nation Address, or when Duterte’s Congress overwhelmingly vote to allocate \$20 annual budget to the Commission on Human Rights. Some see this as an affront to the liberal and participatory ethos enshrined in the Philippines’ post-authoritarian constitution. For others, this is Duterte crossing the line between populism to fascism, where a charismatic leader derives power from a multiclass base to deny basic human, civil and political rights to those who do not fall under his definition of virtuous citizens (Bello 2017b). Responsiveness may be a deeply personal relationship between a leader and his constituents, but democratic politics demands safeguards for such relationships not to deteriorate to abuse.

Responsiveness for what?

Responsiveness is a critical function of any political project. Emboldening citizens to lay bare their latent anxieties and encouraging them to actively take part in the electoral process are notable ways in which Duterte disrupted an unresponsive elite democracy. A year into his presidency, however, we ask, responsiveness for what? Which interests and worldviews benefit from his selective responsiveness?

We find that Duterte’s responsiveness has evolved to become a function of his illiberal project (Curato 2017). The promise of disrupting the Philippines’ elite democracy quickly evolved to an exposition of the country’s fragile liberal culture. Invoking the voices of virtuous citizens to order the genocide [yes, this is what Duterte said] of drug addicts set in motion the deeply disturbing normalization of state-sponsored violence and hatred (see Simangan, forthcoming). As we write this chapter, media organisations have stopped counting the casualties of Duterte’s drug war. Human rights groups say over 12,000 have been killed. Police figures say less than 5,000.

We started our chapter with an enthusiastic depiction of Duterte’s capacity to render deep-seated frustrations visible. We end on a bleak note, for we also recognise how responsiveness can be politicized for illiberal purposes. It is here where we draw the line.

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