

## Book Review

*Counterrevolution: The Global Rise of the Far Right*, by Walden Bello. UK: Practical Action Publishing Ltd, 2019. Pp. 196. ISBN 9781788530514.<sup>1</sup>

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The strength of the book, *Counterrevolution: The Global Rise of the Far Right*, by Walden Bello is its comparative focus and its engagement with classic theories in understanding the rise of democracy and fascism. Bello drew upon the work of Barrington Moore Jr., which is both theoretically astute and methodologically rigorous.

That said, despite the book's stated goal of doing comparative historical analysis, it was lacking in specifying explicitly causal relationships and mechanisms, and processes within systematic and contextualized comparisons. What would have helped is a chapter that specifies all the factors identified by the theories that explain the emergence of the far right and identifying not only the presence and absence of each in the cases, but also the causal configurations. After all, there are multiple pathways to the same outcome. Scholars and activists have stated that the question is whether or not there is a global far right. The far right is complex and dynamic—continuously evolving with elements that sometimes are more akin to a hybrid regime and, at times, outright fascism. We should seek to clarify what is *specific* to each situation and what *unites* them, so that cautious generalizations can be made.

Drawing from the classic theories and past events within the cases, Bello focuses on three important actors: the peasants, the urban

middle class, and the elite, particularly the oligarchy. The analysis should not be limited to these actors, especially as we try to further unpack the complexities of why and how ideologies of the right would resonate and spread. In the case of support for Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalism and Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs, we see the central role of the diaspora and microbloggers who have become the source of news for the public.

Modi, with his projection of Indian nationalism, is popular with large segments of the Indian diaspora. In the 2019 Indian elections, which put the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or Indian People's Party back in power with an increased majority, the Indian diaspora played a major role in fundraising and promoting Modi. The Houston rally, when Modi visited the US, shows us the strength of the diaspora, not only in backing Modi, but also in promoting Hindu nationalism. The diaspora has even used the language of liberal democracy to further their cause. Hindu nationalist organizations have historically portrayed themselves as liberal social and religious groups that denounce bigotry and uphold equality. Hindu nationalists in America have also utilized their minority status to protect themselves while supporting a majoritarian supremacist movement in India.

Can the same be said about the Filipino diaspora? We know that Duterte has a wide support from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). The 2016 elections had the highest turnout in overseas voting in a decade, with 31.65 percent of votes cast. The Philippine Embassy in Ottawa noted a nearly 500 percent increase in ballots cast in Canada, including 347 percent in Toronto, 478 percent in Ottawa, and 656 percent in Vancouver, where majority of Filipino Canadians reside. Early in the campaign, Bongbong Marcos obtained the support of a large number of OFWs in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. His followers formed Facebook pages like "OFW's for Bongbong Marcos (BBM 2016)" and "BongBong Marcos United for OFWs WorldWide." In these spaces, they appealed to their compatriots to vote for Marcos, conveyed longing for the "golden years" of the dictatorship, and galvanized hometown and village organizations to encourage Filipinos to go to the polls. Their endorsement of Marcos also stemmed from the argument, "*Ang kasalanan ng ama ay hindi kasalanan ng anak*" (The sins of the father are not of the son). Unsurprisingly, Marcos won in the overseas absentee votes, surpassing his rival, Leni Robredo of

the Liberal Party, in 49 out of 59 Philippine posts. Robredo was the top choice of overseas voters in 10 posts: Agana (Guam), the United States, Canberra, Jakarta, The Vatican, New Delhi, Yangon, Berne, The Hague, and Port Moresby.

But what's the appeal of Duterte and Marcos among OFWs? In my initial findings on the social origins of political conservatism among Filipino migrants, where I look at Filipinos who voted for Trump in the US and those who voted and continue to support Duterte in the Netherlands, I found the centrality of *disiplina* (discipline) in their narratives. For a lot of Filipinos living in these countries, they see what can be achieved with discipline in basic things—such as following traffic rules and disposing garbage properly. As one of my respondents said:

*Napansin ko na dito sa Netherlands (I noticed here in the Netherlands), Filipinos follow the pedestrian lane, they park their bikes where it should be, [and] even follow the quiet sign in trains. Kapag umuwi sa Pilipinas, nakakainis na makita mo na hindi. So hindi talaga tayo ang problema—yung bansa natin na hindi importante ang disiplina. Na-e-encourage tayo doon na maging pasaway. (If they go home to the Philippines, it's annoying to see that they don't. The problem is not us—our country doesn't value discipline. There, we are encouraged to be stubborn.)*

It is important to look at structural explanations in the rise of the far right. But let us not forget the agency of actors that support these leaders as well, as the supporters of Modi and Duterte in the diaspora show us. Structural determinants are significant, but focusing on what Max Weber calls *verstehen*—meaning to analyze actors' meaning-making processes—can help us further unpack these complexities.

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## Note

1. This review is based on a commentary for Dr. Walden Bello's book launch held at the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) last January 20, 2020.