

Trickster Politics in the Philippines

Understanding Duterte Through the Book *The Sovereign Trickster*

Proceedings of the Book Talk: “The Sovereign Trickster – Death
and Laughter in the Age of Duterte”

17 March 2022

via Zoom and Facebook Live

UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Compiled by Maria Corazon C. Reyes

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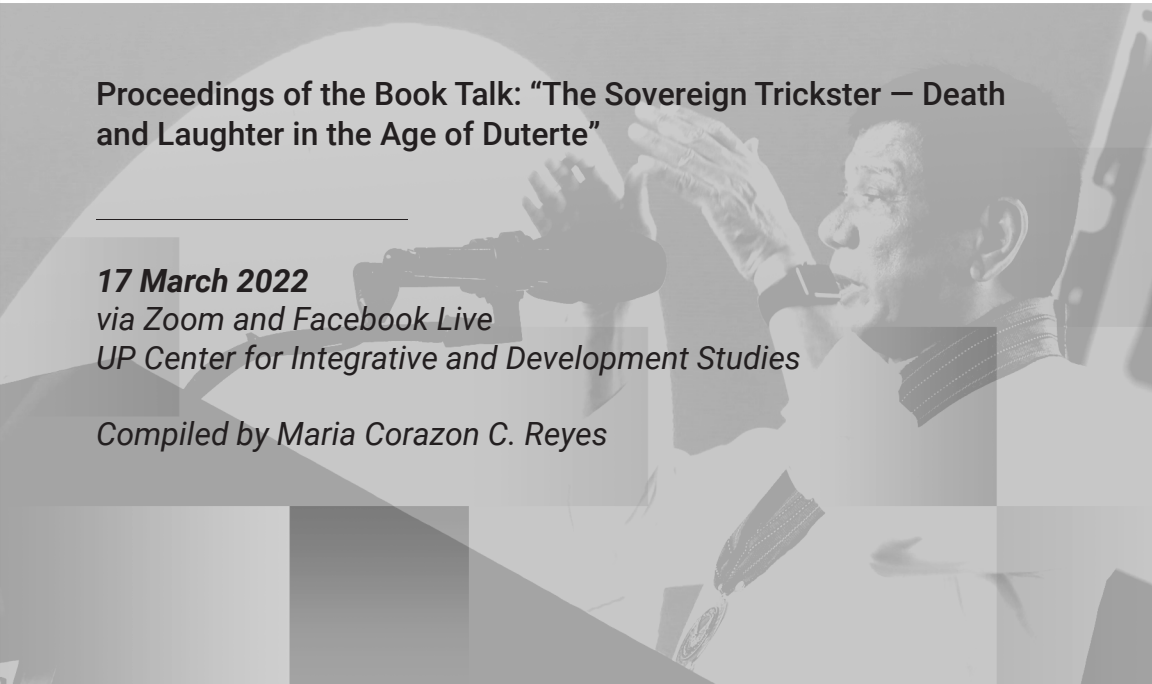
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UP CIDS | PROCEEDINGS

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“President Rodrigo Duterte assures members of the Philippine Airforce of a salary hike by yearend during the 48th anniversary of the 250th Presidential Airlift Wing at the Villamor Airbase in Pasay City on September 13.”

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ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS

The University of the Philippines Center of Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) hosted a book talk on 17 March 2022, featuring *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte*, authored by Dr. Vicente L. Rafael. Co-organizers included UP Diliman's Department of Political Science, the *Philippine Political Science Journal*, and the Ateneo de Manila University Press.

The goal of the event was to analyze Dr. Rafael's insightful book, published by Duke University Press and distributed in the Philippines by Ateneo de Manila University Press. More than just a book presentation, the event served as a platform for academics and the public to engage with the complex and often paradoxical figure of Rodrigo Duterte, the former president of the Philippines (2016–2022).

This book talk was documented by PSPC staff, Alinia Jesam D. Jimenez and Maria Corazon C. Reyes.

Introduction

Dr. Vicente L. Rafael's work, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte*, offers a critical lens to examine the era of Rodrigo Duterte, particularly the interplay of power, violence, and humor in shaping the political landscape. By using the concept of the "trickster," Dr. Rafael sheds light on Duterte's multifaceted persona, characterized by boasts, jokes, threats, and a chilling ability to exploit fear.

This book talk, organized by the University of the Philippines Center of Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC), is timely and should not to be considered solely as a discussion of a literary work. It offers an opportunity for academics, students, and the wider community to engage in a critical dialogue about the Duterte era, its legacies, and its enduring impact on the Philippines. By dissecting the complexities of power, humor, and violence as manifested in Duterte's persona, the event aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical landscape of the country.

Dr. Rafael, the author, is a prominent figure in the areas of history, Southeast Asian studies, and cultural analysis. Born and raised in Manila, Philippines, he is currently a Professor of History and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle. His contributions extend far beyond academic walls. Dr. Rafael is also a prolific author, known for his insightful critiques of power structures and cultural dynamics, particularly in the Philippines. His work often combines historical analysis with a keen understanding of cultural anthropology and literary studies.

The event's discussant is Dr. Oscar T. Serquiña Jr., an Associate Professor in the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts (DSCTA) at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Dr. Serquiña's research interests are rhetoric, theater, and performance studies, illuminating the intersections between language, expression, and societal impact. Dr. Serquiña's insights and understanding of how humor, violence, and political performance intertwine offer a fresh perspective on Dr. Rafael's central arguments.

The event is moderated by Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco, a Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of the Philippines Diliman. With a career spanning both government and academia, Dr. Encinas-Franco effectively contributes to the talk with real-life observations.

Opening Remarks

- **Jean S. Encinas-Franco, Ph.D.**
*Professor, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines Diliman*

A warm welcome to everyone joining this vital conversation about a book poised to spark national dialogue: *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* by Professor Vicente L. Rafael.

This book examines the Duterte era through a multifaceted lens, looking at his complex public persona and its impact on contemporary Philippines. Professor Rafael presents Duterte as a “trickster figure” who employs boasts, humor, terror, and victimhood to weave a narrative around critical issues like the drug war, policing, and extrajudicial killings. He then expands the conversation to encompass neoliberal citizenship, intimacy, and even photojournalism, offering a truly prismatic view of this significant period.

We are especially honored to have both the author, Professor Rafael, and our discussant, Professor Oscar T. Serquiña Jr., with us today.

Professor Rafael is not only the author of the book but also teaches History and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Washington. His research and teaching have long focused on the Philippines, the United States, and Southeast Asia. His latest work promises a nuanced examination of the Duterte era.

Joining him is Professor Serquiña Jr., an Associate Professor in the Department of Speech, Communication and Theatre Arts at the University of the Philippines Diliman. His expertise in rhetoric, communication, theater, and performance studies, particularly relevant to his “Persuasion and the Polls” Project, will offer a unique perspective on Duterte’s public persona and its rhetorical impact.

Also, please stay tuned later for an exclusive discount announcement on *The Sovereign Trickster* book.

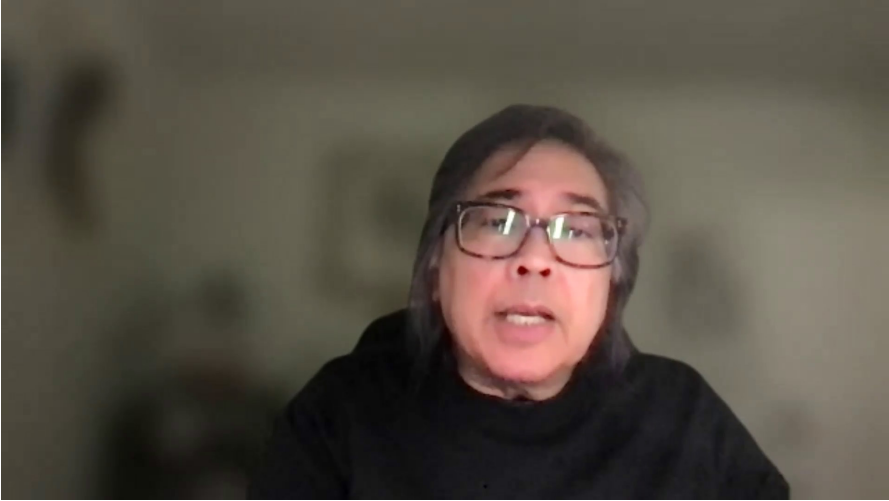
Without further ado, we welcome Professor Rafael to share his insights into *The Sovereign Trickster*, followed by Professor Serquiña Jr.’s insightful discussion. Professor Rafael, the virtual floor is yours.

Discussion

- **Vicente L. Rafael, Ph.D.**
Professor
History and Southeast Asian Studies
University of Washington, Seattle

Dr. Rafael began his talk by expressing his gratitude to the organizers, including Dr. Aries Arugay, the team at UP CIDS, Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco, Dr. Oscar Serquiña Jr., Dr. Maria Ela Atienza, as well as Maria Karina Bolasco from Ateneo de Manila University Press, for organizing a virtual book launch for his new work. He then outlined his discussion, explaining he would cover the book's central themes and highlight its key points. He specifically mentioned the title's significance, focusing on the ironic contrast between "sovereign" and "trickster" in relation to Duterte's leadership style. Dr. Rafael also hinted at the book's exploration of Duterte's use of humor and laughter as tools for intimidation and control, contrasting them with the figure of a trickster who traditionally seeks to subvert authority. He briefly mentioned a chapter dedicated to Duterte's vulgar jokes and their role in suppressing dissent.

Further explaining the title's importance, Dr. Rafael highlighted the inherent irony it presents. He juxtaposed Duterte's claim to sovereignty, embodied in his presidential role and control over life and death, with the figure of a trickster, traditionally an authority subverter. He acknowledged the historical, theoretical underpinnings of Duterte's "authoritarian idea of sovereignty" and his ability to "decide on who shall live and who shall die." However, he then introduced the contrasting figure of a trickster. As a figure prevalent in Philippine and Southeast Asian folklore, the trickster is known for employing pranks and jokes to achieve their goals. Humor is identified as a crucial element of Duterte's tricksterism, emphasizing its "cunning use" to intimidate and overwhelm opponents. While laughter fosters a sense of camaraderie among his supporters, Dr. Rafael argued that it is a calculated strategy to instill fear and silence dissent.



- Dr. Vicente L. Rafael discussing the main points in his book.

This “conjunction of sovereignty and tricksterism,” as Dr. Rafael posited, forms the central theme of the book. He described it as an “aesthetics of vulgarity,” requiring an examination of how vulgarity is employed as a tool for governance, intimidation, and dissent suppression.¹ He referred to a dedicated chapter analyzing Duterte’s vulgar jokes, including those about rape, his own body, and even past experiences, offering a glimpse into the specific examples explored in his work.

Additionally, Dr. Rafael highlighted the key takeaways from his book. First, he emphasized the crucial question the book explores: What were the underlying conditions that allowed a figure like Duterte to rise to power? He stressed that these conditions are deeply rooted in history, dating back to the colonial period, and are likely to have lasting effects. He then identified two key factors contributing to Duterte’s emergence: counterinsurgency and neoliberalism. He framed the drug war, central to Duterte’s image, as a form of counterinsurgency targeting those labeled “social enemies.” He further connected this strategy to the rise of neoliberalism, characterized by the “marketization of citizenship” and

¹ Vicente L. Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 64.

commodification of various aspects of life. This, he argued, creates “neoliberal precarity,” a state of anxiety and uncertainty that is fertile ground for a counterinsurgency operation like the drug war.

For his second point, Dr. Rafael addressed the common perception of the drug war as a class war due to its disproportionate impact on the poor. He acknowledged its validity, but he also proposed a nuanced view. He argued that while many victims belong to lower classes, the perpetrators often share similar backgrounds. Instead of a class war, Dr. Rafael suggested framing it as a civil war. He emphasized how it creates alliances and patronage networks across classes while pitting individuals against each other. This complexity, he argued, makes organizing resistance against the violence particularly challenging, compared to a more straightforward class conflict. He promised to delve deeper into this distinction later in his talk.

For his third point, Dr. Rafael focused on the concept of community. Drawing on ethnographic research from impoverished areas like Barangay Bagong Silang in Caloocan City, he emphasized the unique power dynamics and intimacy that characterize these communities. He described these communities as “bound by a forced closeness and constant interaction” due to limited space and resources. This necessitates a form of *pakikisama*, a practice of living together that is both compelling and obligatory. However, Dr. Rafael stressed that *pakikisama* isn’t simply a cultural value but a dynamic social practice. He argued that *pakikisama* can be hierarchical and unequal as individuals with greater resources hold more power within the community. This inequality necessitates *diskarte* (resourcefulness) and ingenuity to navigate these dynamics. The combination of *pakikisama* and *diskarte* drives individuals toward both legal and illegal activities, including the drug trade, in their struggle to survive and thrive within these communities.

Dr. Rafael concluded with the key takeaways by explaining the darker side of community intimacy. He argued that the very factors that bind these communities—forced closeness, resource scarcity, and *pakikisama*—can also lead to violence, status competition, and entrenched inequality. This, he explained, creates fertile ground for conflict and the rise of authoritarian figures. Such figures, like Duterte and the police, offer a promise of stability and order while simultaneously reinforcing the existing inequalities that fuel the need for *diskarte* and potentially criminal activity. Dr. Rafael then emphasized the complex

power dynamics within these communities. He suggested that they create a breeding ground for an “authoritarian imaginary,” a collective acceptance of authoritarian solutions to address the challenges of poverty and inequality.² This acceptance, he argued, ultimately serves to solidify the existing power structures and resource distribution within these communities. Meanwhile, Dr. Rafael also mentioned additional topics explored in the book, including a brief history of electoral politics and its connection to “communities of intimacy” and *pakikisama*. He highlighted the colonial roots of Philippine electoral politics and its tendency to utilize democratic means for undemocratic ends.

Dr. Rafael then discussed the book’s unique structure, featuring five chapters interwoven with short “sketches” meant to connect and challenge the reader’s perspective. These “sketches,” ranging from essays on photojournalism during the drug war to analyses of Duterte’s jokes and neoliberal citizenship, were originally Facebook posts or opinion pieces. He explained their purpose as “rehearsals” for the longer chapters, prompting readers to engage with deeper analysis while offering a critical context and even challenging some assumptions.

Prompted by a suggestion, Dr. Rafael discussed the book’s methodological approach, highlighting his reliance on the works of anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers. He mentioned two key figures, Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe, whose concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics, respectively, have been instrumental in his analysis.

Biopolitics, as Foucault defined, suggests that the state is responsible not only for its citizens’ survival but also for their well-being and flourishing. This leads to state involvement in diverse areas like education, healthcare, sanitation, and policing, aiming to shape citizens’ behavior and ensuring a specific quality of life.

However, Dr. Rafael argued that this biopolitical concern for life coexists with its necropolitical counterpart. The necropolitical zone encompasses individuals deemed less deserving, such as criminals, insurgents, or drug users, who are targeted and categorized as social enemies. These individuals face death, exile, exclusion, neglect, or are left to die within this realm. He emphasized that every

² Rafael, 136.

state grapples with this tension between the biopolitical and necropolitical, balancing the needs of deserving and undeserving citizens. In the Philippines, a “moral economy” exists, where certain groups are deemed more or less deserving based on cultural norms.³ Duterte’s regime, as Dr. Rafael posited, capitalizes on this existing moral framework, targeting drug users and consigning them to the necropolitical realm.

Dr. Rafael concluded his discussion by summarizing concepts and themes he wanted to highlight. These include: the methodological issue; the making of Philippine modernity; the question of sovereignty and tricksterism and the tensions between the two; the aesthetics of vulgarity and the characteristics of Duterte’s realm; the conditions of the possibility of counterinsurgency and neoliberalism; the dynamics and power relations characterizing communities that turn intimacy into both provocation and a condition of possibility for existence; and intimacy as a way of provoking tension, conflict, danger, and death.

Dr. Rafael then said his thanks and invited Dr. Serquiña to offer his perspective and continue the conversation.

Dr. Encinas-Franco thanked Dr. Rafael’s insightful discussion, and introduced Dr. Serquiña to provide his reaction and share his perspective on the book. She then acknowledged the *Philippine Political Science Journal*, UP CIDS, and Ateneo de Manila University Press for sponsoring the event.

³ Rafael, 129.

■ **Oscar T. Serquiña Jr., Ph.D.**⁴

Associate Professor

Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts

University of the Philippines Diliman

In response to Dr. Rafael's discussion, Dr. Oscar T. Serquiña Jr. presented his critiques through the lens of power and communicative behavior. Dr. Serquiña pointed out that while many perceive Rodrigo Duterte as an enigmatic and unpredictable figure who defies modern statecraft and conventional leadership, Dr. Rafael offers a distinct perspective in his book. Instead of focusing on who Duterte is, Dr. Rafael delves into what he does. He analyzes how Duterte's vulgarity, deceit, and dismantling of societal norms challenge the expectations of a dignified leader.



- Dr. Oscar T. Serquiña Jr. during his discussion about the book.

⁴ Dr. Serquiña's discussion was later published as a review essay: Serquiña Jr., Oscar Tantoco, "No Beast Larger than All of Us: Theorizing Strongman Rule in the Philippine Postcolony: A Review Essay of Vicente L. Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* (Durham and Quezon City: Duke University Press and Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2022)," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 43, no. 2 (2022): 253–258.

Dr. Serquiña continues that while Dr. Rafael acknowledges Duterte’s puzzling popularity, he also questions the positive reception of Duterte’s “mass murderer” image and fear-based governance. He avoids resorting to simplistic explanations or predetermined categories often used to paint Duterte as a democratic aberration. Instead, he examines Duterte’s actions—wielding power, delivering inflammatory speeches, projecting virility, and exhibiting physical and symbolic might—to instill paranoia and fear. By doing so, as Dr. Rafael argues, is the key to understanding Duterte’s establishment and entrenchment as a national leader. Dr. Serquiña asserts that Dr. Rafael's strength lies in his insightful explanation of how Duterte operates, not just who he is perceived to be.

Dr. Serquiña also noted that Dr. Rafael’s work is characterized by its broad historical perspective and in-depth analysis. It offers a powerful explanation for the rise of authoritarian figures like Duterte. The comparative approach employed in the book examines “the matrix of authoritarianism across the world,” coupled with meticulous attention to both official and everyday events in the Philippines (i.e., the close reading of a nation), providing a nuanced understanding often absent in other analyses. Instead of viewing Duterte as an anomaly or a sudden misstep, the book shows that Duterte’s ascent is rooted in centuries-old colonial and post-colonial structures that fostered inequality, impunity, and susceptibility to both democratic and authoritarian impulses. This idea further demonstrates that Duterte is not unique, but rather he belongs to a lineage of global leaders sharing characteristics with figures like Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

In addition, Dr. Serquiña stated that the book avoids simplistic comparisons. It meticulously outlines the specificities that differentiate Duterte from Marcos, including their approaches to statecraft, foreign policy, and personal image. By juxtaposing the broader context of global political structures with the distinct characteristics of individual leaders like Duterte, the book reveals both the common threads and the unique qualities that define different forms of tyranny. This combined approach highlights the dual importance of historicizing Duterte’s rise while also attending to the specific details of his biography, political trajectory, personal psychology, and public pronouncements. By embracing this multifaceted perspective, the book offers a rich and illuminating explanation of the complex phenomenon of authoritarian leadership.

Drawing on his expertise in Philippine rhetorical practices, Dr. Serquiña explained that the book also offers a unique perspective on President Duterte's communication style. He highlighted how Duterte's "communicative behavior" transcended that of any previous Philippine president in terms of notoriety. While known for his controversial drug war, Duterte also garnered fear through his verbal attacks on critics and opponents. Additionally, Dr. Serquiña highlighted the commentary and criticism of Duterte's offensive language, sexist jokes, and "doublespeak." However, he emphasized that the book goes beyond mere critique. Rather, it investigates the "power of storytelling" that Duterte displays. This analysis reveals Duterte's ability to effortlessly shift between victim and aggressor by manipulating power dynamics through his narratives. According to Dr. Serquiña, the book emphasizes the critical role of rhetoric and "aesthetics of vulgarity" in establishing Duterte's symbolic authority and maintaining his connection with supporters. It echoes sociologist Nicole Curato's assertion that Duterte's vulgarity is not incidental but essential to his rule. Moreover, the book posits that while Duterte's speeches deviate from traditional Western notions of rhetoric, they are not inherently subversive or emancipatory. The book clarifies that this style lacks any element of democracy, with its rambling, jokes, and shaming tactics. This then contributes to Duterte's "dissipatory behavior," allowing him to undermine any authority challenging his own.⁵

Dr. Serquiña then stated that Dr. Rafael's book depicts Duterte as the sole author of narratives, demanding passive acceptance of his rhetoric without expecting any genuine engagement or dialogue. This "prismatic view" encompasses the far-reaching implications of Duterte's rule, including the drug war, extrajudicial killings, authoritarian pronouncements, and state-sanctioned repression.⁶ Dr. Serquiña further noted that Dr. Rafael's analysis stands out for its depth and nuance, offering a valuable exploration of a complex and controversial figure.

Dr. Serquiña continued with a more specific critique of how Dr. Rafael analyzes Duterte. According to Dr. Serquiña, the book also offers a framework for understanding Duterte's methods of governing, specifically Duterte's distinction between who "deserves to live and die." It proposes a vocabulary to grasp both

⁵ Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster*, 81.

⁶ Rafael, 3.

the benevolence he extends to supporters and the brutality unleashed on critics. Ultimately, the book demystifies this enigmatic and unsettling figure. The book also emphasizes that Duterte is not beyond the critical gaze of the Filipino people and should not be seen as an unfathomable entity.

Dr. Serquiña also mentioned that Dr. Rafael positions his book as a “diagnosis rather than a ‘definitive history’ or ‘exhaustive examination’” of the Duterte era. However, by examining the “roots and routes of ‘Dutertismo,’” and “scrutinizing the socio-political context of Duterte’s presidency,” the book paints a picture of the Philippines in turmoil.⁷ It portrays a country where “the legal system is profoundly politicized,”⁸ with a backlog in courts, poorly paid judges, and police officers serving an impoverished population. This landscape is further marred by overflowing corpses on the streets, imprisoned critics, stifled dissent, and the feeling that life’s vitality hinges on the whims of a seemingly invincible Duterte. The book depicts Filipinos as trembling in fear, politically paralyzed, and passively receiving Duterte’s rule. The poor, in particular, are portrayed as suffering devastation, despair, and death. Additionally, the book argues that devoid of dignity and trapped in misery, the people become the primary victims of Duterte’s regime, even seemingly relishing his “murderous rants and promises to kill.”⁹ In this scenario, the poor appear entirely subject to Duterte’s mercy, resigned to their fate and trapped in a false consciousness. As Dr. Rafael puts it in the book, “imprisoned in a sort of false consciousness from which they can find no means to escape.”¹⁰

However, Dr. Serquiña cautioned that this is just one of the many interpretations of the complex dynamics at play during the Duterte era. While the book offers valuable insights, it is crucial to consider other perspectives and engage in critical analysis to fully understand the multifaceted realities of this period in Philippine history.

⁷ Serquiña, “No Beast,” 256.

⁸ Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster*, 75.

⁹ Rafael, 60.

¹⁰ Serquiña, “No Beast,” 256.

Furthermore, in his critique, Dr. Serquiña suggested acknowledging potential limitations. This is particularly seen when Dr. Rafael paints a stark picture of Filipinos in the book as passively accepting or even relishing Duterte's authoritarian rule, citing factors like fear, political paralysis, and a false consciousness that traps them in misery. On one hand, this situation suggests that Duterte's attacks, supported by his allies, ultimately weakened and foiled dissenters despite being present. On the other hand, this interpretation presents Duterte as an irresistible force, captivating and entrapping Filipinos in a cycle of violence and fascination. However, Dr. Serquiña stated that multiple voices have challenged this narrative. Feminists, human rights advocates, the Church, and other groups actively resist Duterte's policies, highlighting aspects such as misogyny, indecency, and extrajudicial killings. Photographers document the human cost of the drug war, and legislative efforts seek to address the regime's actions. These actions suggest a more nuanced reality where dissent exists despite the challenges it faces. Furthermore, depicting Filipinos solely as victims trapped in a false consciousness may oversimplify their agency. While acknowledging hardship, it is important to consider how individuals and communities actively navigate and resist oppressive structures. To portray them solely as passive recipients of Duterte's influence risks neglecting their diverse responses and potential for change. Finally, attributing all-encompassing power to Duterte raises questions about the beneficiaries and potential harms of such a portrayal. It asks the question of who benefits from presenting the president as an invincible force, and who might suffer from this narrative of becoming a dominant "fiction." Dr. Serquiña emphasized that while Dr. Rafael's analysis offers valuable insights, it is important to recognize the complexities of resistance, agency, and power dynamics. Doing this is essential for a deeper understanding of the Duterte era and its impact on the Philippines.

Dr. Serquiña further elaborated that while Dr. Rafael acknowledged Duterte's persistent attacks on his opponents, this analysis could be viewed as underplaying the widespread dissent and discontent they engender. The book seemingly omits the lived experiences of Filipinos resisting various forms of discipline and punishment, fighting for the nation's well-being, and demanding an end to criminality and impunity. Counterbalancing the pessimism about the Philippines' future, Dr. Rafael highlights the recent emergence of community

pantries as “a nonauthoritarian alternative” to Duterte instead.¹¹ Community pantries are praised for their “collective ethos,” “reciprocal generosity,” and “community of anonymity,” fostering hope, and standing in stark contrast to Duterte’s “nihilistic management.”¹² This closing note acknowledges a significant social movement but might inadvertently suggest that hope only rose in the later stages of Duterte’s era.

Moreover, Dr. Serquiña argued that a deeper exploration of preexisting and ongoing forms of resistance could provide a more nuanced understanding of the Philippines under Duterte. Examining the experiences of those actively challenging the regime, highlighting their voices and narratives, would offer a richer counterpoint to the portrayal of Filipinos as solely passive or trapped. Furthermore, a critical evaluation of the community pantries is necessary while acknowledging their positive contributions. It is essential to avoid romanticizing or oversimplifying their impact. Understanding their limitations and exploring alternative forms of resistance and activism would also provide a more comprehensive picture of the Philippines’ social and political landscape. Thus, according to Dr. Serquiña, while Dr. Rafael raises important points about dissent and hope, a wider exploration of existing and evolving forms of resistance, beyond solely the community pantries, would enrich the analysis presented in the book. It would also offer a more complete understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the Philippines under Duterte.

Concluding his discussion, Dr. Serquiña presented his alternative perspective to Dr. Rafael’s viewpoints. While acknowledging the hardships faced under Duterte’s regime, he challenged the notion of the Philippines as solely a “dark and dangerous place” where resistance is absent or ineffective. According to Dr. Serquiña, this perspective overlooks the numerous sources and manifestations of hope that persist, even amidst systemic challenges and “contrived governance.” Instead of viewing hope as solely emerging in the “twilight” of Duterte’s rule, Dr. Serquiña proposed to recognize initiatives like community pantries as integral parts of ongoing “struggles that predate and continue alongside Duterte’s

¹¹ Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster*, 141.

¹² Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster*, 143

presidency.” This shift in perspective highlights the dynamism and continuity of resistance movements in the Philippines.

Furthermore, Dr. Serquiña advocated for a participatory approach in analyzing the Duterte era. This involves engaging with the lived experiences of Filipinos who actively wage battles against tyranny and terror, going beyond mere survival to seek genuine change. It is crucial to recognize the diverse experiences of these individuals to better understand the complexities of Philippine society and politics.

Additionally, Dr. Serquiña emphasized the need to address the complicity of some Filipinos in perpetuating Duterte’s rule. This does not necessitate silence, but rather thoughtful critiques and interventions from engaged publics. Open dialogue and critical analysis are essential for fostering collective progress.

Finally, Dr. Serquiña called for the incorporation of concepts, such as embodiment, dynamism, and even play, into the understanding of Philippine politics. By doing so challenges the notion of a singular, dominant force shaping the relationship between citizens and the government. Recognizing the fluidity and agency of individuals and communities is crucial for a more nuanced perspective. Dr. Serquiña also emphasized the need to consider alternative perspectives that acknowledge the ongoing struggles, diverse experiences, and dynamic nature of hope in the Philippines. Both theoretical frameworks and a focus on lived experiences are crucial for comprehensively understanding and navigating the complexities of the Duterte era.

Open Forum

- **Jean S. Encinas-Franco, Ph.D.**
*Professor, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines Diliman
Moderator*

Rodrigo Duterte's Rhetoric and Rise to Power

Following Dr. Serquiña's insightful response to *The Sovereign Trickster*, Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco gathered questions from the live audience,¹³ Zoom, and Facebook viewers. To kickstart the open forum, she highlighted Dr. Rafael's earlier point about Duterte's unique rhetorical style as compared to former presidents. She recounted an instance when Duterte delivered a speech in Korea in 2019, where he displayed his characteristic "sovereign trickster" persona. He joked and engaged in carnivalesque behavior while meeting the Filipino community, even referencing his nontraditional family arrangements with a lighthearted remark: "Every one of you is my family." Shortly after, Dr. Encinas-Franco posed the first question to Dr. Rafael about Duterte's ability to navigate sensitive topics humorously, and how Duterte manages to spin it into something new compared to former presidents like Joseph Estrada. While known for having multiple families, Estrada presented a more "macho" image and lacked the ability to seamlessly turn such personal matters into jokes, unlike Duterte.

Dr. Rafael responded by highlighting Duterte's patriarchal image. Duterte is the benevolent patriarch who accepts and embraces the nation as a kind of family.

¹³ The book talk was advertised as an online webinar, but some faculty from the UP Department of Political Science attended on site.

This is primarily reflected in his campaign with the slogan of “bravery and compassion.” Dr. Serquiña briefly commented that it is “*tapang at malasakit*” in Tagalog. Beyond the traits of *tapang* (strength) and *malasakit* (compassion) often associated with Duterte, Dr. Rafael argued that Duterte cultivated this specific image as a benevolent patriarchal figure. As this figure, Duterte aimed to bridge the gap between families fractured by overseas work, particularly children left behind while parents labored abroad. In the book, Dr. Rafael references a poignant video by Brillante Mendoza that showcase this dynamic. In the video, one side depicts an overseas Filipino worker (OFW) mother tirelessly serving her employer, cleaning their homes, and caring for their children. The other side portrays her son misusing the money she sends to buy drugs, party, and engage in risky behavior. The contrasting scenarios create a potent message: the mother sacrifices for her family’s well-being, while the son squanders these efforts. This narrative fuels the perception that a strong, controlling figure is needed to close this gap. Duterte allegedly presented himself as that figure, promising to reunite families and rehabilitate wayward youth through strict discipline. However, Dr. Rafael emphasized that this image cannot solely define Duterte. Further exploration is necessary to understand the complexities of his leadership and its impact on Philippine society.

Before answering another question, Dr. Rafael opted to respond first to Dr. Serquiña’s review or discussion of his book. He acknowledged the potential shortcomings of the book and anticipated criticisms about the lack of focus on resistance movements and principled critics of Duterte. He claimed that such criticisms, while often beautiful and passionate, have not formed a unified front against Duterte. Instead, Dr. Rafael characterized these criticisms as sporadic, lacking analytical rigor, and failing to offer a compelling alternative to Duterte or the conditions fostering his rise. Dr. Rafael emphasized the potential fallibility and hoped for a more optimistic outlook, but he expressed concern about the possibility of Duterteism continuing with figures like Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. assuming power. While acknowledging the existing opposition and its positive aspects, Dr. Rafael questioned its effectiveness in transforming the political climate. He invited open discussion and sought understanding how the opposition is actively affecting substantial change and where it originates.

Dr. Encinas-Franco asked Dr. Serquiña if he has a rebuttal to that. Dr. Serquiña said that he was still listening and processing.

Nevertheless, Dr. Rafael expressed regret for not incorporating more about resistance movements in his book. He acknowledged the efforts of human rights groups, including their push to condemn Duterte through the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, he raised questions about the overall transformative impact of such endeavors.

Dr. Serquiña replied and cautioned against seeking immediate answers to complex questions about societal transformation. He highlighted the vast disparity between Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s twenty-one-year regime and Duterte's six-year presidency, arguing that direct comparisons may not fully reflect the intricacies of each situation. While acknowledging potential parallels, he emphasized the need for nuanced analysis to accurately capture the specific dynamics of each era and their respective transformations. He encouraged a deeper exploration of the factors shaping change in the Philippines, recognizing the historical context, and avoiding overly simplistic comparisons.

Dr. Rafael acknowledged the significant changes in the landscape of oppositional critique since the EDSA Revolution. Although he was uncertain about the specific factors contributing to this change, Dr. Rafael highlighted the decline of the Communist Party as a major source of organized resistance and theoretical framework. Furthermore, he noted the continued importance of journalism as a source of critique. However, he suggested a shift in the role and activity of public intellectuals compared to the Marcos era. This, he argued, contributed to the perceived inadequacy of current opposition to Duterte. While acknowledging potential criticism for his observations, he remained open to discussion and expressed a willingness to learn and refine his understanding. Dr. Rafael acknowledged that he could be wrong, because he does not live in the Philippines. Nevertheless, he accepted the criticisms.

Necropolitics, Desensitization, and Normalization of Duterteism

Dr. Encinas-Franco read two questions, one from Facebook and one from Zoom. The first question was about Duterte's image as a trickster figure, drawing a parallel to the Filipino card game called *pusoy*. A participant wondered how Duterte subverted traditional expectations associated with heroism and leadership by employing cunning tactics. The second question explored the dynamics of violence within similar economic classes. Another participant inquired about the role of "necropolitics," a concept focusing on state-sanctioned killing, in shaping narratives of security and justifying threats within society.

Dr. Rafael proceeded to answer the second question, admitting it was easier to address. He attributed intra-class violence to the absence of strong class solidarity. In such circumstances, individuals often lack a sense of shared identity and struggle, making them more susceptible to opportunities that provide immediate benefits, regardless of ethical considerations. He specifically mentioned the role of poverty and limited resources in driving individuals towards acts such as vigilantism, where killings can be motivated by mere financial compensation. This highlights the complex interconnections between economic precarity and political violence, with individuals potentially turning against their own class due to desperate circumstances created by a capitalist market system. The notion of violence becoming normalized and even incentivized due to poverty and lack of opportunities align with the core tenets of necropolitics, where the state controls who lives and dies. Dr. Rafael then asked again what the first question was.

Dr. Encinas-Franco clarified that the first question is about a trickster who won a *pusoy* game.

In response, Dr. Rafael acknowledged the complexity of unraveling how Duterte managed to embody the trickster figure. He rejected the notion of a conscious decision on Duterte's part. Instead, he suggested that Duterte's upbringing and cultural context played a significant role. He highlighted the widespread presence of trickster figures in Philippine culture, citing examples like the *bugoy* in Visayan narratives and noting that various ethnolinguistic groups have their own versions. This cultural history provides fertile ground for understanding how Duterte's persona resonated with specific audiences. Dr. Rafael further

referenced the work of scholars like Nick Tiongson, who studied the *pusoy* figure. This figure, according to Tiongson, operates close to power, simultaneously mocking and drawing from its authority. This resonates with Duterte's ability to challenge established norms while occupying a position of power.

Dr. Encinas-Franco read another set of questions from Facebook and Zoom. A participant asked if the book explores Duterte's seeming "underclass posturing"¹⁴ through his vulgar rhetoric and how it might play out in a post-Duterte scenario. Despite not reading the book yet, the participant expressed eagerness to learn more about this aspect. Another participant, building on the previous question about necropolitics, asked if the said framework suggests that the Philippines' liberal democracy exists in a perpetual state of exception. He further inquired how the marginalized and oppressed can resist being categorized as "*homo sacer*" (i.e., the accursed man) within this framework.

Dr. Rafael acknowledged the complexity of finding an alternative to necropolitics, recognizing its deeply ingrained nature within modern structures, not just in the Philippines but globally. He highlighted the inevitable existence of marginalized populations susceptible to neglect and exclusion within any modern society. While expressing uncertainty about definitively eliminating necropolitics, he stressed the responsibility to actively seek alternatives. Seeking alternatives requires challenging the current biopolitical framework, particularly the state's pervasive control over individual behavior. Echoing his earlier sentiment, Dr. Rafael lamented the current lack of clear revolutionary alternatives or influential opposition figures. Although he acknowledged the inherent appeal of "dreaming" about social change and potential revolution, he expressed concerns about such "dreams" turning into "nightmares," as has often been seen in history.

Dr. Encinas-Franco reiterated the question about "underclass posturing" that Duterte's supposed vulgar rhetoric appears to maximize.

¹⁴ Underclass posturing refers to the distinct set of attitudes, values, and behaviors adopted by individuals and communities facing persistent poverty, lack of opportunity, and social marginalization. It is a controversial concept that blends structural and behavioral explanations of disadvantage. (Dressel and Porterfield 1993)

Dr. Rafael elaborated on Duterte's use of vulgarity, situating it within a broader "aesthetics of vulgarity." This deliberate strategy, he argued, aims to portray Duterte as a tough person, exhibiting hyper-masculinity and heteronormative posturing. Such a portrayal projects power but also holds a deeper meaning. Dr. Rafael then highlighted the duality present in Duterte's persona. While Duterte projects a benevolent patriarchal image, he also exhibits a surprising degree of gender fluidity. As an example, Dr. Rafael referenced Duterte's 2016 campaign interview with Vice Ganda, where he engaged in flirtatious behavior and seemingly embraced the possibility of being gay. During that time, several LGBTQ+ individuals also held various positions in his administration. This duality extends to Duterte's attitude towards homosexuality itself. While capable of making homophobic rhetoric and jokes targeting people like Mar Roxas, his fellow former presidential candidate, Duterte is also open in displaying affection toward individuals like Vice Ganda. Dr. Rafael characterized this as a form of "opportunistic" engagement with gender norms and categories, highlighting how Duterte strategically manipulates them for his own benefit. This "wiliness," according to Dr. Rafael, is integral to Duterte's trickster persona and his bag of manipulative tactics.

Analyzing the Duterte Phenomenon

Dr. Encinas-Franco posed two questions regarding the impact of colonialism and anti-colonialism on contemporary Philippine society vis-à-vis Duterte. A Zoom participant inquired whether the American colonial period in the Philippines contributed to the emergence of figures like Duterte by shaping the country's political and social structures. This question pertains to the historical roots of Duterte's rise to power, examining potential legacies of colonialism in the current political landscape. Meanwhile, another participant's question builds on the discussion of the *pusoy* figure, expressing concern about Duterte's appropriation of this traditionally anticolonial symbol for seemingly oppressive purposes. The participant referenced Dr. Nick Tiongson's work and wondered if Dr. Rafael's book or personal views offer insights into reclaiming the "*pusoy*" as a tool for emancipation.

Dr. Rafael acknowledged the malleability of the trickster figure. He argued that if Duterte could manipulate it (referring to the "*pusoy*" figure) for his own ends, others could potentially reclaim it for positive purposes. The inherent ambiguity of the trickster, according to him, allows for various interpretations and appropriations. He cited Walden Bello's attempt to reclaim "vulgar energy"

through the latter's use of profanity against Bongbong Marcos in one of the 2022 vice-presidential debates. Dr. Rafael underscored the potential for such tactics but expressed reservations about Bello's effectiveness in embodying the trickster role. He also emphasized the strategic brilliance of Duterte's approach of using an anticolonial symbol to establish control and manipulate his followers. Dr. Rafael then reiterated the central challenge posed by Duterte's appropriation of countercultural narratives, asking how to counter a figure who presents himself as the antithesis of the establishment. He was skeptical about the effectiveness of traditional protest methods in the face of Duterte's sophisticated strategy, suggesting that simply calling him names or protesting may not be enough to achieve effective and lasting change.

Dr. Encinas-Franco read another question that builds on the concept of Duterte's "brilliance" as presented in the book. While acknowledging Dr. Serquiña's earlier comments, a participant expressed concern that Dr. Rafael's analysis might have overestimated Duterte's strategic capabilities, portraying him as a "brilliant sovereign trickster." The participant directly asked Dr. Serquiña if he shares this view and believes that Duterte possesses deliberate and conscious cunning in confounding his critics and opponents.

Dr. Serquiña disagreed with the notion of an "all-powerful Duterte," advocating for alternative methodologies that avoid granting him undue credit. He argued that focusing solely on Duterte as the central source of power might inadvertently elevate his influence and overlook other dynamics at play. Instead, Dr. Serquiña proposed a more "dialogic" or "polyphonic" approach that examines Duterte in relation to the broader social and political landscape. This approach would account for "parallel energies" or concurrent forces impacting the situation, rather than solely attributing agency to Duterte himself. By adopting this broader perspective, as Dr. Serquiña suggested, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of Duterte's impact and the various players influencing the current scenario.

Dr. Rafael concurred with Dr. Serquiña, emphasizing that his analysis does not intend to portray Duterte as an "all-powerful figure" eclipsing other voices and hindering dissent. He acknowledged the significant space that Duterte occupies in the political landscape but reiterated the central question: How do we effectively counter his influence?

Dr. Serquiña replied in agreement.

Continuing his response, Dr. Rafael delved deeper into the difficulties of challenging Duterte's regime. While acknowledging the initial successes of counterstrategies, Dr. Rafael highlighted the potential for unintended consequences. He used photographing extrajudicial killings as an example. While the said act was initially powerful in exposing state violence, Dr. Rafael argued that the regime might have ultimately appropriated it. Instead of sparking outrage, the constant stream of graphic images could have desensitized viewers and even served as a chilling warning from the government. This phenomenon highlights Duterte's "ability to subvert the subversions," turning oppositional tactics into tools for normalization and control. As a result, the initial shock value diminishes, stories fade from the forefront, and dissent becomes normalized. The crucial questions then become: "How do you denormalize it?" and "How do we effectively counter a regime that seems adept at turning our strategies against us?" Acknowledging the complexity of such challenges, Dr. Rafael left these questions open for further discussion and exploration of alternative approaches.

The discussion continued with a question from another Zoom participant, who expanded on Dr. Rafael's earlier discussion of "denormalizing Duterte's rhetoric." Dr. Encinas-Franco read the question regarding the possibility of undoing the long-term impact of Duterte's tactics. The question explores whether future leaders can dismantle the normalized power structures and cultural shifts potentially embedded in Duterte's regime. It also inquires whether Duterte's approach serves as a blueprint for future populist leaders seeking to manipulate public perception and consolidate power.

Dr. Rafael likened Duterte's "tricksterism" to that of former President Estrada. Like Duterte, Estrada exhibited similar populist tendencies and employed shock tactics, such as public humiliation and threats of violence. Dr. Rafael expressed uncertainty about the possibility of fully reversing these strategies, suggesting that normalization and the perception of impunity might pave way for their reappearance under future leaders. He then emphasized the need for fundamental societal changes, including wealth redistribution, state reform, and reeducation, while recognizing the difficulty and ongoing efforts towards such transformations. While Dr. Rafael offered a "controversial take" on social revolution, he acknowledged the historical challenges associated with such movements in the Philippines. This ultimately suggests that the need for ongoing vigilance and continued efforts is crucial towards systemic change.

The Philippines After Duterte

Dr. Encinas Franco read another question from a Facebook viewer. The question was about whether Dr. Rafael or Dr. Serquiña sees the electrifying rallies all over the country for former Vice-President Leni Robredo as "only electoral." Because, some sectors see these events as manifestations of people power, extending beyond EDSA and having a transformative impact nationwide.

Dr. Rafael replied and stated that he is cautiously optimistic on the possibility of positive change. He acknowledged the ongoing rallies and spontaneous displays of democratic spirit, finding echoes of the EDSA Revolution on their energy and unity. While hesitant to make definitive predictions, Dr. Rafael voiced his support for these movements and expressed hope for their success. He suggested that potential "radical changes" might follow a successful Leni Robredo campaign but acknowledged uncertainties regarding future policies and personnel within the Robredo administration. Ultimately, Dr. Rafael emphasized the importance of hope as a driving force. However, he recognized the need for continued observation and cautious optimism rather than absolute certainty about the future.

Dr. Encinas-Franco read another question from a Zoom participant. He followed up on Dr. Serquiña's earlier question regarding the beneficiaries of Dr. Rafael's analysis of Duterte. He posed a direct question: "Indeed, who benefits?"

Dr. Rafael acknowledged the difficulty in definitively stating who benefits from his analysis of Duterte. He emphasized that his book avoids any simplistic narratives or endorsements, aiming instead to be a nuanced and complex exploration. He specifically denied writing the book to benefit any specific individual or group, stating, "It's not like I wrote this book to benefit X, Y, and Z." Rather, he hopes that any reader, regardless of their initial expectations, will find the book valuable, even if it challenges their preconceived notions or offers no easy solutions. Dr. Rafael also emphasized the book's role as a "diagnostic" tool, providing deeper understanding rather than prescribing specific solutions or dictating voting choices. He acknowledged that some readers might find it irrelevant, while others might appreciate its complexity and prompt further reflection. Ultimately, he leaves the interpretation and application of the book open to the individual reader.

Dr. Encinas-Franco read a question from another Zoom participant, who commented that Dr. Rafael's analysis indeed focuses on the government. But,

the participant inquired about the role of the police in fueling the drug war. He further asked about any regulative policing aimed at improving criminality and fighting an imaginary drug war. For the participant, the police are simply just “upholding the law.” Finally, he also asked, “How does Duterte define a ‘normal person’ in relation to deviance?”

Dr. Rafael recognized the limitation of his book regarding the Philippine police force. While the police were mentioned, they were not the central focus due to research constraints and the difficulty of accessing police stations for in-depth studies. He then offered insights gleaned from other researchers specializing in the national police force. He emphasized the police’s complex role within communities, serving as both representatives of the national state and embedded figures within local contexts. This duality creates a dynamic where people are wary of police authority while also relying on them for a sense of order and intervention in everyday issues. Moreover, Dr. Rafael highlighted the police’s “monopoly of violence” and their position as “specters of the state,” emphasizing their constant monitoring and potential impact on citizen’s lives. He recognized their involvement in domestic disputes, petty theft, and broader enforcement of the law. Considering the discussion on the police’s multifaceted role, Dr. Rafael suggested them as a potential starting point for dismantling an authoritarian framework. He emphasized the need to “reconstitute a nonauthoritarian police force,” viewing it as a crucial step towards broader societal change. He identified the issues of police exceeding their legal authority and acting as “petty sovereigns” as another challenge. Dr. Rafael reiterated the need to address the police’s complex role and to move beyond simply viewing them as enforcers, but rather as figures who could potentially contribute to a more equitable and just society.

The discussion continued with two female participants raising further points. Dr. Encinas-Franco first read the comment on Zoom. One participant challenged the notion that Dr. Rafael’s analysis seemingly elevates Duterte. While acknowledging Duterte’s rhetoric’s lack of sophistication, she argued that its effectiveness as a communication strategy, particularly for specific demographics, cannot be ignored. She characterized Duterte’s approach as “stooping to conquer quite powerfully.” Meanwhile, another participant from Facebook inquired about the book’s treatment of Duterte’s role in the context of American and Chinese imperialism. She expressed concern that focusing solely on Duterte’s domestic policies and rhetoric might overlook the broader geopolitical forces shaping his actions. In addition, the participant questioned whether the U.S. colonialism of the Philippines played a role in fostering conditions that have allowed Duterte’s rise in power.

Dr. Rafael concurred with considering the importance of historical imperialism in Philippine political culture but noted the complexity of Duterte's approach. He highlighted Duterte's vocal opposition to U.S. imperialism, exemplified by the president's criticism of Obama and opposition to the U.S. military presence. However, he contrasted this with Duterte's seemingly pro-Chinese stance, particularly evident in Duterte's South China Sea policies and relationship with China. This seemingly contradictory approach, according to Dr. Rafael, aligns with Duterte's "trickster" persona. He argued that Duterte offers anti-U.S. rhetoric while simultaneously engaging in pro-Chinese policies, suggesting a strategic manipulation rather than a genuine commitment to opposing imperialism as a whole. Further complicating the picture, Dr. Rafael acknowledged the ongoing influence of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, particularly in the economic and military spheres. This dependence creates a complex dynamic where complete denunciation of the U.S. is not feasible. Ultimately, Dr. Rafael characterized Duterte's relationship with imperialism as a "political performance," strategically exploiting anti-U.S. sentiment while simultaneously engaging with China. Dr. Rafael argued that this strategy serves Duterte's own goals rather than a genuine commitment to dismantling imperial structures.

Dr. Encinas-Franco posed a final question, inquiring to what extent Dr. Rafael thinks the candidacy of Bongbong Marcos was made possible by the Duterte administration. This question alludes to the potential connection between Duterte's presidency and the success of Bongbong Marcos's 2022 presidential campaign.

Dr. Rafael acknowledged the complex factors contributing to Bongbong Marcos's candidacy, extending beyond the Duterte administration. He pointed out the long-standing legacy of authoritarianism in the Philippines, highlighting the Ferdinand Marcos Sr. era, which some citizens perceive as a "golden period" fueled by misinformation and propaganda. Regarding Duterte's specific role, Dr. Rafael acknowledged mixed messages. While Duterte initially criticized Bongbong, his silence on the latter's friendship with his daughter, Sara Duterte, who ran as Bongbong's vice president, created ambiguity. Ultimately, Dr. Rafael attributed Bongbong's popularity to factors beyond Duterte, citing the broader post-EDSA period and its shortcomings. Dr. Rafael expressed hope for Leni Robredo's electoral campaign to counter Bongbong's but acknowledged the uncertainty of the outcome.

Additionally, Dr. Rafael referenced Lino Brocka's statement about wishing to execute Marcos to prevent his legacy's resurgence.

“I think the Filipinos were too kind you know. There was just uh, we, I think we were too lax on them. They should have been killed as far as I’m concerned. My answer to that question about Imelda and Marcos before was always no tears for them. Absolutely no tears. I think they should have been killed and as far as killing them is concerned I would volunteer to be in the firing squad. I would want to be in the firing squad and as a matter of fact I would, I don’t know how to fire a gun but for them I think I will train.”¹⁵

This sentiment reflects the gravity of the Marcos family’s return to prominence and the challenges it poses to Philippine democracy. Dr. Rafael’s concluding analysis emphasized the intricate interplay of various historical, political, and social factors driving Bongbong’s presidential candidacy, noting that it is not solely because of Duterte’s influence.

Dr. Rafael concluded the discussion by playfully drawing attention to the book’s cover, wherein a man’s Cartier watch contrasted with his casual attire with a cigarette. Dr. Rafael acknowledged Professor Ambeth Ocampo for identifying the watch brand and its significance as a symbol of class and hidden wealth. This seemingly minor detail highlights the cover’s multilayered symbolism. The juxtaposition of luxury and simplicity embodies the complexities of Duterte’s persona and the challenges of deciphering his true intentions. By emphasizing the “layers of irony,” Dr. Rafael invites readers to engage critically with the cover image and its deeper meaning within the context of the book. This reinforces the central theme of complexity and hidden meanings underlying Duterte’s public image. Ultimately, the book encourages readers to look beyond surface appearances and critically examine the various layers of power, wealth, and symbolism at play.

Dr. Encinas-Franco thanked everyone, and invited Dr. Maria Ela Atienza to deliver the closing message.

¹⁵ Lino Brocka in his own words from the 1987 documentary entitled *Signed: Lino Brocka* was directed by Christian Blackwood. It won the 1988 Peace Film Award at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Closing Remarks

- **Maria Ela L. Atienza, Ph.D.**¹⁶
*Professor, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines Diliman*

Thank you very much, Jean. Allow me first to thank the different institutions and individuals who made this book talk possible. To the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS), the policy research unit of the UP System, we are grateful to Professor Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, the Executive Director of UP CIDS, for agreeing to co-organize this book talk. In particular, among the many programs of UP CIDS, the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC), convened by myself and Professor Jorge V. Tigno, has decided to actually organize this book talk. Of course, the *Philippine Political Science Journal*, the internationally refereed journal of the Philippine Political Science Association, which is co-published by Brill, and the UP Diliman Department of Political Science, are also co-organizers of the book talk. I believe that there are several students both at the graduate and undergraduate levels attending. I can also see some familiar names among the list of online participants, so thank you for coming. Of course, this book talk would not have been possible if the author himself was not available. We thank Vince for agreeing to schedule the book talk at this time. I know it's late evening in the United States right now but thank you very much. We hope this can be the start of our future discussions and webinars on the topic and other related topics. We are also grateful to the Ateneo de Manila University Press, which is publishing the Philippine edition of

16 Dr. Atienza is a Professor and former Chair of the Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines Diliman. She is the Co-Convenor of the Program on Social and Political Change of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies at the time of the event.

Vince's book. So, thank you to Ms. Karina Bolasco and Ms. Almira Mandurriao of Ateneo Press.

Vince's book is available through Lazada and Shopee. I think the UP CIDS will be sending emails to everyone who attended to give you a book discount. In keeping with the multidisciplinary nature of this discussion, we are also fortunate to have Associate Professor OJ Serquiña from the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts as our discussant. He is currently busy organizing an election-related project, which Jean mentioned earlier, "Persuasion and the Polls." We hope you can also follow the series over at DZUP where you can check the recordings of the forum series. We know he [Serquiña] is also very busy, but we thank him for being the discussant for this afternoon. Of course, we are very grateful to my colleague and friend, Associate Professor Jean Encinas-Franco. She was busy being the discussant in a forum this morning on gender and elections, but also agreed to moderate this book talk.

I think, Vince's book is very important. It's coming at a very important time in the Philippine political, social, and cultural history. While many of us are focused on the campaigns and anticipating, either hopefully or with dread, the possible results or outcome of the May 2022 elections, there's another development. President Duterte is near the completion of his term. It's very important that we take stock of the whole six years, not only of the person, the president and his administration, but his legacies, his impact, and the possibilities after his term. The UP CIDS PSPC is actually planning to have a series of webinars, precisely focusing on the assessment of the Duterte administration. We think that Vince's book, as well as the discussion led by OJ Serquiña, can serve as a starting point for all these assessments and discussions. The book also provides scholars and students inspiration and possible directions for analyzing not only President Duterte, but also Philippine politics and society in general. Basically, how do we analyze political leaders, narratives, messages, and rhetoric, and how do we understand the Philippines in general as a nation?

Thank you very much to everyone who came. The recording will be available on YouTube. We hope to see you again in future activities of all the organizers. Thank you very much.

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Annex




- From left to right: Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco, Dr. Maria Ela L. Atienza, Dr. Vincent Rafael and Dr. Oscar T. Serquiña Jr..

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