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Masculinity in the Age of (Philippine) Populism: Violence and Vulgarity in Duterte's Hypermasculine Discourse

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Masculinity in the Age of (Philippine) Populism: Violence and Vulgarity in Duterte's Hypermasculine Discourse

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Abstract

Concerned about the recent rise of global populism, Ulf Mellström emphasized the need for critical attention to the “politics of masculinity and masculinity politics,” which constitute a “great challenge for masculinity studies” at the contemporary moment (2017, p.2). Indeed, the ominous threat to democracy and to progressive gender politics by the phenomenon that is the global rise of populist leaders underscores the urgency of analyzing what is seemingly the restoration of classic patriarchy. Our study aims to contribute to that increasing and important body of scholarship by examining Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s brand of populism that has reshaped regional hegemonic masculinity in the Philippines. We suggest that along with Duterte’s rise to power came the emergence of a particular form of political masculinity, one that is violent, combative, misogynistic, and undiplomatic. We examine Duterte’s hypermasculine discourse using a strategic sampling of his political speeches, interviews, and media appearances, which we suggest is central to the cultivation of his image as sovereign leader and father of the Philippine nation.

Keywords: Populism, Masculinity, Duterte, Spectacle, Hypermasculinity

Masculinidad en la Era del Populismo (Filipino): Violencia y Vulgaridad en el Discurso Hipermasculino de Duterte

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Resumen

Preocupado por el reciente auge del populismo global, Ulf Mellström enfatiza la necesidad de una atención crítica a las “políticas de masculinidad y políticos masculinos”, que constituyen un “gran desafío para los estudios de masculinidad” en la actualidad (2017, p. 2). De hecho, la ominosa amenaza a la democracia y a las políticas de género progresistas por el fenómeno del ascenso global de líderes populistas subraya la urgencia de analizar lo que aparentemente es la restauración del patriarcado clásico. Nuestro estudio tiene como objetivo contribuir a ese creciente e importante cuerpo de estudios al examinar el tipo de populismo del presidente filipino Rodrigo Duterte que ha remodelado la masculinidad hegemónica regional en Filipinas. Sugerimos que, junto con el ascenso al poder de Duterte, surgió una nueva forma de masculinidad política, violenta, combativa, misógina y poco diplomática. Examinamos el discurso hipermasculino de Duterte utilizando una muestra estratégica de sus discursos políticos, entrevistas y apariciones en los medios de comunicación, que sugerimos es fundamental para el fomento de su imagen como líder soberano y padre de la nación filipina.

Palabras clave: Populismo, Masculinidad, Duterte, Espectáculo, Hipermasculinidad

In the 90s, there was a popular song in the Philippines titled “*Ang Tipo Kong Lalaki*” [The type of guy I like; our translation] by DJ Alvaro that expressed a desire for a certain type of Philippine masculinity of that time. There is a line in the song that goes “*maginoo pero medyo bastos*” which could be roughly translated as “a gentleman who is a little bit vulgar”.

It is a line that stuck, and enduringly so, in the Filipino collective consciousness because it captured in a succinct and pointed way a model of idealized masculinity that resonated with local mass culture. Since then, this line appears with regularity in news outlets, and even recently in social media ([ABS-CBN News, 2017b](#)). This particular iteration of the ideal Filipino man corroborates various ethnographic and psychological studies on Philippine masculinity of that period. Aguling-Dalisay et all’s. ([1995](#)) “*Ang Pagkalalaki Ayonsamga Lalaki: Pag-aaral sa tatlong grouping kultural sa Pilipinas*” [or “Manhood according to men: A study on three cultural groups in the Philippines”; our translation] and De Castro’s ([1995](#)) “*Pagiging Lalaki, Pagkalalaki, at Pagkamaginoo*” [“On Becoming a Man, On Manhood, and on being a gentleman”; our translation] examined how men in the Philippines perceive, conceptualize, and define masculinity. Their respondent’s associate manhood with stereotypical macho traits such as physical strength, sexual activeness, and honor and that nearly all of them believe in superiority of men over women.

Those masculine traits are affirmed by Angeles’ study ([2001](#)). She writes that the “hypermasculine Filipino male is not only valorised and glorified in the movies and related advertising billboards but also in real life encounters between kidnappers, criminals, police and urban hitmen” (p. 21). In an examination on how the state legitimizes and exports the aforementioned type of masculinity, McKay ([2007](#)) looked at Filipino seamen and “their constructions of exemplary masculinity” ([pp. 630-631](#)). Another study that concurs with our observations is Rubio and Jay-Green ([2011](#)) whose work on Philippine Masculinity objectively measures “dimensions of Filipino masculinity ideology” through the “Filipino Adherence to Masculinity (FAME) scale” ([p. 81](#)). Subsequently, those views were supplemented by

cultural inquiries on the male image suggesting that popular culture cultivates hypermasculine behavior (Tolentino, 2000) and that local masculinity is inevitably linked to nationalist projects (Cañete, 2012). In particular, Cañete (2012) semiotically analyzes the Oblation, a sculpture in the University of the Philippines, using a post-colonial framework. He concludes his study by saying that the Oblation is a “masculine symbol of nationalist sacrifice, militant surrender, and modernist nation building is ineluctably associated to his represented Body as a muscular (heterosexual) male youth” (Cañete, 2012, p. 297).

Those works foreground our contention that one of the dominant images of the ideal Filipino male is that of a gentleman who is sometimes vulgar, following George Mosses’ notion of the “masculine ideal” in which a masculine type becomes a “symbol of society and nation” (1998, p. 23).

Recently, however, a new model of masculinity has emerged from the domain of Philippine (populist) politics that seems to challenge the hegemony of the “gentleman, who is a little bit vulgar,” a type of masculinity embodied by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. The rise of Duterte—nicknamed “The Punisher” (See Figure 1 below)—brought to the fore a type of masculinity that involves spectacular performances that rehearse qualities of “toxic masculinity” while localizing such qualities, claiming that it is representative of the average Filipino male. We trace the recent rise of this model of masculinity in this case study and suggest that it shifts the ideal image of the Filipino man, moving away from *maginoo pero medyo bastos* [a gentleman who is a little bit vulgar; our translation] to its perverse reversal, *bastos pero medyo maginoo* [a vulgar man who is sometimes a gentleman; our translation]. Previously, the model Filipino statesman was the “proper gentleman” who engaged in “gentlemanly discourse that approximate the ideals of the Enlightenment” (Evangelista, 2017, p. 255) and who only occasionally and strategically revealed a more casual side to appear relatable. In contrast, Duterte’s masculinity rejects those norms and instead performs its opposite.



Figure 1. Rodrigo Duterte was featured in TIME Magazine Asia May 23, 2016 and was nicknamed “The punisher” by TIME.

His performance of masculinity—described by one commentator as “push[ing] the boundaries of ‘street masculinity’” (Evangelista, 2017, p. 257)—is one that embraces crassness, vulgarity, among other qualities of toxic masculinity but is packaged as authentic, organic, and relatable. Our position, however, is that Duterte’s masculinity is a continuation rather than a break from the dominant model of Philippine hegemonic masculinity.

In suggesting that Duterte’s masculinity is a continuation rather than a break from previous dominant models, this essay examines the dynamism and adaptability of hegemonic masculinity by showing how it is able to repackage itself depending on the contingencies of the historical moment. Our position opposes theories that suggest hegemonic masculinity’s slow but undeniable erosion. We demonstrate the aforementioned technologies of power by examining the recent rise of a model of ideal masculinity embodied by Rodrigo Duterte. We argue that it primarily draws its force from a strong

patriarchal undercurrent that defines hegemonic cultural expressions. Extremely helpful for our study are the categories of masculinity proposed by Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios (2013), which examines what they refer to as Dominant Traditional Masculinities (DTM), Oppressed Traditional Masculinities (OTM), and New Alternative Masculinities (NAM) and their relationship with the perpetuation of violence against women. While they argue that DTM and OTM are “two sides of the same coin” (Flecha, et al., 2013, p. 90), NAM is the type of masculinity that “is most successful in the struggle to end violence against women” (2013, p. 106). In the case of Duterte, his masculine performance oscillates between DTM and OTM, portraying it as an organic and authentic iteration of Philippine masculinity. There is therefore a need to examine, in particular, Duterte’s vulgar and misogynistic discourse, which is often cloaked by nationalist and anti-colonial rhetoric, as he positions himself as the Father of the nation.

Recent critical studies on masculinity have suggested a slow yet undeniable erosion of hegemonic masculinity, resulting from the influx of ‘new’ and ‘alternative’ masculinities. These works suggest that alternative models such as childish masculinity, metrosexuality, gay masculinity, feminine masculinity (Miller, 2011), feminist masculinity (Nall, 2011), “nice guy” masculinity (Talbot & Quayle, 2010, p.274), complicit masculinity, subordinated masculinity, marginalized masculinity (Hirose & Pih 2010, p.196), as well as many other forms challenge the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Although this proliferation of ‘new’ forms of masculinity appears to chip away at old structures of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchal culture is still curiously alive and well. These ‘new’ forms of masculinity therefore appear to fail in presenting a legitimate challenge to hegemonic masculinity; rather, they in fact seem to collude with the dominant hegemony through the allocation of power to previously marginalized and subordinated masculine identities. The work of Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios (2013) provides a way to understand this failure. They suggest that a lot of what passes off as “new alternative masculinities” (NAM) are really “oppressed traditional masculinities” (OTM) (2013, p. 90). While we agree with the findings of Flecha, Puigvert, and Rios (2013) our study attempts to explain that confusion

between TDM, OTM, and NAM within the Philippine context. Indeed, to refer to Duterte's type of masculinity as new might be misleading since as we have mentioned previously, Duterte performs a type of masculinity that some consider recognizable in the so-called "common man." Part of what makes Duterte's case interesting is how he is able to fuse TDM with OTM.

In this study, we conceptualize masculinity as a historically and culturally specific formation of power that supports, extends, and ensures the smooth functioning of the patriarchal order. We derive our theoretical framework and conception of hegemonic masculinity from Connell (1995), Connell and J. W. Messerschmidt (2005), and MacInnes (1998). Our argument, which is supported by the work of both authors, is that hegemonic masculinity morphs and reconstitutes itself to fit within the current historical period (even in terms of its overt ethical agenda), while covertly ensuring the continued dominance of the patriarchal order. Connell explicitly emphasizes this by noting that "hegemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy". Michel Foucault's conception of power supports our claim that hegemony cannot be simplified into a concise, measureable group of traits that one either possesses or lacks because it is not something that one can tangibly attain. Foucault's theory surrounding discourse and truth facilitates our analysis of hegemonic masculinity. In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, he argues that discourses produce and transmits power by implicitly denoting 'truths.' In other words, a statement may not be factually true, but it is valorized by the idea that it is meaningful in a society. For example, conventions have been utilized to subordinate femininity and further the discourse that "women are inferior to men." Although this discourse is not based in fact, it became 'true' because it was (and arguably still is) culturally significant and legitimized through the assumption that 'women's work' was less valuable than 'men's work'. Since men and women are no longer exclusively confined to these spheres, the reasoning, which valorizes the discourse that women are inferior to men, must change to fit within currently accepted cultural truths. This article will show that the spectacle of Duterte creates a new logic that validates the same sexist, homophobic and racist discourse, which bolsters hegemonic masculinity.

In addition, the morphing of hegemonic masculinity, at least in the Philippine context, is mainly realized and further empowered by restructuring the national narrative of progress as a masculine project. This draws upon previous research on the intersections between nationalism and masculinity with Nagel (1998, p. 261) establishing that there is an “intimate link between nationalism and masculinity”. Maxwell (2015), Holden (2001) and Karlin (2002) also explore this “intimate link,” thereby accounting for unique cultural intricacies found in different national contexts. These works provide an ample framework to further unpack the nationalistic aspect of the emerging masculinity in the Age of Duterte. In effect, these additional factors give additional directions to further understand the process of how hegemonic masculinities evolve and change as Connell explicitly states that “When conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony” (1995, p. 77). Joane Nagel (1998) and Philip Holden (2001) noted in their respective studies the inherent interconnections between masculinities and nationalism. Holden for instance, notes how Lee Kuan Yew’s autobiography blends his masculinity into the Singaporean nationalist narrative. In the case of Duterte, he blends hypermasculine ideals and nationalism through a sustained spectacle. Rodrigo Duterte’s powerful spectacle is able to capitalize on the masses’ socio-political anxiety and anti-colonial sentiments by providing a vision of change and progress contingent on crass hypermasculine performance. This performance provides a rallying point for Duterte’s nationalistic project.

Our study focuses on Duterte’s spectacular displays of hypermasculinity that has attracted worldwide attention during his presidential campaign in 2015 and in the early months of his presidency in 2016. We primarily employ a social semiotic approach in addition to rhetorical analysis to examine how Rodrigo curates his masculine image. We use selected excerpts from his political speeches and interviews as part of our “semiotic resource” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 150). We take our cue from scholars who have employed a similar approach in making a cultural analysis of populist discourse from a wide variety of socio-political contexts (Ekström et al., 2018; Tambar, 2009;

Mason, 2006). These semiotic resources will be unpacked through the framework of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, MacInnes, 1998). Our understanding of hypermasculinity was derived from Mosher and Sirkin's "hypermasculinity inventory" (1984, p. 150). They indicate that hypermasculine men exhibit three characteristics in particular: 1) they possess "calloused sex attitudes toward women", 2) they find "danger as exciting", and 3) and they consider "violence as manly" (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984, p. 150). This "hypermasculinity inventory" informs the structure of our essay as we examine Duterte's attitude toward women, his confrontational stance against foreign critiques of his administration, and his violent war on drugs.

The Hypermasculinity of Duterte: A Case Study

Rodrigo Duterte drew international and local criticism for his expletive-filled tirades against Obama, the EU, and the Pope (BBC News, 2016; Time, 2016; Ranada, 2015). His behavior was, according to more conservative commentators, unbecoming of his position. However, this is Duterte's usual response to Western criticism of his war on drugs that has claimed no less than 8000 lives (BBC News, 2020).

The on-going war on drugs is the fulfilment of his promise made during his presidential campaign to bring *tunay na pagbabago* [true change; our translation]. While it might be the case that a politician promising change is nothing extraordinary, what is new in Duterte's case is how he communicates his message. Duterte often speaks in a language that is graphically misogynistic and violent, and unapologetically so. We suggest that Duterte's rhetoric draws its force from a strong patriarchal undercurrent that continues to define hegemonic cultural expressions. One that is made even more forceful by the binaristic logic at work in most populist discourse, which further underscores Duterte's robust masculinity against the previous administration's supposed emasculated politics. In what follows, we analyze a sampling of Duterte's discourse such as his rape joke targeted at an Australian Missionary, his nationalistic expletive-filled rhetoric against Obama, the EU, and the Pope, and his expletive filled rhetoric with regards to

drug addicts and common criminals. At the same time, Rodrigo Duterte is regarded as *Tatay Digong* [or Father Digong] by social-media users and the Philippine National Police ([De Jesus, 2016](#)). We argue that Rodrigo Duterte's different manifestations of violence are symptoms of an existing and continuing system of hegemonic masculinity. Subsequently, Duterte's spectacle inadvertently promotes a radicalized and perverse version of Philippine masculinity. The continued public attraction towards Duterte is indicative that the image of the Philippine man is slowly evolving into a more perverse form that amplifies qualities of hypermasculinity.

Duterte's Hypermasculine Discourse

In one of Duterte's speeches during his presidential campaign, he narrated his experiences during the 1989 Davao hostage crisis to a crowd of supporters. The hostage crisis involved Felipe Pugoy and his prison gang taking 17 missionaries from the Joyful Assembly of God as hostage ([Inquirer.net, 2016](#)). This crisis left five hostages and sixteen prisoners dead. One of the hostages that died in the crisis was an Australian missionary named Jacqueline Hamill. In his speech, Duterte claimed that he personally killed criminals back in the day and that he even offered to exchange himself for one of the hostages ([Inquirer.net, 2016](#)). Afterwards, he would joke about the situation saying:

All the women were raped so during the first assault, because they retreated, they left the bodies they used as a cover; one of them was the corpse of the Australian woman lay minister. Tsk, this is a problem. When the bodies were brought out, they were wrapped. I looked at her face, son of a bitch, she looks like a beautiful American actress. Son of a bitch, what a waste. What came to mind was, they raped her, they lined up. I was angry because she was raped, that's one thing. But she was so beautiful; the mayor [referring to himself] should have been first. What a waste¹ ([Beatboxer ng Pinas, 2016](#)).

The statement drew laughter from the crowd, which could be interpreted as a sign of support and even identification, laughing with the aggressor and sharing in his power. Subsequently, Duterte's rape joke drew widespread

criticism internationally and domestically when it was reported by media outlets such as Rappler, Inquirer, CNN, and the BBC. In light of this criticism, Duterte refused to apologize for his controversial statement, saying:

I am willing to lose the presidency. Do not make me apologize for something which I did which was really called for at the moment...*Son of a bitch, I was there in the crisis*², you want me to be courteous all the time?" (Ranada, 2016).

Duterte further defended his statement in an interview, explaining that "Men speak that way"³ ("RRD Interview April 17", 2016). The president's refusal to apologize, along with his rape joke, are part of what constitute his hypermasculine image. Perhaps more importantly, Duterte asserts that his manner of speech is similar to how the common Filipino man talks. He positions himself as a genuine representative of the populace despite being part of the elite oligarchy he claims to oppose. While in fact, Rodrigo Duterte and members of his family have occupied key positions in Davao city since 1986 with his daughter, Sara Duterte, now serving as Mayor of Davao City and his father, Vicente Duterte, was formerly the governor of the Davao province and a former Cabinet member during the Martial Law era of the Philippines. However, Duterte's elite status is cloaked by the very hypermasculine spectacle he consistently performs. His populist image repackages his misogyny as a common and natural trait among Filipino men. By using this assumption as a justification for his crude language, Duterte is then normalizing its use. Duterte's victory in the presidential elections showed that his masculine image is something that his supporters tolerated or even identified with rather than recoiled from. Indeed, after Duterte was elected President of the Philippines, he continued to speak in the manner that got him elected. When a reporter asked what he would do if President Barack Obama confronts him on his war on drugs, Duterte responded angrily saying:

I am a president of a sovereign state and we have long ceased to be a colony. I do not have any master except the Filipino people, nobody, but nobody. You must be respectful. Do not just throw away questions and statements. *Son of a bitch, I'll*

curse you in that forum⁴ (“What did Rodrigo Duterte call Barack Obama?”, 0:28-0:55)

Duterte frames civil discourse as a Western colonial imposition. Through his crude language he is able to assume a more confrontational posture, and in so doing shifts the discussion from one of national shame to that of nationalist pride: instead of defending his inhumane drug war, he positions himself as defending the sovereign nation he was entrusted to lead. Duterte’s anti-colonial posturing is further highlighted when he appears to lecture Obama on how to act and treat other leaders. For a moment, Duterte is able to show that he is a better man than Obama, at least in a symbolic sense. He frames such confrontations as one between colonizers and colonized, but instead of a discourse of subservience, he adopts a discourse of defiance. This is in stark contrast to previous Philippine presidents whose conduct could be said is consistent with their position. Duterte’s regime has framed such deference as colonial emasculation. In a final act of anti-colonial defiance, Duterte is able to appeal to patriotic sensibilities by simply saying “Son of a bitch, I’ll curse you in that forum” (Ager, 2016)



Figure 2. Rodrigo Duterte gives the European Union the middle finger during a public speech from *Philippines's Duterte unleashes more profanity at the EU* (Al Jazeera, Sept 21, 2016)

The European Union also criticized Duterte's policies through a parliamentary resolution that urged the Philippines "to put an end to the current wave of extrajudicial executions and killings" (EU Parliament, 2016). Duterte however, did not take the EU's parliamentary resolution lightly. He responded: "I read the condemnation of the European Union against me. I will tell them f*ck you... And then the European Union now has the gall to condemn me. I repeat it, f*ck you" (News Prime, 2016, 0:12-0:19, Sept 21, 2016). And, as if his words were not clear enough, he supplemented them with an obscene hand gesture. (News Prime, 2016, 0:20). In a static image of Duterte raising his middle finger (Figure 1), he appears to be indifferent to the political implications of such actions. But it is precisely that indifference that constructs his masculine performance as authentic and admirable. He frames matters of international relations with concrete political ramifications as

simple personal squabbles. Duterte once again cited a history of colonial injustices, stating that “The Arabs, they were forced to kneel, it was them [referring to the Europeans], Who? France, Britain...” (News Prime, 2016, 0:04-0:12)⁵. His recklessness and disregard for political consequences contribute to his image as a fearless heroic leader who is ready to stand against persistently intrusive Western powers.

Bastos Pero Medyo Maginoo – A Vulgar Man who is Sometimes a Gentleman

In contrast to those highly publicized displays of vulgar behavior, Duterte sometimes assumes an uncharacteristically restrained demeanour, as could be seen for example in his interview with Al-Jazeera and the Russian Times. Nevertheless, Duterte maintains his anti-colonial stance in both of those interviews. In his interview with Al-Jazeera, when asked about the victims of the war on drugs, Duterte responds:

Just like when the United States and the rest of the country, when you bomb the village you intend to kill the militants but you kill in the process the children there...I have yet to hear an apology for those who have [died] in Vietnam, in Afghanistan, never mind about the militants, kill them...why is it that it is collateral damage in the West to us, it is murder (2016, 6:07-6:57)

In the interview with Al-Jazeera, Duterte tones down his usual hypermasculine performance, but nevertheless continued to deploy the same anti-colonial rhetoric. While the validity of Duterte’s points is debatable, we are more interested in the rhetorical strategies he deploys. In the selected excerpt, Duterte uses *antanagoge*, a common rhetorical device in political discourse where one uses a counter-allegation to respond to an allegation. Instead of justifying his drug war to his Western critics, he instead demands his Western critics to justify their own historical crimes while emphasizing the double standard at work. Interesting too is how he transposes what is a matter of international relations into something seemingly more personal by

repeating the word “you”: “...when you bomb the village”, “...you intend”, “...you kill” [our emphasis]. Despite his discourse being relatively more refined, he nevertheless strategically reveals the potential force of his vulgarity by breaking the expectations of civility and diplomacy.

In an interview with the Russian Times, Duterte continues his tirade against the West, saying that:

My orders were very clear: go out and hunt for them, the drug lords. Arrest them if possible, but if you are confronted with the violence that could place your life, the policemen or the security in danger. Kill them. Because in the past that was what really prevented the police and the military from doing it. Why? Because they were so afraid of the human rights thing, which is a new phenomenon. It's actually the human rights in the guise of human rights. Countries like EU and America are interfering in the affairs of other nations, in the guise of human rights (RT, 2017, 2:48 – 3:35).

Duterte here suggests that the concept of human rights is a project of Western imperialism that impedes him from realizing his promise of true *change*. He frames the concept of human rights as a tool used by the West to continue its imperialist agenda, and refers to the concept as “the human rights thing” and as a “new phenomenon” as a way to trivialize its significance. Equally crucial, is how he frames it as a concept that prevents the police and military from doing their job, and therefore a concept that prevents men from doing what real men are supposed to do, favouring action and results over passivity and restraint. While it may be said that Duterte does not really mean what he is saying. Our contention is that this vulgar discourse is essential to the curation of his masculine image.

Duterte’s Drug War, Masculinity, and Necropolitics

Duterte’s inauguration on June 30, 2016 marked the beginning of his violent war on drugs. Images of dead bodies with attached signs that read “*Pusher ako. Huwag tularan*” [“I am a drug pusher, do not imitate”; our translation] proliferated throughout media outlets merely days after Duterte’s inauguration. Since then, the on-going war on drugs has claimed no less than

8000 lives (BBC News, 2020). Duterte's war is an attempt to fulfil his campaign promise to clean crime in 3 to 6 months even stating that "If they want to play rough, I will redefine to them the meaning of rough" (as cited in Ramirez, 2016). Duterte even voluntarily compares himself to Adolf Hitler and says that "I'd be happy to slaughter them [referring to the three million drug addicts]" (Holmes, 2016). The dead bodies on the street is then concrete proof that Duterte is a man of his word and these bodies convey a message that *change* is indeed happening.

Danilo Andres Reyes suggests that Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs is a form of Foucauldian discipline exercised through a spectacle of violence (p. 128). Reyes further explains that:

The spectacle is "performed" by reducing the body to an object that carries political messages, by politicising the body to boost popularity and as means to acquire votes, and placing the body at the centre by making political decisions on whose life has value and whose does not (Reyes, p. 128).

At play here is what Achille Mbembe (2003) calls "Necropolitics" in which "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides. . .in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (p. 11). While Reyes is correct in his assertion that Duterte's drug war produces images of dead corpses that effectively politicizes life, we argue that those images falls within what Jacques Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible," which is a "system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (2004, p. 12). De Chavez and Varadharajan (2019) note that some of the images of the Drug War have the potential to expose a gap in the "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). However, in general, the circulation of these images merely affirms Duterte's necropolitical regime instead of exposing its inhumanity. The "masculinism of the state" (Brown, p. 167) is then expressed through the bodies produced by Duterte's necropolitics and the images that represent it.

We concur with Chung (2020), Wright (2011) and Jackson (2013) who suggest that the masculine performance is integral in the deployment of necropolitics. In the case of Duterte, we argue that this necropolitical performance establishes a perverse and hypermasculine “regime of the sensible” (Rancière 2004, p. 23), which produces a logic that embraces the worst patriarchal values. This regime has framed the rehabilitation of those drug addicts as an emasculating Western idea—one that has only served to hinder the progress of the nation. These images become the ultimate expression of Duterte’s perversely heroic mandate to make sure that his promises of *true change* become a reality. Through metaphors of war, Duterte’s positions the drug addicts as enemies of the state, failed men whose corpses must serve as a reminder of the power of the sovereign.

Conclusion

The image of the Filipino man as perpetuated by Duterte—one who is hypermasculine; that is to say sexist, vulgar, and violent—positions itself as necessary in the narrative of national progress. Rodrigo Duterte’s *tunay na pagbabago* [true change; our translation] calls for political and social restructuring as it idealizes the qualities of hypermasculinity as necessary to realize that promise. In this paper, we have described Duterte’s image as hypermasculine, an image that is fairly consistent in his political speeches, interviews, and media appearances. While his image seems to deviate from the traditional statesman, we argued that he has constructed an identity that enables the kinds of policies he enacts; that is to say, necropolitical. What we find alarming is that his misogyny, his tendency towards violence and his disregard for diplomacy seems to be tolerated and even accepted by the majority of the Philippine electorate. Duterte has introduced a new type of political man, one that embodies the worst aspects of masculinity. We only hope that the damage that he has inflicted on the Philippine political landscape is one that can eventually be changed.

Notes

¹ Duterte originally said this in Filipino. In the original transcript he says:

Nirape nila lahat ng mga babae so 'yung unang asolte, kasi nagretreat sila, naiwan yung ginawa nilang cover, ang isa doon yung layminister na Australyana. Tsk, problema na ito. Pag labas, edi binalot. Tiningnan ko yung mukha, 'tangina parang artista sa America na maganda. Putangina, sayang ito. Ang nagpasok sa isip ko, nirape nila, pinagpilahan nila lahat doon. Nagalit ako kasi nirape, oo isa rin 'yun . Pero napakaganda, dapat ang mayor muna ang mauna. Sayang.

² Duterte originally said “Putangina, nandoon ako sa dugo”.

³ Duterte originally says “Ganyan mag salita ang mga lalaki”.

⁴ The italicized line is a translated line. In Tagalog, Duterte says “Putangina, mumurahin kita sa forum na yan

⁵ Duterte says this in Tagalog saying “..Mga Arabs pinaluhod nila, Sila yun eh! Sino? France, Britain”.

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