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THE PHILIPPINES

An Uneven Trajectory of Deliberative Democracy

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Introduction

The Philippines was once the darling of international press. In 1986 the People Power Revolution showed the world how a peaceful mass mobilisation can end the 20-year rule of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos. The young nation served as beacon of hope as repressive regimes continued to rule Eastern Europe and the rest of Asia. “Your peaceful People Power Revolution was an inspiration to us for our own revolution,” said Czech President Vaclav Havel, fomenting the imaginary that the Philippines set in motion the first wave of velvet revolutions (see Katsiaficas, 2013).

Thirty years later, the Philippines once again grabbed global attention, this time to serve as a warning. Rodrigo Duterte – the man whose campaign promise was to literally kill all drug addicts – won a landslide victory in the 2016 presidential race. This turn of events positioned the Philippines at the forefront of the global tide of populism. Four years into his term, President Duterte continued to enjoy “excellent” performance ratings despite, if not because of, the rising toll of fatalities in his administration’s brutal anti-narcotics campaign. Genocide is how some observers describe the situation in the Philippines today (see Simangan, 2017).

Does deliberative democracy stand a chance in a country under a strongman rule? What shape does public deliberation take in a nation occasionally lured by authoritarian fantasies? Are institutions robust enough to protect spaces for democratic deliberation? Are there discursive spaces where deliberative virtues and aspirations can flourish?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions in four parts. I begin by revisiting the scholarly debates that characterise the deficiencies of Philippine democracy. I propose a shift in discussion from a deficit-oriented view of Philippine politics to one anchored on the aspirations and practice of deliberative democracy. My

approach is both normative and sociological. As a normative approach, I make a case for deliberative democracy as a political ideal that resonates with the Philippines' complex histories and contemporary realities. I argue that, as a sociological approach, deliberative democracy is not only a realistic aspiration but a political practice that has been attempting to gain ground in traditional political institutions, resistance movements, and new forms of political participation. Despite constraints of colonial legacies and political economy, I argue that there remain spaces for vigorous contestation of discourses, construction of counter-narratives, and governance innovations that allow deliberative politics to take root. I organise these observations around the themes of traditions, institutions, and habits of deliberation. I conclude this piece by imagining a post-populist Philippines by revisiting deliberative democracy's normative aspirations.

From Democracy's Deficits to Deliberative Aspirations

Scholarly accounts about the character of Philippine democracy are often framed using a deficit-oriented vocabulary. In these accounts, the deficiencies of Philippine democracy are highlighted by identifying the structural conditions that derail democratic consolidation. Benedict Anderson (1988) described the Philippines as a "cacique democracy," tracing how the Spanish colonial period created a privileged local class that accumulated wealth and power which evolved to today's modern elite. The position of these elites was further entrenched when Spanish caciquism combined with American electoralism. Central to America's colonial legacy is the use of elections to moderate inter-elite competition.

The government installed by the 1986 People Power Revolution is not an exception. As Walden Bello puts it, "what took place in those glorious February days was not a revolution but essentially a transfer of power from one faction of the Philippine elite to another" (Bello, 2007, 1070). The Philippines might have the trappings of liberal democracy, but in practice, "it has functioned as an oligarchical state, where centuries-old elite families manipulate democratic processes to their liking" (Teehankee and Calimbahin, 2020, 120). It is not an overstatement to say that electoral politics in the Philippines have been fought based on "shifting clan alliances than programmatic political parties" (Putzel, 1999, 207). Today, some 70 per cent of the members of the Philippine Congress come from political dynasties, putting into question the extent to which liberal democracy served to redistribute political power (see Mendoza, Beja, Venida and Yap, 2012).

Duterte's rise to presidency is often viewed as a response by a nation frustrated by the false hopes of liberal democracy. There are many explanations about the controversial leader's appeal across a wide spectrum of society (see Thompson, 2016), but what the Duterte phenomenon brings to surface is another deficiency of Philippine democracy – one that emphasises the central role of coercion in shaping economic and political relations. John Sidel's work on political bosses is particularly illuminating. Bosses, Sidel argues, are "predatory power brokers" who exercise monopolistic control over economic resources and coercive power, acting as if

their jurisdictions are personal fiefdoms (Sidel, 1999, 19). During his two decades long tenure as mayor of Davao City, Duterte acted as a warlord who reserved his firepower towards criminals – to fight “the unscrupulous others” that bring misery to “virtuous Filipinos” (Curato, 2016). Duterte is not unique in his tactics as there have been many local mayors known to use the police and vigilante groups as personal death squads to further entrench their families’ control over provinces. What Duterte did, however, was to create a “national-level boss rule” comparable to the Marcos dictatorship (Sidel, 1999, 144). Duterte’s drug war is the clearest instantiation of how liberal democratic principles of human rights and due process are subverted by a strongman who promised peace and prosperity at the expense of individual liberties. Extending from the repression associated to the drug war are many other manifestations of democratic backsliding from jailing opposition leaders, killing activists, shutting down media organisations and orchestrating the ouster of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court known for her record of defending human rights.

The scholarly accounts I have discussed thus far present a deficit-oriented view of Philippine democracy. They identify the structural constraints that limit the Philippines from evolving to a mature and stable liberal democracy. While these accounts are illuminating, their portrayal of democracy has limitations. Marginal in these accounts are the agentic and oftentimes micro political performances of democratic citizenship that incrementally reshape the process of collective opinion and will formation. Nathan Quimpo captures this gap in his description of the Philippines as a contested democracy. For Quimpo, democracy in the Philippines cannot be reduced to machinations of corrupt caciques, predatory oligarchs, and political bosses but is constantly reshaped by subordinate classes claiming space for greater participation in decision-making (Quimpo, 2009). Political agency, in other words, is not exclusive to economic elites. Philippine politics in the 21st century is defined by “streams, even torrents of rural organizations” that have exerted pressure over local landlords and government officials to seriously consider their grievances and demands for agrarian reform (Kerkvliet, 1995, 416) while the Marcos dictatorship trained a cadre of activists that built capacity for deliberative politics after the end of the dictatorship.

Building on Quimpo’s account, I propose a shift in conversation from a deficit-orientated view of democracy to one that foregrounds aspirations and modest achievements for political reform. I argue that deliberative democracy offers a resonant political ideal and a practical political project for the Philippines. As a political ideal, deliberative democracy refers to a normative vision “in which people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face and, on the basis of those discussions, decide on the policies that will then affect their lives” (Bächtiger, Dryzek, Mansbridge and Warren 2018, 2). While the quality of democracy in the Philippines has always been benchmarked to the ideal of liberal democracy (e.g. free, fair and competitive elections, human rights record, media freedom and so on), I argue that examining the quality of Philippine democracy from a deliberative perspective has merit in

examining institutional logics, informal spaces, as well as unexpected practices that serve to facilitate or subvert democratic deepening when it comes to collective decision-making. Deliberative democracy, however, is not “just” a political aspiration. It is also a practical political project that comes alive in concrete practices that aim to challenge but sometimes end up perpetuating the exclusionary character of the Philippines’ elite democracy.

How then is deliberative democracy a resonant aspiration and plausible political project? I offer three reasons in the next sections. Each of the sections demonstrates the practical manifestations as well as constraints of deliberative practice. By identifying these spaces, I hope to bridge the conversation about deficits and aspirations to a discussion of reasonable scope for reform.

Tradition of Deliberation

The view that deliberative democracy is a product of the Western European tradition of Enlightenment has increasingly been challenged over the past decade. Deliberation, as André Bächtiger and John Parkinson (2019) put it, is contingent, performative and distributed. It is contingent as far as deliberation pursues different goals in different contexts. It is performative because deliberation is often used with other forms of democratic communication. And it is distributed because deliberative virtues are dispersed over time and in different settings, instead of being concentrated in a single forum. This is a critical development in deliberative theory for it underscores deliberation’s pluralistic character. Deliberation is no longer idealised as the gentlemanly exchange of reasons, but a political practice that has wide variations in terms of culture and histories.

One way of appreciating the Philippines’ deliberative tradition is to anchor it in relation to broader global transformations in which Filipino revolutionaries, intellectuals and bureaucrats served as active agents of world making, instead of being portrayed as passive recipients of “Western ideals” of Enlightenment.

Take the case of anti-colonial struggles in the Philippines. The *Kartilya* or the code of ethics of Katipunan – the Philippines’ revolutionary movement – emphasises the counterpart virtues of the Enlightenment including equality (*pagkakapantay*) and reason (*katuiran*) (see Richardson 2013). The writings of Apolinario Mabini, the so-called “brains of the revolution,” locates the Philippine revolution against Spain in connection to the American and French Revolutions that are moved by the same ideals. The Philippine revolution has a cosmopolitan character that placed “Filipinos at the vanguard of a global anticolonial movement” which links the birth of the Filipino nation to virtues of progress and democracy (Rafael, 2016, 30).

The virtues of equality and reason are manifest in Katipunan’s commitment to deliberation. Andres Bonifacio, the leader of the 1896 Philippine Revolution, was described to have a “consultative approach to warfare” (May, 2013, 449). Decisions on key policies, including the question of “whether today is the right time to declare a revolution against the Spaniards” was decided by ballot, after several days and nights of deliberation. As Glenn Anthony May puts it, “Katipuneros became

revolutionaries only after due deliberation and only because a representative group of them had reached a decision to go to war” (2013, 454). Bonifacio made forceful arguments but as chair of the *pulong* (assembly), he did not shift the discussion to further his views. “Bonifacio appeared to take seriously the counsel his fellow Katipuneros were proffering, even when it conflicted on his own,” adds May (2013, 455). Ultimately, the decision-making authority in the movement rested not with its leader but with the *pulong*.

The Philippine revolutionary movement, of course, had its own democratic shortcomings. Apart from the exclusion of women in decision-making, Katipuneros narrowly represent “a category of urban residents” comparable to today’s middle classes. They are not elites but neither are they plebeians. They did not have diplomas but neither were they illiterate (Cullinane, 2014, 88). Contrary to popular portrayals of the movement, there is little evidence demonstrating their solidarity with the masses. Instead, Katipunan’s selective membership drew from a “politically volatile and often angry class, the ambitious urban poor that has improved itself but sees no hope in the existing regime” (Corpuz, 1989, Vol. 2, 219). One could argue that the demographic profile of the Katipunan maps on the character of middle class-led social movements in the Philippines today (Tadem, 2019).

While acknowledging the limitation of Katipunan’s inclusiveness, this historical account is important in clarifying impressions about Asian cultures as predisposed to strongman leadership. Instead, May’s analysis of the Katipunan links this tradition to the kind of leadership in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, where rulers were not autocrats but decentralised, delimited and consultative (Wolters, 1999). As close-knit societies dependent on smooth interpersonal relations, mandalas are only considered “men of prowess” when they share power and engage in consultation. By revisiting this explanation, I do not mean to homogenise the pre-colonial experience of the region. Instead, my intention is to emphasise the practicality of norms of deliberation in conditions of cultural and linguistic diversity.

The practicality of deliberative virtues extends to nation-building in post-colonial Philippines. In the book *Liberalism and the Postcolony*, historian Lisandro Claudio argues that a “civic, deliberative liberalism is a necessity in the postcolony, for postcolonies are, like other polities, venues where multiple value-claims are debated” (Claudio, 2017, 18). As countries chart the course of their political futures, deliberation, while not utopian or revolutionary, is a practical means by which adversarial dispositions are unpacked, preferences are crystalised, and power is shared (Claudio, 2017; Ugarizza and Caluwaerts, 2015). Claudio traces the precise ways in which “pencil-pushing” bureaucrats established institutions that facilitate deliberation – from an educational system that espoused Dewey’s liberalism not because schools embraced colonialism but because they see the potentialities of liberalism in the Philippines, to amplifying the voice of the Third World in the United Nations General Assembly by rejecting the assault of First World imperialism and Second World Communist authoritarianism against human rights (Claudio, 2017, 161). In Claudio’s account, the liberal tradition in the Philippines rejects the politics of revolutionary shortcuts and embraces the slow and often boring politics of democratic exchange as drivers of nation-building.

What can we learn by tracing the Philippines' deliberative tradition to revolutionary movements and post-colonial nation building? I offer two lessons. First, this section demonstrates the rootedness of deliberative politics in the Philippines. Far from being a concept uncritically imported from the West, deliberation is a practice that is responsive to social and political realities of the Philippines. It is an aspirational ideal as much as it is a real-world practice that evolves based on historical contingencies. Second, these accounts emphasise the connectedness of the deliberative projects in the Philippines to a global project of democratisation.

Institutions of Deliberation

The design of democratic institutions in the Philippines provides a framework for inclusive deliberation when making collective decisions. The 1987 Constitution guarantees “the right of the people and other organizations to effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making” (Section 16). The Constitution also empowers workers to “participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting their rights and benefits as may be provided by law” (Section 30). These principles are reflected in the Local Government Code of 1991, where local governments are mandated to consider people's organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGO) as “active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy” (Section 34). The State is required to “conduct periodic consultations with appropriate local government units, nongovernmental and people's organizations, and other concerned sectors of the community before any project or programme is implemented in their respective jurisdictions” (Section 2c). Taken together, these provisions guarantee spaces for non-state actors – from workers to NGOs to people's organisations – to shape the process of collective decision-making. Democratic politics is not limited to electoral representation but direct and deliberative participation of ordinary citizens – at least on paper. In practice, institutions designed to uphold norms of deliberative democracy demonstrate an uneven track record. Let's critically examine two examples.

Local Development Councils

Local Development Councils (Councils) are advisory legislative bodies formed at the provincial, city or municipal and barangay (village) level to set the direction of economic and social development efforts. Forming the Council are elected politicians (e.g. village captains, mayors), officials from relevant government agencies, and representatives from NGOs and the private sector who come together to plan development programmes, prioritise projects and allocate budget.

These Councils hold the potential to facilitate consequential deliberation among a variety of stakeholders. One could argue that this is part of the post-colonial, post-authoritarian project of nation-building where loyalties to political families and relationships of patronage are transformed to democratic procedures for deliberative decision-making. As a tool for democratisation, the Local Government

Code prescribes that decision-making “ought to be steered not only by the local government units but also by the people in localities and communities with whom co-governance is assumed” (Medina-Guce, 2020, 3). Developments in national legislation further deepen the requirements of inclusion in these forums, as in the case of the enactment of the Magna Carta for Women which compels Councils to prioritise women in selecting private sector and NGO representatives if the sex ratio of 40 per cent is not met.

Public policy scholars find the deliberative quality of these local councils to be mixed (Kawanaka, 1998; Shatkin, 2000; Medina-Guce, 2020). Gaps in institutional design and implementation are related to the deficiencies of Philippine democracy discussed in the first part of this chapter. Patronage politics, dominance of political families, centralisation and authoritarian legacies thwart the inclusive character of these Councils. A survey commissioned by the Department of Interior and Local Government finds that 14 per cent of NGO representatives were appointed or selected by local chief executives while 41% are not aware of the selection process (in Medina-Guce, 2020). Some observe that NGO representation is dominated by groups like the Rotary Club and the Lion’s Club which do not represent the interests of marginalised communities (Shatkin, 2000: 2362). The accreditation of civil society representatives also tends to be politicised, where those engaged in “public displays of closeness” to local chief executives tend to get preferential treatment (Medina-Guce, 2020: 9). As a result, NGOs in these Councils end up taking part in the same patronage system that co-governance via deliberation needs to subvert (Porio, 2017). Some scholars also raise red flags about the practice of collusion instead of deliberation in these Councils (Ishii, Hossain and Rees, 2007: 363). Given the selectivity in accreditation procedures of NGO representatives, members of the Councils feel pressured “to be under the thumb of the mayor or governor” to maintain their seat (Wurfel, 2003: 221). This reality reflects Garry Rodan’s critique of participatory processes in the Philippines as “participation without democracy” (Rodan, 2018).

There are, however, some exceptions. Naga, a city of 200,000 people in the island of Luzon, is often hailed as the prime example of empowered civil society participation in post-authoritarian Philippines (see Ledesma-Gumasing, 2019). Beyond the requirements of the local government code, civil society groups are “literally empowered to have rights of influence on local governance from policy making to program implementation” through the Naga City People’s Council (Ishii, Hossain and Rees, 2007: 366). The Naga People’s Council serves two functions. First, it serves as a “community organizer” by creating an association of NGOs and people’s organisations representing urban poor communities, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities, among others. Its main role is to build consensus among diverse constituencies about their positions on issues tabled for deliberation not only in the Local Development Council but also in standing committees of the city’s legislative body. Second, the People’s Council creates mechanisms for a directly deliberative democracy by linking public deliberation to formal spaces of decision-making. They enrich deliberations in Local Development

Councils by articulating crystalised positions, which, in turn, allow other members of the council and local government to respond to their arguments. There are many examples of the People's Council's persuasive power – from contributing to the decision to reject a proposal to build a golf course based on arguments about environmental protection to supporting proposals to redistribute private and government-owned land to disadvantaged families.

Why, one might wonder, does Naga have the capacity to institutionalise deliberative politics in a city that was also once under the rule of political families? For sociologist Teresa Melgar (2020), Naga's success was a result of a combination of “reformers in power,” “a vibrant civil society” that seeks to maximise democratic spaces before and after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, and a “decentralization process” taking place in the late 1980s that called for experiments in alternative institutional arrangements. A reformer in power is personified in the city's mayor, Jesse Robredo, who is known for his approachable and collaborative style of governance. While Robredo himself was a handpicked successor of one of the region's most powerful political dynasties, he is well-regarded among advocates of good governance for demonstrating that “effective city management is compatible with yielding power to the people” (Ramon Magsaysay Foundation, 2000). Of course, one has to be careful not to overly romanticise Robredo's legacy. As Takeshi Kawanaka (1998) reminds us, people's organisations also served as pillars of Robredo's political machinery that commanded loyalty to his administration. Nevertheless, Kawanaka recognises that institutionalisation of people's participation created a system of public service that can directly respond to residents' needs, especially urban poor communities. Naga's success, however, was not Robredo's singlehanded achievement. Quite the contrary, Robredo's success in mobilising people's participation depended on the vibrant civil society that already existed in Naga even before Robredo came to power. The vibrant civil society in Naga was a product of the city's position as the trade and education centre for the Bicol region. The city has been home to domestic migrants who have weak ties with political patrons. Many of Naga's residents were active in anti-dictatorship movements or a counter-public that deliberated on possibilities for realising citizen empowerment in democratic settings. “And when that democratic setting came about,” Melgar argues, they saw an opportunity to “deeply embody the notion of having citizens' voice in these governmental spaces so that decision-making is no longer just monopolized by government” (Melgar, 2020). The decentralisation process prompted by the Local Government Code further created space for civil society organisations not only to assert their right to participation but also demonstrate their capacity in governance from developing annual investment plans with city hall officials to amplifying the voice of marginalised sectors in policymaking.

Naga, of course, is one of many examples of cities where deliberative virtues are put in practice through institutional and informal mechanisms. In 2019, the twenty-nine-year-old Vico Sotto toppled the twenty-seven-year rule of a political family in Pasig – a high urbanised city in Metropolitan Manila. The young mayor admitted to being inspired by Robredo's brand of leadership, vowing to practice

participatory governance in pursuing his health, education, housing and anti-corruption agenda. Meanwhile, in the island of Camotes in Central Philippines, the local government institutionalised a *purok* system or a sub-village level form of governance for disaster preparedness. While this system has its own limitations in addressing inequalities in voice and poverty, it has proven to be effective in cultivating an active citizenry capable of deliberating and implementing the island's policies on disaster preparedness (see Curato and Calamba, 2020). These examples, among others, demonstrate that deliberative innovations can stand alongside deficiencies in democratic politics. The challenge is how bright spots for deliberative democracy can thrive and expand and deepen their reach.

Community-Driven Development Programmes

Community-driven development programmes are another space for democratic deliberation in the Philippines. Similar to village assemblies in India (*Gram Sabhas*) and the National Program for Community Empowerment (Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Mandiri) in Indonesia, the Philippines has KALAHI-CIDSS which stands for Kapiti-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan (link arms against poverty) – Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (see Antlöv and Wetterberg, in this volume; Sanyal and Rao, 2018). It was launched in December 2002 as part of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's good governance agenda, after another mass mobilisation ousted Joseph Estrada from the presidency due to corruption charges.

KALAHI is community-driven in the sense that the programme empowers local communities to propose, design and implement projects at the local level. It is a development programme not because it directly raises household incomes but because it aims to address different dimensions of poverty such as voicelessness and deprivation of basic opportunities and services (Tiglao-Torres, 2011: 201). By giving control to communities in charting their own anti-poverty agenda, they are treated as citizens with deliberative agency who can identify needs, argue about development priorities with their peers, and persuade an "approval committee" to fund their proposed projects. This programme is designed to address the problem of political patronage by loosening the reliance of communities from political patrons' largesse. It also transforms the relationship between local governments and citizens by regularly incorporating underserved communities in project planning and implementation through structured community deliberations and informal consultations. Summarising qualitative and quantitative evidence on the programme, Amaryllis Tiglao-Torres finds that the programme, overall, "enabled community members to acquire or improve knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices through their engagement in decision-making process, as well as involvement in the subprojects themselves" (Tiglao-Torres, 2011, 212). KALAHI's developmental goals were also achieved as subprojects like building roads and health centres had "ripple effects" in improving standards of living (Tiglao-Torres, 2011, 212).

This positive appraisal of the programme, however, does not suggest that KALAHI was experienced similarly in all affected communities. As in the case of

Local Development Councils, the process and impact of community-level deliberations are uneven. World Bank economists Julien Labonne and Robert S. Chase find that projects that get selected after deliberations “match the preferences of those households in the middle quartiles of village asset distribution.” And, as expected, households that take an active role in community activities tend to have their preferences represented in proposals put forward by the community (Labonne and Chase, 2009, 220). As these programmes do not follow the logic of random selection or civic lottery applied in deliberative mini-publics, they are not immune from the worry that “the usual suspects” are the ones that show up and exert influence over collective decision-making (see He, 2019).

Others extend this critique and call for public deliberation that unpacks the reasons for the dominance of participatory and citizen empowerment-focused development programmes. Ben Reid (2011) considers KALAH I as a strategy to depoliticise poverty as a structural issue. It is not an accident that the programme took off in the Arroyo administration whose legitimacy was constantly put into question given the extra-parliamentary manner in which she secured power. Promoting citizen empowerment, one could argue, masks elite power as progressive politics which appeases Arroyo’s civil society allies. It also absolves the regime’s power grab from the populist rule of Joseph Estrada by promoting a good governance agenda palatable to institutions like the World Bank and the US State Department. Meanwhile, Nilan G. Yu warns against “inspiring stories of personal change and success,” as documented in KALAH I’s annual reports and case studies (Yu, 2013: 29). These stories, he argues, perpetuate a distorted narrative that places the burden of solving social problems to neglected communities, instead of assigning blame and seeking justice from political inequalities that perpetuate poverty. These criticisms, among others, underscore the importance of maintaining a critical public sphere that can problematise dominant anti-poverty discourses (see Kusaka, 2017).

Local Development Councils and KALAH I are two of several institutional examples demonstrating the prospects of deliberative democracy in the Philippines. They are also illustrations of the constraints deliberative institutional design faces when overlayed with realities of elite democracy. The purpose of this section is neither to romanticise nor discredit deliberative institutions but to identify the spaces where deliberative politics takes root, how these spaces are compromised, and, hopefully, provoke reflection for reform.

Habits of Deliberation

Outside formal spaces of governance, deliberative democracy comes alive in the public sphere where free circulation of contesting discourses takes place. The Philippines is renowned to have one of the highest densities of NGOs in the world, who are reputed for being dynamic, strong, and organised (Aldaba, 2002). From a deliberative democracy standpoint, civil society organisations in the Philippines play a dual role in cultivating habits of public deliberation. First, they produce

discourses of accountability that challenge the state's abuse of power. Even during Duterte's illiberal regime, civil society organisations could claim success holding the state accountable for its violent anti-narcotics campaign. A broad alliance of political, religious, and youth organisations drew attention to the brutal murder of Kian Delos Santos, which prompted a shift in discourse on the drug war, albeit temporarily. Kian was a 17-year-old student taken by police officers from his home on the guise of a drug raid. Caught on CCTV cameras is footage of police officers dragging the boy into a dark alley near a pigsty, shooting him at close range, twice in the head and once in the back. Civil society organisations mobilised to call for a senate inquiry to hold the Philippine National Police accountable. They also staged a sorrowful protest during Kian's funeral. By combining arguments on human rights and the affective dimension of killing a young boy whose last words were "please stop, I have an exam tomorrow," civil society groups were successful in demanding policy reforms and putting police officers behind bars. Even the tough talking president who promised police immunity in violent anti-drug operations shifted his tone and declared the incident as one that is "not in the performance of duty" (Subingsubing and Ramos, 2018).

Second, civil society organisations cultivate habits of deliberation by articulating a range of contesting views using different discursive strategies. The institutions discussed in the previous section are examples of civil society organisations co-constructing democratic innovations by invoking ideals of liberal and participatory democracy that gained currency in anti-dictatorship movements. Beyond institutional design, civil society organisations enrich public deliberation by crystallising fragmented views on complex issues using frames that resonate to decision-makers and the wider society. Public deliberation on the Reproductive Health Bill is one example of how civil society groups clarified the terms of a divisive and complicated debate. A frame analysis finds that liberal and conservative positions on family planning, sex education, responsible parenthood, and women's rights were "faithfully reflected in news coverage" (David, Fille, Legara, Atun and Monterola 2017: 1263). Despite the popularity of the bill – over 75 per cent of Filipinos supported it – the views of the Roman Catholic Church and conservative organisations were still well-represented in news stories and televised debates. This example, among others, demonstrates the vitality of public deliberation as far as giving space to a range of contesting discourses is concerned (see Curato, 2013).

It goes without saying that the media plays a primary role in facilitating the circulation of contesting discourses in the deliberative system (see Maia, 2012). How Philippine media performs this role is shaped by its chequered history of freedom and control. The Marcos dictatorship imposed "the sternest and most systematic controls in history" based on decrees and secret orders, as well as "unspoken but real threats of arrest, closure, banning, firing and even death." Emerging from this dark period is the emergence of "heroic journalism" and "alternative press" which built capacities not only for investigative journalism but also a flourishing commentary culture necessary for a robust public sphere (Fernandez, 1989: 342). One, however, must be careful in uncritically celebrating the Philippines' vibrant and

free press. The return of constitutional guarantee on press freedom in 1987 also marked the return of elite ownership of media companies. Media dynasties of broadcasting like the Lopezes and the Gozons portray themselves as “patrons of national cultural life” that support foundations and charities connected to their media organisations (Perterra, 2019: 141). Indeed, the performance of cacique democracy in the Philippines is not exclusive to political elites. Media elites too cultivate “family-like relations that produce loyalty among viewers” which, in turn, can mobilise audiences to political communities who can shape electoral and political outcomes (Perterra, 2019: 142). This, coupled with pressures for journalists to engage in sensational reporting to meet the demands of a competitive market, places media integrity on the spotlight. No less than President Duterte called out the media in his public address for their corrupt practices (“presstitutes”), bias in reporting, and foreign influence. These attacks are not inconsequential. Four years into Duterte’s term, ABS-CBN, the Philippines’ largest news and entertainment network, was shut down after the congress decided not to renew its franchise. Rappler, a young online news organisation known for its reportage on the drug war and exposé on state-sponsored troll armies, is facing multiple cases of libel and tax evasion. All these are unfolding in a country that for decades has been considered a hotspot for unsolved journalist killings comparable to Syria, Somalia and Iraq (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019).

The vulnerability of the public sphere is not limited to journalists, but also to ordinary citizens, whom today, are confronted by overt and indirect threats for engaging in democratic contestation. Central to Duterte’s rise to power and regime maintenance are troll armies that systematically amplify discourses that defend state policy (see Ong and Cabañes, 2018). These troll armies have varied consequences for the public sphere. They increase the cost of putting forward a view that goes against the state. There have been many examples of ordinary citizens who have received death and rape threats for criticising Duterte’s drug war, while others receive a subpoena for criticising the government’s COVID-19 response (Conde, 2020). Troll armies also distort public discourse by hijacking trending topics on Twitter to manufacture the virality or traction of a particular discourse. Trolls, for example, co-ordinated to make a hashtag trend that body shames a young celebrity who joined a protest against ABS-CBN’s shutdown. Body shaming might seem like a juvenile tactic, but this is part of the repertoire of bullying that make example of influencers who speak up against the Duterte regime. The consequences of these co-ordinated attacks are also not insignificant. Humiliation not only cost celebrities and influencers their reputation and their careers, it also sends a chilling effect to those who wish to take part in putting forward critical discourses that hold the state accountable. Finally, paid trolls also amplify “fake news” and hate speech from the President and his allies, thereby compromising opinion-formation and deliberation’s truth-tracking functions. Disseminating false information about journalists, activists, and political opposition serves to delegitimise critical voices, which further widens the scope for the administration to consolidate power. This, together with other tactics that curtail press freedom and civil rights in the Philippines pose clear threats to prospects of public deliberation (Coronel, 2020).

What do these observations about habits of deliberation tell us about the character of deliberative democracy in the Philippines today? Three lessons can be gleaned from this section. First, this section emphasised the uneven trajectory of deliberation in the public sphere. Regimes of control and freedom shape how media institutions and civil society organisations formulate and disseminate a range of contesting discourses. This section underscored the vibrant, diverse and consequential voices in the public sphere, while recognising that these deliberations unfold within the backdrop of cacique democracy and an increasingly illiberal regime. Second, this section demonstrated the importance of paying attention to micropolitical tactics that both deepen and subvert deliberative politics. From using an affective repertoire of protest to demand reforms in Duterte’s drug war to shaming and bullying strategies directed at young influencers online, these are reminders that the quality of deliberative democracy is hinged on micropolitical practices that shape citizens’ experiences of public deliberation. While the previous section focused on the formal institutions of deliberation, this section focused on the democratic spaces in the “wild public sphere,” which, in deliberative theory is considered the space for new discourses to emerge. Finally, this section hopes to posit possibilities for reform. It is important to be cognisant of the historical and structural constraints for deliberative democracy to flourish in the Philippines, but is equally important to sharpen our senses when determining promising spaces for deliberative politics. Discussions about Philippine democracy can be enriched by shifting from a deficit-oriented vocabulary to one that spells out democratic aspirations and accompanying political projects that can realise these goals. Emerging counter-disinformation tactics, for example, are worth monitoring, as Filipinos seek to defend the integrity of the public sphere.

Conclusion: A Time for Monsters?

In 2016 Antonio Gramsci’s commentary on the great interregnum once again became germane as observers seeking to make sense of the so-called year of voting dangerously. “The old world is dying, the new world struggles to be born: now is the time for monsters” (Gramsci, 1971: 275–76). The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the precarious character of the liberal international order, with the Philippines at the forefront of these transformations. However, as Milan Babic astutely points out, while there have been many diagnoses about the slow death of liberal democracy and increasing speculation about what is to come, there is little discussion about what takes place in between the death of the old and birth of the new world order (Babic, 2020). It is with this framing that I end my discussion about deliberative democracy in the Philippines. At the core of deliberative politics is the ideal of self-government, where citizens become authors of collective decisions that affect their lives (Lafont, 2019). In this chapter, I demonstrated how deliberative democracy flourished in periods of uncertainty – from revolutionary movements against colonialism to post-colonial nation-building to anti-dictatorship campaigns to civil society-driven democratic innovations after the People Power Revolution.

The deliberative credentials of these historical moments are far from perfect. They are often thwarted by enduring structures of power that perpetuate elite rule. Nevertheless, these political moments are reminders that deliberative democracy is a political project that finds resonance in critical historical junctures when citizens assert their capacity for self-government and build on the imperfect achievements of heroes, pencil-pushing bureaucrats, and ordinary citizens who have come before them. The Philippines once again is at a crossroads. It is ready to fight its monsters.

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