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Precarious Lives of Children and Youth in the Philippines: Critical Perspectives on Rights-based Approaches to Development and Empowerment

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Doing a master's thesis during the course of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been strenuous experience to say the least. Thankfully, I have received abundant support from those around me including my partner, family, and friends.

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Aleksi J. Seger

Abstract

The Philippines is a country of extreme divergence polarized by its meteoric economic growth, natural – and human – wealth, colonial history, and entrenched poverty. Children and youth (ages one to 18) make up over 40 per cent of the nation's population and remain a highly marginalized and maltreated cohort in Philippine society whose daily lives unfold within the precarious context of paradoxical encounters between the archipelago's traditional forces of culture, religion, patrimonialism, and the indelible vigor of neoliberal capitalism with its dogma of modernizing the under-developed. This thesis aims to investigate the complex nature of precarious childhoods in the Philippines and elaborate upon the varying factors which have contributed to the precarious state of affairs in the nation. Besides understanding the different forces which have exacerbated societal precarity (e.g. contemporary political-economy, socio-cultural practices, and Catholicism), this project intends to assess how children's rights discourse and rights-based practices to development have unfolded in the country. Through multidisciplinary analytic lenses, an interdisciplinary literature review, and in-depth interviews with key informants, the present thesis will highlight why precarity has become a 'life condition' for a vast number of Filipino youth and children, and how rights-based approaches to development and children's empowerment are directly at odds with normative Filipino socio-cultural practices. By utilizing up-to-date academic and journalistic sources, the precarious plight of Filipino children and youth will also be located within the wider context of President Rodrigo Duterte's 'war on drugs', and in doing so I will showcase how the initiative has constituted as a step towards the criminalization of poverty.

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List of Abbreviations

4Ps	Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program
AMS	ASEAN Member State
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CICL	Children in conflict with the law
CWR	Philippine Center for Women's Resources
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
EDSA	Colloquial name for "People Power Revolution" of 1986
EJK	Extrajudicial Killings
GNP	Gross national product
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT-BPO	IT-enabled business process outsourcing
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MWSS	Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
PCW	Philippine Commission on Women
PNP	Philippine National Police
PREDA	People's Recovery Empowerment Development Assistance Foundation
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
PSE	Philippine Stock Exchange
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
SOC	Survey on Children
(UN)CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
VAC	Violence against children
WB	World Bank
YDH	Youth Detention Homes
YRC	Youth Rehabilitation Centers

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Philippines is a country of extreme divergence polarized by its meteoric economic growth, natural – and human – wealth, colonial history, and entrenched poverty. Children and youth (ages one to 18) make up over 40 per cent of the nation's population and remain a highly marginalized and maltreated cohort in Philippine society whose daily lives unfold within the precarious context of paradoxical encounters between the archipelago's traditional forces of culture, religion, patrimonialism, and the indelible vigor of neoliberal capitalism with its dogma of modernizing the under-developed. This thesis aims to investigate the complex nature of precarious childhoods in the Philippines and elaborate upon the varying factors which have contributed to the precarious state of affairs in the nation. Besides understanding the different forces which have exacerbated societal precarity (e.g. contemporary political-economy, socio-cultural practices, and Catholicism), this project intends to assess how children's rights discourse and rights-based development practices have unfolded in the country. Through multidisciplinary analytic lenses, an interdisciplinary literature review, and in-depth interviews with key informants, the present thesis will highlight why precarity has become a 'life condition' for a vast number of Filipino youth and children, and how rights-based approaches to development and children's empowerment are directly at odds with normative Filipino socio-cultural practices. By utilizing up-to-date academic and journalistic sources, the precarious plight of Filipino children and youth will also be located within the wider context of President Rodrigo Duterte's 'war on drugs', and in doing so I will showcase how the initiative has constituted as a step towards the criminalization of poverty.

My personal motivation for conducting this research is straight-forward. For years I have been fascinated by the Philippines from political, socio-cultural, and historical perspectives. During my undergraduate years, I enrolled in several courses pertaining to United States' colonialism, which furthered my curiosity for the unique history of the Philippine archipelago. As my academic path has taken me to writing about childhood and children's rights, I eagerly took the opportunity to investigate the Philippines with a closer eye. My interest in the Philippines has also been informed by my interactions with Filipinos, whether it be friends, professors, classmates, or coworkers. These personal experiences have been overwhelmingly positive, and in my opinion the hospitality of Filipinos is second to none.

Since the start of Duterte's presidency and his war on drugs, I began to follow Philippine news more attentively. During the eight years that I lived in Canada, I witnessed firsthand the societal and human costs of the opioid epidemic. Despite having lived in the affluent suburbs of Toronto, daily visual reminders of the drug epidemic were unavoidable and scale of the problem was something I found difficult to ignore. These experiences reshaped my opinions on drug users and the illegality of narcotics in general, and through them I developed deep empathy and an academic interest towards the struggles of drug users across the world. Academically, my view of drug-abuse as a public health concern – rather than a criminal matter – has been especially influenced by the works of physician

Gabor Maté and neuroscientist Carl Hart. For Maté, childhood trauma and adversity are the primary antecedents which increase individuals' susceptibility to substance abuse (Maté, 2012). Dr. Hart, on the other hand, has been an outspoken critic of contemporary anti-drug policies in the United States and his common-sense arguments for the legalization of all narcotics are compelling (C. L. Hart, 2021). Hart's research has also showcased how the negative psychopharmacological effects of illegal narcotics have been sensationalized in media and why policies on narcotics should reflect scientific fact in lieu of moralism (C. L. Hart, 2021; C. L. Hart & Hart, 2019).

1.1 Background

In a televised transfer of power in February 1986, Corazon C. Aquino rose to stage in the San Juan district of Manila to celebrate her appointment as the first democratically elected president of the Philippines (Bello & Gershman, 1990; Javate de Dios, Daroy, & Kalaw-Tirol, 1988). The tyrannical martial law era of Ferdinand Marcos had come to pass and the Philippine populace rejoiced as democracy finally reached the shores of their archipelago. In her inaugural speech at San Juan's *Club Filipino* – an exclusive clubhouse established for Filipino upper classes in 1898 (Rappler, 2014) – Aquino buoyantly declared; “It is fitting and proper that, as our people lost their rights and liberties at midnight fourteen years ago, the people should formally recover those lost rights and liberties in the full light of day” (Javate de Dios, Daroy, & Kalaw-Tirol, 1988, p. 761-762). A new chapter in Philippine history had begun, but its rhetoric of revolutionary reform failed to materialize. Decades following Aquino's presidency, the Philippines remains a nation marred by deep-rooted precarity, endemic poverty, and a political system resembling a soap-opera of landed and wealthy regional oligarchs – dating back to Spanish colonialism – who continue to embezzle Filipino masses with total impunity (Silarde, 2020). The “full light of day” has not shone down to the lowest echelons of Philippine society, and even though the nation had seemingly unshackled itself from its colonial past, it became an emblematic case study for the precarious and paradoxical consequences of neoliberal market reforms and neocolonial globalization. Indeed, there is arguably no other nation where the majority population are as intertwined to – and dependent upon – global economic processes (Alipio, 2019).

With Rodrigo Duterte's election in 2016 and the commencement of his 'war on drugs', fears regarding a return to authoritarianism have reignited (Domingo, 2016; Gallagher, Raffle, & Maulana, 2020; Jensen & Hapal, 2018). Despite international backlash against Duterte's government, the president – and his anti-drug policies – remain highly popular among the Filipino electorate (Reuters, 2020; Ronald & Leonardo, 2020). Just as in the past, the central paradox of contemporary Philippine society endures; how can a country with such immeasurable natural and human wealth remain so unequal? By weaving together academic, historical, and journalistic sources, the present thesis will unpack this dilemma and create a comprehensive narrative regarding the precarious lives of children and youth in the nation and the feasibility of rights-based approaches to development and children's empowerment.

The focus on the precarious lives of children and youth is not unwarranted. Children and youth (from ages one to 18) make up over 40 per cent of the total population of 100

million (UNICEF, 2015). While the country's 2019 Voluntary Sustainable Development Goals Report (NEDA, 2019) confirmed several landmarks in economic development, adolescents are a highly marginalized, maltreated, and vulnerable group (Aldaba & Sescon, 2009; Racelis & Aguirre, 2002; Tabuga, Reyes, Asis, & Mondez, 2014). Children disadvantaged status is aggravated by poverty, with 35.5 per cent of Filipino children living below the poverty-line and the incidence of poverty increasing among larger families which are commonplace in the country with the highest average fertility rates – at 3.2 births per woman – in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc (UNICEF, 2015). As noted in a 2016 United Nations Working Report, the country's meteoric economic growth has failed to incite any sustained or significant improvements in social development (Grugel & Nem Singh, 2016) and recent UNICEF reports (2015, 2017) have indicated the ineffectiveness of the present-day poverty-alleviating initiatives due to harmful socio-cultural norms, lack of financing, and poor policy-enforcement among other factors. As this thesis will demonstrate, poverty is an inescapable reality for the vast majority of Filipino families (Albert, Santos, & Vizmanos, 2018) and the archipelago's insistent poverty has had a myriad of disenfranchising, *precaritizing*, and criminogenic effects on its adolescent population. Impoverished Filipino children and youth are especially vulnerable and face diverse forms of exploitation and maltreatment both in and outside of their home environments (Roche, 2019). With the near inexistence of government-funded social services (Grugel & Nem Singh, 2016) or child protective agencies (Roche, 2017, 2019), the burdens of children's rights advocacy, empowerment, and rehabilitation have been bestowed upon Philippine civil society, namely non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Catholic church.

To accurately gauge the precarious plight of impoverished youth and children, their daily existences will be assessed in consideration of the overarching politico-economic, historical, and socio-cultural contexts under which their lives unfold. Such an approach necessitates the use of interdisciplinary methodologies and this thesis is predicated upon providing a holistic and up-to-date investigation into these precaritizing factors. While poverty is a crucial component in the proliferation of precarity, other factors must also be acknowledged as no single variable can in and of itself capture the extent of precarity in the nation. This question will be explored from four different angles. First, I will showcase how the country's colonial past continues to influence the modern state of Filipino politics and economics. Second, I will consider how neoliberalism and the programmes of international development agencies have heightened precarity and economic insecurity. Third, Catholicism – as a cultural identity and political force – will be assessed for its convoluted and oftentimes contrasting influences. Lastly, in order to contextualize these arguments with present-day developments, this thesis will consider how President Rodrigo Duterte's policies – including the 'war on drugs' – have impacted children and impoverished families in the Philippines and why some scholars have decried the initiative as inherently anti-poor (Simangan, 2018).

While understanding precarity as a process is a focal point of this thesis, the topic of rights-based approaches is equally integral. Central to rights-based approaches to development and children's empowerment is the notion that development should be human-centered, and that due to children's particularistic needs, development initiatives should

take into account children's perspectives (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). The idea is that through institutionalizing children's rights and enabling children's participation in development programmes, children will be empowered and better equipped to become the future leaders of their communities. While the Philippines ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, the legally mandated enforcement of children's rights has not been recognized as imperative since children have traditionally occupied the lowest position in the Filipino social hierarchy and are seen as wholly dependent upon – or inseparable from – their families (Roche, 2017, 2019). The socio-cultural importance of *family* cannot be downplayed. The family is the primary welfare-benefactor of children and according to Philippines' Department of Justice, only the family is responsible *for* and capable *of* enforcing, preserving, and teaching rights to their children (Roche, 2019). The mismatches between children's rights discourse and practice have been expressly evident in the arena rights-based approaches to development. These approaches, as promoted by United Nations, are highly disputed in contemporary literature and this thesis will critically unravel the ways through which rights-based discourse and practices have unfolded in the Philippines and whether a rights-based focus can coexist with the archipelago's socio-cultural context. By examining the state of children's rights in the nation and the different challenges of rights-based development practices, I will showcase how local cultural practices are directly at odds with the conceptualization of rights espoused by development agencies and the CRC.

In order to provide more nuance to arguments regarding the viability of rights-based development and children's rights discourse, this thesis will also assess the non-governmental organization of People's Recovery Empowerment Development Assistance Foundation (PREDA). Since its inception in the 1970s, PREDA has been at the forefront of children's rights advocacy, empowerment, and rehabilitation in the Philippines (PREDA, 2020d). Through analyzing the practices of PREDA, the enforcement of international legal frameworks like the CRC, and the practicality of rights-based practices can be further contextualized. In doing so, the investigation will highlight how normative socio-cultural practices among other overarching conditions complicate the efficacy of NGO programmes for children's rehabilitation and empowerment. I will specifically examine what PREDA are doing to help disadvantaged Filipino children and youth, and what is the nature of the interventions or rehabilitative programmes provided by the NGO. Likewise, I will deliberate upon whether PREDA reproduce a certain vision or image of childhood.

1.2 Research Questions

The two major research questions and arguments of this thesis are as follows. Firstly I will assess; ***What are the factors that engender and reinforce Philippines' persistent poverty and societal precarity?*** Contextualizing the precarious lives of youth and children necessitates an analysis into the wider context within which their lives unfold, namely the nation's historico-institutional, politico-economic, and socio-cultural landscapes. By doing so, I will elucidate why Filipino adolescents are particularly *precaritized* by macro-level forces and how the capacities for poverty alleviation and redistributive reform are incredibly weak due to the historically entrenched rule of landed oligarchy and political dynasties. Secondly, and in relation to rights-based approaches to development and

children's empowerment, I ask: ***What are the challenges related to rights-based practices in the Philippines and are these approaches congruent with the local culture?*** Through my analysis I will argue that while rights-based approaches to development and children's empowerment are worthwhile objectives, they manifest as arduously ill-fated pipedreams in practice as Eurocentric and individualistic notions of children's rights are incompatible with the Philippines' socio-cultural context at-large.

To reiterate, the purpose of this empirical study is to create a comprehensive and multidisciplinary narrative pertaining to the current situation of impoverished children and youth in the Philippines. Considering the nation's volatile post-colonial past, unpredictable politics, and climbing rates of poverty, crime, and population, an analysis of the lowest subject in Filipino society – children and youth – is both warranted and necessary. The present research will enclose how precarity has permeated the lives of the nation's majority – the poor. I approach my analysis of precarity in reference to Judith Butler's (2004) distinction between *precariousness* and *precarity*. This investigation is not simply an analysis of impoverished children – or the lowest level in society – but an inclusive account vis-à-vis the *state* of precarity in the Philippines. A major motivation behind the selected research foci is to bridge the 'gap' identified by Bessell (2009). She argued for a major disconnect in Filipino children's participation, the children's rights policy framework, and the broader factors of institutions and governance in the Philippines. Bessell outlined how the very notion of 'children's participation' is poorly understood within local communities and contexts. In order to tackle the issues brought to light by Bessell, I intend to create a dialogue between the various macro- and micro-level factors at-play in the contemporary Philippine context. The programmes of PREDA, along with the children's rights-based perspective, will be located and analyzed in relation to these macro-level antecedents which have contributed to the precarious state of affairs in the nation.

It is worthwhile to note that this research is not a critique of the Filipino government and Rodrigo Duterte. Rather my intention is to understand *why* Duterte is such a divisive figure and *how* he has succeeded in maintaining his domestic popularity despite the international condemnation of his policies. Likewise, this thesis is not a critique of the functions and mechanisms neoliberal capitalism. Despite their culpability, these systems are working as intended – to resist change whilst subjugating masses and nullifying dissidence – a claim which will be corroborated by the research I have conducted. The provided evidence and subsequent arguments are intended to stress the fact that the lived experiences of Filipino adolescents and the working class are inseparably linked to and uniquely influenced by global politico-economic mechanisms. While such issues necessitate globalized solutions, the exportation of Eurocentric rights-based discourses to development and children's empowerment is ill-advised and counterintuitive. To address nation's unique socio-cultural and historical context, localized solutions to the empowerment of children and youth are deemed necessary.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter two I will provide the background context for assessing the topic of children and youth in precarity. In order to illuminate the variety of factors which have

influenced the unique characteristics of the Philippines, this chapter will discuss the Philippines' colonial legacies as well as the everchanging landscape of Filipino politics. 'Dutertismo', or the political ideology of President Duterte, will also be examined so as to better understand how and why the President remains a beloved figure in his nation. Besides providing historical context for the arguments of this thesis, Chapter two will also consider the present-day state of education, healthcare, and social mobility in the Philippines.

The third Chapter will offer a more thorough analysis of the theoretical frameworks upon which I have built my arguments. Specifically, Chapter three will highlight why interdisciplinary methods are best suited for analyzing precarity in the Philippine context and how I have applied these different theories in my investigation.

The methodologies used in the present project will be reviewed in Chapter four. The chapter will deliberate upon the present-day state of child-centered research in a post-COVID world. The chapter will elucidate upon the various dilemmas which arose during the course of research and offer an overview of the present thesis' methodological limitations.

Chapter five is dedicated to assessing the specific factors which have contributed to precarity in the Philippines. The chapter will detail the implications of Catholicism, Duterte's 'war on drugs', and the contemporary Philippine political-economy.

The sixth Chapter will provide a detailed analysis into the specific forms of child exploitation which occur in the Philippines. I will cover the topics of children's labour, children in conflict with the law, and children's sexual and physical abuse. In doing so, I will show how these abuses infringe upon the wellbeing of children and how children's disadvantaged societal position is exacerbated by the various forms of exploitations that they endure. Chapter six will also detail the present-day state of children's rights in the country and provide a legal overview of how children's rights are perceived and legislated within the judiciary branches of the Filipino government. Despite the ratification of the UNCRC, this chapter will showcase how present and past Filipino governments have failed in upholding the mandates of the CRC and how certain socio-cultural norms are directly at odds with rights discourse and legislation in the nation.

In Chapter seven I will focus on the history, practices, and achievements of PREDA. This chapter will deliberate upon how local NGOs like PREDA are attempting to tackle wider societal issues which plague Filipino adolescents. In particular, this chapter will assess the types of obstacles which prevent the emancipation and empowerment of children and youth. Through the analysis we will arrive at a clearer image of the *scale* of social problems in the nation, and see how international doctrines like the CRC are being translated and applied by NGOs who advocate for children and youth.

The eighth Chapter will provide a discussion of the research findings presented in this thesis. This chapter will also propose suggestions for future studies on the topic of precarious childhoods in the Philippines.

Chapter nine will conclude my investigation by reiterating the arguments and findings of the thesis. In this chapter I will offer my final thoughts on the topics analyzed in this project and discuss potential ways forward.

Chapter 2: Contextual Background

A closer inspection into the Philippines' history, politics, and colonial past is necessary for multiple reasons. Firstly, by analyzing the nation's colonial legacy, we will arrive at a clearer understanding of how the nation's persistent poverty has been engendered by colonial and neocolonial factions. Second, by deliberating upon the lopsided nature of Philippine politics and class-relations, we can better gauge the reasons behind Duterte's election victory and his persistent support. Third, by providing an overview into the state of social mobility, education, and healthcare in the nation, I will shed light upon the factors that halt the possibilities for upwards social mobility and exacerbate the persistence of poverty.

2.1 Philippines' Bipartite Colonial Inheritance

2.2 The Iberian Experiment: Creating the Filipino.

Spanish reign from 1565 to 1898 marked the single longest period of colonial rule in the history of the Philippine archipelago. The islands, named after Spain's ruling Monarch King Philip II, had never been subjugated to the rule of a unified state and indeed, the various indigenous ethnic and linguistic groups were all conveniently slotted under the label of *Filipino* (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). The Pope had granted the Spanish Crown permission to the islands on the condition that the indigenous populations were Christianized and as a result, the Catholic church became the central pillar of both colonial life and governance (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Much like in the Americas, the Iberian colonialists subdued the existing native factions with war and disease (Newson, 2009). With indigenous resistance nullified, the Spanish had succeeded in baptizing over half of the existing populations by the 1590s (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018).

Effectively, Spanish imperial rule equated to rule by friars and the Catholic church became the dominant authority on the archipelago during the period (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Being that the Philippines were the Spanish empire's most distant colonial outpost, the Church became essential in maintaining Spanish dominion and the Spanish Crown never attempted to build a colonial state with a strong bureaucratic apparatus, instead allowing the Church to oversee all the islands non-economic matters (Kramer, 2006). What developed were political, economic, and governmental systems which resembled the feudal system of medieval Europe (Kramer, 2006). Economically, the islands were organized akin to the Latin-American colonies with an emphasis on *hacienda* plantations and the *encomienda* system of slave labour (Anderson, 1976). The administrative layout of the Spanish colonial state gave rise to a new class of landed, Hispanicised, and powerful regional elites known as *principalía* (Kramer, 2006; D. C. Simbulan, 2005). This social class consisted of precolonial regional chieftains and *mestizos*

(mixed-race Filipinos) (D. C. Simbulan, 2005) and as export trade blossomed in the late nineteenth century, these clans entrenched their provincial footholds and became the nation's bureaucratic upper-class (Kramer, 2006).

The weakness and near non-existence of a Spanish colonial state marks a significant change from the colonial approaches employed in South America (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Unlike in South America, the Spanish colonialists in the Philippines were not as interested in Hispanicizing the indigenous populations partly since the Spanish crown had deemed the native populations as 'undeserving' based on racial inferiority (Kramer, 2006). Since the colonial-era state and education system were run entirely by the Catholic Church, the focus had shifted from Hispanization to Evangelization (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Majority of the Filipinos during this period never learned Spanish due to such tactics, yet Spanish remained as the official language of business and was spoken largely by the church-educated Filipino elites (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018).

One of the most notable legacies of the 333 years of Spanish rule was the establishment of a caste system (Kramer, 2006). The "color line" which W.E.B. Du Bois argued to be the organizing principle of global commerce and an inseparable feature of imperialism was alive and well in the Philippines during its colonial history (Kramer, 2006). The Iberian caste system, while transformed, is visible to this day and continues shape politics and ethnic relations in the country. The caste system divided the population by ethnic blood lines, effectively denoting the degree to which a person was 'civilized' in the eyes of the colonialists (Kramer, 2006). These racial divisions were institutionalized with taxation and labour laws which furthered the economic exclusion of non-Hispanicised or non-Catholic ethnic groups.

Having learned from indigenous revolts in Latin America, the Spanish Crown made deliberate attempts at incentivizing mixed-race marriage in order to quell ethnic tensions and insurgency but to also encourage further evangelization (Kramer, 2006). While mixed-race families and racial integration were common during the Spanish period, anticolonial Filipino nationalists like José Rizal sought to advance a reimagined pre-Hispanic Filipino identity (Kramer, 2006). These Filipino nationalists tapped into their common ancestry of Catholicism as it was seen as the only true unifying feature of *all* Filipinos (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). As argued by Kramer (2006) however, the pro-independence nationalist movement in the Philippines had reoriented the anticolonial struggle to a form of national colonialism that reinstated internal classifications of difference, specifically excluding the animistic religious sects and the Muslim populations of the Southern islands.

There is much more about this period in the Philippines' history that could be discussed, but my goal is to emphasise how Spanish colonialism transformed the economic and cultural landscape of the archipelago and instituted wealth and power at the hands of the Catholic church and elite regional families. The very category of *Filipino* was created during the Iberian reign and more importantly, Catholicism became a powerful means of coalescing the various ethnic and linguistic communities under a shared religious doctrine and identity.

2.3 The American Era: Modernization Without Secularization

Iberian dominion came to an end after the Spanish-American War in 1898. American imperialists were keen to modernize the largely agrarian society leftover by the Spanish and imposed strict economic controls that constrained the sovereignty of the new independent Philippine state (Kramer, 2006; Wolters, 2012). In exchange for land and leftover infrastructure, the United States paid \$20 million to the Spanish Crown (Chambers, 2000). The transfer of ownership was not a straight-forward matter and tensions eventually escalated with the Americans fighting against various Filipino insurgent groups during the Philippine-American War from 1899 to 1902 (McCoy, 2009b). While the United States attempted to subdue the power and influence of the church by disestablishing Catholicism as the state religion, such efforts at secularization failed in undermining the church's authority over social life in the country (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Contrary to the original intent, the importation of American-style secular education only furthered the elite status of Church-operated schools where the majority of the country's rich received their education.

The socio-economic landscape of Philippines underwent radical changes during the initial years of American colonialism. Major land reforms took place in 1904 as friar-owned land and assets were bought and resold to wealthier Filipino estate owners. Yet like their Iberian predecessors, the American imperialists were not interested in installing their own bureaucrats across the islands to maintain American hegemony. In their attempts to democratize the island nation, the United States utilized corrupt authoritarian techniques in fostering control over the nation (McCoy, 2009b). Whereas the Spanish had relied on the Catholic friars for the supervision of regional affairs, American colonial hegemony relied upon coercion, surveillance, and control of information (McCoy, 2009b). The American doctrine for empire-building in the Philippines – and to an extent in Puerto Rico and Cuba – was centered around insularity (Kramer, 2006). In other words, the decentralized American colonial state functioned with the sole purpose of insulating the Philippines from the political affairs of Washington. Grzymala-Busse and Slater (2018) saw the American insular government of the Philippines as “one of the most standoffish states in the annals of colonial history” (p. 558). Hutchcroft (1991) went further and argued that the American colonizers were never fundamentally interested nation-building and were instead invested in propping up pro-American oligarchs who worked in favour of American business interests.

The newly imported Americanized electoral system with its a focus of upward politics from the municipal level aided in ensconcing the political power of land-owning regional elites (Kramer, 2006; McCoy, 2009a). More specifically, these provincial clans used elections to appoint themselves – often through coercion – to legislative positions and from this base they were able to act upon their particularistic interests and exert suzerainty over the bureaucratic machinery of the Filipino state (Hutchcroft, 1991). The Bureau of Insular Affairs tasked with administrating the American colonial state saw partnership with Filipino elites as vital in achieving a stable country and economy (Hutchcroft, 1991; Kramer, 2006). Hence in the early stages of United States-led empire building, the Bureau of Insular Affairs allotted significant shares of government land and assets to regional elites in the hopes of creating a burgeoning image of Filipino-American collaboration and solidarity (Kramer, 2006; McCoy, 2009a). What rose during this period was an emergent class of professional

politicians – mostly belonging to the aforementioned *principalía* – who used their wealth and regional influence to undermine the strength of the insular Filipino state and to pass legislature which they themselves benefitted from (McCoy, 2009a; D. C. Simbulan, 2005). This marked the beginning of political dynasties which have dominated the face of modern Filipino politics.

2.4 Business as Usual: The Independent Filipino State

The story of an independent Philippines may be best summarized as an economically-dependent and peripheral nation molded in the imagined vision of American democracy and exceptionalism (Robinson, 1996). Indeed, the nation's administrative structures mirrored those of the United States, with formal separation of powers and a two-party arrangement (Bello & Gershman, 1990). The real locus of power and control however did not rest upon the mass citizenry as Bello and Gershman (1990) candidly wrote: "it was a marriage between the feudal paternalism of the Philippine elite and Chicago-style 'machine politics'" (p. 38).

During the 1950s, the country underwent a period of late-industrialization with loans provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Silarde, 2020). The era of industrialization brought about structural realignment of social classes with a burgeoning class of industrial bourgeoisie whose wealth was powered by the proliferation of import-substitution manufacturing. With a bustling economy, calls for land reform intensified, but failed to judicially materialize due to the political influences of landed elites and the new industrialist class (Rivera, 1994). As a result, publicly-run social services remained very limited in scale and quality, with the sector being notoriously underfunded and low-quality when compared to the private sector (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). The Catholic Church have since taken up the burden filling in the 'gap', and to this day ordinary Filipinos remain heavily reliant upon Church-run institutions related to healthcare and schooling.

Ferdinand Marcos became the tenth president of the independent Philippine Republic in 1965 and while he had sought to build a more secular government, in practice, he ran the country with the same cronyism as his predecessors (Putzel, 1999). As noted by Hutchcroft (1991), prior to Marcos, the independent republic never had a recognizable or clear-cut 'central' head of state. The presidents of the pre-Marcos era had short-lived tenures and directly accommodated regional patrimonial clans (Hutchcroft, 1991). The provincial patrons or 'bosses' oversaw their localities through militaristic quasi-judicial tactics with non-existent accountability or governmental oversight (Hutchcroft, 1991). Marcos did attempt to subdue the influences of elite business and political families, but in lieu of eliminating elites entirely from Filipino governance, he elected his own cronies to positions of interest (Hutchcroft, 1991). Likewise, Marcos' claims for eradication were not far-reaching as he specifically targeted only a few powerful families whom he viewed as his enemies – namely the Aquino family of Tarlac (Hutchcroft, 1991). Marcos' regime was inherently authoritarian and during the martial law era, political and civil dissidence was silenced with intimidations, coercion, or *lead* – as with the case of Marcos' chief rival Benigno Aquino Jr. (Bello & Gershman, 1990).

In economic terms, the Marcos-era saw the implementation of major IMF and World Bank (WB) endorsed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (Silarde, 2020). The economy

was characterized by an agro-industrial strategy that was export-oriented and labour-intensive. According to Lauesen and Cope (2015), such economic schemes could be labeled under the frame of 'imperialist globalization of production'. Under this mode of production the low-wage proletariat became embedded within the machinery of global capitalism and production was moved to countries where conditions were most ideal for the proliferated accumulation of capital (Lauesen & Cope, 2015). The SAPs were not successful in combatting the unemployment or precarious work in the nation and Silarde (2020) argued that Marcos' surrender of Philippines' economic sovereignty is a defining legacy of the regime. Indeed, Marcos' regime received substantial backing financially and militarily from the United States and President Reagan had cherishingly expressed his support for the regime until moments prior to its overthrowal (Bello & Gershman, 1990).

What were the other legacies of the two-decade long Marcos regime? Eight years of martial law had left the country in a politico-economic quagmire with a new ruling coalition of pro-Marcos cronies and a stagnant economy (Hutchcroft, 1991; Patricio, 1996). To illustrate, the Philippine gross national product (GNP) grew from \$495 to \$540 during Marcos' 20-year rule, whereas South Korea's GNP increased from \$330 to \$2,345 during the same time period (McCoy, 2009a). Another particularly relevant legacy of the Marcos-era was the beginnings of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) phenomenon which persists to the present day (Silarde, 2020).

In 1986 a series of nonviolent mass demonstrations, the *People Power Revolution* or *EDSA Uno*, aided in ousting Marcos from his throne (Putzel, 1999). Corazon Aquino – the widow of Benigno Aquino Jr. – was a monumental figure of the anti-Marcos movement and eventually became the country's first democratically elected president with much of her support being founded upon her husband's senatorial legacy (Bello & Gershman, 1990; Patricio, 1996). Upon Aquino's ascendance to presidency, there existed genuine hope that the nation's deeply-rooted inequality and poverty could be properly addressed (Bello & Gershman, 1990), but the revolutionary spirit that propelled her campaign failed to materialize (Patricio, 1996). Silarde (2020) showcased how Aquino's progressive rhetoric never extended to reconfiguring the Philippines' economy and rather it adopted the prevailing neoliberal doctrine of transnational corporatism which saw the government incurring more IMF loans – partly to pay-off debt sustained during Marcos' regime – and continuing the agenda of export-oriented industrialization. The dichotomy between Aquino's narrative and action was aptly summarized by Silarde (2020): "while civil liberties curtailed during Martial Law were restored during the term of Aquino, the economic and political structure that engendered cheap, flexible, and docile labor was left intact" (p. 13). Indeed, Aquino's progressive rhetoric floundered within the four years of her presidency and in December 1989, a sixth coup d'état nearly succeeded in ousting her from power were it not for the substantial military support and counter-insurgency efforts of the United States (Bello & Gershman, 1990). The apparent *democratization* brought about by Aquino during the post-Marcos transition-era did not trickle down to the mostly poor and landless rural peasants whose regional areas were still largely controlled by their regional 'bosses' (Putzel, 1999).

The economic and political climates remained largely unchanged during the presidencies following Corazon Aquino's tenure (Silarde, 2020). Curato (2016) noted that the Philippine presidency alternated between populist and reformist candidates in the post-Marcos era. While populist presidents like Estrada and Ramos attempted to thwart the cronyism of their predecessors, they never succeeded in fully overhauling the engrained influence of patronage politics and their subjective presidencies were embroiled in corruption scandals. Much more could be discussed about the post-Aquino presidents, but I argue that the post-Marcos Philippines became what David Harvey defined as a 'neoliberal state' where the economic impetus is solely centered around enabling profitable conditions for capital accumulation on both domestic and foreign capita (Harvey, 2005).

This section has provided an account for how the Philippines transformed itself in the post-colonial era. Likewise, I have provided evidence to support McCoy's (2009a) claim that throughout the Philippines' history, the elite clans were able to withstand political turmoil and ally themselves with the ruling state apparatus.

2.5 Contemporary Filipino Politics: A Family Feud

The prior section demonstrated how the historical and politico-economic context of the Philippines has been defined by an elite democracy of the landed regional clans who have continuously succeeded in aligning themselves with the existing Filipino state in order to guarantee the maintenance of their status and in order work outside jurisdiction of the government. The embedded control of regional elites has resulted in a failed democracy where patrimonial interests beget economic and social initiatives that marginally benefit the poor and landless classes while disproportionately profiting the wealthy and landed. To quote Bello and Gersham (1990):

For the different factions of this fractious elite, formal democracy provided a means of competing, relatively peacefully, for political office and alternating in power. At the same time, it afforded the poor majority the illusion of democratic choice - that is, the ability to choose among different elite candidates and elite political parties. (p. 38)

To what extent have these elite families embedded themselves within the government of present-day Philippines? To gauge the success with which dynastic clans have hijacked the institutions of democracy, one only has to view the 2016 election results where the bicameral Filipino Congress - composed of both the Senate and the House of Representatives - had over 70 per cent of its 304 seats occupied by politicians from dynastic families (Mendoza, Beja, Venida, & Yap, 2016; T. S. E. Tadem & Tadem, 2016). Similarly, 81 per cent of provincial governors and 69 per cent of mayors elected belonged to these dynasties (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019). Political dynasties are certainly not unique to the Philippines, but a cross-country comparison reveals the true extent of the issue. In the United States 6 per cent of all legislative positions are occupied by dynastic families, whereas in Japan and Mexico, the estimates range from 37 to 40 per cent (Querubin, 2016).

In the Philippines however, estimates suggest that 50 to 70 per cent of all legislative seats are occupied by dynastic families (Querubin, 2016).

Here I turn to Robert Dahl's (1971) concept of *polyarchy* as it offers a fitting angle from which to approach our understanding of elite democracy in the Philippines. *Polyarchy* refers to a democracy where governmental power is possessed by multiple political actors, with each actor embodying distinct and particularistic stakes which come into conflict with the interests of the masses (Dahl, 1971). For Dahl, a *functional* democracy refers to a government that can efficiently and equitably allot public services to its citizens and where the state is expected to responsively hold politicians accountable for their performance (Dahl, 1971). If we are to follow Dahl's conceptualizations, we can confidently conclude that Filipino democracy is marred by a *polyarchy* of unequally influential interest groups, which has disrupted the establishment of a truly equitable – or *functional* – democracy. Beeson and Bellamy (2008) argued similarly that the polyarchal delineation of Philippine legislative branches has resulted in a government that is both uncertain and dysfunctional.

Much of the past literature has resoundingly pointed to the negative influence of dynasties on representative democracy (Beeson & Bellamy, 2008) and poverty (Mendoza et al., 2016), yet measures invoked to combat the overrepresentation of dynastic clans have been insufficient in fundamentally changing the country's political landscape (T. S. E. Tadem & Tadem, 2016). In their 2013 study, Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre established that exercises in representative democracy were consistently undermined by the self-serving corruption of dynastic families. Their research found a strong correlation between the presence of political dynasties and the inequitable distribution of public goods and increased incidence of crime (Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre, 2013). As noted by the authors, the voter base of dynastic families hail mostly from the impoverished provinces outside of Luzon (the most populated island) and these same regions were historically shown to have worse governance and increased corruption due to their dynastic patronage politics. Other studies have similarly corroborated that the presence of political dynasties is linked to increased poverty in the peripheral provinces outside of Luzon (Mendoza et al., 2016). To contextualize how dynasties have preserved their political powers, the consequent paragraphs will offer different perspectives and hypothesis regarding the dynasties' continued success.

Sidel (1999) presented a bleak vision of Filipino politics by arguing that the Philippine state permitted the endurance of private control over the means of coercion resulting in a class of political elites who empower themselves via predatory tactics. For Sidel, coercive methods in voter recruitment are the key to understanding how political clans have remained powerful and untethered by allegations of corruption. For example, regional 'bosses' have been noted to energize local voters by threatening the suspension of financial supports, if they vote unfavourably. In effect, these coercive tactics rely on *perceived risks* of noncompliance and thus voters continue to elect corrupt leaders as they are incentivized not by the prospect of democratic reform, but rather by retributive vengeance (Sidel, 1999).

Research on vote bribing has provided substance to the narrative proposed by Sidel (1999). Schaffer (2002) found that impoverished populations in the Philippines overwhelmingly vote in favour of candidates who express compassion towards low-income

communities. Other studies have pointed to the country's weak multi-party system – or a lack significant differentiators between supposedly opposing parties – as leading many low-income voters to choose candidates simply based on name recognition (Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre, 2013). Indeed, many progressive and non-dynastic organizations who preach empowerment and accountability are often criticized for being 'out of touch' with the masses (Schaffer, 2002). These antecedents have created a political backdrop where wealthy dynasties prop-up relatives or allies into legislative positions – often with the use of public funds (Mendoza et al., 2016) – and by doing so, they further weaken the country's multi-party system and possibilities for electoral reform (Schaffer, 2002). An analogous cynicism concerning democratic processes was reported by Bello & Gershman (1990), who stated that most Filipinos – disenfranchised by their failed democracy and calls for reform – see no other viable alternative for change besides the ballot itself.

The proliferation of dynasties can also be analyzed from a socio-economic perspective. For instance, Teehankee (2007) traced the development and endurance of dynasties to the historically-rooted inequalities in the archipelago and the failures in installing a strong representative electoral system. For Teehankee, these failures have led to situation where the majority are unable to contest the hegemon of elite clans. In his analysis of Philippine political campaigns, Sidel (1999) corroborated Teehankee's claims and concluded that wealth – namely entrenched wealth – is a necessary tool for gaining political power and for remaining in power in the Philippines.

Besides direct voter coercion or entrenched wealth, other authors have proposed alternative accounts for the enduring strength of dynasties. Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre (2013) prescribed *accountability* as a focal issue in enabling the continuation of dynasties, as the central Filipino state has consistently failed in establishing mechanisms for curbing the corrupt practices of regional politicians. The authors suggest that the patrimonial status-quo in peripheral provinces has reigned supreme and due to its historical entrenchment, these provincial dynasties were allotted with the necessary leeway for maintaining their regional supremacy without governmental interference. Successful political campaigns thus create self-serving feedback loops of dynastic families who consolidate their powers through legislative proliferation whilst concurrently using these legislative positions to advance their own economic interests (McCoy, 2009a).

This section has deliberated upon the emergence and practices of political clans in the Philippines. Through a review of past literature I have presented evidence that illustrates how political dynasties are symptomatic of Philippines' democratic underdevelopment and historically-rooted socio-economic inequality. Considering these antecedents, I conclude that the present-day Philippine democracy has failed in catering to the majority of its population and has become a hodgepodge of familial alliances and rivalries which play-out during election cycles to the disbenefit of the masses.

2.6 Duterte and Filipino Populism

The previous section examined the general landscape of Philippine politics and how it has transformed over its colonial and post-independent histories. In the current section I

will situate Duterte's presidency within the timeline of post-independent Philippines and highlight how his rule came to be and *why* – despite numerous scandals – the president remains popular among his electorate.

Rodrigo Duterte became a prominent political figure for his tenure as the Mayor of Davao (Teehankee, 2016). His unique blend of ideologies made him stand out in the sphere of Philippine politics. A staunch anti-imperialist, a self-proclaimed socialist, and a former student of José María Sison – the founder of the Maoist-leaning Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) – Duterte fostered a reputation as a bridge-builder who openly worked with various leftist organizations in a nation rife with anti-leftist propaganda (Bello, 2017; Palatino, 2017). However, his mayoral stint was most noted for its punitive approaches to quelling crime and communist guerrilla groups which turned the Muslim-majority city into an exemplary, law-abiding city. Duterte's reign as Mayor was not without its controversies with many Filipino scholars lambasting the heavy-handed and extra-judicial approaches he endorsed (Teehankee, 2016). Rappler journalists Isaac and Aceron (2016) described citizens of Davao as having; "entered into a Hobbesian social contract with Duterte, which allowed him to rule with an iron-fist in exchange for social peace and personal security"¹. The mayoral period laid the foundations for his eventual presidential campaign which was built on the heels of his 'law and order' approach to politics (Teehankee, 2016). While many academics have argued over supposed reasons for *how* Duterte succeeded in winning the nomination, there appears to be unanimous agreement that Duterte was capable of tapping into the pent-up frustrations of many Filipinos (Capuno, 2020).

For many the election of Duterte was unexpected and marked a significant turning point in the trend of patronage politics practiced by his liberal democratic predecessors (Curato, 2016; Teehankee, 2016). Despite having cursed the pope, having admitted to multiple mistresses, and being accused of having undeclared bank accounts, the popular support for Duterte never dithered (Curato, 2016). Indeed, the nation witnessed its most comprehensive voting turnout in post-independent history at 81.62 per cent of the entire population, with Duterte unassailably edging nomination during the whole election-night tally (Curato, 2016). The fact he became the first Mayor from a city outside of Manila – and the first from Mindanao – to have risen to presidency speaks volumes to the degree to which politics on the archipelago were controlled by those Duterte himself would call "imperial Manila elites" (Capuno, 2020; Teehankee, 2016). The Manila elites – corrupt government officials and oligarchs alike – were a reoccurring target of Duterte's boorish speeches at campaign rallies, even despite the fact his own family had been a prominent clan within Davao politics (Capuno, 2020). For Capuno (2020), Duterte's anti-elite rhetoric struck a chord with the middle-/upper-middle class voter blocs who were dissatisfied by the endemic corruption of post-EDSA governments. Duterte has in fact held true to his promises and unlike his predecessors, he has repeatedly ousted members of his inner circle of cronies and politicians who were accused of corruption (Capuno, 2020). As stated by Curato (2016) "His currency is his promise of certainty, anchored on the rhetoric of violence and machismo" (p. 146).

¹ <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/rodrigo-duterte-elections-2016>

Duterte's populism is inimitably his own and uniquely Filipino. Whereas populist movements elsewhere were attributed as pushbacks against the pitfalls of globalization, globalization in the Philippines is celebrated (Rodrik, 2018), partly due to the fact Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) circulate international labour markets in large numbers and are seen as modern-day heroes (Alipio, 2019). Unsurprisingly, polling from the 2016 elections showed that a sizeable portion of Duterte's supporters comprised of younger, wealthier, and more educated voters, or the 'new Filipino middle class' (Ramos, 2020). These supporters effectively represent the 'fruits' of globalization with many of them working overseas workers as nurses, seamen, or nannies, or in the booming tech-support industry in Manila (Ramos, 2020).

Curato (2016) made an important distinction in stating that Duterte's populism is far less about the ideological content, and more about the *style*. For Curato, Duterte's populist narrative and the magnetism of his political character relied upon a *performance of crisis*. Similarly in their study on populist movements, Moffit & Tormey (2013) detailed how modern populism is akin to a performance act which fosters a relationship between the leader – as the performer – and their electorate – as the audience. When viewed from this perspective, Duterte's unstructured bravado appears far less like an exercise in ideological grandstanding and rather a theatrical performance. To quote Filipino journalist and sociologist Randy David who attended one of Duterte's election rallies; "This is pure theater - a sensual experience rather than the rational application of ideas to society's problems"² (David, 2016). Moreover, as Curato (2016) pointed out, the 'unpresidential' use of profane street Tagalog only furthers the perceived urgency of the crisis which Duterte's campaign claimed to solve.

This section has highlighted the underlying facets of Duterte's allure and how they led him to the presidency in 2016. His presidential victory was founded upon the effective utilization of a uniquely Filipino populist narrative predicated upon a performance of crisis (Curato, 2016). The immense grassroots support that Duterte gained both online and in-person cannot be underestimated. His meteoric rise to fame showcases how performative and theater-esque populism thrives in the digital era (McKay, 2020; Montiel & Uyheng, 2020). Duterte's strain of populism has been cautiously celebrated by many academics, as while the democratic potential of an energized citizenry must be acknowledged, Duterte's campaign also legitimized anti-democratic and authoritarian practices as responses to the nation's systemic issues (Boehringer, 2017; Curato, 2016; Gatmaytan, 2018). The next section will further elaborate on the Duterte cabinet's social projects and analyze how they have been used to foster increased support for the president.

2.7 Narrow Universalism in Education and Healthcare

During the Duterte administration's initial years, significant investments in human capital were undertaken, including free tuition to public universities, universal national health insurance, and the addition of the conditional cash transfer as a permanent facet of the country's social protection services (Ramos, 2020). These investments have been

² <https://opinion.inquirer.net/94530/dutertismo>

rightfully lauded by supporters and critics alike, but their efficacy has been called into question by certain academics. In their study, Ramos (2020) contended that despite the exceptional allocation of public resources in strengthening the social services sector of the government, historico-institutional and politico-economic antecedents serve to limit the transformative potential of such programs. A closer inspection at the disparate distribution and provision of private and public social services reveals the cogency of Ramos' claim. Indeed, 71 per cent of all Filipino universities are privately-operated with unregulated tuition fees (Ramos, 2020). The University of the Philippines – the most renowned university in the nation – hiked its tuition fees by 300 per cent during the turn of the century (McCoy, 2009a), and other private universities have followed suit during Duterte's presidency (Hallare, 2018). Similarly, 64 per cent of all Filipino hospitals are privately-run and the number of hospital beds in the public sector decreased from 54 per cent to 47 per cent (out of the total number of hospital beds) between 2003 and 2016 (Ramos, 2020).

These prior findings point to a stark contrast in the provision of social services and capacities for social mobility between the upper and working classes of the Philippines. The working class, unable to afford the expenses of privately-run establishments, are subjected to queue and overwhelm the inexpensive public facilities whose services are subpar in comparison to the private sector (Ramos, 2020). Policy initiatives that prioritize the proliferation of access to social services are not unique to the Philippines and have taken precedence in other countries belonging to the Global South (Franzoni & Sánchez-Ancochea, 2016). Empirical data from Latin America suggests these programs may consolidate socio-economic stratification, with Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea (2016) noting that such approaches – fixated on universal provision – fail to equitably deliver quality services to all affected social classes. Comparisons between Latin America and the Philippines are not unwarranted, both share the legacy of Iberian (and in cases American) colonialism and face similar issues related to the historico-institutional exclusion of marginalized and ethnic populations. Hence when discussing policy implementations aimed at enhancing social mobility in the Global South, it is vital that the structural antecedents culpable for inequity are not overlooked. Here I am referring to what Nancy Fraser (1995) coined as “transformative change”, or the extent to which social policy amendments may tackle the inequitable consequences of pre-existing social hierarchies and the very institutional frameworks which enable such hierarchies.

The ‘narrow universalism’ – or expansion of access – present in the social policies of Duterte's administration follow the endorsed dogma of international development organizations like the World Bank and United Nations. Between 2009 and 2019, The World Bank supported the expansions in the Philippines' Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) with a \$1 billion stimulus package (Ramos, 2020). This investment helped establish the database necessary for the conditional cash transfer, or *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps). In a recent World Bank report, the program was noted to have succeeded in enrolling more impoverished children in school and providing their families with the financial support necessary for their basic needs (Acosta, Avalos, & Zapanta, 2019). Simultaneously, the report warned that due to inflation rates, the allotted cash grants are falling short of covering the basic needs of many impoverished families with unstable work circumstances. It is important to acknowledge the reformative capacities of

social policy amendments, but as this paper has shown, the relative capacity for social mobility appears to be dampened by the pre-existing hierarchies within the society, economics, and politics of the nation. As argued by McCoy (2009a), every society needs to renew its elites via the consistent recruitment and election of leaders from the lower class, yet this has never been the case in the Philippines. It is difficult to disagree with McCoy's assessment, and as long as dynastic politicians reign supreme, there is little chance for the average Filipino to gain a considerable foothold or *voice* within the contemporary political landscape.

Up to this point I have assessed the politico-economic and historical antecedents which have shaped the landscape of present-day Philippines. I have demonstrated how Duterte was able to tap into the pent-up frustrations of the new and budding upper-middle/middle-class voter cohorts with his performative rhetoric of law and order. Lastly in analyzing the empirical data available on the Duterte government's social projects, I have highlighted how universalist approaches to social services have not succeeded in circumventing the historically rooted inequalities of the Philippines.

2.8 Social Mobility in the Philippines

I now intend to present an overview into the state of social mobility in the country. In citing past research I will showcase how the issue of social mobility continues to shape the life-trajectories of many lower- and middle-class families, particularly children and youth. Importantly, an investigation into social mobility – in the Filipino context – necessitates an analysis of normative socio-cultural kinship practices and the international Filipino precariat.

Social mobility is a pertinent topic in modern Philippines and some authors have argued that the lack of viable possibilities for upward mobility has contributed to the proliferation of transnational migrant workers (Alipio, 2019). In comparison to its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbours, rates of upward social mobility in the Philippines – despite the rise in average household income – are low (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019), and this weakness in mechanisms allowing for effective social mobility is historically rooted (McCoy, 2009a). While a regional comparison may show lackluster trends for upward social mobility, what are the specific factors which underlie this issue?

Since its transition to an electoral democracy, the country has scored favourably on many measures (e.g. national Gini coefficient and expansion of the middle class) and has witnessed a flourishing economy (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019). In reality however, much of this supposed economic growth has not trickled down to the lowest strata of society. The economic growth came about during Corazon Aquino's era of privatization and deregulation, which saw many oligarchic families extending their pre-existing wealth and influence (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019). This 'deindustrialization' has been a particular focus of many past studies as the Philippine economy transitioned rapidly in the immediate post-Marcos years from an industry-focused economy to one concentrated on the low-end service-sector. As a result, labour-exporting (in the form of OFWs) has increased and the country's IT-enabled business

process outsourcing (IT-BPO) sector has prospered. These two industries have enabled the growth of a new middle-class, yet the low-end service sector has become the employment “sink” of the nation. Hence the issue is not the *number* of jobs available in the country, but rather the *quality* (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019).

The notion of a global “race to the bottom” – or the practice of deregulating market environments (Kiefer & Rada, 2014) – is perhaps nowhere more relevant than in the Philippines. While these market-informing initiatives have been treated as tools that allow for upward economic competitiveness and social development, Ruddick (2003) made the claim that these programmes are also inherently tied into certain visions of youth and childhood. She argued that education – or increased access to education – has become a key milestone for ‘developing’ the ‘underdeveloped’ (Ruddick, 2003), yet as we witnessed in the past section, the liberalization of the domestic economy has also led to increased privatization in education, effectively leaving a vast number of Filipino families ‘priced out’ of these sought-after institutions (Ramos, 2020). Deindustrialization coupled with increased privatization and wealth stratification has ultimately left a sizeable cohort of low-income Filipinos bereft of chances for upward mobility. To illustrate my point, between 2006 to 2015, the annual net income of Filipino firms on the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) rose by a staggering 259 per cent, whereas average household income increased by 43.4 per cent (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019). Moreover in 2016, the net worth of the richest fifty Filipinos accounted for 24 per cent or one third of the national gross domestic product (GDP) growth. Here we can see how politico-economic factors, namely the liberalizing market reforms promoted by international agencies and the entrenched power of oligarchies, have persisted in the post-Marcos era.

As pointed to by Tuaño and Cruz (2019) however, challenges that underlie the achievability of social programmes targeted at upward mobility are not merely politico-economic, but also technical. While the authors listed many relevant technical challenges such as the archipelagic geography of the country, the most noteworthy technical challenges arise with policy implementation. Specifically, due to the weak bureaucracy of the Philippine government and its overall inability to regulate and equitably supervise different market players and economic sectors, the institutional capacity for effective development programme implementation is severely hampered. Tuaño and Cruz (2019) identified this structural bottleneck as the overarching constraint which continues to limit the efficacy of critical social and economic development agendas. Likewise, other studies have pointed the significance of demographic factors which obstruct the actualization of development schemes (Cudia, 2015). In their statistical analysis on poverty mobility, Cudia (2015) demonstrated how larger families with low parental educational have a lower probability of ‘escaping poverty’. As evidenced here, the factors which influence social mobility in the Philippines are multi-faceted and require programme implementation at levels which have not been achieved by prior governments. The patronage-laden political-economy of the nation has certainly contributed to this social “(im)mobility” as coined by Tuaño and Cruz (2019), but how does poor social mobility translate at the local level, specifically in relation to children? One way to approach this question is to analyze the lives of OFWs and their left-behind families.

In the introduction to this section, I used the term 'international Filipino precariat' intentionally as *precarity* is the foremost characteristic that defines the experiences of many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) (Alipio, 2019; Yu, 2015). Indeed, the Philippines is the largest labour-exporting nation in the world with the third largest remittances in Asia (Alipio, 2019). The vast majority of OFWs are women and in many cases, the choice to migrate is not done out of free volition (Alipio, 2019). Overseas migration is often premised on the hope for upward social mobility but it is simultaneously informed by normative socio-cultural notions related to the gender and kinship (Bernardo, Clemente, & Wang, 2018). Sassen (2002) wrote candidly about the OFW phenomenon and despite her study being nearly twenty years old, the findings remain relevant. Sassen contended for a *feminization of survival* in the Philippines as a growing number of communities and families were solely reliant upon the overseas work of migrant women. OFWs and their sacrifices are widely celebrated in popular media in the Philippines (Alipio, 2019), but these depictions succeed in disguising the precarious realities of overseas work. Alipio (2013) illustrated this point as follows; "they struggle transnationally, moving from one form of abuse to another, from the intergenerational poverty and gendered oppression faced at home to the intergenerational precarity of migrant labour" (p. 111).

In this chapter I have provided the contextual background upon which the rest of the thesis will be founded upon. In analyzing the history of the country, we have come an understanding of how colonialism has shaped the modern-day economics and politics of the Philippines. Contemporary Philippine politics and "Dutertismo" have also been touched upon and I have showcased how and why President Duterte's law and order bravado resonated with the new generation of disenfranchised middle-class Filipino voters. This section has also highlighted how universalism has become the most salient feature of the Philippine government's social development initiatives and how these programmes have lacked the transformative capacities to circumvent the nation's deep-seated poverty and inequality. Lastly this section has given an overview into the ways through which social mobility is hampered by politico-economic and global forces. In the next section I will further elaborate on the chosen theoretical lenses which will inform the arguments of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will detail the different theoretical positions and arguments which have informed my present analysis. The outline is as follows. First, I will briefly present the merit of interdisciplinary approaches in childhood studies. I will discuss why an analysis of politics, economics, and history is necessary in uncovering the intersectional and multidimensional nature of precarity in the Philippines. Second, I will distinguish between the concepts of precarity and precariousness. Third, I will deliberate upon why work of post-colonialist and post-developmental authors is relevant to my current analysis of precarity in the Philippines. Likewise, post-developmentalism will be considered in relation to the ways in which normative notions on development – and in extension the normative views on children and children’s rights – have failed to yield success in the nation. Fourth, I intend to overview the utility of both structuralist and post-structuralist theories. Lastly I will offer an overview of the rights-based focus endorsed by many developmental agencies such as the United Nations, World Bank, and UNICEF.

3.1 Interdisciplinary Approaches in Childhood Studies

Even though the formative ideas of childhood studies as a discipline were founded upon the rejection of the normative practices and theories endorsed by mainstream psychology and sociology, I contend that this thesis benefits substantially from employing an interdisciplinary lens. Accordingly, in lieu of subscribing to a single theoretical stance, interdisciplinary approaches are deemed most appropriate for contextualizing the lives of Filipino children and youth with the wider societal forces at work. In reflection of past research within childhood studies, structuralist approaches are recognized for their utility in locating the child’s *voice* within the wider socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts (Abebe, 2016; Abebe & Bessell, 2011; J. Hart, 2008a, 2008b; Qvortrup, 2009). While children’s rights are a common focal point of many prior studies, the thesis identifies a strict rights-based focus as potentially harmful as it may conceal the underlying issues pertaining to children’s agency and participation (Reynolds, Nieuwenhuys, & Hanson, 2006). In other words, the present project aims to acknowledge and deliberate upon the nuances and difficulties in applying westernized notion of *children’s rights* in a majority world context.

Simply put, we cannot divorce the contemporary context of the Philippines from its subjective histories and global economic processes. In an attempt to better understand the Philippines and Philippine childhoods, I have researched a wide range of academic and non-academic sources from various different disciplines. The wide backdrop in empirical data is done in order to evoke more nuance in my arguments.

In relation to understanding the nature of precarious childhoods, the presence of interdisciplinary methods can reveal differences in experiences that McAdam-Crisp (2006) termed the “subjectivities and cultural dimensions of coping” (p. 459). She emphasized that a strict adherence to the mainstream psychological frameworks regarding risk or resilience often perpetuate asymmetries of power between the expert researcher and child, as views of the children themselves are often entirely disregarded, or lost in translation during the

scientific and quantitative analysis of accumulated data. Moreover, *context* is – as defined by William Wentworth – “the world realized through interaction and the most immediate frame of reference for mutually engaged actors” (quoted in Cole, 1996, p. 142), and hence this thesis aims to contextualize and highlight how specific vulnerabilities (e.g. experiences of exploitation) may impact a person’s overall experience of precarity.

3.2 Precarity vs. Precariousness

The concept of precarity is a central focus of this thesis. As a term, precarity has often been used to describe the rise of uncertain and insecure labour in neoliberal economies (Lewis & Waite, 2015). In using the words *precarity* and *precariousness* I specifically allude to the distinctions drawn by Judith Butler. According to Butler, precarity differs from the generalized human condition of precariousness as precarity is unequally distributed in global terms with the majority world experiencing it more acutely (Butler, 2004). Acute experiences of precarity have multiple sources, but Butler (2004) explicitly pointed to the *precaritization* brought about by neoliberal economic agendas which have exposed already marginalized populations of the Global South to heightened economic insecurity, violence, and forced migration.

Precarity is not a new phenomenon in the Global South (Nilsen & Holdt, 2019), but its expressions are dependent upon *place* and *time* (Lee, 2007). In the context of the Philippines, precarity as Alipio (2019) asserted, is a *life condition* that is experienced translocally – particularly with Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) – and influences the life trajectories of impoverished families through its intergenerational transmission. *Livelihood* – or the attempt at achieving a better livelihood is thus a central struggle of the precariat (Menon & Sundar, 2019). Here we can refer to Butler’s bodily dimension of precarity. The bodily dimension of precarity refers to the extent to which precarious lives (and bodies) are *not* recognized. Past studies in Asia regarding precarity and children have similarly confirmed the problematic nature of *value* and *recognizability*. In their study of precarious childhoods in South East Asia, Ang (2019) noted how in many impoverished communities, children’s lives become *valuable* only when the child is capable of providing financial support to their families. Ang concluded that *childhood*, or at least its Westernized version, neither exists or thrives in many Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states (AMS).

In my view, Butler’s distinction between precarity and precariousness is essential in contextualizing and locating the experiences of precarious childhoods. As noted by Jason Hart (2008a), precarious childhoods are outcomes of macro-level processes which children have no control of. While children may be *passive* recipients to these macro-level processes, cross-cultural studies have pointed to how Westernized agendas for ‘development’ disproportionately burden – or *precaritize* – the lives of mothers and their children (Abebe, 2016; J. Hart, 2008b). The *feminisation* of poverty is a common phenomenon in countries – including the Philippines – that underwent International Monetary Fund-mandated structural reforms or otherwise lagged in achieving developmental milestones (Chant, 2007, 2014). Importantly, Chant (2014) distinguished that the feminisation of poverty also refers to the feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation. Feminisation of poverty and precarious of

lives of children and youth are inextricably linked to one another. These increased responsibilities, obligations, or maternal labour bestow new domestic and non-domestic duties to children (Chant, 2007). Past research from Philippines has found that gendered disparity between working hours are most pronounced among the lowest-income households, with women working far longer hours than men (Pineda-Ofreneo & Acosta, 2001).

The above conceptualization of precarity highlights its multidimensional construct. In acknowledging the uneven global distribution of precarity and its bodily dimension, Lewis and Waite's (2015) 'hyper-precarity' offers an additional facet to the present analytical frame. In their 2015 study, Lewis and Waite introduced the concept of hyper-precarity as a means of understanding the multidimensional vulnerabilities faced by migrants and asylum-seekers in Europe. Their project assessed how different arrangements in states' socio-legal structures in combination with neoliberal market policies produced insecure labour for these migrants. Moreover, research on asylum-seekers in Europe by Schenner, Cavanna, and Ollus (2019) elaborated upon Lewis and Waite's framework and focused on the interdependent relations between three notable factors; "*legal* (stratified rights), *economic* (labour market dynamics), and *social* (exacerbation of vulnerabilities)" (p. 84). In my opinion, the hyper-precarity framework can substantiate Butler's concept of precarity and allow for a better contextualization of individual vulnerabilities.

My intention is to contribute to this ongoing literature by applying the notions of hyper-precarity and precarity – as defined by Butler – within the context of youth and children in the Philippines. In doing so, I will assess how the precaritization of adolescents is enabled by the socio-legal structures of the state, the political-economy, and by socio-cultural factors. As I have already discussed in Chapter two, we can trace the roots of precarity to the Philippines' colonial and post-colonial histories. Acknowledging these roots is vital as precarity is differentially produced and manifested in the majority world (Kalleberg, 2013). In Chapter five I will further extend the argument and showcase the various ways through which societal precarity is engendered in the contemporary post-Duterte Philippines.

3.3 Post-Colonialism and Post-Developmentalism

I have included both post-colonialism and post-developmentalism in the theoretical framework of this thesis as I believe they offer corroborating accounts for understanding the economic and social 'underdevelopment' of the Philippines. As noted in the background section of this thesis, the independent Filipino state was far from sovereign and its economic and political pathways have been significantly influenced by its neocolonial overlord – the United States – and international development agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Post-colonial theory may be best described as an attempt to expose how European and Western societies have dominated and continue to dominate the Majority world (Lande, 2002). As mentioned in the introduction, the Philippines' endemic poverty is in stark contrast to its richness in both human and natural resources. To unpack this central paradox

of the Philippines, I have so far looked into the country's history of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Chapter two. Through a post-colonial analysis of the Philippines, I have discussed how the underdevelopment of the nation was predicated upon the economic triumphs of their colonial occupiers. Both Spain and United States used the Philippines as a means of extending their own geopolitical and economic stature at the expense Philippines' own development. The colonial heritage is far-reaching and attempts at 'decolonizing' the language, culture, and Filipino identity have been hallmarks of many famed Filipino scholars and nationalists alike (San Juan, 2006).

Post-developmental scholar like Escobar (1995) have furthered post-colonial arguments by positing that 'development' – as framed by international agencies – is an extension of Westernized and Eurocentric dominion over the Global South. Post-developmental thought substantiates the premise of this thesis in several ways. Firstly, children's rights discourse (e.g. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)) has become increasingly enmeshed within modern-day development agendas, such as the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Reynolds et al., 2006). For advocates of the CRC, the document serves as a blueprint for children's emancipation and takes into account the 'best interests' of children across the world. The notion of 'best interests' has been highly contested among scholars in childhood studies with some noting that the concept is often counterintuitive in practice (Bessell, 2009). Second, the Philippines has been a major testing ground for different development initiatives over its history and the nation has received substantial funding from international organizations as a result (Bello, 2016; Scipes, 1999).

As this thesis is predicated upon analysing precarious youth and childhoods in relation to the feasibility of a rights-based approach, a closer inspection into the workings of development agendas in the Philippines is warranted. In assessing contemporary and historical examples of development and children's rights discourse in the Philippines, we can begin to deliberate upon how and why such development programmes have failed to yield results. Being as the Philippines are a burgeoning economy with immense human capital potential, children's rights issues are at the core of emancipating the Filipino population as a whole.

3.4 Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

Structuralism as a school of thought has continued to shape the theories and methodologies of contemporary social sciences (Segre, 2014). Views of structuralism diverge between different subdisciplines, but in essence, they share a basic set of propositions. Philosopher Simon Blackburn summarized it as follows;

The common feature of structuralist positions is the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract structure. Thus superficially diverse sets of myth, or works of art, or practices of marriage, might be revealed as sharing the same pattern. (Blackburn, 2008, p. 353).

Investigation of local *structures* is thus the starting-point for many structuralist scholars. Sociologist Robert Merton (1976) elaborated that *structures* are moulded by a person's own social position and that these positions are characterized by specific arrangements of advantage or disadvantage. Lévi-Strauss, a French cultural-anthropologist, assumed a more radical stance regarding the benefit of structuralism by stating that it cleanses the "arrogant self-centeredness of Western modernity" (Honneth & Geuss, p. 624). In other words, Lévi-Strauss treated structuralism as a tool for restricting *amour propre*, or the self-loving ego.

The intellectual movement of post-structuralism grew out of criticism – and outright rejection – of normative structuralist theories. Foucault was particularly outspoken in his critique of the *universality* of structuralism (Foucault, 1980; Olssen, 2003). Foucault's post-structuralism was concerned first and foremost with *power* and its historical origins. He rejected the existence of a stable structural *essence* – as alluded to by Blackburn – and argued that *meaning* is an unstable category that is derived from a complex interplay of social and historical antecedents which are both influenced by power. Foucault's post-structuralism was thus more concerned by how power was historically produced and exercised, and how these instances created differential sets of *truth*.

The theoretical lens of this thesis has been informed by both structuralism and post-structuralism. While the two intellectual movements may be directly at odds with one another, in my view, they can be applied to evoke more nuance in the historical analysis of development and precarity in the Philippines. Structuralist – namely structural Marxist – applications allow for a recognition of the lopsided nature of development between central and peripheral nations. In arguing for the utility of structuralist analyses, Fischer (2015) posited that;

The particular salience of the structuralist centre–periphery approach and its elaborations on dependency is that it provides clear conceptual principles for an empirical research agenda without being overly burdened by static characterizations or by doctrinal theoretical debates on the existential characteristics of capitalism. (Fischer, 2015, p. 709).

Hence structuralism can serve as a guiding principle for understanding how development and modernization – as practices – have influenced economic and social structures of peripheral nations. In the case of the Philippines, structural approaches can reveal how vulnerabilities and constraints are wholly distinct to the nation. Moreover, by analysing the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the nation, I will demonstrate how these factors have contributed to the proliferation of precarious childhoods and how the specific challenges faced by children in the Philippines are distinctive. On the other hand, through a post-structural lens, a distinction can be made on how Philippine *knowledge* about children is unique, and how normative socio-cultural practices produce specific *types* or *visions* of childhoods. In doing so, we can further contextualize precarious childhoods in relation to the politics of power – at the societal and family level – at-play in the nation.

3.5 Children's Rights and the Rights-based Focus

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its global endorsement has been the most important achievement in the struggle for children's social justice (Stoecklin & Bonvin, 2014). Its ratification coincided with the 'new paradigm' of childhood studies and since then the document has been the focus of many critical debates within this sociological discipline. The CRC and the rights-based focus it promotes are important topics for this thesis. Central to the rights-based approach are the notions that children and youth have particular needs and that they should be equipped to partake in the development initiatives that shape their respective environments (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). In other words, the rights-based approach can be considered as an attempt to embrace human rights in sustainable development paradigms. Several past studies have deliberated upon the ways in which children's rights and rights-based discourse are *localized* in majority world contexts, but the debate over how to best actualize – and in cases *teach* – children's rights is highly contested (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012; Abebe & Tefera, 2014; Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2012). Despite these controversies surrounding the *proper* ways of making development child- or youth-focused, the utility of rights-based approaches to development is manifold.

Abebe and Kjørholt (2012) listed four benefits of rights-based approaches in development. Firstly, the rights-based approach has been used as an analytical tool for understanding how different factors (e.g. local customs and inequalities) influence youths' subjective experiences of social isolation or poverty (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Second, the coupling of youth-focused development with comprehensive legal doctrine (e.g. UNCRC) can lay the groundwork for other people-centered approaches to development. As the UNCRC is the most widely ratified human rights document in history, it provides a judicial framework for children's rights which different countries can use as a guiding-principle in making development more youth-centered. Third, by promoting inclusive participation by young people and various actors from the local communities, the concerns and wishes of multiple sectors can be taken into account in development paradigms. Including youths' *voice* in development is fundamental to safeguarding their well-being and it can also ensure that their particularistic needs are not disregarded. Fourth, rights-based approaches are key in empowering young people. As young people are the leaders of tomorrow, it is imperative that their concerns are reflected in development programmes and that youth can feel as if their participation in development can result in a situation in which they – and other youth – can freely succeed and fulfill their individual potentials.

The premise of this thesis is to understand how different factors have contributed to the precaritization of young people in the Philippines. In understanding precarity however, I will also deliberate upon how attempts at child-focused development have fared in the nation and whether the very concept of rights-based approaches is compatible with the socio-cultural landscape of the Philippines. In my opinion, analysis into the application and feasibility of a rights-based approaches is complimented by the use of interdisciplinary methods. Stoecklin and Bonvin (2014) corroborated that children's rights are best studied through interdisciplinary methods where doctrines from interrelated and complimentary scientific disciplines can be mobilized to showcase the unique context-dependent challenges which arise when children are considered as bearers of human rights. To reiterate, my aim

is two-fold; firstly to analyze the application and rhetoric of the UNCRC within the contemporary context on the Philippines, and secondly draw links between these findings and the larger debates within childhood studies. Indeed, many academics have had their qualms about the contents and implied assumptions of the UNCRC. Likewise, there has been substantial discussion regarding how to best incorporate tenets of the UNCRC into the development programmes at-play in the Global South. These specific challenges will be further deliberated upon and contrasted with evidence from the Philippines in Chapter six of this thesis.

This chapter has provided an account into the different theoretical perspectives that have informed my investigation of the Philippines. Since the concept of precarity is multi-dimensional, I have argued for the utility of interdisciplinary perspectives in my analysis. My assessment into precarity has been formulated in line with Judith Butler's distinctions between *precarity* and *precariousness*. In my view, Butler's distinctions are essential in contextualizing and locating the experiences of precarious childhoods in the Philippines within the wider macro-level conditions and forces. The analytic lens of this thesis has also been influenced by the work of post-developmental and post-colonialist scholars. Simply put, the contemporary socio-cultural and politico-economic state of the Philippines cannot be divorced from the nation's colonial past and a post-colonial lens allows for a better understanding of why poverty and inequality have persisted despite significant economic developments. Since notions regarding children's rights are becoming increasingly enmeshed within international development programmes, a post-developmental enquiry into development is warranted as it showcases how development programmes – and children's rights discourse – have had counterintuitive consequences on local populations. Likewise, my investigation into the precarious lives of youth and children has been informed by structuralist and post-structuralist schools of thought. In my view, structuralism serves as a guiding principle for understanding how practices of development and modernization have influenced economic and social structures of peripheral nations. In the Filipino context, structuralist theories yield insights into the Philippine-specific vulnerabilities and constraints. Furthermore, post-structuralism lends further credence to the idea that *knowledge* about children is unique and country-specific, and in doing so, we can further contextualize precarious childhoods in relation to the politics of power – at the societal and family level – in the Philippines. Lastly, this chapter has outlined the contemporary theories related to children's rights. The premise of my thesis is to understand the various challenges and mismatches related to children's rights discourse and practice, and as I will highlight, a westernized conceptualization of children's rights may not be compatible with normative Filipino culture and practices. The next chapter will detail the methodologies used in this thesis, their methodological limitations, and the different challenges I have encountered during the course of my research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this methodology chapter I will first outline the state of child-centered research during the COVID-19 pandemic. After, I will outline the specific methods which I have utilized in the thesis investigation. I will also deliberate upon important ethical dilemmas related to research in the Philippines and child-centered research in general. Lastly I will discuss the major methodological limits of the thesis as well as provide potential future suggestions for child-centered research in the Philippines.

4.1 Child-centered Research During COVID-19

Given the current situation with COVID-19, the methodological framework involves desk-study combined with online interviews. The primary methodology involved are interviews with key experts and other professionals (e.g. non-governmental organization (NGO) workers) which will then be contextualized and contrasted with the independent empirical literary research I undertook. While my original research design had advocated for the use of participatory methodologies with children and youth themselves, due to the structural constraints incurred by the ongoing pandemic, such methods have been deemed both unethical and unfeasible. The pandemic has heavily affected the operations of many Philippines-based NGOs, leaving many unable to participate in the research. The subsequent paragraphs will detail the utilized methodologies and theoretical reflections supporting their inclusions.

4.2 Data Sources

4.3 Literature Review

The majority of the data referenced in this thesis was derived through a literature review. Literature reviews have notable benefits and drawbacks that I intend to highlight. One of the major benefits of literature reviews is that by interpreting the arguments of past authors, the researcher can add *value* by presenting these works in new light (Desai & Potter, 2006). As this thesis primarily relied upon secondary sources (e.g. academic journal articles), I have attempted to reinterpret and present these sources in response to and in contrast to other findings from other academic or non-academic materials.

Conducting literature reviews will pose differential challenges to researchers. Firstly, since my literature review was not systematic, the variety of sources used may be interpreted as too broad and selective. In other words, one could conceivably argue that sources are hand-picked to suit the structure of the thesis and my personal arguments. I have attempted to remain impartial and non-selective by citing multiple sources in support of my arguments, but I wholly admit that there is a lot of academic literature and other materials which I have not touched upon in this thesis. During the course of writing this thesis I experienced several instances when I willingly chose to omit certain alternative perspectives which I had encountered during my research. My rationale behind these actions is rather simple. I believe the strength of my arguments does not rely solely upon the *breadth* of coverage, but rather on the very *value* which I attempt to add to these

sources which I am citing. The *situated* nature of knowledge is unavoidable, and as Kenneth Gergen (1991) wrote: "Knowledge is not something that people possess in their heads, but rather, something that people do together" (p. 270). When viewed in this regard, my research and literature review are reflections of my personal dispositions and the conditions under which the task of knowledge-creation took place. In my opinion, this *situational* nature is not a hinderance to the thesis I have written, but conversely, it echoes my own academic background in psychology and my occupational experiences in education.

Additionally, my literature review has benefitted greatly from its temporal scale. Here I am referring to what Unwin discussed in the "Research at Home" chapter of *Doing Development Research* (Desai & Potter, 2006). As argued by Unwin, a major advantage of doing research at home is that the researcher has temporal flexibility in researching and reporting their findings. As my literature review was conducted at the confines of my home, I had several opportunities to re-evaluate my initial research notes and arguments. These revisits helped me a great deal in configuring my approach to the structure, arguments, and data sources of my thesis, and I am confident that my arguments became more nuanced as a result.

4.4 Interviews

In addition to a literature review, I attempted to establish contacts with several key informants. These informants were contacted via e-mail, Twitter, and Facebook. In my initial correspondence, I attached a document that briefly introduced myself and outlined the thesis and its research questions. This document also highlighted the various questions which I wanted to ask the informant about. My original plan was to include three to four interviews with these informants but the task proved to be far more difficult than I had projected. In total, I contacted ten different informants ranging from journalists, local politicians, NGO staff members, and academics. Despite these difficulties, I was able to have correspondence with two key actors; People's Recovery, Empowerment, and Development Assistance (PREDA) founder Shay Cullen and political historian Joseph Scalice.

My discussions with Father Cullen were limited to e-mail correspondence and my questions were answered within the documents which he had forwarded to me. With Dr. Scalice, the interview was held over Zoom. The interview was semi-structured and a list of key topics (e.g. colonial history, contemporary political-economy, Duterteismo, and Catholicism) were discussed. My interview with Dr. Scalice was fruitful and our conversation helped me further develop the arguments of this thesis. Given that the topic of my thesis could be considered controversial, it is understandable why I experienced difficulty in establishing contact with key informants. This issue, among others, will be further examined in the following section.

4.5 Ethical Reflections

While my research into the topic of precarious Philippine childhoods did not involve any direct fieldwork, I was confronted with several ethical dilemmas regarding both the topic of my research, and the research approach itself. This current section will highlight

some of these issues which perplexed me during the course of my research. I will also provide a discussion into the topic of free speech in the Philippines and the 'gaps' in research which I have identified as noteworthy.

4.6 Free Speech in The Philippines

Just because you're a journalist you are not exempted from assassination, if you're a son of a bitch.³

– Rodrigo Duterte

As mentioned in the prior section, I attempted to establish contact with numerous experts, including Filipino politicians, journalists, political analysts, and human rights advocates. What became abundantly clear through this process was that most individuals – particularly those currently residing in the Philippines – were unwilling or unable to participate in the research. Of course, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, people's priorities have changed and helping a student on their master's thesis is unlikely to be of great interest to most. As I discussed with Dr. Scalice, free speech has a perilous existence in the nation (J. Scalice, personal communication, September 21, 2020) which is worth assessing, as it has implications for undertaking primary/fieldwork-based research on sensitive topics.

Freedom of speech is a guaranteed right under the Filipino constitution, but it has been a topic of controversy in the years following Duterte's inauguration in 2016. The nation has consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, and the trajectory has remained the same under the Duterte's administration (Robie, 2020). Indeed, 61 lawyers have been murdered under the current Duterte administration, and critics have decried the President for undermining the Philippine judicial system (Regencia, 2021). The President has not hesitated in targeting and publicly shaming those he labels as his opponents, particularly journalists and left-wing activists. Duterte's emboldened and internet-savvy fanbase have also targeted journalists, particularly female journalists, who face sexual harassment and 'trolling' on the internet for their critical reporting (Robie, 2020). Rappler – an online news website – has been an enduring target of Duterte since the organization first began publishing anti-Duterte articles on their website (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In January 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission of the Philippines annulled Rappler's mass media license due to accusations of the organization being foreign-owned. International and other national journalistic associations saw the event as an attempt to curtail press freedoms and to silence dissidence by intimidation.

The intentional targeting of left-wing activists is known colloquially as 'red-tagging' (R. Robles, 2020). The nation has a violent and complicated history with communism, with communist insurgent groups having waged active guerrilla warfare against ruling governments since 1969 (A. Robles, 2019). In a speech delivered to the nation in December 2018, President Duterte openly vowed to destroy the remaining leftist guerrilla groups in an all-out-war (Simangan & Melvin, 2019). More recently in July 2020, the Duterte cabinet

³ <https://time.com/4353279/duterte-philippines-journalists-assassination/>

enacted the Anti-Terrorism Act, a law which human rights organizations have labelled as yet another attempt to criminalize anti-government speech and behaviours (McCarthy, 2020). According to critics, the law expands the definition of terrorism which leaves anti-Duterte activists as potential subjects to law's harsh penalties, including a 12-year prison sentence. In the wake of this legislation, even community pantries established during COVID-19 have been targeted by the government's anti-communist task force and the Philippine National Police (PNP) (Bolledo, 2021).

Considering the findings I have discussed here, it is easy to understand why I faced difficulties in recruiting adult participants for interviews. With the looming fear of Duterte's internet mobs, red-tagging, and vague definitions of terrorism, it is easy to imagine why individuals would feel hesitant in sharing their opinions openly.

4.7 Children at Risk: Bridging the 'Gap'

The inclusion and analysis of macro-level variables is unavoidably problematic, particularly when we consider children's *position* in Filipino society. Adolescents in the Philippines occupy a subordinate societal rank deeming them incapable of being (or as having potential to be) contributing citizens (Bessell, 2009; Hock et al., 2018). This *non-participating* child is manifested by children's perceived inability to influence the overarching conditions that negatively impact their lives, which in relation to this thesis may lead to a definition of the 'target' participant as an outside *object* of sociological inquiry. Indeed, Bessel (2009) observed that NGOs and stakeholders persistently exclude Filipino youths from the policy-related decision-making processes that shape their lived realities. Despite the emancipatory goals of the state-led and publicly-lauded *Katipunan ng Kabataan* (youth assemblies) in 1991, the promise of proliferated youth involvement within local *barangay* (district) governance has been largely tokenistic in practice (Bessell, 2009). A confounding issue noted by Bessel was with NGOs who commonly treat protection and provision of care as more urgent concerns in lieu of participation.

Considering that the cohorts of youth and children in precarity are the primary focus of the present thesis, the potential for ethical dilemmas to arise during the course of the research is immense. As affirmed by prior risk-related studies on vulnerable children, research at this *level* of society requires considerable ethical assessment and reflexivity by the researcher (Panter-Brick, 2002; Spruit, Wissink, & Stams, 2016; Sta. Maria, Martinez, & Diestro, 2014). Panter-Brick (2002) argued that studies on such children are inherently at risk of inaccurately depicting the actual realities of lived experiences which is why predetermined categories (e.g. *delinquent* or *at-risk* youth) must be carefully disseminated by the researcher, and why children's opportunities for free-expression must be carefully planned-out and orchestrated. Since the current thesis did not recruit children as participants, I have attempted to avoid misrepresentation by researching a wide-range of academic and non-academic literature pertaining to children, youth and precarity in the Philippines. Moreover, thanks to PREDA's collaboration, I am able to combine and contrast the academic and non-academic resources alongside the materials provided to me by PREDA.

4.8 Methodological Limits

An obvious methodological limit of this thesis is in its source materials. Specifically, there were very few studies which explicitly analyzed the topic of “precarious childhoods” in the context of the Philippines. Likewise, a small number child-focused studies have been published since the inauguration of President Duterte in 2016. Hence my interpretations of the sources are unavoidably limited in scope and temporal relevance due to this lack of up-to-date literature. As a result, many of my arguments have been informed by journalistic accounts made since 2016. In my opinion, journalistic sources – while at times sensationalized – can capture the realities on the ground in a different light than academic sources. I therefore attempted to use news articles from international and Philippines-based publications and I believe that by doing so my arguments are grounded in a more nuanced and localized understanding of the contemporary Philippine reality.

In researching for this thesis I encountered academic and non-academic works belonging to various different disciplines. I attempted to use these materials in creating a comprehensively empirical and interdisciplinary backdrop from which I formulate my own arguments. Understandably, I must acknowledge several limits to the research I have presented in this thesis. While I have made my argument for the utility of interdisciplinary methods, a notable limitation of this study is in this wide-range of empirical sources. I have attempted my best in immersing myself in the literature I have cited, yet my understanding of the various academic disciplines covered – such as development studies and labour economics – is admittedly generalized.

During the course of the preliminary planning for this thesis, I sought collaboration with several notable Filipino NGOs who work in the realm of children’s rights, rehabilitation, empowerment, and advocacy. Out of the five NGOs I contacted, only two replied to my e-mails. PREDA was one of these two NGOs and Father Cullen was quick to share the NGOs own resources and materials related to my thesis topic. The other NGO who replied to my initial request for collaboration cited time and financial stressors (due to COVID-19) as reasons for their inability to contribute to the research. Ideally it would have been interesting to compare and contrast the specific programmes of different NGOs in the Philippines but considering the hardships of the ongoing global pandemic, such a feat could not be achieved.

Chapter 5: Factors Perpetuating Societal Precarity

In this chapter I will highlight the multitude of interrelated factors which have perpetuated the “life condition” of precarity in the Philippines. I will begin by analyzing the wider societal influence of Catholicism. By drawing on historical accounts and scholastic research, I will present evidence for the dynamic – and sometimes antithetical – impacts of the Catholic church in the nation. Afterwards, I will discuss the scale of illegal drug use in the nation in order to contextualize my analysis of the impacts of Duterte’s infamous war on drugs. In establishing historical antecedence for drug enforcement in the country, we will begin to understand why the war on drugs is interpreted by many scholars as a ‘war against poverty’ and why the measures enacted by the government are disproportionate. Lastly, this chapter will present an investigation into the ways in which neoliberal economic doctrine has shaped the contemporary politico-economic landscape of the nation and how these initiatives have contributed to precarity.

5.1 Catholicism: Philippines’ Second Government

The socio-cultural significance of the Catholic church in the Philippines as a social and political institution cannot be understated. Close to 80 per cent of Filipinos consider Catholicism as an integral aspect of their identity as a Filipino/a and the country has some of the highest church attendance rates among Christian nations (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Besides the Vatican, the Philippines are the only nation in the world where divorce is illegal (Jeofrey, 2017) and abortions, while also prohibited by law and highly stigmatized, operate within a financially lucrative and exploitative judicial grey-area (Gallen & Gallen, 1982; Hirz, Avila, & Gipson, 2017). When we also consider the fact that the legally defined age for consent is 12, we begin to understand how a strict adherence to Judeo-Christian dogma is embedded within the government’s judicial framework, and why some Filipino scholars see the two institutions as *legitimizing* each other and *legitimized by* the other (Cornelio & Medina, 2019; Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Maxwell, 2019). I am not interested in lambasting the Catholic church or the contemporary Philippine legal system as *causes* for the exploitation of adolescents. Such argumentative points of reference are simply inappropriate and successfully further the distance and power asymmetry between the Western-educated researcher and research targets, whether it be the children and youth themselves, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or other stakeholders. Rather, I intend to highlight the historico-institutional significance of the church and how Catholic dogma continues to permeate aspects of daily life in the Philippines. As I will discuss in the next sections however, the role religion and the Catholic church play in the socio-political and cultural landscape of the country has evolved. Opinions on the Philippine Catholic church differ greatly, with some labeling the organisation as harbingers of progressive change, whereas others view the church as an obstacle in achieving social justice.

5.2 A Force for Progressive Change or Abettors in Crime?

Religiosity in the Philippines is not a monolith. Historically speaking, the church has occupied varying positions along the axis of tradition and progress. During the three centuries of Spanish rule, the Church was the de facto authority on the islands and they exercised punitive measures to control the population (Grzymala-Busse & Slater, 2018). Contrarily, in recent decades, the church has played an influential role in reformist movements (Roberto, 2010). During both EDSA revolutions in 1986 and 2001 for example, Catholic bishops and cardinals took part in anti-government and helped garner popular support for their progressive cause (Reid, 2001). These historical accounts do not illuminate upon the contemporary role of the church however and many presently prominent Catholic organisations espouse contrary political and social philosophies (Cornelio & Marañon, 2019). For Cornelio and Marañon (2019), these differences are ultimately reflective of the *class* that these organisations cater to. The authors analyzed how many nascent 'megachurches' – with upper- and middle-class clientele – have staunchly supported, or remained apolitical, towards Duterte's war on drugs. Contrarily, well-known bishops from poverty- and violence-stricken *barangays* have publicly decried the president's violent drug war (Watts, 2017). With this background in mind, I will now consider why the Catholic church could be argued to have contributed to precarity on the archipelago.

Most prominently, the Philippine Catholic Church is outspoken in its stance against contraceptives, abortion, and divorce (Cook, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2017; SCMP, 2017). Prior studies have argued that access to family planning services are key in reducing poverty and income inequality in the Philippines (Ozaki et al., 2017). Despite this, Catholic bishops and lawmakers have consistently lobbied against all and any measures which would enable Filipinos access to affordable reproductive medicine and/or family planning services (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Tanyag, 2017). As a result of lobbying, the Philippines remains one of the few nations globally where teenage pregnancy has increased in recent decades (Santos, 2017). Feminist scholars have argued that restrictions on reproductive freedoms are a reflection of the perceived 'threat' they pose to the religious image of a child-rearing female and the contemporary economic order (Tanyag, 2017). For Tanyag (2017), the economic dependence on Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) remittances is at the core of this issue and explains why self-sacrificing and altruistic images of Filipino women as ideal care workers are propagated by the Catholic church, government, and media. According to her; "Restrictions to reproductive freedom are a clear revelation of prevailing global material inequalities and how crisis and global austerity come at the cost of bodily depletion for women and girls" (Tanyag, 2017, p. 50).

In 2017, President Duterte issued an executive order that called for new legal protections for women (Santos, 2017). According to estimates, the new law would enable six million women to access birth control, including two million who would require government assistance to afford the medicine. While President Duterte should be lauded for instituting such a legal precedence, his stance on marriage equality remains unaffected (Cook, 2018; Ranada, 2018). Even as reports from the government-funded Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) noted that violence against women is one of the "country's pervasive social problems" (Philippine Commission on Women, 2017), Duterte has been vocal in his view that divorce should remain illegal and that children are *damaged* by divorce

(Ranada, 2018). Recent UNICEF reports have indicated that Filipino children's experiences of violence occur disproportionately in home environments (UNICEF, 2016b) and that the illegality of divorce has left generations of women and children "trapped" in abusive relationships (UNICEF, 2020). When coupled with the nation's high birth rates, persistent poverty among larger families (UNICEF, 2015), and low social mobility (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019), we begin to see how Catholic doctrine has permeated the legal foundations of the nation and debatably contributed to the insistence of poverty and precarity. For me, these findings exemplify the dichotomous and at times antithetical relationship between Catholicism, law, and welfare. This is especially true when we consider that most arguments against divorce and contraceptives rest upon the need to protect the *healthy* Judeo-Christian vision of family.

While the adverse impacts of Catholicism must be disclosed, it would be academically disingenuous to not highlight contrary claims for the importance of the church. Catholic organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have provided significant social services to the poorest of the nation as a result of gap left behind by the central government's Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Positive efforts of Catholic organizations have been especially noticeable during President Duterte's ongoing drug war, with some churches opening their facilities as sanctuaries – or hiding places – for victims and alleged suspects (Watts, 2017). In the severely affected slum of Payatas in Quezon, a local church established a food bank and sewing center for the families and widowed mothers who were affected by the drug war (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Catholic organizations have also played significant roles in rehabilitating and educating the youth of the nation, as exemplified by the People's Recovery Empowerment Development Assistance (PREDA). The picture is not as clear-cut as one may be inclined to imagine however. Past research in Philippines demonstrated the socio-cultural importance of incorporating religious values and practices (e.g. prayer) into the community-based rehabilitation programs for drug addicts (Hechanova et al., 2018), yet other studies have warned that the heavy enforcement and reliance upon normative cultural values may in fact reinforce street children's collective sense of ostracization, or being the chastised *other* incapable of conforming to their society (Sta. Maria et al., 2014). Akin to the puritan theories of childhood and children disavowed within childhood studies, these socially-constructed *moralities* may not be conducive to improving the life conditions of children, youth, and their families. The specific relationships between rehabilitative practices and religious moralities seems to be understudied in the Philippine context, and thus it requires further analysis by future studies.

This section has showcased the convoluted role and history of the Catholic church in the Philippines. Catholicism is so deeply intertwined with the Filipino identity, politics, and law that they are near inseparable. Specific religious organizations and churches vastly differ in their ideologies, mostly depending on the clientele to whom they preach to. As the subheading of the section suggests, these religious organizations often occupy contrary positions which can be construed as either progressive or traditional. Progressive religious organizations make significant efforts to fill-in the gaps in social services left over by the state, whereas traditional religious forces staunchly oppose laws or behaviours that compromise the traditional socio-cultural fabric of the nation. Recognizing both sides of the

argument is vital. In my opinion, one can fully retain respect for religion and religious freedoms whilst simultaneously acknowledging the harmful repercussions of certain religious tenets.

5.3 The War on Drugs: A War Against the Poor and Downtrodden

Hitler massacred three million Jews. There's three million drug addicts. I'd be happy to slaughter them.⁴

– Rodrigo Duterte

Since 2016, the Philippines' war against drugs has been a major focal point in Western academic literature and media coverage regarding the country. The point of including the war on drugs in the analytical framework of this paper is due to the simple fact that there is a limited amount of child-/youth-centered research that has been conducted since 2016. Much of the academic research released after 2016 has noted a significant rise in violence against anyone suspected of drug use alongside an increase in the occurrence of extrajudicial killings (or EJKs), particularly in the largest poverty-stricken districts (*barangays*) of Metro Manila (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Simangan, 2018). The anti-drug campaign has been hailed as a success by most of Duterte's followers (Reuters, 2020) while voices from the international community – including the UN – have called the campaign a genocide in disguise (Simangan, 2018). The question hence remains; how has Duterte fostered widespread approval for his violent anti-drug campaign despite the international condemnation? There are several angles from which we can approach our understanding of Duterte's popular appeal. In my view the most pertinent theme can be found in analyzing the violence itself and the moral message it intends to uphold. Besides understanding Duterte's popular appeal, the current section intends to understand how the policies of the war on drugs have influenced the daily experiences and lived realities of youth and children living in the country.

5.4 Drugs in the Philippines: An Overview

In order to understand the context for President Duterte's war on drugs, I will begin with an overview into the state of drug use in the nation. During the last decade, the Philippines has become a major hub for both drug use and drug trafficking (Ranada, 2016). Due to its convenient geography, the archipelago has become a key location for many international drug syndicates (Ranada, 2016). The local demand for cheap narcotics has been substantial and lucrative enough to attract even the Mexican Sinaloa Cartel, who according to recent reports have established import operations in the nation (Shadbolt, 2014).

Illegal drug use in the Philippines splits between socio-economic lines with lower-income *barangays* being disproportionately affected by the sale and consumption of illegal

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/30/rodrigo-duterte-vows-to-kill-3-million-drug-addicts-and-likens-himself-to-hitler>

narcotics (Human Rights Watch, 2020). According to United Nations' 2012 World Drug Report, the Philippines was the top consumer in East Asia for methamphetamines, known locally as *shabu* (UNODC, 2012). In 2020, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that 1.1 per cent of Filipinos aged ten to 69, or roughly 850,000 individuals, used methamphetamines in the past year (UNODC, 2020). While *shabu* has been the main target of the country's anti-drug initiatives, inhalants (e.g. contact cement) are also widely consumed (Dangerous Drugs Board, 2019). The popularity of inhalants, as with *shabu*, is due to their low-cost and ease of acquisition. Drug dens where *shabu* is used and sold are common throughout many of the low-income neighbourhoods across the Philippines (Lasco, 2018a). These statistics and findings paint a bleak image of the state of drug use in the nation, yet in my opinion, these figures may in fact obscure several practical reasons for *why* individuals choose to consume drugs.

As discussed in Sy et al., (2019), the Weberian 'protestant work ethic' offers an alternative angle for understanding the persistence and prevalence of drug use in urban Manila. During their study, interviews with *shabu* users revealed the productivity-enhancing effects of the drug to be the biggest motivators for their continued use. The authors argued this label of a *hard* worker represents an idealized trait of a *good* Christian which in reflection to the general hardships of poverty, demonstrates why individuals may *choose* drugs as a coping-mechanism or as a means individual or familial survival. Here we arrive at an interesting intersection between socio-cultural and economic practices. Similarly, Lasco (2018a) found that young *shabu* users enjoyed the alertness they gained from the drug and that it improved their *diskarte*, or the wits to survive in difficult situations. No other study besides Sy et al., (2019) has assessed the prevalence of drug use in relation to the notion of a protestant work ethic, but I find their argument compelling, especially when considering the overtly Catholic nature of the nation's culture and collective identity.

5.5 A Spectacle of Violent Moral Purification

The Philippine government has a long history of committing violence against its own populace (Jensen & Hapal, 2018). In undertaking the issue of illegal narcotics, the Filipino police forces initiated a militarized and countrywide door-to-door crackdown known as *Oplan Tokhang* (Li, 2019). The term is a portmanteau of two Tagalog words *tok* (to knock) and *hangyo* (to plead) and it has become near ubiquitous with the violence caused by the war on drugs. During nighttime raids, police indiscriminately foray houses of suspected drug pushers. The families of the suspected criminals are often present during these raids and many children have experienced trauma as a result of seeing their fathers violently detained or killed in front of them (Conde, 2020a; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The casualties of the drug war – according to the government and police – have been justified on the basis of *nanlaban* (self-defence), yet many critics argue that the police purposely plant incriminating evidence on suspects in order to validate these claims for self-defence (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, drug-related killings have hiked again with the Filipino government reporting a 50 per cent increase in deaths at the hands of the police between April and July 2020 (Conde, 2020b).

Duterte's war on drugs is uniquely Filipino in many regards. Firstly, unlike in Mexico, the drug cartels in the Philippines do not hold large swaths of territories under control, nor

are they capable of violently undermining the authority of the Philippine state (Gallagher et al., 2020). As such, the Philippines cannot be labeled a *narco-state* like Mexico. Secondly, while government-led initiatives against illegal narcotics and their users have raged in many majority-world contexts (Cornelio & Marañon, 2019), the most insidious factor that distinguishes the Filipino reiteration of the war on drugs is the rhetorical claim for moral purification (Simangan, 2018). The morality this rhetoric aims to vindicate is simple; drug users and pushers are social pariahs and an existential threat to the nation and its people. Such discourse extends beyond simply vilifying a single individual involved in the sale or consumption of narcotics, it arguably denotes the *family* as being abettors to crime. Despite the trauma and violence experienced by these families, they become merely “collateral damage” in Duterte’s ongoing drug war (Conde, 2020a). Reyes (2016) drew on Foucault’s spectacle of the body to showcase how Duterte fostered popular support for his anti-drug campaign through a spectacle of violence. Reyes argued that the *violence* itself became the medium for propagating Duterte’s political message, and the message itself is clear; those who do dare to use or sell drugs – will not be spared from punishment. Duterte’s exhibition of violence bares analogous qualities to the anti-terrorism agenda espoused by the United States in the years following 9/11, and as portrayed by Butler (2004), “The result is that an amorphous racism abounds, rationalized by the claim of “self-defence”. A generalized panic works in tandem with the shoring-up of the sovereign state and the suspension of civil liberties” (p. 39). In this sense, Duterte’s radical methods – irrespective of their legality or appropriateness – are justified on the grounds of an unaddressed moral *panic*. Hence violence becomes a political tool for addressing deeper societal insecurity but it is simultaneously used in order to disseminate specific socio-cultural notions of ‘acceptable’ livelihoods or behaviours. One could thus argue that Duterte’s war on drugs is – to a degree – an exercise in social-engineering as it defines certain lifestyles as immoral whilst concurrently labeling such individuals as threats to the well-being of the country. These perceived threats to security and the moral fabric of the nation have been utilized as the necessary pretext for progressing anti-poor demographic objectives, yet the argument for moral impurity hinges upon the way through which *narcotics* themselves are thought to embody specific values. Jacques Derrida aptly summarized; “The concept of drugs is not a scientific concept, but is rather instituted on the basis of moral or political evaluations” (Derrida, 2003, p. 20).

This section has shown how the strong rhetoric of moral purification endorsed by the Philippine government has designated drug users in the country as immoral beings in need of salvation, or eradication (Jensen & Hapal, 2018; Warburg & Jensen, 2018). The importance of this moral narrative cannot be understated. Philippine National Police (PNP) are notorious for corruption and have been implicated to have taken part in highly publicized extrajudicial killings (Espenido, 2018; Jensen & Hapal, 2018), but Duterte has given law enforcement the *green-light* to continue these practices, since they serve as visual hallmarks of his populist narrative of moral salvation. While images of lifeless bodies donning handwritten “pusher” signs may be evoke indignation in the West (Dancel, 2016), for Duterte’s proponents, these images are proof of how Duterte’s law and order approach is fixing the moral and social ails of the nation. In effect, this rhetoric coupled with the nationwide police crackdown on drug users has aided in cloaking the deep-rooted societal inequalities and corruption within the PNP and the Philippine penal system. Indeed,

Philippine prisons are severely underfunded and overcrowded with inmates living in inhumane conditions (N. Simbulan, Estacio, Dioquino-Maligaso, Herbosa, & Withers, 2019). But why would anyone care for the welfare of these inmates when the state labels them as social pariahs in need of redemption? I think Archbishop Villegas' summary of the situation illustrates my point: "They say that a nation that rejects drugs should give its consent to the murder of drug pushers. If you take a stand for the murdered victims, you would be for sure cursed and threatened... Is this the new normal?"⁵ (Cornelio & Marañon, 2019, p. 212).

Duterte has offered the Filipino populace an 'easy-fix' to deep-rooted social issues, with his solution being predicated upon the very moral narrative that this section has discussed. Simbulan et al., (2019) affirmed this point and argued that the drug problem will remain insoluble, as long as persistent social inequalities remain unaddressed. While violence has certainly been part and parcel of Duterte's war on drugs, how has this nationwide campaign influenced the everyday lives of Filipinos? The following section will further examine these social costs of the anti-drug campaign and present evidence for why many academics have considered Duterte's war on drugs as a war on poverty.

5.6 Social Costs of the War on Drugs

The human cost of the war on drugs is unmistakable, but exact figures are contested. Independent sources consistently report far higher incidences of death – up to 27,000 – while official Philippine government statistics cite the death toll as 5,601 (Human Rights Watch, 2020). According to Carlos Conde, a senior researcher for the Human Rights Watch (HRW), the drug war has resulted in a generation of torn-apart families and children scarred by violence (Conde, 2020a). A 2020 HRW report cited fears among social workers that an impending mental health crisis is brewing as a result of the drug war and the paranoid atmosphere it has fostered within communities. Even as children and entire communities became irreparably damaged, recent polling of 1,200 Filipino adults in September 2020 showed that 82 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the anti-drug campaign (Reuters, 2020). The fact that popular support for the initiative remains unhindered says a lot about the *type* of lives that are lost. Lives of pushers and drug users are seemingly framed inherently unworthy, and their death is not a loss, but rather a victory.

An intended consequence of President Duterte's initiative is that drug users must either face incarceration or go into hiding. In the United States, academics and public health officials have contended against mass incarceration and the stifling long-term effects it has on individuals and their families (Wallace, 2012), yet these demonstrable consequences of imprisonment are seemingly unacknowledged by the Philippine government. Mass incarceration has also been implemented in other drug-affected countries such as those in Central America, but like in the United States, the results have been counterintuitive (Felbab-Brown, 2017). Reasons for the ineptitude are straight-forward; prisons are well-

⁵ This is a translated version taken from Cornelio and Marañon (2019) with the original Tagalog version being available at <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/08/20/1730992/full-texts-cbcp-officials-statements-drug-related-killings>

known recruitment centers for criminal gangs and the inhumane conditions – in addition to the accessibility to drugs – are unlikely to create an environment conducive to rehabilitation of addiction or criminal behaviour (Felbab-Brown, 2017; Morales, 2017). In the Philippines, the long-term consequences of drug-related mass incarceration are yet to be seen, but one can feasibly argue that thousands of inmates – especially the youngest – have enrolled in what the former Filipino public defence attorney and activist Esperanza Valenzona coined as the “university of crime” (ABC, 2002). Critics have often cited children as the principal victims of the drug war, but some have argued that children are also specifically targeted by the anti-drug campaign (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Ratcliffe, 2020). President Duterte has in fact warned about a generation of criminals and suggested that mandatory drug testing should be implemented at a national level in schools to children as young as ten years old (Elemia, 2018). In 2016 alone, 54 youth aged 18 or younger were killed by vigilante death squads or during anti-drug police operations (Elemia, 2018). As of 2020, this number has risen to 122 (Ratcliffe, 2020). Among these cases, the death of 17-year old Manila resident Kian delos Santos made national headlines (BBC, 2018). The police had accused Kian of being a drug pusher and according to official reports, his death was due to self-defence on the part of the officers. However, CCTV footage of the killing surfaced which contradicted the official account and made Kian into a martyr on social media. It was the first death of the drug war which caused nationwide outrage, as being the son of an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) working in Saudi Arabia, Kian’s story struck a chord with the Philippine public at-large. To date, Kian’s death is the only case where the responsible police officers have received a criminal conviction. While justice was ultimately served and the three convicted officers were given extensive sentences, human rights groups warn that Kian’s case was not an anomaly and that a culture of corruption and impunity still mar the Philippine National Police and the anti-drug initiative as a whole (BBC, 2018; Espenido, 2018).

5.7 Political-Economy of the Philippines

Within much of the current literature on contemporary political-economies, there is a lack of attention given to the modern Philippine context that – in spite of sustained economic growth – has witnessed alarming increases in the incidences of childhood poverty in recent years (Berner & Berner, 2000; Ofreneo & Ofreneo, 2013; Tabuga et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2015). While childhood studies emphasises the importance of representation of *voice* and research *with* children, I argue that it is of equal importance to highlight the ways through which overriding factors like the political-economy may in fact diminish the long-term sustainability and effectiveness non-governmental or government-led initiatives aimed at alleviating childhood poverty. Simply put, the highly unique and complex context of contemporary Philippines – both culturally and historically – is inseparable from the everyday lives or life-courses of individual children and youth. In this section, I will present an overview of the contemporary political-economy of the Philippines and its neoliberal characteristics. In providing an closer analysis of the labour markets I will show how these economic practices have perpetuated persistent inequalities and precarity in the nation and why some academics have deemed the Philippine neoliberal experiment a “social disaster” (Scipes, 1999, p. 14).

5.8 Neoliberalism, Economic Growth, and Precarious Labour

The economic growth the Philippines has witnessed in recent decades has not come without its costs. Impressive economic feats have been coupled by World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) endorsed administrative reforms driven by privatization, austerity, deregulation, decentralization, and labour exportation (Grugel & Nem Singh, 2016; Lindio-McGovern, 2007; Mangaoang, 2019; E. C. Tadem, 2019). The nation was an early guinea pig for the World Bank (WB) Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), with neoliberal doctrine reaching its pinnacle during the post-EDSA presidency of Fidel Ramos from 1992 to 1998 (Bello, 2009, 2016). Some Filipino academics have argued that post-EDSA governments have been inherently *anti-development* due to their adoption of neoliberal policies and lack of attention given to internal and structural challenges (Bello, De Guzman, Malig, & Docena, 2005). Next I will investigate these claims in order to highlight the ways through which the political-economy and neoliberal policies have perpetuated inequality, poverty, and precarity in the Philippines.

Privatization of former state-owned enterprises in the Philippines has been an especially contentious topic (Lindio-McGovern, 2007). According to Bello et al., (2005), runaway privatization of key industries in the Philippines has not succeeded in substituting for poor or careless governance by the central Filipino state, nor has it brought about a healthier market. A case study of the most basic necessity – water – seems to corroborate this claim. The Filipino government had promised that privatization would lead to lowered prices for basic consumer goods, but on the contrary, water prices rose 226 per cent between 1997 and 2004 after the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) – the oldest state-owned company – was bought out by foreign companies (Lindio-McGovern, 2007). Heightened water prices placed additional pressures particularly on the poorest families in the nation. For Bello (2009), heightened privatization eroded domestic industries – particularly the manufacturing sectors – to irreversible levels. Lindio-McGovern (2007) substantiated Bello’s argument in assessing the Philippines’ ever-increasing import-dependence. As she pointed out, most of the basic necessities that were once produced in domestically have been outsourced, which has contributed to heightened levels of food insecurity in the nation.

Labour-exportation, on the other hand, has arguably become the most prominent feature of the modern Philippine economy. For many scholars, the proliferation of OFWs has aided in creating an easily-exploitable and readily-expendable workforce in the labour-receiving countries (Alipio, 2019; Lindio-McGovern, 2007). As already discussed, for Tanyag (2017) the continued exportation of female labour has undermined the reproductive freedoms of women in the Philippines and has been propelled by religious – and misogynistic – stereotypes of Filipino women as the ‘ideal’ care workers. This commodification of the Filipino women’s work is undoubtedly problematic, especially when we consider the scale of their labour. As Lindio-McGovern (2007) argued, the OFW-phenomenon has reinforced transnational divisions in female labour, as low-wage and low-prestige care work in richer nations has been subsidized by migrant women from peripheral nations such as the Philippines.

Contrary to their promises, neoliberal reforms – including the exportation of labour – have not decreased national levels of unemployment or underemployment (Grugel & Nem Singh, 2016; Lindio-McGovern, 2007). According to some scholars, a ‘jobless growth’ has been a hallmark of neoliberal market reforms in the Philippines (Grugel & Nem Singh, 2016). The term – ‘jobless growth’ – refers to the fact that while the national average income has risen, this growth has not trickled-down to poorest of the nation. Eduardo Tadem (2019) corroborated this view in arguing that the benefits of high growth rates have only reinforced the wealth and power of propertied elite classes. Effects of market reforms have been especially pronounced among youth, with youth unemployment in 2018 having remained at a high of 14.1 per cent compared to the 5.4 per cent national unemployment rate (Beam & Quimbo, 2018). Chronic unemployment has forced almost 90 per cent of the Filipino labour force to resort into precarious work conditions where employees are ineligible for of benefits, lack tenure security, or are forbidden to organize (E. C. Tadem, 2019). In recent years, underemployment also become particularly concerning. Tuaño and Cruz (2019) pointed that the persistent segmentation of the informal and formal labour-markets coupled with the flexibilization of labour have forced millions of Filipinos to seek out precarious work. The authors noted that one third of Filipinos with secondary education worked in low-paying precarious jobs, whereas about 30 per cent of labourers earned less than two thirds of the national minimum wage while employed within the informal and mostly low-skilled sector.

A common thread in my arguments here has been the fact that economic globalization is not a neutral process and it has created feedback loops which perpetuate inequality, precarious labour, and poverty in the Philippines. A few nations have benefitted from globalization as much as the Philippines and in the past, the notion that Filipino workers – particularly women – would comprise the backbone of Global North economies would probably be unimaginable to most. Filipinos make up a major subsection of the larger international precariat class, who thanks to international commerce and labour-demands, are capable of bearing the fruits of globalization by providing better livelihoods for themselves and their families. By having their entire lives intricately intertwined to global economic processes however, these people are left extremely vulnerable to bouts of recession and various forms of exploitation. Yet due to poor domestic opportunities for labour, the OFW population is unlikely to dwindle. The Philippines is thus an excellent case study for the ways through which market-freeing reforms can have counterintuitive consequences for local populations. Neoliberal reforms have effectively nullified the capacities of local markets in exchange for import-dependence on even basic necessities. Likewise, government-imposed deregulation has stymied workers’ attempts at unionization with demands for better wages and work conditions remaining largely unfulfilled. In other words, these reforms have created feedback loops between poverty and labour whereby Filipinos who cannot find meaningful or non-precarious labour domestically are left with no other choice but to work abroad despite the huge risks and sacrifices the lifestyle entails.

In this chapter I have provided an account into the various factors which have perpetuated precarity in the Philippines. Through my analysis of Catholicism – both as a political force and a social identity – the convoluted relationship between religiosity and precarity has been uncovered. While members of the Philippine Catholic Church have

historically been at the forefront of many progressive social movements, the judicial entrenchment of conservative religious values – particularly in relation to divorce, abortion, and women’s reproductive health – have contributed to the endemic nature of poverty in the nation. This chapter has also highlighted how President Duterte’s war on drugs is in effect a war on poverty and how perceived threats to domestic security have been weaponized as a pretext anti-poor policing and demographic objectives. Drug use is certainly a major issue in the nation, but as my research has suggested, a militarized police campaign against drug users has obscured deep-rooted issues of inequality and poverty, which have otherwise remained unaddressed by past and present Presidential administrations. As shown, the policing of Duterte’s anti-drug policies has also disproportionately affected the poorest and the most vulnerable Filipinos – including children and youth. Lastly, the present chapter has provided an overview into the politico-economic structures of the Philippines, and how these structures have been shaped by the nation’s complicated colonial and neocolonial past. The provided evidence has shown how neoliberal market-freeing reforms have contributed towards a precarious domestic labour market. In discussing the OFW phenomenon, I have showcased how poor domestic labour opportunities, coupled with poverty and stereotyped visions of Filipino women as ‘ideal caregivers’ have fueled the ongoing brain drain in the nation. In the next chapter I will further elaborate upon the specific forms of exploitation that children and youth face in the nation. The subsequent chapter will also provide an account into the various challenges related to children’s rights based discourse and practice.

Chapter 6: Exploitation of Children and Youth and Children's Rights in the Philippines

In this chapter I will provide an account for the exploitation of children and youth in the Philippines as well as the state of children's rights in the nation. Through an investigation of past literature, the current section will demonstrate how the exploitation of youth and children juxtaposes with the nation's prevailing socio-economic and political conditions. Likewise, I will offer a critical analysis into the challenges and mismatches between children's rights discourse and practice.

Exploitation of Children and Youth

6.1 Children's Labour

Considering the socio-cultural and religious significance of the *family*, children are from birth disposed a set of duties which they must fulfill. This is exemplified by the cultural tenet of *utang na loob*, or debt of gratitude, which children bear towards their parents (Hindman, 2009). Subservience to parental authority is unquestionable and children are expected to contribute towards the well-being of their household, whether it be through educational achievement, labour, or household tasks. There are no up-to-date statistics regarding the actual number of children engaged in labour activities. To date, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) has conducted three surveys on working children, in 1995, 2001 and 2011 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019). The PSA and International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2011 Survey on Children (SOC), estimated that there were 5.49 million *working* children ages five to 17, most of whom were boys. Out of these *working* children, 3.03 million were engaged in *child labour*, whereas 2.46 million were employed in *permissible* work (e.g. shorter work hours and non-hazardous conditions). Out of 3.03 million children in the *child labour* category, 98.9 per cent (2.99 million) worked in hazardous environments (Philippine Statistics Authority & International Labour Organization, 2011). These statistics highlight that a significant portion of Filipino children are regularly working, and often under dangerous conditions. When compared with other countries in the Global South, statistics on children's labour in the Philippines reveal significant socio-cultural influences. Hindman (2009) noted that in the Philippines, boys were likelier to work than girls, but girls were likelier to attend school *without* working. Contrarily in Egypt, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast, girls were less likely to attend school compared to boys (Hindman, 2009). Such differences could be argued to be the result of socio-cultural norms and expectations regarding young women and young men.

There are several examples of child-specific jobs in the Philippines. For instance, A *jumper boy* is a colloquial term for children – mostly young boys – who board and steal contents from passing cargo lorries, which they later sell at local markets (Hicks, 2013). This line of work is incredibly dangerous and many children have died as a result. The stolen goods acquired by these children rarely amount to more than a day's meal. *Jumper boys* exemplify the Tagalog expression of *diskarte*, or the wits required for survival in difficult

times (Lasco, 2018b). Due to children's smaller frame, they are also commonly targeted for work in the country's booming informal mining sector (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Children are particularly involved in small-scale gold mining operations, where makeshift mining pits are carved into riverbeds and the child miners are tasked with diving into these narrow shafts in order to extract gold. Most of these small-scale mines lack any safety regulations or proper equipment which leaves miners exposed to significant hazards (e.g. shaft collapse or mercury poisoning). Children's employment in the mining sector was significantly associated with poverty and higher school dropout rates according to the 2015 Human Rights Watch report. Both of the child-specific work examples discussed here highlight how children's vulnerabilities are exacerbated by poverty and how due to a lack of viable alternatives to income, children are often forced to engage in life-threatening employment at the expense of their schooling.

6.2 Children in Conflict with the Law

Children in conflict with the law (CICL) are a particularly vulnerable cohort among Filipino adolescents and since Duterte's inauguration, Filipino police have made significant efforts to clamp-down on youth criminality despite evidence from international agencies confirming that the act of jailing children and youth does not contribute to decreases in crime or improvements in security (UNICEF, 2016b). The current section will argue that the criminalization of children and youth is in direct violation of children's rights and results in hampered chances for a brighter future. Moreover, by highlighting the gaps in social and legal services provided to juvenile criminals, the analysis will illustrate how children's healthy psychosocial development is hindered by discrimination and their marginalized position in society.

According to statistics by the Philippine National Police (PNP), the number of juvenile criminals increased from 10,388 to 11,228 between 2017 and 2018 with physical injury being the most reported crime (Ng & Lachica, 2019). A typical CICL is a boy between ages of 14 to 17 and these children most commonly come from poverty-stricken families of six or more people (Alhambra, 2016). On average, 23.8 per cent of CICL came from families with a history of domestic violence and most CICL also used drugs and/or alcohol. In the past, young offenders were jailed within adult prison populations but due to public outrage both locally and internationally (Boele, 2005), the Filipino government committed to providing juvenile delinquents with *Bahay Pag-Asa*, or child-caring centers aimed at rehabilitating the criminally-inclined youth (Alhambra, 2016). However, out of the 114 government-mandated care centers, only 35 were operational as of 2016 since most municipalities were unable to fund their construction. Besides these government endorsed care-centers, there is an alarming lack of Youth Detention Homes (YDH) or Youth Rehabilitation Centers (YRC) in *barangay* municipalities. Under Philippine law (PD No. 603), each municipality is required to have a detention center specifically for young criminals but since the penalty for non-compliance amounts to 60€, most municipalities simply ignore the law and pay the fine (Boele, 2005).

In January 2019, the Filipino government proposed lowering the criminal age of responsibility from 15 to 12 (Castro, 2019). In July 2019 the Senate President Vicente Sotto III went further and proposed lowering the criminal age of responsibility to nine years old

(Rey, 2019). Human rights organizations opposed such amendments and many argued that children are being disproportionately targeted and penalized for their delinquent behaviours. According to statistics, children commit only two per cent of all crime in the Philippines (Alhambra, 2016), yet proponents of the new bill paint a starkly different image of 'out of control' juvenile delinquents who run amok without any fear of punishment. While there may be *some* truth in the notion that children may behave criminally when they are aware that their wrongdoing will be spared from judicial punishment, such thinking is fundamentally erroneous as it disregards scientific facts about children's neurological development. As cited by UNICEF (2016b), the adolescent brain continues to develop well into a person's mid-20s and critical centers for impulse inhibition and risk-reward assessment are not fully functional until adulthood.

As the current section had demonstrated, children who find themselves on a criminal pathway in life are not treated in a way that could be considered conducive to their rehabilitation. Contrarily, these children become political pawns or symbols of the social ills of the Philippines and are discriminated within the Philippine judicial apparatus and vilified by society at-large.

6.3 Physical and Sexual Exploitation of Children

Various forms of child maltreatment persist in the Philippines, but the two most well-studied are sexual and physical abuse. Abuses as such are widespread across the archipelago, yet they disproportionately affect the impoverished populations (UNICEF, 2016). Past studies have confirmed that the protection of children who experience abuse is a significant policy dilemma (Bessell & Gal, 2009) and hence I intend to answer; what factors have contributed to the high prevalence of these forms of exploitation, and what obstacles have allowed for their continuation?

In 2016, the UNICEF Council for the Welfare of Children conducted a nation-wide study on abuses against children and its results showcased the alarming extent of children's poly-victimization. Notable statistics from the report include the following (UNICEF, 2016b):

- 80 per cent of Filipino children experienced violence at home, school, community, or the workplace
- Four out of five children grew up in families where domestic abuse was common
- Six out of ten children experienced physical and psychological abuse
- Seven out of ten children lived in communities where they had no access to social and protective services

Cases of physical violence tend to overwhelmingly occur in familial settings according to findings from UNICEF (2016b). In their analysis, Roche (2017) described how the practice of corporal punishment is a culturally-accepted form of child-rearing and disciplining, making it far more resistant to change. The deep-rooted acceptance of corporal punishment as an acceptable practice in the Philippines poses a difficult task for human rights advocates as the boundaries of appropriate child-rearing practices are in dire need of reimagination. As noted by UNICEF (2016b), an additional obstacle emerges in the fact that Filipino children are often unwilling to report abuses. The report indicated that despite the high prevalence of physical abuse, only ten per cent of boys and girls were willing to disclose information

about their abuse, and when they did it was mostly to their own friends – rarely to their families or professionals.

Sexual exploitation of children on the other hand is arguably the most well-researched area within child research in the Philippines. The issue of commercial sexual exploitation has become near ubiquitous with the country itself, with certain regions – particularly those frequented by tourists – becoming infamous for underage prostitution. Indeed, the country has the fourth largest population of underage prostitutes in the whole world (Boele, 2005). In many regions, the sex industry is primarily fueled by tourism and many pimps specifically target foreigners as they are more likely to pay higher fees for sexual services than Filipinos (Boele, 2005). Adding to the problem, Filipino police often avoid prosecuting and investigating foreign suspects. The prevalence of sexual abuse was corroborated in a 2016 research project by the Philippine Center for Women’s Resources (CWR) (Perez, 2016). The report found that a woman or child is raped every 53 minutes in the country and that out of every ten sexually abused victims, seven are children. Furthermore, the data revealed that between 2010 and 2014, encroachments of the Republic Act 9262 – or the Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act – rose by 200 per cent. In reflecting upon the data and figures provided by CWR, we can better understand how impunity and politico-institutional factors have contributed to the high instance of sexual abuse of both children and women.

The digital-era has brought about new challenges to minors’ sexual exploitation. According to statistics by the World Bank and UNICEF, 43 per cent of the Philippine population had access to broadband internet (UNICEF, 2016a; World Bank, 2019). These factors have paved the way to new forms abuse, with the Philippines becoming the global epicenter for online sex-trade (Brown, 2016). The epidemic extent of the cybersex phenomenon was illustrated in the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office report (2016a) on child protection in the digital age. The findings showed that between April to December in 2014, the Philippine Office of Cybercrime received 12,374 claims of child exploitation from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) based in the United States in which either the victim or perpetrator were based in the Philippines. The nature of cybersex crimes is further problematized by the fact that parents often enable the cybersex abuse of their own children. According to UNICEF (2016a), scholars (Brown, 2016), and Father Cullen of People’s Recovery Empowerment Development Assistance (PREDA) (Cullen, 2020), many families treat cybersex as an acceptable form of income-generation and do not view these cybersex services as harmful to their own children. According to both UNICEF and PREDA, poverty is the core issue which enables these harmful practices.

As I have discussed, certain socio-cultural practices play a pertinent role in the endurance of physically and sexually harmful practices. UNICEF (2016b) documents suggested that the acceptance of corporal punishment stems partly from the lack of positive parenting skills and training. The authors of the 2016 report stated the following: “It is therefore important and strategic to change social norms that support and justify the use of violence against children and violence against women to prevent violence in the home, at school and in the community” (p. 21). Such a task is inherently at odds with contemporary

Filipino culture, particularly the tenet of *utang na loob*, or the debt of gratitude that children owe their parents (Hindman, 2009). The reimagination of normative cultural practices does appear imperative in hindering widespread child abuse on the archipelago, but these social-cultural norms cannot wholly explain the high incidences of abuse. Hence the underlying politico-institutional faults should also be addressed. Past research has demonstrated how the exploitation of children has been aggravated by non-cultural factors such as the Philippine legal system and lack of education regarding one's human rights (Bessell, 2009; Boele, 2005; Narag & Guzman, 2012). To elaborate, the 2016 CWR report confirmed that a major obstacle in prosecuting acts of sexual violence against women is the apparent impunity which sexual predators benefit from. The PREDA foundation (Cullen, 2020) corroborated CWR's claims by positing that sexual exploitation remains prevalent because most women and children are unaware of their human rights and do not have the necessary legal resources available to them for effectively prosecuting their abusers. The image portrayed here by both CWR and PREDA is alarming. While Bessel and Gal (2009) noted that human rights discourse can be used as an influential social instrument, the challenge remains in confronting the sites and uses of power – namely adult power. As the next section will highlight, though the Philippine state may accept children's rights on paper, in practice, these rights are not treated as entitlements and children's competence is directly challenged by the legal notions of *children* provided by the government.

Children's Rights in the Philippines

The Philippines was one of many countries that ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) upon its introduction as a guiding-principle in children's rights. To the benefit of the Philippine state, several landmark achievements have been reached (UNICEF, 2016b), but prior academic literature shows a clear discrepancy between theory and practice (Bessell, 2009). How is the institutionalization and actualization of children's rights *localized* in the country, and what does the rights-based approach entail in the Philippine context? This section will elaborate upon these questions and the various challenges that emerge in response to attempts at institutionalizing children's rights discourse in the Philippines. In doing so I will provide support for my argument that socio-cultural norms are directly at odds with the *individualistic* rights espoused by the UNCRC.

6.1 Contemporary Challenges and Future Implications

The Philippines is a family-oriented and collectivist society where the contemporary values reflect the nation's indigenous and pre-Hispanic heritage (G. R. Ang, 1979). Filipino children are expected remain submissive to their elders and are 'in debt' to their families from birth (Bessell, 2009; Hindman, 2009; Jensen & Hapal, 2018). The cultural tenet of *bayanihan* (meaning communal unity and cooperation) is particularly pertinent, with Ang (1979) denoting it as the Filipino 'way of life'. However, this cultural emphasis on communal harmony and the subordinate status of children have complicated the institutionalization of children's rights with the very notion of children's *individual* rights being in direct conflict with conventional Filipino child-rearing practices and cultural norms. Additionally, Bessell, Siagian, and Bexley (2020) argued that the very term *child* encapsulates a far wider age-

range in the Philippines which complicates the practice of children's rights as the specific needs of different age cohorts cannot be fully addressed by singular measures. Other academic studies have corroborated these findings and presented supplementary complications.

In their review of Philippine social policy regimes, Roche (2019) suggested that children are rendered as inseparable from their families and parents. This apparent inseparability is fundamental to the problems that emerge in the application of CRC in the Philippines. According to Mason (2005), policies that conceptualize children as *merged* with the family reduce children to a status of dependent invisibility. Roche (2019) postulated that the Philippine government occupies a subordinate role in the welfare of children, and that this burden rests solely upon the parents. While such an obligation is likely a reflection of the cultural importance of family in the Philippines, Roche warned that these policies may work against the welfare of children. Overarching conditions (e.g. political economy) that impact parents' capacity for welfare provision are disregarded in policy, and navigating through such structural hurdles becomes a parental responsibility. Indeed in the social policies they analyzed, Roche pointed to a distinct recognition of structural inequality and hierarchical social order as *preordained* outcomes. Such a conceptualization of society could partly explain why Philippines has such diminished social assistance programs when compared to other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. Moving beyond the inseparability of children and family, why has the CRC been heavily criticized within academia and what are the alternative perspectives proposed in contemporary literature?

Many academics have specifically criticized the UNCRC for its endorsement of a vertical child-state axis whereby the *state* is primarily responsible for the preservation of children's rights (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2012). For Roche (2019), this vertical relationship is inherently at odds with normative familial and care-related social practices of collectivist societies. In other words, by proposing that children – and the preservation of their rights – are the responsibilities of the state, the CRC discredits the care, support, and teaching that children receive within their familial social contexts. Myers and Bourdillon (2012) furthered the criticism and posited that westernized notions of childhood and children's rights are incapable of addressing the needs of children in the Global South. According to Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2012), in order to move beyond the vertical child-state axis, children's rights should be reconceptualized as *living practice*. The authors argued that children themselves *practice* and *shape* their rights, and thus the enforcement of Global North standards of *childhood* is not merely insufficient, but also denotes children as passive *recipients* of these rights. Although the consensus regarding the efficacy and generalizability of the CRC seems to be unanimous among several scholars, what are the specific socio-cultural practices – besides socio-cultural tenets such as *bayanihan* – that have made the practice of children's rights so contentious in the Philippines?

A recent UNICEF (2016b) study showcased how certain socio-cultural practices may be directly at odds with the agentic view of children espoused in the UNCRC. For example, the authors noted how corporal punishment is often treated as an acceptable and necessary form of child-rearing among Filipino families of all socio-economic classes. Filipino children

rarely reported instances of violence and if they did, they were most likely to report to their teachers. Findings indicated that many teachers were uneager to acknowledge children's rights with some arguing that children's understanding of their own rights would result in more disobedient behaviours. The messy picture painted by the UNICEF report is indicative of the challenges related to the empowerment of children and the actualization of children's rights in practice. Indeed, violence against children (VAC) has been shown to lead to worse outcomes in psychological health and school performance, yet these practices remain commonplace – and accepted – due to their deep ties to cultural conventions in child-rearing practices. Other studies in the Philippines have pointed to similar inconsistencies in state and local actors' understandings of children's rights, participation, and competence. Bessell (2009) studied children's participation within local districts (*barangays*) and her findings portrayed the cultural and operational difficulties of institutionalizing children's rights – namely the right to be heard (art. 12 of the CRC). Bessell's research focused on the work of *Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children* and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These neighbourhood councils were endorsed by many as they recruited children as 'child representatives' who helped the councils mediate the removal of other local children from abusive family environments. Results indicated that these councils overburdened their child representatives with far too many duties and responsibilities that were inappropriate and potentially traumatizing. Interestingly, similar challenges were noted by Abebe & Tefera (2014) in Ethiopia, where children themselves argued that children's rights discourses in their local communities had created unrealistic expectations for how they as children should *be*. In this sense, an acceptance of children's competence may in fact be wholly against their 'best interests'. These findings exemplify how the line between *emancipatory* and *harmful* forms of participation appear blurred in everyday practice in the Global South. Bessell (2009) saw this issue as having risen from a failure among the councils and NGOs in establishing a middle ground between the romantic and incompetence narratives on children.

Though children's rights – as endorsed by the CRC – are at odds with normative Filipino culture, additional issues arise in relation to the ways through which children's rights are exercised in judicial settings. As shown in the earlier section on children's abuse, there are clear inconsistencies between children's rights discourses and practices in the context of juvenile criminality and rehabilitation. Boele (2005) posited that the Filipino criminal system is at its core oriented towards unlawful discrimination against children. With an overburdened legal system and overworked public defence attorneys, most Filipino youth facing trial are advised by their attorneys to plead guilty, simply to hasten the judicial process. Situations as such are clear obstructions to Articles 37 and 40 of the UNCRC. While a lack of understanding for children's rights could partly explain these practices, in my opinion, these findings point to a lack of due process in legal proceedings which does not only affect children, but all those who are subject to them.

In this chapter I have discussed the plethora of ways in which children and youth are exploited in the Philippines and why their exploitation has persisted. Through my investigation into children and youth's labour, I have showcased how precarious labour is a defining feature of underage employment, and how employment in these sectors is influenced by familial poverty. My analysis into children in conflict with the law (CICL)

highlighted how the lack of state-sponsored social and legal assistance continues to undermine children's welfare and how their legal rights are often disregarded entirely. Moreover, the present chapter has noted how certain socio-cultural practices have normalized physical and sexual violence against children and youth. Likewise, the ineffectiveness of the present day Philippine legal system and the culture of perpetrator impunity have been brought to light through my investigation. This chapter has also underlined the different barriers which complicate children's empowerment and the *practice* of children's rights. My findings have consistently pointed to the problematic nature of children's *individual* rights – at least in the Philippine context. The evidence discussed seems to point to a clear mismatch between what is *preached* and what is *practiced*. While the notion of individual rights may be incompatible with Filipino culture, this section has also pointed to deeper issues in the Philippine penal and judicial systems which reflect the degree to which the Philippine state has failed in upholding the general human rights of its most vulnerable citizens.

Chapter 7: People's Recovery, Empowerment and Development Assistance (PREDA)

This chapter will examine the non-governmental organization (NGO) of People's Recovery Empowerment and Development Assistance (PREDA). The purpose of the current section is to illuminate how PREDA is attempting to challenge the very obstacles that I have mentioned in the preceding chapter. The present section will assess how PREDA has attempted to alleviate the various macro-level politico-economic, historical, and socio-cultural factors which have contributed to precarity in the nation. Moreover, this section will analyze visions of *childhood* that are produced and asserted within the programs and ethos of the NGO.

7.1 Organizational Background

The People's Recovery Empowerment and Development Assistance is a licensed and government-accredited NGO founded in Olongapo City by Father Shay Cullen in 1974 (PREDA, 2018a). Father Cullen, an Irish missionary, came to the country in 1969 and worked as an assistant parish priest in Olongapo City (PREDA, 2020j). The establishment of PREDA in 1974 coincided with Marcos' martial law era and the foundation has a long history of combatting societal stigmas related to youth involvement in drugs, crime, and sex.

PREDA is one of the most renowned social development NGOs in the nation and their advocacy has been lauded by international and local voices alike (PREDA, 2020c). The foundation were three time nominees for the Nobel Peace Prize and have received numerous accolades from notable human rights organizations across Europe.

Today the foundation has 63 Filipino professionals as employees and PREDA is a leading NGO in the battle against child abuse and sex trafficking in the country (PREDA, 2020a). The foundation has been a long-term supporter of at-risk children caught up in crime, prostitution, and drugs which has often put the organization in the crosshairs of the Filipino government (Cullen, 2010; PREDA, 2020h, 2020i).

7.2 The Ethos of PREDA

According to PREDA's official website, their mission statement is as follows; "The mission is to bring spiritual values with practical help and provide rescue, protection legal action, education and therapy to abused children and to promote sustainable development and economic enterprise through Fair Trade for poverty alleviation"⁶ (PREDA, 2018b).

In relation to how the mission statement is put into action; "This goal is to be achieved primarily by implementing these revolutionary values and ways of community life so that people are helped to help themselves. The empowerment of people is essential"⁷

⁶ <https://www.preda.org/about-preda-foundation/vision-mission/>

⁷ <https://www.preda.org/about-preda-foundation/>

(PREDA, 2018b). It is worth noting that the preceding passage alluded to the pre-Hispanic cultural tenet of *bayanihan* (or communal harmony), which many scholars see as a defining feature of Filipino life (G. R. Ang, 1979).

7.3 Programs and Projects

PREDA has several projects in place which have been aimed at empowering populations in both Olongapo and the Philippines at-large. In total, the NGO operates twelve different programs, some of which overlap (PREDA, 2020g). Table 1 listed below outlines each of the twelve programs. I will also provide a more detailed analysis regarding some of the initiatives which I believe are most noteworthy.

Table 1
Outline of PREDA's programmes⁸

Type and/or Name of Program	Target Cohort or Institution	Purpose	Tools and Services
Childhood For Children (CFC)	Young children and youth who are victims of domestic abuse at home or sexual abuse	A. Enable children's empowerment and healthy development by removing them from abusive environments	1. PREDA provides abused children places at residential homes 2. At these residential homes, the children receive therapy, family counselling, and education (both formal and vocational)
Legal Services	Children in conflict with the law	A. Provide legal assistance and research in persecuting the abuser in a given situation	1. PREDA has a dedicated legal team who work in collaboration with local courts and police
Rescue Every Child Today (REACT)	Children in conflict with the law	A. PREDA aims to rescue children in conflict with the law from the sub-human conditions of prisons in Central Luzon and Manila	1. PREDA provides children with legal assistance 2. PREDA attempts to remove children from detention centers and relocate them to their residential centers
Public Education and Preventative Seminars (PEPS)	The local community (e.g. teachers, social workers, church leaders, and other community members)	A. Spreading awareness regarding child abuse B. Enable preventive measures at the community-level	1. Integrated workshops 2. Public seminars 3. Training regimes for reporting and preventing abuse
HIV-AIDS Preventive Education	At-risk youth and local communities	A. Helping spread awareness related to HIV-AIDS prevention	1. Direct youth participation 2. Educational handouts, posters, and videos
Special Human Rights Education (SHARE)	Local community and government	A. Help inform local communities about children's rights B. Lobbying government to provide more legal protections for children	1. Lobbying 2. Community outreach 3. Training volunteer "Guardians at Litem" who are appointed by courts to be legal guardians of

⁸ The listed information was retrieved from <https://www.preda.org/projects-2/>

			children in need of legal protection
Research, Advocacy, Information, and Networking (RAIN)	International and national communities	A. Disseminating information and building awareness to the issues concerning youth in the Philippines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research articles 2. Pamphlets 3. Newsletters 4. Media Appearances 5. Networking with other NGOs
Indigenous Peoples' Assistance Community Training (IMPACT)	Indigenous communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Help organize indigenous peoples' leaders for dialogue and community action for environmental protection and development B. Empower indigenous communities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meetings with indigenous leaders and government/military officials to mediate land disputes 2. Establishment of tree nurseries 3. Tree planting by indigenous community members and PREDA volunteers
Youth Organizing and Empowerment Training (AKBAY) and Theatre Production	Youth and children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Provide training in leadership and social/familial values B. Enable youth to freely discuss issues that pertain to their daily lives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seminars 2. Workshops 3. Summer camps 4. Youth-led social projects 5. Youth-led theatre group
Scholarship for Youth (SCHOLAR)	Disadvantaged youth (particularly Filipino-Americans)	A. Provide formal education to empower disadvantaged youth	1. Specialized education in nursing, social work, and computer training
Internet Safety Campaign (INSEC)	International and national communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Advocate for safe internet use B. Aimed at pressuring internet service providers (ISPs) to block child pornography on the internet C. Protect children from cyber-sex abuse, pedophiles, and stalkers 	1. National and international safety advocacy campaigns
PREDA Fair Trade	26 rural and urban production groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Help farmers get a fair price for mangos or other dried fruit exported by PREDA Fair Trade B. The sales go directly into other PREDA projects 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interest-free production and/or development loans 2. Giving farmers access to profitable export markets 3. Village infrastructure projects (e.g. sanitation and water) 4. Settling land disputes by land reclamation

7.4 Residential Care Centers

The organization has two residential facilities in Olongapo dedicated to young girls and boys (PREDA, 2020h, 2020i). These residential care homes offer therapeutic programs for the children and families and also provide formal and informal education to the residents. According to their website, the goal of the protection and therapeutic homes and services is to facilitate "recovery and return to childhood"⁹ (PREDA, 2020b). The residential

⁹ <https://www.preda.org/about-preda-fairtrade/>

homes are located in the countryside and are surrounded by open fields with no walls or fences blocking children's access to nature (PREDA, 2020i).

The PREDA home for girls houses up to 49 girls from ages eight to 17 who have been victims of sexual exploitation (PREDA, 2020b). The girls are provided with a safe living environment with the psychological and therapeutic support necessary for full recovery. On the other hand, the residential home for boys primarily targets those who have been in conflict with the law. These boys are encouraged to act independently and in fact 90 per cent of the boys at the care center stay there out of personal choice (PREDA, 2020b). As with the girls' care center, the boys are provided with the educative and therapeutic tools necessary for a successful life outside of the center. Notably, there are very few instances of violent conduct by the child residents (PREDA, 2020i).

7.5 Children in Conflict with The Law

PREDA is committed to defending the human rights of juveniles caught up in the muddy waters of Filipino justice and penal systems. PREDA social workers frequently visit jails and take legal actions in order to have the detained youth released to the custody of the PREDA foundation (PREDA, 2020i).

7.6 The PREDA Fair Trade Project

For over 40 years, the PREDA foundation has established programs for empowering small business owners in the Philippines (PREDA, 2020f). By collaborating with mango farmers and their cooperatives, PREDA has been able to circumnavigate the price-fixing schemes of fruit cartels which had historically exploited the work of local producers. The mango products produced under the PREDA Fair Trade Project are sold in European markets at an equitable price. As a result of the Fair Trade initiative, poverty among farmers has decreased allowing for more funds to be allocated to feeding and educating their families. Likewise, the mango profits are directly funding other PREDA projects.

7.7 Community Outreach

The PREDA foundation's work extends far beyond the scope of simply rehabilitating exploited children (PREDA, 2020g). The organization plays an active role in its local communities, promoting awareness to child rights issues. They hold advocacy events, seminars, and workshops at local schools and for public and government officials.

According to the organization, community outreach projects have been crucial in targeting at-risk children in local communities (PREDA, 2020a). PREDA has an active phone hotline where locals can call-in to report cases of child abuse and exploitation (PREDA, 2020e). Once PREDA is notified about a child in need of help, they send a rescue team together with government social workers, or police, to safely escort the child and take them to a PREDA care center. When possible, the PREDA legal team attempts to bring abusers to court.

Besides the Fair Trade Project, PREDA has initiated other economic development projects with local indigenous people in Zambales (PREDA, 2020f). PREDA provided funding

for water and sanitation infrastructures as well as giving out educational assistance grants to allow indigenous youth enrollment in schools.

7.8 Reflections on PREDA and the Challenges of Filipino NGOs

In this chapter I have provided an outline of the ethos, programs, and achievements of PREDA. In my opinion, PREDA is an exemplary case study of how NGOs in the Philippines are fighting an uphill battle against widespread abuse of children and youth, and the *precaritization* of childhoods. To the credit of PREDA, their programmes are comprehensive in attending to the several macro- and micro-level issues which have enabled the endurance of precarity as a life-condition in the nation.

From my overview of the foundation, it is clear that the *vision* of childhood produced in the official texts and programmes of PREDA is one of romantic innocence. In other words, it appears to me that the foundation believes Filipino children are being forcefully embroiled within and dehumanized by the 'adult' world of sin. Considering the ample evidence for child abuse in the nation, it is difficult to disregard PREDA's assessment of the issue. While these notions of children's romantic innocence may be informed by the Catholic roots of the foundation, I find their arguments robust when considering the scale of the child abuse problem in the nation. Specifically, the foundation seems to put a great deal of stress on the issue of *family*. In my e-mail correspondence with the Father Cullen, I was forwarded a document titled "The social background of sexually-abused children"¹⁰, in which the founder bluntly stated that "the Filipino family is damaged" (Cullen, 2020, p. 1). Father Cullen further explained;

One of the factors in the Philippines that contribute to the spread of sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking is the prevailing culture of machismo that perpetuates the myth that men, especially foreign rich men, have a "right" to sexually exploit the so-called "weaker, and therefore incorrectly marked inferior sex." They look on the poor, uneducated girls from the provinces or the slums as fair game for sexual exploitation and low paid jobs as cleaners, domestic helpers or sometimes if poor relatives with a "Debt of Honor"; or "utang na Loob" for some favor given to their families [sic]. (Cullen, 2020, p. 2)

I find Cullen's summary compelling. His assessment points out how Filipino childhoods are simultaneously compromised by both endogenous socio-cultural and economic influences like *machismo*, *utang na loob*, or familial poverty, and exogenous factors such as the growing tourism sector that directly benefits from foreigners who partake in the commercial sex industry. Cullen's narrative also highlights a more foreboding aspect – the fact the Filipino state, Filipino families, and normative socio-cultural practices play a major role in ongoing abuses and the loss of children's innocence. To quote Cullen;

¹⁰ Alternative version available at <https://www.preda.org/newsitems/the-social-background-of-sexually-abused-children-in-the-philippines/>

Whereas some father bring their sons to a brothel for such sexual initiation encounters or they are allowed to sexually abuse young school mates. This dominant male attitude gives rise to the rapid expansion of the sex bar industry that exploits the young women and are run mostly by men, many foreign, with the help of Filipino Mamsans and traffickers who recruit the young girls into the bars. The sex bars are the prime destination of trafficked girls in the Philippines. Unless they are eliminated they trafficking will continue unabated as they operate with a mayors permit. Thus they appear to be legitimate businesses. Behind this façade is a system of slavery and human bondage, sexual exploitation and drug culture that is untouched and operates with impunity protected by the authorities. This has a detrimental effect on the local Filipino population who has come to accept it without protest. This is re-enforced by a media soaked with sex and violence that damages the psyche and moral values especially of children. (Cullen, 2020, p. 2-3)

It is difficult to disagree with Father Cullen's characterization of Philippine childhoods as being *broken*. As noted in the above passage, child exploitation is a multidimensional phenomenon, that is enabled by various actors with differing motivations, including the family, foreigners, the Philippine judicial system, and media. From PREDA's approach to advocacy and Father Cullen's own words, it appears evident that they as an organization recognize that combatting child abuse in the Philippines necessitates a reordering of societal depictions, attitudes, and laws regarding children and their rights.

It seems abundantly clear from my research that there are endemic and systematic issues present at the very core of the Filipino government and culture which are enabling abusers to go about their business with absolute impunity. Despite the advocacy work of NGOs such as PREDA, internationally-based pedophiles are keen to target Filipino children due to the widespread knowledge of English and internet accessibility in the country (PREDA, 2020h). Sexual abuse in the Philippines is thus not a domestic issue, it extends beyond the country's borders. As such, I contemplate whether there are meaningful legal avenues through which the Filipino state may curb ongoing abuses of underage children and youth in the sex industry. Impunity seems to lie at the core of the issue, but this impunity could be argued to reflect the deep-seated corruption of the Philippine judicial apparatus as a whole. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how NGOs such as PREDA could meaningfully challenge harmful socio-cultural practices without the backing of the central government. In my view, the crux of the issue is trust, or the *lack of* trust in the Philippine government. This lack of trust was certainly reflected in the election of President Duterte who ran on an anti-elitist and anti-imperialist platform that resonated with the Filipino masses. Duterte's agenda however has been far more concerned with curbing the *symptoms* of entrenched poverty and inequality in lieu of fundamentally addressing the structural inequalities that continue to subjugate children and youth to precarious pathways in life with NGOs like PREDA being left to 'pick up the pieces'. Effectively, organizations like PREDA are investing in the human capital of youth who are knowingly forgotten – and in cases vilified – by the Philippine state and society at-large.

Chapter 8: Discussion

The Philippines is a country of extreme divergence polarized by its economic growth, natural – and human – wealth, colonial history, and entrenched poverty. Wherever you look, conflicts wage between the archipelago's traditional forces of culture, religion, patrimonialism, and the indelible vigor of Western capitalism with its dogma of modernizing the under-developed. Nowhere are these clashes more evident than in the precarious plight of impoverished young people in the Philippines, who – bereft of institutional means of challenging their subordinate societal status – are left to using their wits in order to survive the ordeals of an inherently unequal society.

In this chapter I will discuss the findings presented in this thesis. I will begin by reflecting upon the precarious lives of Filipino youth and children. Second, I will reevaluate the various forces that have contributed to the societal state of precarity. Third, this chapter will reiterate how Filipino non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – such as People's Recovery, Empowerment and Development Assistance (PREDA) – are working to alleviate the aforementioned societal precarity. Fourth, the feasibility of rights-based approaches will be critically assessed. Lastly, I will reflect upon the way forward and offer suggestions for future studies in the area of youth and children's precarity in the Philippines.

8.1 Children and Youth in Precarity

This thesis has corroborated Alipio's (2019) assertion that precarity is a 'life-condition' in the Philippines. The presented evidence has validated that *precaritization* of adolescents is enabled through numerous overarching and interrelated dynamics. Due to children and youths' subordinate position, they are rendered as passive recipients to these *precaritizing* societal conditions. The central Philippine states' hands-off approach in children's rights provision has culminated in a situation where families are primarily responsible for the teaching, enforcement, and protection of children's rights. As evidenced in this thesis, due to hardships of poverty and normative socio-cultural or kinship practices, most families are ill-equipped in undertaking such tasks. It is difficult to argue *what* is the best way forward. For one, there certainly needs to be a reconceptualization of children's rights and duties in a way that is Philippine-specific and does not rely upon the Eurocentric notions espoused by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Moreover, examples discussed in this thesis – such as children's precarious work or sexual exploitation – cannot be feasibly addressed without government assistance. The fact of the matter is simple; as long as profits are to be made, the exploitation of desperate families and children will continue. Insofar as law-enforcement is concerned, significant strides must be made in quelling perpetrator impunity and enhancing police accountability as these factors continue to propagate the crisis of children's sexual exploitation in the nation. Likewise, educational regimes regarding sex-work and children's sexual exploitation must also be improved since many families fail to see the harm in enrolling their children in such work. Similar issues apply to children's physical abuse as well, but the degree to which corporal punishment is seen as a valid form of child-rearing has made such practices resistant to change.

8.2 Forces Perpetuating Societal Precarity

This research project has been predicated upon analyzing the variety of factors that have prolonged precarity in the Philippines. Findings suggest that precarity is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that continues to shape the life trajectories of Filipinos both domestically and abroad. Addressing the Philippines' precarity is ultimately a political appeal, but as shown in my analysis of the archipelago's politics, the government has been historically incapable of profoundly addressing the systemic issues which continue to plague the nation. These systemic issues, whether it be the entrenched rule of elite oligarchs, the socio-legal influence of the Catholic church, or the incessant poverty caused by the surrender of Philippines' economic sovereignty to neoliberal forces, require levels of grassroots political mobilization which have not been witnessed since the EDSA revolution of the late 1980s. Even though Catholicism's inseparability from the Filipino identity poses a great challenge, a greater obstacle may lie in the attitudes that average Filipinos have towards globalization. As discussed, globalization – while not a neutral process – is widely celebrated in the country. It is undoubtedly true that generations of Filipinos have benefitted from the globalization of labour markets, but these positive imaginations of globalization have embedded themselves in the media and politics of the country in ways that resemble religious fervor if anything. I am unsure whether a healthy marriage can be achieved between globalizing mechanics and the domestic Philippine economy and society, but what remains true is the fact that tackling precarity – as experienced in the Philippines – necessitates fundamental economic restructuring at the domestic and international levels.

8.3 PREDA and Filipino NGOs

Filipino NGOs such as PREDA play an immensely important role in Philippine society. As shown in Chapter eight, PREDA has attempted to work around the central government's lackluster welfare regimes, lopsided socio-economics, and harmful socio-cultural practices in a way that appears to be conducive to positive changes in the nation. The PREDA free trade program is a good example of an NGO programme that attempts to address fundamental inequalities by empowering local communities. Moreover, the rehabilitative work that PREDA offers the residents of its youth homes must be lauded for its comprehensive nature. As the founder Shay Cullen has alluded to however, there remain several factors which underlie the efficacy of the work PREDA are conducting. The laissez-faire attitudes of many parents – regarding their children's involvement in the sex industry – are particularly troublesome. Advocating against such practices and changing socio-cultural norms cannot be single-handedly achieved by NGOs. Indeed, my analysis of PREDA has furthered the importance and urgency of governmental interventions. While the commendable work of NGOs like PREDA cannot be understated, their task of caring, rehabilitating, and educating the youth of the nation speaks volumes to the jaded capacities of the contemporary Filipino state and its Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). As such, the central government must begin to enforce the rule of law equitably and hold itself accountable for the entrenched poverty and culture of impunity that mar the nation.

8.4 Feasibility of Rights-based Approaches

This thesis has centered around understanding the various factors which contribute to precarious childhoods in the Philippines and the state of children's rights in the nation. My

goal has been to create a comprehensive interdisciplinary narrative through which the feasibility of the rights-based approaches can be better evaluated. From my research, I conclude the rights-based approach – as proposed by the UN and the CRC – conflicts with the local culture, practices, politics, and history of the nation in five key ways. The following section will outline – point by point – the findings that support this conclusion.

Firstly, the vision of *childhood* proposed within the CRC is not universal. As Myers and Bourdillon (2012) put it, *childhood* – as conceptualized in the Global North and in the CRC – cannot possibly address the needs of all children living in the Global South. Laws such as the CRC are not born in an ideological vacuum and for Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2012), laws represent volatile translations of ideas of *right* and *wrong*, which are context-specific. This binary creates many challenges in the *practice* and advocacy of children's rights, as westernized moral ideations of *right* are not necessarily congruent with their local counterparts. The mismatches between what is preached and practiced were especially evident in the study by Bessell (2009). To reiterate Bessell's findings, children – who were encouraged to participate within *barangay* councils by local NGOs – found that these 'new' rights presented them with duties and tasks that were beyond their capabilities, which culminated in unnecessary stress that some found traumatizing. Thus in lieu of a standardized *childhood* and the 'righteous' rights, duties and morality which the denomination endorses, locally conceived alternatives may be much better at responding to the specific socio-cultural environments of children. In a Filipino-specific context, such an alternative could mean a more nuanced conceptualization of children's duties and rights in the arena of family and community.

Second, the very idea of *individual* rights is problematic and does not bode well with collectivist cultures like the Philippines (Roche, 2019). As alluded to in prior sections, the notion of *bayanihan* – or communal harmony – is often thought of as the Filipino 'way of life' (G. R. Ang, 1979), and this emphasis on communal unity does not coincide with the individual rights of children advocated within the CRC. *Pakikisama* – or simply getting along with each other – is an additional cultural tenet tied closely to *bayanihan*, and according to Jensen and Hapal (2018), this practice constitutes as a reciprocal duty among people of same status to behave in ways which do not infringe upon the harmony of the community. Furthermore, with the socio-cultural importance of family and the subservient position children occupy within the familial hierarchy, the CRC's normative expectation that children *must* possess individual rights to voice within this setting is highly problematic (Bessell, 2009; Hock et al., 2018). As Stoecklin and Bonvin (2014) argued, the issue is not that the CRC endorses the right to voice, but rather that the prerequisite settings that allow for a capability to exercise this right are not outlined. Understandably, the conditions which allow for children's voices to be expressed in meaningful ways cannot be generalized across different countries, but by withholding any potential preconditions *for* voice, the procedural ambiguity encapsulated within the CRC complicates the institutionalization and protection of children's rights in nations with historically poor track records for governance and human rights enforcement – such as the Philippines.

Third, culturally accepted forms of child-rearing and normative sociocultural ideations of childhood in the Philippines are antithetical to the types of environments where CRC-

derived notions of *childhood* may flourish. *Utang na loob* (or debt of servitude) is particularly important, and through it, children's submissiveness to their parents becomes a justified and virtuous trait (Hock et al., 2018). This vertical debt influences children's life courses well into adulthood, renders them inseparable from their families, and its importance becomes especially amplified with poverty (Hindman, 2009; Hock et al., 2018). As such, children's income-generating activities – in cases of extreme poverty – become invaluable to their families, yet children's heightened involvement in labour activities has been shown to correlate in higher school dropout rates, especially among boys (Hindman, 2009). Children's corporal punishment – as an acceptable form of child-rearing – also conflicts with the CRC doctrine, and according to Roche (2019) and UNICEF (2016b), this practice is both legally accepted and highly pervasive in the Philippines. The sexual abuse of children is an additional topic through which harmful socio-cultural practices are brought to light. As PREDA founder Shay Cullen (2020) posited, children's sexual abuse (e.g. cybersex services) is mostly enabled by those closest to them and many parents treated such practices as acceptable forms of income-generation. These difficulties highlight the scale to which normative parenting practices – and parenting practices brought about by extreme poverty – are complicating the institutionalization and actualization of children's rights in the Philippines.

Fourth, the influence of the Philippine Catholic church – and Judeo-Christian dogma at-large – must also be acknowledged. Specifically, the consistent anti-abortion and anti-divorce lobbying of Church leaders has culminated to an environment where women's reproductive rights are not recognized by the state. The lack of affordable, safe, and legal ways of family planning have certainly contributed to the high occurrence of large families and poverty is a far more common phenomenon among such families (Cudia, 2015). Additionally, Boele (2005) argued that Catholicized education has left children – and adults – completely uninformed of the risk of STDs, with recent data showing that the Philippines has the most severe HIV-AIDS epidemic in Asia-Pacific (Vista, 2018). Hence we can see how the Catholic church's deep-seated influence in Philippine politics has also undermined the implementation of the CRC. It is unlikely that the contemporary Filipino identity and culture can entirely divorce themselves from their Catholic roots, but it is nevertheless vital to acknowledge how religion and the Church as a socio-political institution have contributed to the current state of affairs in the nation.

Fifth, the implementation of a rights-based approach to development in the Philippines is undermined by the functions of the central Philippine state. In writing about the strengths and weaknesses of human rights-based approaches to development, Broberg and Sano (2018) argued that the existence of an effective and accountable state apparatus is a precondition for the protection of human rights. In other words, rights-based approaches to development do not imply a charitable donation of rights to people, these rights cannot be exercised or protected without the presence of a state that possesses the judicial means for enforcing rights. In Chapter seven I outlined how the Philippine state has not fulfilled its duties in safeguarding children's rights at a national level. The epidemic nature of children's sexual abuse in the Philippines is to significant degree an issue of impunity and the lack of state intervention (Boele, 2005; PREDA, 2020h). Child labourers –

especially in the mining sector – are another defenseless cohort of adolescents who risk their long-term health for the sake of income-generation under precarious work conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Due to the centrality of the mining industry in the Philippine economy and in order to achieve a competitive advantage, the Philippine government – along pro-mining lobbyists – have made significant strides in deregulating the industry and clamping down on anti-mining activism (Camba, 2016). Children in conflict with the law are also vulnerable and for these children, judicial due process is not a guarantee (Boele, 2005). Moreover, since Duterte’s presidency, human rights discourse as a whole has been put on the back-burner, and widespread killings, and trauma associated with the drug war have become accepted as a justified form of collateral damage by the state and the general populace (Lamchek & Sanchez, 2021). Examples given here illustrate the point that despite the on-paper acknowledgment and institutionalization of children’s rights, poor governance continues to undermine the protection of children’s rights at the national-level.

Recognizing the incompatibility between children’s rights and the contemporary Philippine context does not mean a complete disregard of children’s agency or human rights, nor does it imply that normative socio-cultural stances regarding children and child-rearing in the Philippines are without their faults. Children certainly *bear* and *deserve* rights in the Philippines, but how can we go about advocating for children’s rights without infringing upon the socio-cultural sovereignty of the nation? What appears most evident is the need for a reconceptualization of children’s rights, agency, and participation that is specific to the societal and cultural context of the Philippines. In my opinion, the concept of interdependent rights and agency – as argued by Abebe (2019) – may be more valuable than the overly individualistic approaches propagated by the CRC. For Abebe, children in many parts of the Global South are seen as interdependent to their families, communities, and society at-large. By analyzing the interdependent nature of children’s duties, rights, and obligations, a multifaceted image of children’s everyday agency can be discovered. The goal is to understand how children’s rights are exercised and how these expressions may differ depending on the social, relational, or spatial context in question. From my research into children’s rights in the Philippines, there was a distinct lack of studies with such contextualized discussions that distanced themselves from the CRC. In future studies, I would encourage that the use of interdependent agency for understanding how children’s labour or delinquent/high-risk behaviour (e.g. drug-use) may reflect socially- and spatially-dependent forms of agency.

This section has showcased the various reasons for why the institutionalization of children’s rights is an ill-fated and convoluted mission in the Philippines. From the prior analysis of PREDA, we can see how NGOs are attempting to achieve this feat by providing at-risk youth a safe environment within which they can acquire the necessary tools and knowledge for self-empowerment. However, NGOs like PREDA are unable to single-handedly change societal perceptions regarding children, and as long as structural antecedents persist, infringements upon children’s rights – and the precaritization of children as a whole – will likely continue. Certain structural precursors, such as the neoliberal global economy or the inseparability of Catholicism and law have certainly contributed to precarity in the Philippines, but as this section has underscored, certain socio-cultural practices are also

culpable of the contemporary state of affairs. The central dilemma I have alluded to remains the same; in order to fully recognize the agency of children and to empower them as individuals, historically-rooted structural inequalities – both local and global – need to be addressed. In her book “The Government of No One”, Ruth Kinna summarized the dilemma as follows: “Multiple oppressions are not functions of changes in modes of production; they emerge from an all-encompassing system of exploitation – structured by state and capitalism – they are inseparable from it” (Kinna, 2020, p. 158).

I end this section with a summary critique of *rights* as a whole. As I have argued in this section, international legal codifications are unable to address context-specific problems in many majority world contexts. Likewise, the idea of individual rights are antithetical to socio-cultural notions of children in the Philippines which substantiates the need for a critical reinterpretation of children’s rights in a way that is appropriate to the country. Such a feat may involve acknowledging the ostensible inseparability of children from their families, thus embracing a notion similar to that of Abebe’s interdependent rights. All the examples highlighted in this section hark back to Hanson and Nieuwenhuys’ argument for the ‘biggest issue’ with children’s rights discourse and the CRC. According to the authors, there is a massive difference between the *imagined* child – within the normative legal framework of the CRC – and the *social* child (e.g. the social practices of children). Children’s social lives, rights, and practices cannot be confined to a legal doctrine, which can be interpreted in widely different ways by development organizations. Perhaps what is most urgent is a critical distancing away from essentializing children’s *being* and their rights, and acknowledging that such conceptualizations cannot be generalized universally, or as Tamanaha argued, “Law is whatever people identify and treat through their social practices as “law”” (Tamanaha, 2000, p. 313).

8.5 Implications for Future Studies

During the course of my research I have found a noticeable lack of academic studies which specifically focus on the topic of precarious childhoods in the Philippines. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, precarity in the Philippines is expressed and experienced in ways that are unique to, and inseparable from, the archipelago’s socio-cultural, historical, and politico-economic backdrops. While future studies should assess how the challenges of adolescent Filipino precariat’s are unique, a commonly missed dimension in such assessments is *morality*. In accepting the socially-constructed nature of *childhoods*, one must also acknowledge how morality – as a concept and practice – relates to differential understandings of childhood. What childhood *is*, or *should be*, is contested in both a socio-cultural and moral arena. Thus in order fully contextualize Filipino childhoods, a deeper dive into the different socially-constructed moralities is necessary. For example, future studies could disclose the ways in which societally-endorsed notions Christian morality may impact youths’ drug use and criminal recidivism. In their research, Sy et al., (2019) referenced the Weberian “protestant work ethic” as an alternative angle for understanding the persistence and prevalence of drug use in Manila’s *barangays*. Interviews with *shabu* users revealed the productivity-enhancing effects of the drug to be the biggest motivators for continued drug use. The authors argued this label of a *hard* worker represents an idealized trait of a *good Christian* which in reflection to the general hardships of poverty, demonstrates why

individuals may *choose* drugs as a coping-mechanism or as a means individual or familial survival. Socially-constructed ideas of morality also influence the rehabilitative or preventative programs of the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Macarayan, Ndeffo-Mbah, Beyrer, & Galvani, 2016). Many prominent child-centered NGOs in the Philippines explicitly promote a Christian ethos of “saving the damned”, effectively categorizing the delinquent children and youth of the nation as targets for “purification” and protection. I believe it is worthwhile that future studies closely assess how these different moral narratives are reflected in NGO programme regimes and whether they influence the life trajectories children and youth who are enrolled in such programmes.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to unravel the different influences that shape the precarious of nature children and youths' lives in the Philippines. My analysis has shown how the legacies and functions of history, normative socio-cultural practices, political-economy, and the judicial system have bestowed unique challenges to young people in the Philippines, and how these factors have reinforced poverty, crime, and societal precarity. The topic of Philippine politics has been discussed in great detail to illustrate how the capacities for democratic reform are weakened by the entrenched rule of landed oligarchy and political dynasties. From my analysis of President Duterte's rule as head of state, I have also showcased how young Filipinos are disproportionately targeted by and are the 'biggest victims' of the ongoing drug war. Importantly, this thesis has also put rights-based approaches to children's rehabilitation, empowerment, and advocacy under scrutiny. Due to children's subordinate societal position in the nation, I conclude that a strict rights-based approach, while noble, is incompatible with many normative socio-cultural notions and practices in the nation. These difficulties were also corroborated and extended upon in my analysis of PREDA. The examination into PREDA's ethos and programmes demonstrated the variety of ways this NGO is attempting to help the nation's children in-need. The major findings of this thesis are as follows.

Firstly, precarity is engendered multidimensionally through various endogenous and exogenous factors. Internally, harmful socio-cultural practices – such as the sexual and physical exploitation of children – have contributed to children's precarious and subordinate societal status which has complicated attempts at children's empowerment. These endemic structural problems are unique to the nation, and as this thesis has demonstrated, the country's colonial legacy continues to be reflected in ongoing struggles for economic and social justice. Externally, the colonial heritage of the Philippines has ensured that power, both political and economic, rests in the hands of a few landed and wealthy oligarchical clans. The patronage-laden practices of these rapacious clans have effectively hijacked the democratic institutions of the country, and with their entrenched rule, the capacities for genuine democratic reform, and ultimately redistributive justice, are incredibly weak. Moreover, since gaining its independence, the Philippines has become the testing ground for neoliberal economic dogmas. The religious degree to which globalization has been embraced has effectively masked the dire state of the domestic economy and has succeeded in *precaritizing* generations of families, whose best chances for upward mobility often lie in undertaking precarious overseas labour. When historically poor governance is coupled with change-resistant and harmful normative socio-cultural practices, the convoluted and multi-dimensional nature of precarity starts to unravel. Likewise, the degree to which Catholicism has been embedded within the politico-judicial structures of the nation has ensured that women's reproductive freedoms remain unaddressed which has consequently heightened the frequency of large families and the persistence of familial poverty. The high incidences of poverty are fundamentally tied into these factors and in order to combat poverty in the Philippines, deep-rooted structural inequalities must be addressed via redistributive means.

Secondly, through my exploration into the programme-regimes and ethos of PREDA, we have witnessed how local NGOs are attempting to empower Filipino children. As I have highlighted, the programmes of PREDA attempt to address societal precarity and poverty in ways that appear conducive to positive changes in the nation and are congruent with the country's socio-cultural and religious context. However, NGOs themselves are incapable of addressing all overarching factors that perpetuate conditions of precarious existence and incessant poverty. When coupled with the culture of impunity that defines the judicial branches of the Philippine government and the jaded capacities of state-provided child welfare services, my analysis has underscored the need for governmental intervention and assistance in children's rehabilitation and the enforcement of children's rights.

Third, this thesis has brought to light the multitude of challenges that arise with rights-based approaches to development and children's empowerment in the Philippines. Socio-cultural norms in child-rearing practices and the subordinate position of children in the Philippines have effectively ensured that the institutionalization of children's rights – as proposed by the CRC – is problematic and impractical. Mismatches between the CRC and local Filipino culture are rife, and as I have demonstrated, the very notion of individual rights is incompatible with collectivist cultures like the Philippines where emphasis is placed on communal harmony. As suggested in the prior discussion section, a notion akin to Abebe's interdependent rights might be more suitable for creating new and Philippine-sensitive reiterations of children's rights.

One of the greatest obstacles facing the Philippine state and its people is the lack of viable alternatives. As demonstrated in this thesis, the politics and economics of the archipelago have historically been formulated to benefit the small ruling class, who have reaped the benefits of the nation's natural and human riches. These ill-gotten gains have not trickled down to the masses and honest attempts at improving the welfare of the citizenry have failed in circumventing the lopsided economic foundations of the nation. As Eduardo Tadem (2019) put it; "in the political sphere, rapacious dynastic families cemented their long-running rule while the disease of corruption infected every nook and cranny of public service"¹¹. The mafioso-esque practices of dynastic clans have turned Philippine politics into a family-affair guised under the façade of *representative* democracy, where prudence is replaced by rampant cronyism and embezzlement. On the other hand, there is an increasingly fragmented left-wing movement in the nation, whose past infighting, tactics, and leadership have undermined their political credence according to some scholars (Bello, 2017; E. C. Tadem, 2019). Though the Overton window for certain radical political narratives may have closed, the question remains, where can an alternative future be found? For Manila-based activist and anarchist organizer Bas Umali, the answer lies in the country's pre-colonial history. According to him, the archipelago's indigenous groups had rich traditions for communal harmony and these pre-Hispanic *barangays* organized themselves in a decentralized manner and operated in loosely-organized federations based on trade and commerce (Umali, 2020). Umali touted his vision for the Philippines as an 'Archipelagic Confederation' – where the citizenry are empowered through direct and redistributive democracy. In Umali's words;

¹¹ <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/analysis-philippine-left-2019-elections>

Making politics accessible to every Filipino family is what counts. What we need is the widest participation of the people from the communities and localities. The system of representative democracy is not designed to accommodate people's participation in power, and we must replace this with direct democracy, a political system that offers a true participation in power by being organized in a decentralized fashion based on the principles of solidarity and mutual cooperation. (Umali, 2020, p. 97)

It is easy to disregard Umali's argument as naïve idealism, but in consideration of the contemporary state of affairs in the Philippines and globally, change must begin with the acknowledgment that capitalism is incapable of self-reformation and its outcomes will always be inequitable and unethical. Raising class consciousness is fundamental, especially in the Philippines. The poor, uneducated, and landless peasantry still comprise the majority of Filipino citizens, yet despite the nation's irrefutable economic developments (Albert et al., 2018), the struggles of the Philippine working class have remained unaddressed by post-independent Filipino states. On one hand, Philippine governments have eagerly adopted International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) funded economic doctrines that have compromised the archipelago's economic sovereignty. On the other hand, Philippine politics have become a ceaseless contest between rivaling dynasties whose practices serve only their personal economic and class interests. The pent-up frustrations that Duterte weaponized during his electoral campaign are reflective of this disassociation between average Filipinos and their government. The seeds for a blossoming Philippine nationalism have already been planted by leaders like Duterte, but in lieu of a nationalism predicated upon an authoritative 'law and order' approach, the country could one day embrace proletarian nationalism driven by the goal of self-determination. Such a movement is a critical step towards working-class emancipation, or as Friedrich Engels (1882) put it; "an international movement of the proletariat is possible only among independent nations"¹².

In 2022 the Philippines will hold presidential elections. It remains to be seen whether the chaos caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – including the rise in drug-related deaths (Conde, 2020b) and unemployment (Rivas, 2020) – will influence its outcomes. For Tadem (2019), "the atmosphere is ripe for alternative voices and perspectives"¹³, yet with his unwithering popularity, a democratic overthrowal President Duterte would require a massive shift in the opinions of the Filipino masses. Perhaps the youth of the nation may play a vital role in the upcoming election cycle. When I asked Dr. Scalice about the potential role youth of the Philippines could play in dismantling the structural inequalities of the nation, he made a compelling comment;

There's a long and painful history of the politicization of children. This is not something that should be thrust upon them, but it has been, so they have the right to be political if they choose to. But youth certainly. I think they'll have a central role in all of this. They are in a liminal moment in life, where everything is still in-flux,

¹² https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82_02_07.htm

¹³ <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/analysis-philippine-left-2019-elections>

where they have not yet figured everything out, have not yet had their ideas locked down, and where the fact that the current shape of the world is the way and the only way that things could be, isn't something they have yet accepted. The fact that the world could be fundamentally different does not seem unusual to a youth, but if you tell it to a 50 year old, most 50 year old's will tell 'well you're full of it'. So I think it is not only the right of youth, but to an extent their obligation to ensure that a better world is made possible.¹⁴ (J. Scalice, personal communication, September 21, 2020).

A major argument – and a common thread within the aforementioned findings – is that Filipino children and youth have bared the brunt of the negative costs of globalization. The socio-cultural inseparability of children from their families is indisputable and the feminization of poverty has contributed to the intergenerational protraction of precarity as a 'fact of life'. In this thesis I have attempted to showcase how these problems of post-independent Philippines are reflective of global economic and political processes. However, while the Philippine context under which neoliberal market reforms were introduced was unique, consequent challenges have been similarly felt across other countries belonging to the Global South. The crux of the matter is simple, but rather daunting; addressing global inequalities brought about by neoliberal economics cannot be achieved without global action, yet *solutions* to these crises are not universal. One could also argue that traditional antidotes to social and economic injustices are incompatible with our modern digital-era and its contemporary practices. Nascent advancements in technology and the ongoing automation of traditional industries pose new challenges both locally and globally, and it remains to be seen whether peripheral nations – such as the Philippines – will be the future winners or losers of the fourth industrial revolution. Philippine children and youth – as affirmed by Dr. Scalice – will have an important role in shaping the future of their archipelago, and perhaps a youthful elan and an idealism for a 'brighter' future are the remedies that the country has yearned for.

¹⁴ Personal Communication, 21/09/2020

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