

Politics, Power and Violence in the Visayas Region of the Philippines

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There is liminal predation amidst surface harmony, with the norm of constant massacre underneath social relations affecting the poor, the deprived and the oppressed peoples.

Duplicities rule. President Duterte said he wants peace. So the left sat in the peace process with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), but the armed forces continue their attacks at communities.

He said, he is anti-corruption but the ousted dictator Marcos is given a hero's burial.

He said he wants to protect the country but he ordered the killing of peasant-national minorities, and likewise ordered the bombing of Lumad (tribal) communities. He said, he will stop the contractualization of labor, but legalized it under DOLE Dept. Order 174.

He was for a tax reform but that which boosts up more levies on consumer goods. He said lands will be redistributed to farmers but had the appointment of peasant DAR secretary Mariano subject to the approval of landlords in congress.

A family dispute that commenced since 2016 in Muslim, Butig, Marawi City community was transformed into an anti-terrorist campaign killing Muslim civilians and bombing communities in Mindanao under a declaration of Martial Law. Art. 106-109 of the labor code and justified it in DO No. 174.

When a rido took place in Marawi you elevated it to ISIS and allowed aerial bombings even beyond Marawi City. You said land will be redistributed to the farmers, but you had it subject to the concurrence of landlords in congress. You said you are anti-destructive mining but you still sustain massive mining. You always say what you are not.

Meantime, in the country-sides, the ruling class keeps killing poor peasants. A case in point are the landlords in the Island of Negros who have maintained private armies to grab peasant cultivated lands and shoot poor farmers regularly. And just like the Negros landlords, Negros politicians invoke political medievalism and a bankrupt developmental politics attacking human rights defenders conducting fact finding missions in farming communities in Negros.

This is the design of Negros Provincial Ordinance No. 5 Series of 2008 which denies Human Rights Defenders the right to conduct mercy missions, fact finding missions or even medical missions through layers of bureaucratic measures and permit requirements. The landlords or the ruling class in this country remain to be the problem because they appear to have barren minds which hopelessly rely on private armies to shoot those who question them.

They are the problem ever since Philippine history!

The Series of Killings at Guihulngan City

Since July, 2017, a reign of terror hounds Guihulngan City in Negros Oriental with series of Marcos-inspired killings, when progressive groups have called on the abrogation of government's misplaced policy of three wars against the drug menace, the Bangsamoro rebellion and civilian-political unrest. Guihulngan has become government's priority target in its counterinsurgency drive as it has been the subject of ruthless attacks by state agents victimizing unarmed political dissenters. Hence, the murder victims:

1. Glen Absin - July 23, 2017
2. Alberto 'Leboy' Tecson - July 24, 2017
3. Danilo Salazar - July 28, 2017
4. Rene Faburada - August 4, 2017
5. Leodegario Benero, Jr. August 17, 2017
6. Marlyn Vidal - August 26, 2017
7. Oscar Asildo, Jr. - August 30 2017

Alberto "Leboy" Tecson was the vice-chair of fishermen's group *Pambansang Lakasng Kilusang Mamalakaya* (Pamalakaya). Oscar Asildo, Jr. was Bayan Muna organizer who is a bookkeeper of DepEd's Guihulngan Division Office, and then two other reported cases of attempted murder. Rolan Pacunla, driver of a motorcycle-for-hire (popularly known as habal-habal) and is a member of the Guihulngan Habal-habal United Operators and Drivers Association (GHUODA).

He was shot on August 6, 2017 but survived with injuries. Luardo Yac was shot and wounded on Sept. 1, 2017. He was a resident of Sitio Balay Sungayan, Poblacion and a member of KAUGMAON. He recovered from his injuries but was shot dead on September 13. Yac's death bring the total number killed to 8. All the killings were reportedly perpetrated by masked men riding motorcycles. Likewise, activist leaders, *Marilou Alangilan (KAUGMAON Spokesperson)*, *Cenona Estrada (KAUGMAON Chairperson)*, *Josephine Saguran (Health workers in Mountain Clinics)*, *Harry Centilla, a member of the Pinagkaisang Samahanng Tsuper at Operators Nationwide (PISTON)*, *Lorna Tecson, wife of Leboy Tecson* and *Florante Burdado, leader of GHUODA* receive constant threats and harrassments.



Policemen killed in an ambush allegedly staged by the New People's Army (NPA) in Guihulngan City on July 21, 2017

Hence, the climate of Martial Law-like impunity govern the Guihulngan City of Negros Oriental this year while perpetrators remain scot-free inspired by the Duterte go-kill doctrine, while the victims and their families live in anxiety. With the pervasive fear among residents that curtail their movements, livelihood or socio-economic activities are disrupted and displaced. The pattern shows that state security forces were running amok to satisfy vengeance on a previous (July 21, 2017) incident that resulted to combat losses against the New People's Army. They are actually, vending their ire upon hapless civilians and government critics whom they are quick to brand as NPA supporters to justify the execution.

Peace negotiator abducted with two other farmers

In 1986, was chief peace negotiator and ex-priest Rustico “Tikoy” Tan who was abducted early November this year. Operatives of the Cebu Provincial Intelligence Branch (PIB) picked him up last November 9, 2017 at his in-law’s residence at Barangay Pasil, Santander town. Police Inspector Chief Joie Yape, Jr. issued a statement in SunStar Cebu’s November 11, 2017 news report that positively identified the Cebu Police Provincial Office’s (CPPO) PIB as the apprehending office.

However, hopping around military camp to police camps in Cebu City, the relatives and Cebu’s Karapatan Team were denied information on the detention of Fr. Rustico “Tikoy” Tan and two others who were identified to be in police custody with him for the last 3 days. Hence, in the third day, the search for Fr. Tan ended to no avail. Both military and police officers were bent on denying to death the detention of Fr. Tan.

The case in point is that a retired peace negotiator at age 76 is incarcerated under the present dispensation. Is Duterte’s regime bent on reviving the cases of former anti-Marcos activists? Is Duterte too desperate to prove his loyalty to the Marcoses?

In November 13, the Karapatan search team went to the Cebu Police Provincial Office (CPPO) to counter check where the police intelligence kept the missing Fr. Rustico Tan. With all media personnel around, finally Police information Superintendent Virgilio Bayon-on revealed that the warrant of arrest was issued at Bohol, so they sent Fr. Rustico Tan to the 47th branch of the court at Bohol Sunday November 12, but that they said it is not also sure because there is another set of warrant from Negros province.

So another warrant issued from a court’s branch at Negros. If it was yesterday that the captives were transported to Bohol, we were not informed on that account while we were camp hopping the whole day. And for what intent does PNP blind the relatives of the detainee on his whereabouts, when protocol says that PNP should inform the prisoner of his rights? Four days had passed. This is already a case of abduction.

So where do we go now? They won’t give us any copy of the manifesto and/or copy of the arrest warrant. My resolution is rather futuristic, that what we should teach in school are strategies on how to respond against police violations of their own operations manual and the constitution. Two days after, it was learned that the two other farmers who were abducted earlier that day of November 9, at Oslob town were already traced, and billeted at the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) at Kalunasan, Cebu City.

The Karapatan workers gathered that 52 year old farmer Mr. Eduardo Cullamat was abducted at about 5:00 p.m. at Barangay Mainit, Oslob, Cebu last Nov. 9, 2017, while calling for his wife through a cellphone. Cullamat said that he and his companion Lopito Paquegbao Jabagat were tied with hands at the back while they were taken via a truckload of armed men from Mainit, Oslob, Cebu. Cullamat shared that for four days he was blindfolded. He said that his chest was repeatedly hit by a hard object, and that he was mauled and manhandled to force him to accept or agree that he is a member of the “sparrow” unit. He also shared that for sometime he was not allowed to eat on his own and that food was administered to him while he was on hand cuffs and repeatedly beaten by some men. Jabagat, on the other hand revealed that he was taken by surprise while cooking his food and his arms pulled to his back and blindfolded. Both said that they were repeatedly interrogated all throughout the four days.

On November 13, 2017, it was learned that both farmers were brought to the Oslob Police Station where Cullamat requested for medical help for his aching chest. In November 14, 2017, they were committed to the CPDRC. Cullamat had P500.00 in his wallet while Jabagat had P45,000.00 and two cellphones taken away from them during their abduction.

Killing of Barangay Chair Felicisimo “Imok” Rupinta



Cebu’s icon urban poor, vendor and political leader, Felicisimo “Imok” Rupinta (image on the right) was murdered November 23, 2017. His case is one of Cebu’s political killings. Chair Felicisimo “Imok” Rupinta was murdered at Tayud, Liloan, Cebu. A year ago he was suspended with the rest of the Barangay Kagawads of Barangay Ermita Cebu City for defying cooperation with the Duterte’s original operation tokhang/Double Barrel implementation. Last night he was murdered by unidentified gunmen riding in tandem.

Over the years, of ethnographic studies in Cebu City, Chair Imok has always been there as key informant to various researches. His rich experiences in Cebu City politics, his leadership with the Cebu City United Vendors Association (CCUVA) and the KAMANSI Cooperative and his engagement from the SIR-P to the CMP to vendor cooperativism are so valuable that should have earned him great honor as source of that community knowledge. But sadly, he was murdered to highlight on the selective war on drugs despite the absence of litigation against him. Engaging Chair Imok is always an opportunity to understand the anatomy of the underground economies in Cebu City. His death is a blow as it is a great loss to the urban poor and the vendors of Cebu city.

Killing of Badayos and Moises

Attacking human rights defenders is bestial madness. The private army and their patron who murdered Emelisa Badayos of Karapatan Central Visayas and peasant Elioterio Moises must face murder charges.

Sad news came on November 26, 2017 about the Fact Finding Mission (FFM) at Bayawan, Negros Oriental, that resulted to the death of a colleague, Mrs. Emelisa Badayos of Karapatan Negros, and Mr. Elioterio Moises, a barangay tanod and peasant member of the Mantapi Ebwan Farmers Association. Both were with the 30-member team investigating on the massive militarization in Negros communities and on the reported human rights violations in the area, only to be shot at by unidentified men in the afternoon of November 26. Another one who is a Kabataan Partylist member is still in critical condition at the Bayawan hospital when reports came to Cebu City Bayan office. Earlier that day, the team was blocked and harassed at San Ramon, Bayawan by no less than the Mayor’s private

army. Patterns and regularities show that armed groups including those of government are unleashed on its bestial madness, shooting on all fronts just for the booty of the what they call monetary rewards that government had used to entice the armed bureaucracy to aggressively attack even human rights defenders.

The situation of the poor sectors in Cebu City

Genuine assets redistribution remains an elusive dream. The urban poor settlers continue to sleep in anguish and fear that the next day their shanties are uprooted and their abode destroyed by continuing and impending demolition. Tomorrow or the next day they may hear from the news that Osmeña's City government had already fully demolished the urban poor colony of Mambaling, Cebu City.

While demolition is implemented, government agents constantly manipulate the poor to purchase their lots via government's market driven programs dubbed as "socialized mass housing" and/or "mortgaging communities".

It is difficult to understand why government remains poor in their imagination about finding means for genuine assets reforms and genuine assets redistribution. Why is government getting into the profit driven motive? Why can't government realize public service without having to marketize public welfare, such as public housing, public health care and public education? Why do some scholars in development invoke these neoliberal policies? And they gloss over the repressive state apparatus employing demolition to the nth time. Communities are just being demolished and demolished without really providing them with a final abode they could call their own.

General situationer

As the true character of the Duterte regime now unfolded and flaunted its collusion with the US, various forms of conflicts confront the Filipino people that are ripe for protest actions. Summing up the 1 and a half year of Duterte, was the AFP and PNP's re-inauguration as strong institutions committing 100 politically motivated killings, 845 illegal arrests, 42,894 victims of threats and intimidation, 416,005 evacuees, and 357,569 victims of killings, indiscriminate firing and aerial bombardments.



Philippine President Duterte with Philippine National Police (PNP) chief, Director General dela Rosa

Given all these, the December 10, 2017 International Human Rights Day shall then be celebrated in the spirit of nationalism and militance in the defence of the basic human rights.

Today, attacks on human rights have worsened, with the deplorable condition of livelihoods and dire poverty.

Martial Law in Mindanao

To consolidate its hold on to power, Duterte completely embraced US imperialism fully relying on militarist and fascist actions. It used one dispute incident in Marawi to justify the imposition of Martial law in the whole of the Mindanao Region. Foremost, with its all-out war and the Oplan Kapayapaan against a citizenry that aspires for genuine peace, genuine change and genuine development, it sabotaged the peace process that the NDFP had launched.

US Imperialism. Neoliberalism and Subservience to Foreign Capital

Just like previous regimes, Duterte regime has now taken the path of a puppet under US imperialism. It sustains the same neoliberal policies that drove the local economy to greater subservience to foreign control, which favours big compradors and landlords. These economic strategy is juxtaposed to an ever stronger counterinsurgency program with Oplan Kapayapaan, and other means of attacks on civilian lives.

A mark of Duterte's rule is the way of a "killing machine" in the manner Oplan Tokhang/Double Barrel operates that marauds basic human rights and kills thousands of poor citizens. Duterte's war on drugs was a big failure. Despite the killing of thousands it never stopped the drugs trade. Most of the victims of killings were poor and deprived peoples, while drugs continue to proliferate. Despite the killing of a few suspected drug lords who are also political opponents of the Duterte regime, it dismissed questions on the apprehension of billions worth of drugs involving his son and associated Davao cronies.

In the past month, the SWS survey showed a decrease in Duterte's net satisfaction rating from 55% to 48%. The greater reason for that decrease in Duterte's rating is the citizen's distaste to constant killings that greatly oppressed the Moro people, the national minorities and the poor citizenry in general. It appears that the Duterte regime has no solid program for genuine national development but that solely goes for an all-out war on all fronts against the citizens. It takes fast hold on militarist rule. It does not restrain its idea on imposing martial law for the whole nation, and it utilizes the securitization of its governance against a perceived "leftist take over", but all as ploy to impose a dictatorial regime.

Massive Protests

On the other hand, protests are constantly gaining grounds, expanding its reach against a militarist, fascist and ambitious dictatorial rule. After the killing of kids like Kian delos Santos, Carl Angelo Arnaiz, and Reynaldo de Guzman in August and September, the brewing large protests developed against the massive extra judicial killings under Oplan Tokhang. Massive protests took place that converged in a big political mobilization of about 25,000 forces at the Luneta Park last 21st of September in the anniversary of the Marcos' Martial Law.

As expected, the AFP and PNP, deliberately prevented the protest from getting bigger. Disinformation and psychological war strategies were used saying that the left and the yellow forces had conspired to oust Duterte from office. A desperate account on destabilization, countered via police state and militarist actions, were the Duterte regime's political ploy in order to prevent articulation of legitimate issues and concerns of ordinary citizens in protests. It shows calculated attacks on legitimate protests by tainting the excuse that protest actions sow disorder to the peaceful administration and intends to change the government.

Hence, an Inter-Agency Committee on Legal Action (IACLA) was created which is similar to the Arroyo government's Inter Agency Legal Action Group (IALAG) that was tasked to persecute by trumped up charges those so called "enemies of the state". Duterte and AFP generals likewise articulated the threat of a nation-wide martial law.

Meanwhile, violations of human rights continue against the ordinary citizens.

Because poor peasants, farmers and national minorities organized themselves in protests, massive militarization in their poor communities took place, and their leaders and some members murdered which have reached to some 98 incidents very recently. Demolition and constant threats to urban poor communities also take place when the community asserts for better living condition and their right to the security of abode. Duterte also threatened the drivers sector who launched a massive protest against the jeepney phase-out as part of Duterte's transport modernization program and demands that this be followed as it is due come January 2018, while tainting PISTON, KMU and KARAPATAN as communist fronts.



Recently, Duterte declared that Marawi City is liberated after reports that Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute had died. But AFP sustained Martial Law in Mindanao saying that threats to other places within the region continue, especially from other armed groups like the New People's Army (NPA). The United States of America (USA) was fast to praise Duterte's war in Marawi City for waging a war "without human rights violations" despite reports of residents that there were lootings of properties, illegal arrests and torture, killings and other gross violations of human rights.

Duterte and the GRP also entertained the possibility of the return to the negotiating table with the NDFP. Peace must however, be pursued and sustained between the GRP and the NDFP. The reason is because the issues of contention are the genuine political, economic and social reforms for the wellbeing of the Filipino people which need not be articulated in a bloody war. The peace process is very important for the realization of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and the International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) and the release of 435 political prisoners.

Meanwhile, Duterte dominates the Senate and the Congress, and saddles his critics with charges of impeachment, such as the case of Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno and Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales.

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