

**GROUNDING POPULISM:
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE POPULIST PUBLICS**

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In Memoriam
Maria Teresa “Tessa” Cruzat Trazona
(1991-2016)
A fellow teacher and activist; beloved friend.

Abstract

The spread of democracy across continents has been accompanied by a curious case of what have been called the “shadow” (Canovan 1999), “spectre” (Arditi 2004), “mirror” (Panizza 2005), and “internal periphery” (Arditi 2007) of democracy: populism. The surge of populism around the world has not only brought about populist leaders but also, what Curato (2017) calls, the “populist publics”. The rise of firebrand populist leaders like United States president Donald Trump, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, and Venezuela ex-president Hugo Chavez are equally matched by the popularity of their energetic, passionate, and agitated supporters. However, it has all been too common for the populist publics to be represented in pejorative terms, even in the academic literature. They are perceived to possess archaic prejudicial views and exhibit incivilities aside from being gullible victims of populist demagoguery. Furthermore, while a thriving study of populism generated a variety of conceptual approaches, what is common among these is the absence of the populist publics in theorizing populism. As a result, presumptions on populist voting and populist attitudes thrive and is left unexamined. This thesis is an intervention in these conversations. In this study, I have explored how the populist voters themselves perceive, understand and respond to populism. Using a political ethnography of a community of supporters of populist Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, this thesis offers a grounded re-conceptualization of populism in terms of the perceptions of the populist publics. To them, populism is understood as a political performance, characterized by an enmeshment of style, rhetoric and actions, perceived to give voice to the miserable, bring authenticity to politics, and reflect persistent political will.

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Introduction

The spread of democracy across continents has been accompanied by a curious case of what have been called the “mirror” (Panizza 2005), “shadow” (Canovan 1999), “spectre” (Arditi 2004), and “internal periphery” (Arditi 2007) of democracy: populism. The surge of populism around the world has not only brought populist leaders but also, what (Curato, 2017) calls, the populist publics. In various societies, populist supporters have caught the attention of the public as much as populist leaders have caught their attentions. The firebrand character of populist leaders like US president Donald Trump, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, and late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez are matched by their equally energetic, passionate, and agitated supporters. Controversial statements that have defined these populist leaders have also characterized much of their supporters. In a campaign rally in Kentucky, supporters of Trump aggressively shoved and repeatedly shouted “out nigger” at a young black woman while she was removed from the venue. In the online world, Duterte’s supporters send hundreds of death and rape threats daily to netizens that dared criticized the president. It is common to receive replies of “I hope your mom or sister gets raped” on posts critical of Duterte’s policies and actions. In the streets of Caracas, Chavistas are accused of functioning as gangs threatening with violence the neighborhoods that support the opposition. These perceived deviant character of many populist supporters earned them pejorative labels among critics.

At a fundraising gala in New York, US presidential candidate Hilary Clinton berated the supporters of her rival, now US president Donald Trump, as hateful individuals that could be put into a “basket of deplorables”. For Clinton, populist Trump’s supporters are “folks... [that] are irredeemable” and “are not America”. She eventually apologized for this remark

after earning negative political points for it. Just south of the continent, foreign media commonly represent Venezuela's Chavistas as "stupid" and "dumb" groups of supporters that unthinkingly follow the populist Chavez. And across the Pacific, rivals of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte have also labeled his supporters negatively in the same manner that Clinton did to Trump's supporters. Populist Duterte's followers have been called "Dutertard", a contraction of "Duterte" and "retard", and were also branded as the other of a "decent Filipino". Just like in the case of Clinton, this practice of labeling Duterte's supporters negatively also backfired. They embraced these pejorative names and many voters saw it as proof of the perceived elitism of his rival candidates.

The global rise of populists that took the world by storm has been accompanied by a similarly international wave of ridiculing and mocking populist supporters. Especially in the media, derogatory labels against supporters of populist leaders are popular. For many, the populist publics are perceived to possess archaic prejudicial views and exhibit incivilities aside from being extremely gullible. It is all too common for the populist publics to be represented in negative terms, even in academic literature. While a thriving study of populism generated a variety of approaches, what seems to be common among these claims is an uninterrogated way of approaching populist voting as a deviant behavior or even as a social disease.

On the one hand, there were several approaches that emerged that explained populist attitudes as common among individuals who suffer from facing vast and disorienting changes in the society and/or who have been brought to a position of economic weakness and vulnerability due to these changes (Betz 1990). On the other hand, a group of scholars claimed that the populist publics are the losers of modernization process (Schönfelder 2008). In this approach, populist voters are portrayed as "losers" who are unable to respond rationally to the fast-

changing world. In other instances, there are also claims that the support for populism can be rooted economically (Laclau 1977; Taggart 2004). Populist voters are seen to be carelessly driven to protest voting due to the precarious situation that economic crises subjects them to. Another example would be the other groups of scholars that even argued that a particular set of personality traits fuels populist voting (Czikora 2015). A populist attitude, which is believed to be psychologically innate to individuals, is responsible for the emergence of populist publics. Worse among these approaches, in many times, populist voting is even pathologized (Taggart 2002; Akkerman 2003; Mudde 2010). While the global wave of populism has generated a surge of attention among academics, journalists and even politicians in theorizing and explaining the “many-headed monster” phenomenon that is populism (Hill 1974), presumptions on the populist and how they mis/understood populism thrives and is left unexamined.

This thesis is an intervention in these public and academic conversations. In this study, I have explored how the voters themselves perceive populism. By going on the ground, prevailing characterizations of the populist publics as dumb, prejudicial, and irrational voters were challenged. Furthermore, what is also revealed is a nuanced understanding of populism among the populist publics. This thesis offers a reconceptualization of populism in terms of the perceptions of the populist publics. In the succeeding section, the research question that guided this thesis is discussed in detail.

Research question

As chapter 1 will explain more in detail, the existing research on populism suffers from two major weaknesses. On one hand, theoretically, most of the conceptual approaches to populism that have been developed in the recent years ignore, if not totally exclude, the

populist publics. Populism is only theorized based on the characteristics of populist politicians and parties. However, our historical and contemporary experience with populism instructs to recognize that populism is not only about the populists. I argue that populism is about the populist publics as much as it is about the populists. On the other hand, empirically, studies on the populist voter have primarily relied on these weak conceptual approaches to populism to map individual-level populist attitudes. As a consequence, populist attitudes are worryingly inductively measured from what has been identified as populist characteristics. This top-down and circular understanding of populism makes our understanding of it more limited and incomplete. This thesis aims to respond to these two weaknesses on existing research on populism.

This research is a bottom-up inquiry of how the populist publics understand populism. Others have approached it from a top-down perspective and have focused on the populist parties and politicians to understand populism. I de-center the discussion from the populists and shift the focus to the populist publics to generate a grounded conceptualization of populism. This research question situates itself within two streams of the current debates in the study of populism: one on its conceptualization and the other on the populist voter. As have been repeatedly rehearsed in the literature on the study of populism, the concept of populism itself and its underlying logics are as complex, convoluted, and diverse as its historical and modern-day examples in practice. My point of entry into this literature, however, is from a different angle. Quite straightforwardly, these works, possibly reinforced in the public discourse, overlook the significant presence of the populist publics in theorizing the phenomenon of populism. This thesis approaches populism from an empirical populist voter-centered perspective that puts at the heart of the analysis the voices of actual ordinary populist supporters who engage with populism in their everyday life. As such, this thesis is

guided by this central question: how do populist voters in their different everyday contexts perceive and respond to populism?

As a rather “quintessentially mercurial” (Taggart 2000) concept, a contextualized analysis of populist politics will contribute to the better understanding of the articulations and nuances of populism in particular settings, because “populism is always partially constituted by aspects of the environments in which it finds itself” (Taggart 2000, 4). Populism, as “the exacerbated expression of the people’s place within democratic institutions” (Meny and Surel 2002, 21), to some degree, also provides insight on how institutions and interactions in democratic political landscapes are perceived and practiced by ordinary individuals on the ground. As such, by asking this kind of research question, this thesis explores a new and different approach to the study of populism. Why this research question is empirically and theoretically important to be explored is discussed in the next section.

Significance of the study

The significance of the research question explored in this thesis is its two-fold empirical and theoretical contributions to the literature on populism. This research offers three particular empirical contributions.

First, the focus on the populist publics is a novel turn in the study of populism. The populist publics has been traditionally overlooked, if not excluded, in existing studies on populism even though the phenomenon of populism is about the populist voters as much as it is about the populist leaders. Hence, the entire thesis attempts to surface their perspectives on what populism means to them, what their views are towards populist leaders, and how do they

respond to populist strategies. While there are studies that also focus on the populist voter, they are not framed in the perspectives of these voters.

Secondly, the particular case that was explored in this thesis also de-provincializes the study on populism. Researching populism in the Philippines potentially enriches an otherwise provincial scholarship that has been for so long centered on the European and American societies. Populism in Africa and Asia where a large majority of the world's population is found remains underexplored. The inclusion of these new cases advances theorizing on and comparative studies of populism.

And lastly, because of the character of many populist voters as previously excluded or immobilized electoral constituencies, their political participation, in a way, can be taken to suggest the future make up of these democratic societies in an age of declining formal political participation (Skocpol et al 2011). It goes without saying that the future of many democracies around the world is contingent on many other factors. It is worth noting, however, that how political elites and other key actors include or exclude the populist publics in subsequent political processes will considerably shape the character of these polities especially considering their large numbers. To understand their perspectives is to get a glimpse of the possible trajectories of affected democratic societies.

The other contribution is more theoretical in that the research question proposes a reconceptualization of populism in terms of individual perceptions of populist voters, one that has not been explored fully in the study of populism. Indeed, in the existing literature, as chapter 1 will explain at length, existing theorizing on populism suffers from two weaknesses. The current theorizing on populism that is centered on populist leaders and

parties leads to a tendency to underrecognized the role that the populist publics plays in populism. Furthermore, since scholars theorize populism without the populist publics, they are prone to rely more on unexamined normative beliefs on voting behavior. This thesis proposes that only by focusing on populist public's self-understanding or what voters mean when they support a populist, can scholars begin to understand why certain styles, ideologies, or rhetoric- aspects of what can be considered broadly as populism- are held in favor of others. A more nuanced analysis of populism and the populist publics can therefore ensue. But beyond understanding their perceptions and responses to populism, as the chapters of this thesis unfold, it will be seen that grounding populism on the perspective of the populist voters does not have to end in merely identifying their nuances, values, ideas, or worldviews that inform their support for populist leaders. This has several implications. One, as will be explained in succeeding chapters, other aspects of political participation such as voting behavior and political beliefs become more intelligible in light of the self-understanding of populism. In other words, can we see a relationship between their political participation and how they perceive populism? Two, asking about their self-understanding of populism is also implicitly asking about the condition and resources of their political socialization. As an inquiry in political science, interrogating self-understanding of populist voters necessitates a comprehension of the social milieu they are embedded in. What social conditions account for the emergence of such understanding of populism? What resources are now being drawn upon to shape such kind of understanding? In the next section, I introduce the case that I will use to explore the research question as well as demonstrate the significance of this study.

Study area

This study focuses on post-authoritarian politics in the Philippines, exploring the challenges in the country's democratization project and on the role of populism in the process. This

thesis argues that the Philippine democracy is a poignant case to dialogue with the current debates on populism for three reasons.

First, the implications of the recent Philippine full turn toward populism extend well beyond its national borders. As Asia's oldest democracy (Regilme 2016) and Southeast Asia's most durable presidency (Teehankee 2016), it has been the subject of in-depth exploration of Western scholars for over a hundred years as the site of some seminal research on democracy and politics in developing countries. The repercussions of the electoral victory of the populist president Duterte speak on the gains and losses of the democratic experiment beyond the Western world. Similar to many young democracies, the Philippines is witness to perennial political and social challenges that continues to pose as serious difficulties to the consolidation and deepening of democracy in the country. Huntington (1991) identifies the Philippines, along with Peru, as third wave democracies with tremendous contextual problems including a serious insurgency, intense poverty, grave socioeconomic inequality, large foreign debt, and pervasive state intervention in the economy. The triumph or defeat of the democratic deepening course will have a major relevance on whether Philippine democracy becomes, or remains, consolidated. As early as 1990s, several political scientists have already evaluated Philippine democracy as consolidated (Thompson, 1996; Case 1999). Yet, tremendous obstacles to democratic deepening are still present. The Philippines commands scrutiny, both on its own terms and for what it can teach about democratization in third-wave democracies, especially those with deep-seated social cleavages. As part of the third wave of democratization in the late 20th century (Huntington 1993), its experience with populism can be compared to the experiences of third wave Latin American populist democracies and contrasted with the experiences with populism of advanced democracies.

This exploration on the populism in the Philippines is a good starting point towards deeper comparative studies.

Second, since this thesis focuses on perspectives of populist voters as situated in their everyday lives, it draws from contemporary pioneering studies on the political praxis of ordinary Filipino voters in response to elite electoral strategies (Aguilar 2007, Vote of the Poor 2016). As far as I know, this kind of bottom-up inquiry on ordinary voters has not yet been replicated elsewhere. The grounded perspectives on populism by the populist publics that is generated by this study is in conversation with existing studies on the political beliefs, electoral behavior, and everyday politics of ordinary voters (Kerkvliet 1995, 2006).

And lastly, the regime character of the Philippines largely deviates from other democracies that experienced populism. Personality politics is pervasive (Sidel 1998, Teehankee 2002), political parties are non-existent (Teehankee 2002, Uften 2007), ideologies are rare in politics, and electoral participation is not declining. How these regime characteristics play with populism and the self-understanding of the populist publics is a theoretically insightful puzzle both for scholars of populism and Philippine democracy.

Structure of the thesis

The entire thesis is progressively organized in five thematic chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 are foundational as theoretical issues in the study of populism and methodological concerns for this research were threshed out. Chapters 3 and 4, on the other hand, address the main question of this study.

Chapter 1 is a discussion of the review of the literature for this study. It offers a critique of the existing research on populism. It focused on two aspects: one on the limitedness and incompleteness of the dominant conceptual approaches to populism and the other on the issues of conceptual weakness of many of the recent empirical works on the populist voter. The critique revealed two major weaknesses of the current literature on populism: that the populist public is discounted in efforts on theorizing populism and that attempts to measure individual-level populist attitudes relies on a posteriori conceptualization of populism.

Chapter 2 expounds at length the political ethnographic method that is employed in this study. In sum, this research is built from a considerable wealth of qualitative data from 47 individual in-depth interviews, two rounds of focus group discussions, and seven discontinuous months of participant observation in one of the biggest and vote-rich slum communities in the Philippines. “Ethnographic sensibility” primarily guided data gathering and analysis for this thesis.

The empirical aspect of the thesis is shared in chapter 3. It argues for the heterogeneity of the populist publics and surfaced grounded perspectives of populism. Populism is best understood as a political performance demanding a convincing enmeshment of rhetoric, style and actions from the populist. Furthermore, what is revealed in my immersion with the community of populist publics, are three essential elements of this populist political performance: serving as a surrogate voice for the miserable, bringing authenticity as opposed to hypocrisy in politics, and showing persistent political will. What is surfaced in this chapter is a nuanced, sometimes even a bit counterintuitive, but familiar understanding of populism.

And lastly, the empirical findings are analyzed, situated in the literature, and preliminarily theorized in chapter 4. It is where I addressed the main question of what populism means to the populist publics. Using the empirical perspectives generated in the previous chapter, a grounded re-conceptualization of populism is attempted. Furthermore, the chapter also offered a discussion on the emergent typology of populist publics.

Chapter 1:

Theorizing populism with the populist publics

Across the globe, one of the central characteristics of present-day politics is populism. Its spread across different continents and over different periods of time has made this “mercurial” (Stanley 2008) political phenomenon a challenge for those who study it. Any attempt to fully understand populism must explain the different forms that it has assumed in societies as diverse, and at times even divergent, as Hungary, Venezuela, Thailand, the United States of America, and many others. These variations in experience with populism have also resulted into a diversity of approaches in studying it. As early as 1969, Wiles has already identified this problem, that “to each his own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds” (in Ionescu and Gellner 1969, 166). With a significant uptick in the number of scholars in populism in the recent years, it is now considered as one of the most contentious issues in contemporary political science (Canovan 2004; Comroff 2011; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). This chapter examines existing studies on populism and offers a critique of the primary approaches to the study of populism. As the succeeding sections will demonstrate, several gaps and weaknesses have been identified with the present set of literature.

The main proposition in this review of literature is that the reconceptualization of populism from the perspectives of the populist publics fills a necessary theoretical and empirical gap. Despite general recognition of the importance of “the people” in populism, current theorizing on populism was mostly generated from a study of only the populist politicians and political parties. As has been argued in the previous

chapters, empirical realities suggest that populism is about the populist supporters as much as it is about populism. A grounded conceptualization of populism surfaces the populist public's understanding and responses to populism. By surfacing this, scholars studying populism no longer have to unnecessarily resort to uninterrogated assumptions of pejorative characterizations of populist voters whose normative baggage is inherited from the gaps in current theorizing on populism. For instance, empirical studies on the populist voter commit a conceptual mistake of inductively measuring individual-level populist attitudes using a conceptualization of populism operationalized through characteristics of perceived populist parties and politicians. This focus on a populist publics-centered perspective of understanding of populism in this study explores its theoretical and empirical potentials for the study of populism.

Reconceptualizing populism

Similar to many concepts in political science, populism is the subject of a contentious debate (Roberts 2006; Barr 2009). In particular, despite developments in studies on populism, there remains a limited consensus on how to define it. Then and before, scholars of populism has been preoccupied with the business of properly defining populism (Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Laclau 1977; Canovan 1981; Taguieff 1995; Taggart 2000; Pappas 2016). In fact, Moffitt and Tormey (2014, 382) rightly and wittily observed that “the literature has reached a whole new level of meta-reflexivity... that it has become common to acknowledge the acknowledgement” of the contested nature of populism. Pappas (2016) has also lamented cases of conceptual stretching in existing studies on populism where scholars like Mudde (2004) label political parties and leaders as disparate as the French National Front, Canada's Social Credit Movement, former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony

Blair, the Scottish Socialist Party, and others as populists. The significant identification of who is populist and who is not has become a simple, but theoretically messy, game of addition. While it is tiring to rehearse the discussion on the contestability of populism as a concept, any serious undertaking to study populism must begin with the challenge of clarifying it. It is a necessary entry point to the study of populism.

Currently, there are four primary conceptual approaches to populism (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013; Mooffitt and Tormey 2014; Bozöki 2015). Populism is, respectively, defined as a kind of ideology (Canovan 2002; Mudde 2004, 2007; Abts and Rummens 2007; Stanley 2008; Kaltwasser 2012; Kaltwasser and Mudde 2012), a type of discourse or rhetoric (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Torfing 1995; Kazin 1995; Howarth 2008; Howarth et al 2008; Barros 2005; Laclau 2005; Panizza 2005; Stavrakakis 2005; Groppo 2009), a form of political strategy (Roberts 2003, 2006; Wayland 2001; Jansen 2011), and a distinct political style (Knight 1998; Moffitt and Tormey 2014). While other scholars like Pappas (2012) and Bozöki (2015) have identified more than four, this section examines each of these dominant and influential approaches.

Populism as an ideology

Defining populism as a “thin ideology” is one of the most dominant conceptual approaches to populism. For Mudde (2004, 543), arguably the most influential of scholars employing this approach, populism is:

“...A thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volanté générale* (general will) of the people”.

In this approach, populism is primarily conceptualized as a kind of ideology that is typified by a belief in a contentious bipolar understanding of the society that is divided between the “virtuous people” and the “morally corrupt elite”. Populists, armed with these set of ideas, employ politics to articulate and carry the general will of the people. But this ideology, unlike other traditional ideologies like liberalism or conservatism, is defined to be “thin-centered” (Mudde 2004). As such, it is not a well-developed belief system but rather one that is “thin” enough to accommodate and weld with other ideologies in order to be “thick” enough to offer understanding and responses to key social, economic, cultural and political issues. This explains why populism can and have assumed different ideological forms, ranging from the right to the left, especially that “ideological features attach to populism depend upon the socio-political context within which populist actors mobilize” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011, 2). As Bozöki (2015, 277) would put it: “populism is not a singular phenomenon linked to a certain age and phase of development. It can accommodate itself in different social contexts and political regimes”. Historically, scholars observed that populism has assumed a right-wing variant of populism in Europe (Norris 2005; Carter 2005; Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2007; Art 2011; Berezin 2013) while it took a left-wing character in Latin America (Madrid 2008; Levitsky and Roberts 2011).

This approach lends populism amenable to empirical studies, especially cross-national/regional researches. Offloading normative and ideological baggage, scholars employing this conceptual approach to populism have directed their focus on empirically verifiable proof of “populist ideology”. This has led them to mainly

studying programmatic statements of political parties and actors. In the recent years, scholars have assessed party manifestoes, speeches by politicians and similar materials for populist contents (Mudde 2007; Arter 2010; Pankowski 2010; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Hawkins et al 2012; Akkerman et al 2014).

Populism as a discourse or rhetoric

Another similar but distinct conceptual approach to populism defines it as a discourse or rhetoric. While this approach shares the observation with the previous approach that the populists' imagined society is a bipolar world between the people and the elite, it is seen as a discursive style rather than a set of ideas. De La Torre (2000, 4) argues that populism is a "rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo [the people] and the oligarchy". This kind of rhetoric is specifically conceptualized by Hawkins (2009, 2010) as a type of "Manichean discourse" that designates a binary moral element to contentions in politics. Plainly, this means that populism refers to the use of discourse or rhetoric that constructs an "us" versus "them" dichotomy in politics (Kazin 1995, Panizza 2005). Instead of being a "thin-centered ideology", populism in this approach is a form of political expression that can be used strategically and tactically by any political actor across geography, ideology, and time. Although Hawkins (2010) asserts that discourse and ideology are actually intertwined, he argues that since populism is a "worldview and is expressed as a discourse" (10), "unlike ideology, populism is a latent set of ideas that lacks significant exposition and contrast with other discourses and is usually low on policy specifics" (1045).

Some scholars within this approach, like Laclau (2005), take the discursive character of populism more seriously. The argument is that populists discursively imagine the constructed divide between the people and the elite through a process of identification wherein specific members or groups in the society are imagined as “the people/us” and set against an oppressive “elite/others/them”. The figurative difference between “us” and “them” that comprises populist discourse is a case of relational “empty signifiers” that can be filled with motley of contents, subject to the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. Therefore, populism is conceptualized as a discourse of antagonism whereby the:

“... Antagonism is thus a mode of identification in which the relation between its form (the people as signifier) and its content (the people as signified) is given by the very process of naming- that is, of establishing who the enemies of the people (and therefore the people itself) are” (Panizza 2005a, 3).

As a consequence of conceptualizing populism as a discourse, rhetoric, or even a type of political talk (Krause and Haughton 2009) rather than as an ideology of political actors, the focus of those who study it are re-directed from evaluating political actors as populist or not to navigating the extent of populism of these actors. Instead of a binary opposition, populism is seen in degrees considering that actors across contexts and over time may employ populist discourse depending on their needs and subject to their particular constraints (Bos et al 2013). This has led for Gidron and Bonikowski (2013, 9) to contend that this approach conceptualizes populism “as a form of politics rather than a stable category of political actors”. This theoretical and methodological difference necessarily affects the nature of researches generated in this approach. Typically researches focuses on a range of texts associated with political actors, which are then subjected to qualitative or quantitative content analysis to measure the

degree of populism that it exhibits (Armony and Armony 2005; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Hawkins 2009, 2010; Reungoat 2010; Pauwels 2011).

Populism as a political strategy

Relatively underdeveloped and rather messy compared to the previous conceptual approaches to populism, populism in this tradition is particularly seen as a political strategy that is expressed in a variety of modes such as organizational setting, mobilization tactics, and policy preferences. For instance, Madrid (2008) defines populism as redistributive economic policies and anti-establishment mobilization. Acemoglu et al (2013) further explains what populist policy preferences are claiming that these refers to policies that generates support from a sizeable share of the population, but is actually prejudicial to the long-term interest of the majority. This has been most commonly observed in Latin America where many populists have used promises of economic redistribution to reflect their link with the interests of the ordinary voters. On the other hand, Weyland (2001) de-centers policy content and focuses on political organization and mobilization. Populism is then conceptualized in these terms, arguing that “populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland 2001, 14). Rather than conceptualizing populism as an ideology or discourse, it is reconceptualized in this approach as the relation between the political actors concerned and their constituencies. Scholars like Taggart (1995) and Pappas (2012) contends that the strong charisma of populist leaders upsets and reinvigorates traditional party structures as well as its relationship to the voters.

However, many have criticized this approach. For one, Hawkins (2010) points out that the forms of political strategies that this approach associates with populism are not mutually exclusive to populism. For example, religious or millenarian movements can also exhibit these features but is outside the ambit of the populist phenomenon. More importantly for Moffitt and Tormey (2014), the approach also neglects the traditional and important referent in rival conceptualizations of populism: the appeal to “the people”.

Populism as a political style

The last and recently emerging conceptual approach to populism defines it as the performance of a particular political style with the aim of creating an antagonistic political relationship between the imagined people and elite, a definitional character that mirrors previously discussed conceptual approaches to populism (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). While this approach acknowledges the significance and distinctiveness of the populist ideology, discourse or strategy, it stresses that the central element of populism can be found “beyond the text”. The focus of the approach is on “populist style” (Moffitt and Tormey 2014): the non-textual dimensions of political communication such as its visual, sonic, aesthetic, emotional and performative elements (Canovan 1999; Mouffe 2005; Stavrakakis 2004). Populism here is redefined as a distinct political style, along with authoritarian and post-representative styles, all of which are characterized by their particular “performative repertoires and tropes” that organizes political relations (Moffitt and Tormey 2014).

There are three central elements to approaching populism as a political style: the appeal to the people, the creation of a crisis, breakdown or threat, and the performance of bad manners (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). The appeal to “the people” is key to distinguishing it from other contemporary political styles. In the performances of the populist, “the people” are the most significant audience. As the “true sovereign”, they are referred to constantly to successfully bifurcate politics in a society between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite/establishment/others”. This appeal to “the people” to create a bifurcated society largely depends on “the people” perceiving a crisis, breakdown, or threat (Taggart 2000). The creation of a crisis- a departure from the normal, an emergency- allows the populist to redefine the terrain of political debate and action, usually to simplify discourse in the language of “us” versus “them”. And lastly, to render legitimacy to the claim of urgency, the populist political style usually also involves the performance of bad manners or the “coarsening of political discourse” (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Since a perception of a situation beyond the normal has been created among “the people”, the populist appeal comes from abandoning the traditionally professional ways of performing politics. This includes the use of slang, swearing, and political incorrectness that has been often associated with many populist leaders.

Corollary, considering the attention given to the performative aspects of populism in this approach, it significantly deviates from other dominant approaches. For instance, while those who define populism as an ideology tend to focus on the populist ideological content of texts associated with concerned political actors, it is an incomplete account for those who contend the centrality of political style in populism. Moffitt and Tormey (2014) points out how this is evident in more traditional

ideologies like communism. So while communism is identifiable as an ideology, it generated a variety of political styles of communism ranging from the Stalinist edifice complex to the more austere Leninist sensibilities. On the other hand, while easily confused with each other, political style is also distinct from the discursive approach to populism. Rather than mainly focusing on the discursive content and consider style as less important, approaching populism as a political style considers the enmeshing of content and style.

As a consequence, approaching populism as political style redirects our attention in how the performances of the political actors concerned affect the relationship between the populists, the people, and the imagined others. It departs from a classical notion of distinguishing content and form that the previous approaches unconsciously built on, de-centering focus on the content of the thin populist ideology, the discourse populism employs, or the organizational form that it assumes. It treats populism as performed and enacted (Moffitt and Tormey 2014) rather than as a thing (Jansen 2011). With the collapsing of content and style (Ankersmit 2002), what the populists claim that it merely represents, inevitably, he/she also produces (Butler 1990). For instance, the populist's constant reference to "the people" is also an attempt to create a similar subject "the people" into being (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Therefore, populism as a political style deviates from a top-down reading of the populist's relationship with its constituencies wherein the populists merely "performs" for a passive audience. Rather, what is generated is a feedback loop wherein the performance has the potential to create or affect a public and its subjectivities, and following this can influence the future trajectories of the performance. This has an important theoretical and empirical implication, especially for this thesis: in studying

populism, the question of who the populists are is as important as the inquiry on who the populist publics are and how these two came into being.

Until only recently, what emerges from this review of the dominant conceptual approaches to populism is that the populist publics have been traditionally overlooked, if not excluded, in existing conceptualizations of populism. This weakness in the literature is evident in various forms. Despite an emerging approach that considers the relationship of the populists with the populist publics, the conceptual literature has extensively focused on only the populist leaders and parties. Whether approaching populism as an ideology, discourse, strategy or style, the preoccupation has been to identify whether a particular party, party leader or other politician exhibits populism through their ideological beliefs (Mudde 2007; Arter 2010; Pankowski 2010), messages (Armony and Armony 2005; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Hawkins 2009; Reungoat 2010), party literature (Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Arezjeimer 2015), mobilizational strategy (Taguieff 1989; Roberts 2006; Hetland 2014), or political communication style (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Moffitt 2016). The absence of the populist publics in key texts on conceptual approaches to populism (Mudde 2004, 2007; Laclau 2005; Panizza 2005; Weyland 2001; Roberts 2006; Moffitt and Tormey 2014) has also led to the underrecognition of the role of the populist publics in many empirical studies on populism. Despite repeated references in the literature on the importance of “the people” in the populist phenomenon, it is ironic that the populist publics have been mostly excluded in theorizing populism. As a consequence of this too, populism has been mostly perceived as a top-down process despite apparent involvement of huge numbers of voters and supporters in many cases of populist victory. This thesis attempts to fill

this particular gap by reconceptualizing populism from the perspective of the populist publics.

The populist voter?

As the previous section of this chapter demonstrated, the empirical studies on populism have been mostly concentrated on the supply-side. These mainly problematizes who and how populist the politicians and political parties are. Some of these have focused on party manifestoes (Abedi 2002; Cole 2005; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011), leadership style (Pedahzur and Brichta 2002), and messages of politicians (Armony and Armony 2005; Jagers and Walgrave 2007). Despite debates on conceptual issues, scholars of populism are well versed at measuring and mapping populist attitudes at the level of political elites.

On the other hand, studies on the demand-side, which examines the micro-level foundations of populist support, are just recently emerging (de Lange and Mudde 2005; Thijssen and de Lange 2005; Stanley 2011; Hawkins et al 2012; Akkerman et al 2014). Most of these studies claim to analyze individual-level “populist attitudes”. These studies on the demand-side of populism follow the tradition in political psychology on determining the psychological determinants of support for extreme/radical/deviant parties and movements (Adorno et al 1950; Altemeyer 1997; Lipset 1960; Van Hiel 2012) by refocusing the subject of analysis to the supporters of populist parties and/or politicians.

The pioneering study on individual-level populist attitudes was published in the 1960s (Axelrod 1967). In the recent years, more and more scholars are attempting to

measure populist attitudes of voters (Stanley 2011; Hawkins et al 2012; Akkerman et al 2014; Elchardus and Spruyt 2016) as well as look for particular personality traits that are conducive for populist support (Bakker et al 2015; Czikora 2015). I look at some of these studies and demonstrate that while there are studies that also focus on the populist voter, these are not framed in their perspectives.

For instance, Stanley (2011) conducted a survey containing questions on populist attitudes to assess its effect on party and voting choice. The six questions used reflected four core concepts of populism drawn from Canovan (2005), Mudde (2004), and Fieschi (2004): the notion of the homogeneity of the people and the elite, the perception of the antagonistic character of politics, populism's disagreement with pluralism in democracy, and the conception of the people as purely moral and the elite as morally corrupt. Employing a roughly similar set of questions, Hawkins et al (2012) administered a survey that will measure affinity to populist discourse. Their survey questions focused on key elements of populism that is similarly drawn from Stanley's (2011) sources: a Manichean notion of politics, a conception of a reified popular will, and a perception of evil elite. For example, survey respondents are asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements like "politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil" and "the people, not the politicians, should make the most important policy decisions". In the case of Akkerman et al (2014), while a different population was surveyed, the study was built on the research design by Hawkins et al (2002).

These three recent studies on measuring individual-level populist attitudes (Stanley 2011; Hawkins et al 2012; Akkerman et al 2014) reveal that even voter-centered

researches exhibit tendencies in excluding the perspectives of the populist publics. The populist attitude that is being measured is operationalized using conceptual approaches to populism that was generated by studying only the populist parties and politicians. The approach is clearly inductive and top-down in nature, which excludes the theoretical and empirical potential of acknowledging that populism is about the populist publics as much as it is about the populists. For instance, in the study by Axelrod (1967), his “populist cluster” emerged rather inductively. His cluster analysis categorized six questions in a very correlated scale, labeled as populism “because one of its extremes corresponds to many of the attitudes of the American Populist movement of the 1880s” (Axelrod 1967, 57). While succeeding studies no longer continued the use of this design, most of it still suffers from the same weakness. By inductively measuring populist attitude using characteristics of populist as operationalization of populism, our understanding of populism and populist attitude becomes more limited. Despite repeated references to the significance of “the people” in populist ideology, rhetoric, strategy or style, they are left out in both conceptual and empirical studies. As I previously argued, a reconceptualization of populism from the perspective of the populist publics has theoretical and empirical potentials.

This weakness is most evident in a similar research by Elchardus and Spruyt (2012). Like the studies previously mentioned in this section, a survey was ran to measure individual-level populist attitudes. While the research generated several interesting correlations on perceived economic position and populist attitudes, they may have measured something different than populist attitudes. The extremely high number of survey participants that agree with the questions on populism suggests that what they might have measured is a general anti-establishment attitude, which is not necessarily

populist. In fact, the level of populist attitudes that was discovered by their study do not also match with the electoral support generated by populist political parties in the area (Elchardus and Spruyt 2016). A grounded conceptualization of populism may have been more effective in surfacing populist attitudes among the public.

Worse than the previously discussed weaknesses in current empirical studies on the populist voter is the recently emerging trend to pathologized populist support. Studies like Bakker et al (2015) and Czikora (2015) are driven to root the psychological dispositions of populist voters by linking certain personality traits to their voting behavior. That studies like this exhibits a tendency to pathologized populist support is actually not surprising considering that researches on demand-side of populism emerged from the tradition in political psychology of studying psychological roots of support for deviant/extreme/radical ideologies (Adorno et al 1950; Altemeyer 1997; Lipset 1960; Van Hiel 2012). While the causal relationship is not yet determined, these studies parallels voices in public conversations that also pathologized support for populists.

While various studies have already dedicated their attention on the populist politicians and parties, its ideology, style, rhetoric and strategy, this thesis shifts the focus by investigating the perspectives of the populist publics. Previous studies may have attempted to explore individual-level populist attitudes but they are based on a conceptualization of populism that excludes and ignores the role of populist supporters in populism.

Chapter 2:

A political ethnography of populist publics

As a political ethnographic research, this thesis utilized the multiple methods of in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and participant observation- all guided by “ethnographic sensibility” (Schatz 2009). The ethnographic approach to populism may be considered novel when compared to previous methodologies utilized in existing studies on populism. To recall, the focus of this research is to unravel the understanding of populism by the populist public. As such, this thesis primarily relied on “political ethnography” (Schatz 2009) to surface accounts of the populist public’s “actually existing” understanding and responses to populism. In sum, this research is founded from a considerable wealth of qualitative data from 47 individual in-depth interviews, two rounds of focus group discussions, and seven discontinuous months of participant observations, all with the residents of a 63,000-strong “squatters” community in the most populous city in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority 2015). In the succeeding sections of this chapter, the several elements of this thesis’ methodology are discussed in detail.

Political ethnography

Political ethnography is a method primarily utilized to study the dynamics of politics in an everyday context (Schatz 2009). Since the focus of this research is to unravel local and specific understanding and responses to populism by the populist publics in their everyday contexts, this study found it the most appropriate to employ political ethnography as its primary method. Two important dimensions of political

ethnography guided this research: the use of participant observation and the concept of ethnographic sensibility (Schatz 2009).

Traditionally, ethnography entails the use of participant observation through extended periods of immersion in a particular group (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Schatz 2009). It involved...

“... Participating overtly or covertly in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions- in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light in the issues that are the focus of research” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 1).

Ethnographic observation demands “going native” or by immersing oneself deeply, and ideally over a long period of time, in a particular field site to systematically study the people’s everyday lives, behaviors, and perspectives. In this case, ethnography allows for a widened remit of analysis compared to other traditional methods of interviewing. An ethnographic perspective demands to be holistic: it not only examines processes of reception in investigating specific populist electoral strategies; it also accounts for general processes of studying how people negotiate with populism in their everyday lives.

So while ethnography is traditionally concerned with field observations through immersions (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), in this research, political ethnography is more importantly considered also a sensibility...

“... That goes beyond face-to-face contact... an approach that cares- with the possible emotional engagement that implies- to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality” (Schatz 2009, 5).

To be able to study their perceptions, one must negotiate its access to their particular world of meanings and experiences (Wacquant 2002). As such, the goal of an

ethnographer is not only to generate a rich account of how and why people think, behave, and interact in a given time and space, but most importantly, to understand these things from the standpoint of the studied: to employ an emic perspective or an insider standpoint (Geertz 1973). Thus, this thesis utilized ethnography to develop a grounded understanding of populism and how the populist publics perceive and give meaning to it. This research adopted this ‘ethnographic sensibility’ (Schatz 2009) in using data collection techniques of in-depth interview, focus group discussions, and participant observation. In the next section, the field site where these data collection techniques were conducted is introduced.

Field site

The fieldwork for this thesis was concentrated in the village of Barangay Tatalon, a slum community in Quezon City- the most populous city in the Philippines. In this study, this particular field site was chosen for several significant reasons. First, a poor voter is the face of a typical voter in the Philippines. They comprise more than the majority of Filipino voters and are dispersed in many poor villages in the country. At present, Barangay Tatalon is now considered one of the largest villages in Quezon City. With a total land area of almost 100 hectares, it is now populated with almost 60,000 residents. While many are considered informal settlers and extremely poor, within-community differences are wide as reflected in the variation in the quality of their houses, access to education, and type of employment (Pinches 1992). The village is divided into several districts reflective of the within-community class divisions. Furthermore, since most of the initial residents of Tatalon were previously farmers who left the countryside for better economic opportunities in the city (Pinches 1992), district divisions also reflect differences in provincial origin. In fact, some of the

districts in the village are identified with their provincial-linguistic categories: Bisaya, Bicolano, Waray, etc. Despite social and economic differences, what binds them as a “squatters” community is that many illegally settled in the area, built houses, developed communities, and remained residents. As such, land tenure continues to be one of the most primary concerns in Tatalon. Aside from community evictions and extreme poverty, Tatalon residents have also faced other evolving challenges in the recent years. According to village officials, this includes criminality, flooding, and teenage pregnancy. In these qualities, Tatalon represents the typical vote-rich poor communities in the Philippines.

Second, for decades, the village of Tatalon had also survived many ruptures in local and national politics. Centrally located at the Metropolitan Manila, the residents of this village is a witness to and active participants of rapid transformations in local and national politics over the years. Prior to the authoritarian breakdown in 1986, then dictator Ferdinand Marcos regularly dispersed gifts to Tatalon residents in the form of cash, groceries, jobs, or medicines to establish himself as the village patron and get the support of the community (Pinches 1991). One of the most successful moves of the Marcos administration is the grant of land tenure to a sizeable number of residents in the slum community in 1970 (Pinches 1992). Since then, the grant of land tenure to Tatalon residents has become a semi-permanent political tool among local and national politicians to mobilize support from the area. In the 1980s, Tatalon became a hotspot of resistance against the dictatorship. Organizations like Alyansa ng Maralita sa Tatalon or the Alliance of the Poor in Tatalon were at the forefront of anti-dictatorship movements. Eventually, many of the working class and poor residents of Tatalon will be significant participants to the 1986 EDSA People Power uprising that

toppled the dictatorship (Pinches 1991). Tatalon residents will also become participants to several popular uprisings against succeeding administrations such as the EDSA Dos in the time of former president Joseph Estrada and the unsuccessful EDSA Tres against former president Gloria Arroyo. In post-authoritarian years, national and local politicians, especially presidential candidates, have made Tatalon a regular campaign stop. Vote buying, political machinery, and other electoral tools are also regularly utilized in the community. Furthermore, major social movements and other political organizations have also made the village a permanent site of their community organizing. For decades, Tatalon residents have negotiated with both traditional and alternative politics on a regular basis.

And lastly, Tatalon delivered an overwhelming victory for president Rodrigo Duterte in the most recent elections. With several organized groups and many individuals self-identifying as a supporter of the populist Duterte, this community of poor informal settlers is an ideal terrain and vantage point from which to examine the perspectives of the populist publics. Months after the village decisively voted for Duterte, the president's controversial campaign against illegal drugs has already claimed almost a hundred bodies in the village. The community of Tatalon is one among many poor villages that have been targeted by the government's brutal operation against the drug menace that have so far resulted to 8,000 murders (Sabillo 2017). As a result, community organizing is being attempted in the area to mobilize Tatalon residents against Duterte's drug war. This kind of messy relationship by the community and the communities within it with the populist Duterte offered theoretically rich opportunities for ethnographic exploration.

From this field site, Barangay Tatalon, I drew a purposive sample of respondents for the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations.

Respondents

Tatalon served as a primary fieldwork site in meeting members of the populist publics, the self-identified supporters of president Duterte. To unravel the perspectives of the populist publics on populism, the research needed a diverse group of respondents as possible, as long as they self-identify as supporters of Duterte, although representativeness is not the main concern of a qualitative research like this (Miles and Huberman 1994). Since the goal is to produce a grounded conceptualization of populism, research participants were determined according to classifications that are theoretically relevant to the research question (Eisenhardt 1999). Purposive sampling was employed in this thesis to secure a good balance of informants spread across categories of class, sex and age. These are known to be factors that commonly affect political socialization, behavior and perspectives. The primary guiding principle in this theoretical sampling is that this ethnographic study attempted to approximate the multiple contexts and realities in the community so that it is able to maximize what it can learn (Stake 1995).

Table 1
Characteristics of respondents

Categories		Number of respondents
Sex	Male	21
	Female	26
Class	Poor	19
	Extremely poor	28

Age	Young adult	15
	Adult	19
	Elderly	13

In total, this thesis had 47 respondents (see Table 1), 11 of whom participated in both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. As previously mentioned, maximum diversity of respondents were aimed. As demonstrated in the table of respondents, multiple diversities in age and class and equal diversity in sex were attempted to be satisfied. For class, housing type was used as a proxy for income and other socio-economic indicators. As the community is generally poor, what was aimed at is maximum diversity in within-community differences. A village leader, assigned by the village captain, primarily facilitated the recruitment of these respondents.

In-depth interviews

As repeatedly mentioned earlier, this thesis offers a reconceptualization of populism based on the meanings and understandings the populist publics attach to populism, thus making in-depth interviews the most relevant method. This method is combined with focus group discussion and participant observation to improve the validity and trustworthiness of the data (Creswell 2009). These methods are appropriate in my aim to surface the perspectives of the populist publics on populism using their “local and specific constructed realities” (Lincoln and Guba 2003, 256).

In total, I had done 47 in-depth interviews with varying characteristics of respondents (see Table 1). These interviews were carried out in two rounds. The first round of

interviews was part of two larger research projects that aimed at surfacing grounded perspectives on the electoral process¹. They were first conducted three months prior and ended a month immediately before the 2016 Philippine national and local elections. On average, these interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The approach to these interviews was semi-structured with specific questions on different electoral practices flowing from general electoral topics such as campaign strategies, political platforms, and patronage building being asked. Respondents demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge of different electoral practices in their community. These in-depth interviews were used to contextualize the responses acquired in the second round. The data gathered in the first round were useful in sensitizing the researcher to possible fruitful areas of inquiries for another round of interviews.

In the second round, the in-depth interviews are more focused on the research question being explored. These were conducted two months before Duterte's first year in office. These individual interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes in average, with the longest being 90 minutes and shortest around 30 minutes. While the main question asked in the interview is "what is populism?", the in-depth interviews were done in an unstructured manner for two reasons. First, it is important that various existing conceptualizations of populism in the literature are explored in the interview. At the same time, it must not close the possibility for the respondent to generate a nuanced and individual conceptualization of populism. And second, many respondents were unfamiliar with the concept of populism. This was only expected since the concept is

¹ The first round of interviews was done as part of two research projects where I was research assistant: The "Vote of the Poor 2016" study funded by the Institute of Philippine Culture at the Ateneo De Manila University and the research on "Money Politics in Southeast Asia" financed by the Australian National University and the De La Salle University Manila.

rarely used in daily conversations and only beginning to be discussed in the mainstream media. However, as the unfolding of the chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, this does not mean that they are also unfamiliar with the phenomenon. When given contexts, respondents are able to offer their perspectives. The unstructured in-depth interview served as an occasion for an informal exchange of information, insights, and perspectives on a wide variety of political issues. These mostly covered burning issues of the day mostly focusing on president Duterte. Despite appearances of naturalness of these interviews, questions were still asked to distill data for the research. Questions revolved around several themes including, but not limited to, the following: Duterte as a populist leader, Duterte's supporters, being a Duterte supporter, being part of the populist publics, populist electoral strategies, populism in office, etc. These themes have been explored in a decidedly open-ended manner. When possible, respondents in the first round of interviews were asked to participate in the second round of interviews. These offered the study an evolving snapshot of their perspectives since Duterte's election, assumption to the presidency, and several months into his office.

The in-depth interviews generated a wealth of useful data. It was central to the general patterns and themes that I have identified in their responses. But in order to confirm whether the preliminary themes that have been identified in their responses resonate with their everyday lived experiences and perspectives, a select number of respondents were invited to focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions

The goal of the focus group discussion is to put the respondents of the in-depth interviews in a group format and have them confirm initial conceptualizations of populism identified in their responses. This goal is consistent with the concurrent triangulations strategy (Creswell 2009) aimed at corroborating themes and probing them further. Guided by this similar goal, two rounds of focus group discussions were conducted. Six of the original respondents of in-depth interviews participated in the first round while another five sat through the second round. In principle, the theoretical sampling outlined in the initial sections of this chapter was also followed for this particular method. Maximum diversity in age, class and sex were attempted in both rounds of the focus group discussions. In both rounds, respondents were able to recognize each other as neighbors, friends or acquaintance. These facilitated a smooth flow in the discussion. But as was expected, some participants were more vocal than the others. This includes the adult in the group or the village leaders. This is part of the data produced by the focus group discussion as this method particularly offers opportunities to observe group dynamics (Kitzinger 1999).

The approach to the focus group discussions was semi-structured. General questions about their perspectives on Duterte and populism were first asked before going through preliminary conceptualizations of a grounded perspective of populism. Many of the themes would prove to be resonant throughout the discussions. These focus group discussions lasted for 170 minutes in the first round and 180 minutes for the second one. Although the focus group discussions were not carried out as extensive as the in-depth interviews, it served a particular purpose for this research. Aside from

confirming themes generated from the in-depth interviews, it also complemented the latter well in ways that follow from the tradition of mixed methods design. Although the usual design in research is to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell 2009), data collection techniques and methods within these different traditions can also be mixed to enrich the data and improve its validity. This methodological triangulation is intended to increase the credibility of the reconceptualization offered by this thesis through a “stronger substantiation of constructs” (Eisenhardt 1999, 142).

Participant observation

The use of participant observation is central to any ethnographic research. It allows the researcher to observe the participants in their natural habitat. For this thesis, participant observation was done for seven discontinuous months. It was conducted before, during, and after the 2016 Philippine national and local elections². This participant observation was almost done every time the researcher is in the field site. It is conducted during in-depth interviews, especially those that were conducted in respondents’ homes. Although less extensive, this was also conducted during the focus group discussions. Data was collected on their lifestyle, interaction with family members and neighbors, and the kind of lived spaces that they inhabit. For example, it is common to see posters or photos of politicians they support inside their homes. Die-hard supporters of president Duterte also wear rubber bracelets bearing his name, especially the younger ones. And since they lack spaces in their community, it

² *The first months of participant observation was done as part of two research projects where I was research assistant: The “Vote of the Poor 2016” study funded by the Institute of Philippine Culture at the Ateneo De Manila University and the research on “Money Politics in Southeast Asia” financed by the Australian National University and the De La Salle University Manila.*

is also frequent for neighbors to join the conversation since it is easy for them to overhear it. It is usual for one-on-one conversations to turn into a group exchange especially when you permit it to. In these settings, I found it easier to talk to them. Without an audio recorder in sight and the tone of voice largely informal, residents of the community freely express their opinions on different matters. Some of the data that I have collected, like stories told in between waiting for respondents while at extremely small alleys, would have only been possible because of the opportunities provided by this method. While the majority of the participant observations were conducted during the interviews and the walk around the community, some of it was also conducted during special events. This involves a campaign rally by the leading national political party, the 2016 national and local elections, and a community-wide seminar and parade against illegal drugs. My data is also enriched by occasionally joining the village security officers' regular patrolling duties as well as community basketball tournament. The themes explored in both "ordinary" and "special" cases of participant observation largely parallels the questions in the in-depth interviews.

Chapter 3:

Populism from the perspectives of the populist publics

Besides a big mall in the city, alongside an unkempt waterway, a tiny tent-like home made of recycled plywood and corrugated metal sheets houses Magdalena³, 49, a mother to a family of five. When I first met Magdalena, she had been carrying her fifth baby for several months, and she told me that she is anxious that she might have to stop working in a few months. She disclosed that she is worried about her first four children more, a family that she had been raising for years as a solo parent. In our initial conversation, when she learned that I worked for a university, she insisted that her children, soon becoming five, are all smart, caring, and industrious and asked if they could be given the chance to attend school. She told me that she promised herself that she would no longer look for a husband, because all the previous ones just left her, and that she will just focus on the future of their children. It was a few days before the 2016 national elections when we had our first conversation. She was hopeful then that her candidate Rodrigo Duterte, emphasizing to me that Duterte is “her candidate”, would win the presidency. In the middle of our brief conversation, when she was informed that I was interviewing her for her thoughts on politics, Magdalena immediately jumped to the topic of Duterte. She thought that Duterte is “genuinely concern for the poor”, a “man of his word”, and a “real man”-characteristics, according to her, that “were not possessed by [her] husbands⁴”.

³ All the respondents in this thesis had been anonymized. On the other hand, age and occupation is reflected accurately.

⁴ All the quoted responses in this thesis had been translated from the original language of Taglish, a widely-spoken language in the Philippines containing Tagalog and English.

On the eve of election day, unlike most of their neighbors in their shanty town located in the middle of an expansive business district, Magdalena and her children had to get up that morning to delve into countless trash bins scattered in the commercial areas for plastic bottles of soft drinks and mineral water. They had to clean every bottle carefully, ensuring that all bottles are free from any grit so the recyclers would accept it. At noon, they walked to the nearest recycling facility to sell their finds, with one of her daughters wearing a dress that revealed a part of her breasts because otherwise the security guard manning the facility would not let them in. Magdalena told me that she got this “special dress” from a donation drive a year ago when their part of the neighborhood was devoured by a fire. While walking back to their home, she told me that she was thinking of all the trash that will be generated by the election day and how she will greatly profit from it- “you know I always have to think of how to feed my children... and I just hope that government officials are also thinking about these things”.

Instead of the usual pan de Sal, Magdalena prepared instant noodles for her family’s breakfast on the morning of the election day. She thought they had to be full for their “vote watching activity” later that day. Barely eating, Magdalena went to the headquarters of their political group, an organization of hired vote watchers, and checked whether the other members were also all geared up. That day, Magdalena told me she is simultaneously juggling her role as a “conscientious citizen” and a “mother needing to feed her family”. They manned the voting booths and tallied the “secured votes” of the politician that hired them. In “dry hours” where the polling precinct is empty, she would sneak out of the area and talked to me. She thought that she was being “responsible” and that she was “proud” to be a “responsible citizen”. It

was half past five in the afternoon when the polls closed. Amidst shouting poll officers and noisy vote watchers in a hot and crowded schoolroom, she eagerly waited for the results in the voting precinct she was assigned. I watched Magdalena as she received the results at their precinct with mixed feelings: the politician who hired her lost but Duterte was in the lead. “I am really hoping that our country will change for the better. If Duterte will do it, I will give him all my support”, she told me.

Magdalena and the rest of their community bought in to the political project of Duterte. They delivered an overwhelming victory for Duterte. Her teenage daughter previously told me that it is only “expected that Duterte will be supported” by her community since “he is one of them”. Several months later, I have met Magdalena again and she introduced me to her new baby Ezekiel. She jokingly told me that she even wanted to name her son “Rodrigo”, that is after the new president, but her other children protested because it is too “out of fashion”. The national political atmosphere had changed months after I first met Magdalena. Duterte is under fire from human rights critics at home and abroad for the rising number of extrajudicial killings that resulted from his war against illegal drugs. She is aware that Tatalon, like many other poor communities in Metro Manila, were primarily targeted by the policy. “It is always on the news”, she complained. Magdalena told me that she had to rush to the house of her friend a week ago when she heard that the police have raided it. She recounted that she saw that the children wailed as they witnessed the dead bodies of their parents brought out of their shanty. At that moment, she confessed that she could not imagine leaving her children in that same situation. She further disclosed that she used to sell cigarettes with one of the couple, the woman, which was shot that day. I apologized for asking her to re-tell this story. She calmly responded,

“No, it is fine. Duterte is really serious about drugs. I know that the couple sometimes sells drugs when they are in need. They knew this was going to happen under Duterte... We have always thought that it is rare for politicians to fulfill their election promise. But Duterte is different, he really is”.

Her teenage daughter, listening the whole time, just nodded in full agreement.

Meeting and listening to Magdalena and other members of the community's supporters of Duterte was one of the highlights of my fieldwork in Tatalon. Like the rest of the populist publics interviewed in this thesis, she is a self-identified supporter of the populist president Duterte beginning the campaign period and until now that he is in his first year to the presidency. I recount Magdalena's narrative as an entry point for this chapter: an exploration of how the heterogeneous populist publics understand populism. My interview with Magdalena, at different crucial junctures- the immediate days prior to the election, the election day, and several months after it- resonates with on-the-ground perspectives on populism that I have surfaced in this chapter. In this empirical chapter, using select quotes and cases from the interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, I share my findings that populism is best understood as a performance by the populist publics. Furthermore, what is revealed, in my immersion with the community of populist publics, are three qualities of a politician that they associate the most with populist political performance: surrogate voice for the miserable, authenticity as opposed to hypocrisy, and persistent political will. What is surfaced in this chapter is a nuanced, sometimes even a bit counterintuitive, but familiar understanding of populism and what it means to be a member of the populist publics.

I will first discuss populism as a political performance and then followed by its three elements that the populist publics have identified: serving as a voice to their misery, bringing authenticity to politics, and showing persistent political will.

Populism as a political performance

Alexander, 58, one of my oldest respondents, recalled numerous politicians when asked whether Duterte is unique as a politician. A self-identified supporter of Duterte, to him, the president closely resembles previous president Joseph Estrada, former vice president Jejomar Binay, and ex presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr, who are all commonly identified as contemporary populist politicians (Hedman 2001; Thompson 2010). He said that he used to admire all these politicians and would eagerly listen to their speeches while on duty as a security guard. The similarity can be found, he insisted, in their perceived pro-poor rhetoric, policies, and origin. But Alexander argued that “Duterte has been the most effective... and convincing among them” because “he is just more than words... Duterte really makes [him] feel that he is for the ordinary Filipino”.

His son and a first time voter, Jethro, 18, explained in detail this feeling that his father Alexander talked about. That while he is “unaware” that Duterte resembled previous politicians like Estrada and Poe Jr,

“the way Duterte speaks, his beliefs... when I hear him talk, you really feel that he is serious about change... just listen to his plans and you will know what I am talking about”.

Jethro even claimed that some of his friends personally witnessed how “convincing” Duterte is.

In both Alexander's and Jethro's accounts, what distinguishes Duterte from many politicians is described in terms of a particular appeal of a fusion of rhetoric, style, and policies. In this section, I present an emerging theme from the interviews that I have conducted with the populist publics- that populism is understood as a particular political performance. Furthermore, the substantive content or elements of the populist political performance as distinguished from other types of political performance, surfaced also through the interviews, are also presented in this section.

Populism, for the populist publics that I have dealt with, is a political performance. Like any other regular performance, the public is unconcerned whether the performance is actually sincere. What is more central to the evaluation of the performance is whether it is authentic enough to pass off as genuine.

Marissa, 32, a vocal supporter of Duterte and a longtime vegetable vendor in the makeshift market in their community claimed that "... you cannot really know for sure whether a politician is sincere or not, you do not see him/her when he is just alone... I just want him/her to be convincing so my vote will be worth it". Many respondents, claiming that politics is all about "being convincing", repeatedly used "convincing" as a term in characterizing Duterte. When pressed to explain what convincing is and means for them, they refer to the enmeshment of style, rhetoric and policies. Marissa contended that "Duterte is a complete package... he is different in the way he talks and what he says... even in what he wears". She added that if you listen to and watch the president closely, you would be able to "see him fully". This claimed is also echoed by Jethro who argued that his friends have watched Duterte speak in person and they are "amazed" by how he spoke in the campaign rally: "the

curses, his jokes, even his mannerisms... it is part of his appeal... he even sang with the crowd at the end! They really felt different”. These claims are not isolated to Marissa and Jethro. For many residents of the village, Duterte’s appeal is beyond his campaign promises or just his rhetoric but a combination of these. It has to be, in the words of Sergio, one of the youngest village staff, 25, would say, “convincing in all aspects... in thoughts, in speech, and of course in action...” In short, it is seen as a performance.

Marilou, 27, a young mother who threw her support for Duterte late into the campaign period, even provided an example to demonstrate how other politicians fail to be convincing. She cited the case of former vice president Jejomar Binay who ran against Duterte for the 2016 presidential elections. Marilou explained that she “had to switch from Binay to Duterte” because the congressional investigations on his alleged corruption during the campaign period made “his claim of being just like the rest of us... less convincing... it was all confusing”. Marilou, obviously thinking back and making sense of her decision, told me:

“At first, I really wanted to vote for Binay because I know that he is for the poor because that is also where he came from... his track record as Mayor is a proof of this and besides you can also see his skin, he is dark-skinned because he is hardworking, he is exposed to the sun just like the rest of us... but when I saw in the TV the properties he owns, I can no longer trust him, he no longer convinces me...actually, I was confused”.

Like many other respondents, Marilou easily associated Duterte with other commonly known populist politicians like Binay but they have also been clear how and why Duterte has been more effective to get their support. The counterexample of Binay reveals how holistically the populist publics evaluate the political performances of these politicians. Prior to running for president, Binay has been known to provide

extensive provision of social services in his city as a longtime mayor. These included, for example, free tuition and school supplies to the city's college, hospitalization without charge for indigent patients, and numerous medical and entertainment freebies for senior citizens. Despite being associated with redistributive policies, traditionally popular style and typical pro-poor rhetoric, the populist publics found dissonance between who he claims to be in his performance and who he really is. But as Marissa previously pointed out, the public is unable to discern the sincerity of a politician, for what he really is. This is why the political performance is assessed mostly on "convincingness" more than "sincerity" to which he fell short because his performance was "confusing".

The focus group discussions echoed the sentiments generated in the individual interviews. The concept of populism as a political performance widely resonated with the members of the group.

Louielyn, 46, formerly a domestic helper at Hong Kong, told the group that "politicians are not really different from celebrities" because they also need to "act" whenever they are in public. Sitting across her, Angela, 30, a full-time housewife, agreed and added that "politicians, like celebrities, also assume characters... especially when they pretend to be pro-poor". In between these exchanges of agreement, the group also remarked how successful many celebrities were in becoming politicians because of the similar performative need of the profession. Celebrities have become the usual winners in contemporary Philippine elections (Maniago 2007; Centeno 2010; David and Atun 2015; David and San Pascual, 2016).

Michael, 36, a tricycle driver and occasional construction worker, enumerated examples of popular celebrities who made it into politics including former president Joseph Estrada, senator Vicente Sotto III, senator Joseph Victor Ejercito, and Quezon city mayor Herbert Bautista. For Michael, Duterte, “although not a celebrity”, can be considered part of the long list of “movie action stars” that became politicians. He insisted, to which the group enthusiastically agreed, that Duterte’s “way of speaking, the use of curses... and even issuing death threats on his interviews” made him no different from other celebrity-politicians.

Sergelito, 55, a partially paralyzed village staff, “confessed” that he is amused by the “crassness” of Duterte, something that “traditional politicians would not dare do”, because it lends credibility to his performance. He claimed that Duterte’s “cursing” made him “more believable”. This was followed by another “confession” from Angela who claimed that he is also entertained with the way the president carries himself even in his choice of clothes.

Before moving on to a different topic, the group recounted their “favorite instances” of Duterte’s vulgarity, which, according to them, is most effective when “traditional politicians are caught off guard by it”. The problem with traditional politicians, according to Angela, is that they do not know “how to live in the real world”. As Louielyn perceptively shared to the group, Duterte was just doing politics the way that it is done in real life:

“...In real life, that is how you issue threats against your enemies... if my neighbor is my enemy, I will not threaten her with just the law, I will say that I will burn their house if she will not stop gossiping about me... it just makes sense, otherwise, how can your threat be believable?”

Duterte's consistency in rhetoric and style contributes to the "convincingness" and "believability" of his performance in the eyes of the populist publics.

One of the trickiest aspects of surfacing a grounded conceptualization of populism is to come up with its distinguishing characteristics. While what emerged from the interviews is that the populist publics consider populism as a convincing political performance, what is still needed is an assortment of distinctive features that will set it apart from other political performances. If many respondents are claiming that populist politics is about delivering a convincing performance, what makes this performance populist? In the succeeding parts of this section, the following elements of a populist political performance are individually discussed: serving as a surrogate "voice for the miserable", bringing "authenticity" as opposed to "hypocrisy" in politics, and showing "persistent political will".

Seeking a "voice for the miserable"

"I know who the drug addicts are here... even the pushers... most of the time they are just peaceful, some of them are even friendly with their neighbors... but on other days, they are really a big nuisance to our community, you can only imagine the things that they do when they are high or unable to get high".

That is Gerry, 30, a longtime jeepney driver, speaking. When I first met him, it was just a day before the election period. Like many residents in their community, he was rooting for Duterte. He was one of the most vocal Duterte supporters that I have met during my fieldwork. During the campaign period, although many respondents would favorably talk about Duterte's threat against illegal drug users and sellers only quietly, Gerry is one among few members of their community who is outspoken about the issue. In our conversation, he insisted that "for a longtime, no one stood up against the

addicts in their village”, even claiming that “many local politicians are in their pockets”. Duterte’s declaration of war against illegal drugs appeals to him the most because, as he claimed, Gerry is “aware of the abuses that they [illegal drug users and sellers] have done”.

We were at a small alley talking about the elections when his compadre passed by, whom Gerry reminded to vote for Duterte: “compadre, we are both single fathers, we are voting for Duterte so we can safely leave our children at home while we tirelessly work to feed them”. He told us that “while he is afraid of the violent hold-uppers” when he is driving his jeepney, he is actually “more afraid when he is leaving her children at home” because “you can never really say when these addicts would go crazy”. Before finishing our conversation, this is what Gerry left me with:

“You see, we are suffering from this situation... so when I heard Duterte talk about our suffering, I felt that, finally, someone is giving voice to our misery... so I will not only vote for him, I even campaigned for him!”

Gerry articulated best the most prominent response that I was getting from the community: “Duterte is giving voice to our misery”.

For instance, Rosario, 62, a longtime resident of the village, defended Duterte from critics. She claimed that while she is...

“...sad that the drug war had been claiming lives, these are not innocent lives... these are the people that made our miserable lives even miserable... they do not know how to live with them... so should we criticize the president for just speaking on behalf of us?”

Another case is Elena, 39, a single mother working as a part-time domestic helper, who told me that:

“...it is easy for other politicians to pretend that killings are not happening because they do not live in places like ours... what Duterte is saying is not actually new, he is just saying what we poor people have been experiencing all along”.

For Rosario, Gerry, Elena and many other residents of their poor community, misery has been a perpetual character of their lives. Politicians like Duterte are perceived to have served as their surrogate voice, which has traditionally been marginalized. The proliferation of community crimes due to drug abuse was a previously untapped frustration among the populist publics. Indeed, in the words of Rosario, “we are only important during elections... we might as well support someone who is capable of representing our suffering”.

In the focus group discussion, this surrogate “voice for the miserable” as one element of the populist political performance was threshed out more. Michael said that when they say that Duterte is giving voice to the miserable, they are actually saying that he is talking about the “basic problems” of the society’s “poor, victims, and weaklings”. Giving voice for the miserable, he argued, is not only about Duterte’s war on drugs but also about improving the basic peace and order situation in the country and even battling the endemic corruption in the government.

Louielyn added that when Duterte is speaking about these “everyday problems that we face”, she felt that the president is saying that he is hearing the concerns of the miserable. That, to her, is the most important. Aya, 22, a sales lady at the biggest mall chain in the country, told the group that “when Duterte discussed a problem as simple as the traffic” in Metro Manila, he is already “speaking for them”.

While the group recognized that other politicians might also talk about these issues and also attempt to serve as a stand-in voice for the miserable, they demand authenticity among these politicians. For them, Duterte passed both the “tests” of accurately representing their misery and maintaining authenticity in the process. Yet Sergelito argued that it is not only Duterte who can represent their voices of misery but still insisted that it is “rare for a politician like him to come around”. He told the group that they “have had similar politicians before”. Michael, agreeing with Sergelito, added that he could only think of Estrada as another politician who similarly gave voice to them.

Rosario, confessing as a fan of the popular “king of Philippine action movies”, also contended that Poe Jr should also be considered claiming that the deceased actor-turned-presidential candidate really “spoke for the poor and from the heart”. Louielyn, agreeing with the rest of the group, concluded that this capacity to “speak of” and “speak for” the miserable is what “distinguishes Duterte and politicians like him from other traditional politicians”. In Louielyn’s words, “this is why they [Duterte, Estrada, Poe Jr] are different... it is easy to say that you are for all Filipinos but it is difficult to speak for those at the margins of this country”.

These perspectives from the populist publics reveals that a perceived accurate representation of their suffering, of giving voice to their misery is an essential element to the populist political performance.

Days after the election, I met Gerry for the second time. Since the community is back to its usual activities, I had to join him in his jeepney drive to talk to him. As soon as I

got to the front seat of his jeepney, he immediately told me this: “I told you, my bet [Duterte] is going to win the elections... this is really our time”. I asked him what he meant by “our time” and whom is he referring to by saying “our”. While showing me the Duterte stickers scattered around his jeepney, he responded that as a longtime jeepney driver, his top concern had always been about “reducing crimes” in his community and the entire country. To him, this is one of the fundamental sources of his misery claiming that what worsened the situation of the country is that “authorities are in cahoots with the criminals most of the time”.

Just before starting his usual trip and lining up in the terminal to fill his jeepney with passengers, Gerry proudly told me that “our time has come... this is just like what is written in the bible, you know, people who have been constant victims like us, this is our time”. He turned on the radio, switched it to AM, and asked me to secure my belongings: “look out for your things, it is not safe to use your cellphone... Besides, I will not be able to watch you while I am driving... By the way, are you okay with listening to the news? I like hearing Duterte speaks... it is almost like I am the one speaking”.

Demanding “authenticity” in politics

Lea, 39, popular among her neighbors, is a seasoned grassroots campaign coordinator. We met during what she would call the “peak of the election season”, the immediate days before the election day. She would greet every single person that we passed by with a “good morning beautiful!” or “what a nice morning brother!” I knew that she was not popular in her community for nothing: Lea was warm, bubbly, outspoken, and able to talk to anyone that needed to be talked to. When I complemented her

sunny attitude, she responded, “Well, it is part of the job!” She told me that for the past 15 years, she had been involved in every election imaginable- local, national, special- in various capacities as campaign coordinator, local leader, vote watcher, and even as a personal assistant to politicians. “This is my livelihood... and this is also how I am helping my neighbors”, said Lea while we were combing through a street she labeled as “enemy territory”. She disclosed that she was having a difficult time getting the support of the residents of this particular street because they have been a loyal supporter of another political family. I asked her what she was planning to do to break their loyalty and earn their support. Lea confessed and softly whispered:

“You know, we have to rely on old habits... I am actually just checking now who will be interested to receive the payment that we will be distributing tonight... we have a saying that in politics, sincerity is measured by how much you can give”.

In the most recent elections, Lea was hired by a local district-level politician to coordinate his campaign in their community. As a known vote-rich community, Lea is “pressured” by her boss to deliver. She told me that she is fine being “pressured” as long as the “price is right”. She shared that her responsibilities included a daily house-to-house campaign, tallying of “sure votes”, setting up a team of vote watchers, and reporting on-the-ground activities by opposing teams. While explaining these varied responsibilities that she carries, Lea revealed that she was also campaigning for Duterte “on the side”. She mentioned that this was an “intimate revelation on her part” since her boss could fire her for doing a simultaneous campaigning.

I met Lea’s workmates while doing my fieldwork and they seem to be the type of people that highly values their work and their earnings from it. In fact, when I first approached Lea for an interview, she asked me whether she would be paid for it,

“otherwise, it is a waste of my precious time... I have to earn for even the simplest things that I do”. In short, to my mind, there was little expectation that she would do something that could jeopardize her livelihood. So to my surprise, Lea told me that she was not getting paid for campaigning for Duterte. When asked why she was doing this, she responded rather powerfully:

“Listen hijo, I have been doing this job since I can remember, so trust me when I say that Duterte is genuine... we may not know if he is sincere because sincerity in politics is about money, but I can definitely say that Duterte is not like other hypocrite politicians, he is not fake, he is... a real person”.

In the course of my interviews with the community’s populist publics, demanding authenticity, as opposed to hypocrisy, had been one of the most consistent running themes. For these respondents, hypocrisy is common among traditional politicians citing their prominent practice of keeping hidden wealth and secret mistresses. Authenticity is valued because of the populist politician’s transparency and consistency in living out his/her values. These perceived authenticity is then associated with trustworthiness, predictability of political calculus to the common people, and a moral status similar to ordinary individuals.

For instance, Fe, 16, a high school dropout, while a teenage female, continues to support Duterte despite knowledge of the president’s infidelity. She contended that it is not about “having mistresses” that she finds hypocritical among other politicians but the fact that “they pretend that they do not have one”. The pretension, according to Fe, is used to make them feel that “politicians are morally superior beings... sometimes even claiming that they are God-given...” She insisted that “we all know that having mistresses is normal among men, be it poor or rich... politicians are just like everybody else, they are also sometimes tempted”. She cited the case of Duterte

having a mistress and defended him: “at least everyone knows about it... you know he is just being honest and real because he admits his failings... he is not a hypocrite unlike many politicians”. For Fe and like many other respondents, Duterte’s authenticity is manifested in his transparency that he has weaknesses like ordinary individuals such as in the case of his extramarital affair.

When I get the chance, I asked respondents, especially female ones, about Duterte’s relationship with his wife, the controversial rape joke, and the president’s general treatment of women. Interestingly, female members of the community were more likely to give the president a break for his infidelity to his wife, mistreatment of women, or even with rape jokes. As Marissa would put it, “we have been around like-minded men for years, he is like any other man that we have met”.

Marissa even argued that “at least Duterte is not abusive, I just wonder how many hypocrite politicians subject their wives to constant domestic abuse”. Louielyn also agreed with Marissa and quickly remarked: “they should just give him a break... do they think they are holy? Who were they fooling?” Jethro also defended Duterte on the controversial rape joke saying that “he is just speaking his mind... green jokes are usual for men, if you do not say so then you might be gay”. He continued to defend the president and asked: “would they rather that he keeps these things to himself? ... that is the problem with these traditional politicians, they are so used to being hypocrites!”.

Jethro’s, Louielyn’s, and Marissa’s positions resonates widely with many of my respondents. Like them, many residents of the village would consider these issues as

proof of Duterte's "ordinariness" and "authenticity". When critics highlight his personal failings, the populist publics are more likely to be attracted to him. Not only do they see Duterte as more relatable, given his ordinary-like morality, but also they are more likely to reject high moral judgement because of the perceived hypocrisy of traditional politicians. Maxwell, who would not disclose his age and occupation, put it so well:

"when a person is being real, he will make mistakes and is more likely to say bad things accidentally... but when you are hiding something, you are as perfect as a robot, and we do not want that... we accept Duterte and his mistakes as long as he is being real with us".

In the focus group discussion, David, 42, a freelance electrician, shared that Duterte appeals to him the most because "he is not showy and just being true to his self". He cited the case of the news reports about Duterte's refusal to wear the traditional barong in ceremonial activities because it is "uncomfortable and itchy", which he told the group is "a fact that we all know... yet you see the previous president wearing barong day and night, and even at the height of the sun, as if it is not an uncomfortable thing to wear".

David argued that Duterte, referring to this particular news story, is "not used to being a hypocrite unlike other politicians". Angela added that Duterte's "ordinariness" made him more "trustworthy" because they are able to relate to him more:

"He eats monggo [simple vegetable dish] for dinner just like the rest of us, he likes wearing jeans just like any other man, and he curses his enemy when he is angry just like what we would expect from any other angry individual".

Michael pointed out that this is a case of "what you see is what you get" making Duterte not only more "trustworthy" but also "accessible". He summed up the discussion on this and argued that "if you think the president is just like you, you will

think that he thinks and decides like you... so you really trust him more”. When asked whether they could think of other politicians that also exhibit these characteristics, they admitted that they could not think of anyone else.

For them, Duterte set the bar of authenticity “really high” and may even be a “once in a lifetime opportunity for the country”. A populist political performance that is perceived to be authentic, which demands high levels of transparency and consistency, is ultimately rewarded by the populist publics with an equally high level of trust and support.

Months after the elections, Lea appeared more relaxed and calmed than when I first met her. She told me that she had been temporarily absorbed as a village staff since she is still waiting for a new assignment from her bosses. She asked me what I thought of Duterte now, given the controversies he is facing, but I deflected and asked her what she thought. Before answering the question, Lea invited me to come to her house. She admitted shyly that, despite “the killings”, she is contented with the performance of the president. To her, it seems that Duterte is fulfilling his campaign promises, “bad or good”. Later on, she mentioned that although she is still supportive of the president, she is no longer as hopeful as before. She told me that she is worried that Duterte might not finish his term because “real people are not good with politics”.

Before continuing, she pointed out her photos with different politicians that she worked with:

“If only I can advise the president, I would... he cannot just continue being himself... because he is no longer just him but already the president... he has to learn how to not speak his mind at times, otherwise, his enemies in politics will take advantage of it and impeach him”.

I asked her what kind of advice would she give the president, and she responded that “for starters, why would he admit that he is ordering the killings? I am sure he is aware that that is unlawful!” But I told her, curiously, that he is just being consistent and real, something that she admired about the president. Lea moved closer to me and said:

“Whatever! What I am saying is that it is difficult to be genuine in politics, it is a weakness... I am just amazed that, despite the difficulties, the old man is maintaining his authenticity... you know what, now I am more convinced that I voted correctly!”

Supporting “persistent political will”

My first encounter with Joel was at his birthday party. My local contact in the community was invited to come but she could not attend the party because she had to work with me during that day. I knew that she was trying to excuse herself from her duty but she could not say it directly to me. I asked her if she wanted to come and she told me that it is an important gathering because Joel is a son of one of the influential village officials. While I was thinking on how best to proceed with my fieldwork that day, she brilliantly suggested that we come to the party instead and just interview people there. I agreed, especially when Adelina, my local contact, told me: “we should really go... all the important people of the village will be there... you will get to interview them!”

Joel turned 23 that day. They turned a part of the street into a party venue filling it with tables and chairs. Adelina told me it is one of the perks of being the son of a village official. The birthday celebration, while not grand, was well attended: people brought food and drinks, and everyone was in a party mood. I talked to many of the

attendees during the party, switching tables as quickly as I ask questions about my research.

Three hours into the party, Joel approached me and offered himself for an interview. He was articulate and confident, answering my questions straightforwardly. He mentioned that his dad “trained him” to answer that way since he “will soon inherit his father’s position at the village”. There were numerous interruptions to our conversation but he was rather focused.

“I see Duterte like my father, when he sets a goal, he will find a way to fulfill it... even in the village level, it is difficult to get things done because of rules and legalities, you have to really force things to happen”,

Joel told me as he was passing me another bottle of beer.

For him, Duterte’s appeal lies in the president’s capacity to overcome “legal” obstacles to his chosen course of action. He is convinced that previous politicians’ “choice of actions” were as good as Duterte’s but it takes “a man like Duterte to implement them without any excuse... just pure action”. To this, Joel said,

“Once I am given the chance to serve, I will rule like how Duterte did in Davao city... you will have critics, they will even use the law to stop you but what it matters is that you will not give up, that you are... stubborn but for the right cause”.

The persistence of political will is another element that the populist publics associate with the populist performance. For the populist publics, the persistence of political will refers to a populist’s capacity and willingness to overcome impediments, even legal ones, to his desired course of action. This is performed in the populist’s speeches as much as it is expressed in real actions or reflected in actual outcomes.

Regina, 22, new to her job as a waitress at a restaurant, claimed that “despite criticisms from big people” like the United Nations and the former United States President Barack Obama, Duterte is unperturbed and “is still focused on his goal of eradicating drugs in the country”. This, according to her, is a man that is worth trusting because “he will do everything to fulfill his promises”.

This is echoed by Alexander who told me that even if “Duterte is being bullied by powerful people... he refused to be bullied... he would just curse at them”. He also cited the example of the war on drugs and said that “they cannot threaten Duterte with just the law... sometimes we really need to deviate from the law to bring back peace and order, we know that from our experience”. Duterte’s unresponsiveness to criticisms on his war against illegal drugs is seen by the populist publics as proof of persistence of his political will.

For Ogie, 19, a first time voter, Duterte entered the national political scene just at the right moment when people “are tired of hearing excuses from politicians... that they have attempted to do something but due to certain limitations, they were unable to fully do it”. He told me that “what is needed by this country is someone like Duterte who, without any excuse, will just say that I will do it, I will do that... and our waiting will be repaid by fulfilled promises”. Although Ogie recognized that “government processes are difficult and extremely complex”, which reminded him of “mess that he had to faced when he registered as a first time voter”, a “good” politician must not give in to and must instead fight the bureaucratic inertia.

Gerry echoed this sentiments of Ogie when he said that “Duterte may not be as smart as the other politicians but we do not need smart politicians right now... nowadays, with the kind of politics that we have, what is needed is endurance, even fortitude”. These perspectives resonate broadly with many respondents. Populist politicians are perceived to possess political will that can rival the frustrating complexity of bureaucratic processes associated with running the government.

The focus group discussion shifted the conversation towards provision of actual material goods or services in their community as a metric of a politician’s political will. As a community that has been under the influence of patron-client relationship for the longest time, the residents of the village values “actual goods given to them and not just rhetoric”.

They admitted to receiving “help from other politicians but not from Duterte”. Interestingly, despite this, they believed that they will “get more” from the president than the previous politicians. But by “more”, they do not mean material goods and services.

Trinidad, 65, a former longtime factory worker, said this: “I am thankful that I sometimes receive medicines from politicians but, you know, with Duterte... what I receive is something that is priceless”. I asked Trinidad what this “something priceless” that she is receiving from Duterte. I had to repeat the question twice because of her hearing problems. As soon as she understood the question, she responded that:

“In living a life like mine... which has been a life of poverty, I had enough of pity... it is easy for politicians to pity us but what makes me really happy is just to see someone like Duterte... who is willing to do everything for us, even if he will be at odds with the powerful”.

Although the populist publics demand populists to serve as a voice for their misery, this should be balanced with expressions and actions of solidarity and not only charity. A politician's political will is also best reflected on his solidarity with the populist publics, interrupting traditional privileging of patron-client relationship in politics (Curato 2017).

My second encounter with Joel was also at a big gathering. This time, it was his father's birthday. As his father is a popular village official, the party was not only bigger but also grand. There was free-flowing food and drinks to which many residents of the village are lined up to get a taste of. Joel saw me as soon as I came to the party and introduced me to some of their important guests. The village officials as well as several city district politicians were seated at the longest table. His father was unable to greet me because he was busy saying his farewell to city police officials and their wives who were about to leave the party. Joel and I settled on an unoccupied table at the far end of the street. He kept looking on the police officers that were leaving. Looking at them, he told me this: “look at how proud they are now of the president, they have one thing in common with Duterte, they like action more than words”.

Before I can even begin asking questions, Joel already started the interview. He talked about how his father had been empowered to enforce “unpopular” policies in their community despite opposition from “well-meaning” groups. He told me they may be

“sincerely concerned” but their “opposition” is not contributing to restoring peace and order in the village. He also told me that he was informed that neighboring communities had also been inspired by the “tough” actions of Duterte. He said, “this is the beginning of change that we had always wanted”. He talked lengthily about this, citing individual instances of how the seriousness of Duterte at pursuing his policy promises is contributing to transformations at the grassroots level.

In closing, he told me that he knew that I was concerned with the increasing number of murders associated with the president’s war against illegal drugs because he read some of my Facebook posts. I was surprised. But Joel calmly told me:

“It is okay to have a different opinion, we are a democracy... but the only way things will get done in this country is if a politician will act as boldly as Duterte... these drug addicts are getting in the way of the president’s agenda, and we both know that many Filipinos voted for him to get things done once and for all”.

For the populist publics, populism is a political performance: an enmeshment of rhetoric, style and actions that gives voice for the miserable, bring authenticity in politics, and show persistence of political will.

Chapter 4:

A grounded re-conceptualization of populism

In all conceptual approaches to populism, the populist's ubiquitous appeal to "the people" has always been considered a primary distinguishing element of populism-whether as a thin-ideology, discourse, strategy, or style. Despite this sustained reference to "the people", attempts at theorizing populism, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, has largely ignored, if not excluded, the populist supporters. In this thesis, what are unraveled are grounded perspectives on populism by the populist publics. Chapter 3 presented in detail, using select interview quotes from a community of populist publics, what these perspectives are. In this chapter, these surfaced perspectives are analyzed, situated within the existing literature, and synthesized towards a bottom-up re-conceptualization of populism. For the populist publics, populism is best understood as a political performance by the populist, characterized by an enmeshment of style, rhetoric and actions, perceived to serve as a surrogate voice for the miserable, bring authenticity- as opposed to hypocrisy- in politics, and show persistent political will. This chapter offers a preliminary re-conceptualization of populism.

In the first two sections, the discussion on what populism means to the populist publics is synthesized. On the third and last section, the heterogeneous character of the populist publics and their varying motivations for populist support is discussed.

Populism as a political performance

Rather than as an ideology, discourse, or strategy, populism is seen from the eyes of the populist publics as a type of political performance. This parallels existing conceptualization of populism as a political style (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Both conceptualizations shift the focus from the textual to the non-textual elements of politics: the visual, aesthetic, sonic, and spatial. While attention is given to the performative aspects of politics, the role of substantive ideas is simultaneously considered. These performative aspects of politics, traditionally marginalized as trivial, prove to be significant in how the populist publics perceive populism.

By conceptualizing populism as a political performance, the populist publics refer to an enmeshment of a particular rhetoric, style and action. All these three aspects of the performance must reflect the populist's attempt to give voice to their misery, bring authenticity to politics, and show political will. For instance, in the case of the populist president Rodrigo Duterte, his supporters appreciate holistically his tough rhetoric against drug addicts, his use of street talk as language style, and his demonstration of decisive actions. For the populist publics, Duterte displays mastery of the collapsing of rhetoric, style and action into a single political performance: he warns the country against the devastating effects of the prevalence of illegal drugs, shames and threaten with murder those who are involved with the illegal drug trade, and shows proof of his seriousness through his brutal war against illegal drug addicts and sellers. The populist's rhetoric, style, and actions are evaluated by the populist publics as intertwined aspects of the populist political performance.

For this populist political performance to be successful, the populist publics demand on the part of the populist not sincerity but consistency. Although pejoratively portrayed as dumb voters, political processes appear to be opaque for populist supporters. Therefore, as voters that are conscious of the limits of traditional politics, they do not evaluate populist political performance based on sincerity since the state of mind of traditional politicians are perceived to be inaccessible and mainstream politicians have historically fail to be sincere. Instead, they value consistency in the performance. This means that the narratives of performances must be coherent and logical using their everyday experiences as a metric. As such, populist political performances showing contradictory elements are not rewarded by support. This happened with the case of former vice president Jejomar Binay, also commonly identified as populist, who ran against Duterte in the most recent presidential elections. Although his previous performance when he ran for the vice presidency proved to be successful, the congressional investigation on his hidden wealth and assets simultaneous with the presidential campaign made his performance narrative a disaster of contradictions. Once poor himself and a self-made man, his supporters were disappointed to learn that he had been financing his extravagant lifestyle through corruption in the government. It was a scandal, a “confusing” one according to many of his supporters, which made them throw their support to Duterte instead. Contrast this with Duterte’s lifestyle, which, despite also serving as city mayor for decades like Binay, remained simple. Furthermore, Duterte’s threats directed against his critics make his performance more believable: the style is consistent with his rhetoric and actions, and it mirrors the populist publics’ everyday experience with their “enemies”. So consistent, coherent and logical populist political performances convince the populist publics while the opposite confuses them.

For the populist publics, politics is all about delivering a convincing political performance. They associate populism with the phenomenon of “celebrification” of Philippine politics: many celebrities succeed in changing professions towards being politicians (Maniago 2007; Centeno 2010; David and Atun 2015; David and San Pascual, 2016). This may explain why many commonly identified populists in contemporary Philippine politics, which the populist publics also identify with, are celebrities. This includes former president Joseph Estrada and ex-presidential candidate Fernando Poe, Jr. In many instances, supporters of Duterte sees the president as resembling movie action stars, which both Estrada and Poe, Jr. are also popularly known for.

Interestingly, the populist publics assign a minimal role to ideology in conceptualizing populism as a political performance. While populism has been associated in a variety of left and right wing ideologies in Europe and the Americas, it appears to be “ideology-less” in the case of the Philippines. The populist president Duterte is identified with penal populism (Curato 2017) while other populists like Estrada and Binay are associated with democratized access to patronage and government services (Thompson 2010). This may be explained by the fact that politics in the Philippines is “ideology-less” as evidenced by the absence of ideological parties (Teehankee 2002; Ufen 2008; Tomsa 2013). This may also explain why ideology or ideas play a less prominent role in the populist public’s understanding of populism.

Elements of the populist political performance

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the populist political performance is distinguished from other political performances through three important elements: it must give voice to the populist public's misery, bring authenticity to politics, and reflect persistent political will. This section individually discusses these three elements of the populist political performance.

Populist supporters recognize populism when populists serve as a surrogate voice for the miserable. This refers to the populist's articulation of the problems faced by the suffering public in their everyday lives. They are expected to represent their misery in mainstream public spaces like politics. These problems are mostly identified with the structural and slow violence of poverty (Kruger 2014): from day-to-day community insecurity to lack of access to basic services. In the case of Duterte, the populist publics are attracted to his promise of peace and order in the country by countering the prevalence of drugs. Despite widespread international and domestic criticisms on his drug war policy, the populist publics see it as recognition of the hidden suffering that they have been experiencing due to the proliferation of illegal drug addicts and sellers: the silent suffering of living in one community with them. On the other hand, critics are seen as detached and unable to represent their misery. Instead, it is seen as proof of their being out-of-touch to the populist public's everyday realities.

I see this is a critique, and more importantly, an interruption to traditional patronage politics that has characterized the Philippines for many years (Teehankee 2002; Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2011; Teehankee 2013; Curato 2017). Traditionally, what

exists between the voters and the politicians is a patron-client relationship where electoral support is rewarded with access to material goods or government services. However, in the case of the populist publics, populists are given electoral support just by giving voice to their misery. It interrupts the material exchange in the patron-client relations and becomes rather more representational. Although not necessarily the same, this mirrors claims of the displacement of traditional politics of redistribution with the emerging politics of recognition (Fraser 2000). The material benefits enjoyed by the populist publics through traditional channels of patronage politics is outweighed by a recognition and articulation of their hidden suffering by the populists in the public sphere. As one of my respondents would put it: “I like listening to Duterte... It is almost like I am the one speaking”.

Yet in the process of giving voice to their misery, the populist publics demand populists to demonstrate authenticity.

Bringing authenticity, as opposed to hypocrisy, in politics is another distinguishing element of the populist political performance that had been identified by the populist publics. Political authenticity here is defined two-fold: first, it is understood as a politician’s transparency in his public and private life; and second, it is also perceived as consistency in a politician’s political and domestic life.

The populist publics recognize transparency if a populist is open to the public with details of his public and private life despite these details being incriminating. On the other hand, consistency refers to how the populist lives out his public claims in his private life. To the eyes of the populist publics, these two things bring authenticity in

politics. Authentic politicians are then seen as more trustworthy, predictable, and relatable so they are rewarded with political support.

The demand for political authenticity is pitted against the prevalence of hypocrisy in mainstream politics. The populist publics are frustrated by the lack of not only transparency but also consistency among many traditional politicians. For example, despite the public's common knowledge of the pervasiveness of extra-marital affairs among them, they are angered by many politicians' efforts to keep it in secret or pretend that it does not exist. Worse, according to them, many of these politicians with extra-marital affairs even profess morality in public and act as if they are "God-given". This hypocrisy is hated by the populist publics on two counts: one, they despised that politicians consider themselves to be better individuals than the ordinary people; and second, they are offended that the politicians think that they can easily be fooled.

In comparison, populist politicians like Duterte are perceived to counter this hypocrisy and bring authenticity in politics. The populist publics' knowledge of the president's infidelity is matched by his openness about it. Furthermore, his use of rape jokes or his inappropriate treatment of women in public is perceived to be a sign of consistency in his public behavior and private life. Authentic politicians, the populists, are then given reward with electoral support by the populist publics. Populists are considered trustworthier because they demonstrate transparency and consistency. Furthermore, since populists are open about their personal failings or moral weaknesses, they are perceived to be as ordinary as the populist publics. As a

consequence, the populist publics perceive them to be more predictable and accessible since they understand the state of mind of an ordinary person like them.

Duterte is perceived by the populist publics to have brought authenticity to politics (Arguelles 2016). How the populist publics understand political authenticity and its relationship to the populists reveal the personal, relational and experiential- aside from the performative- aspects of populism. This affirms the significance of understanding populism from the perspectives of the populist publics. As I have mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, populism is about the populist publics as much as it is about the populists.

The third and last element of the populist political performance is the populist's demonstration of persistent political will. To the populist publics, this is recognized as a politician's determination- in both capacity and willingness- to overcome all impediments, including legal challenges, to his desired course of action. The demand is for populists to refrain from using the complexity of bureaucracy as an excuse but rather demonstrate that determined action can overcome bureaucratic inertia.

Although under fire from critics at home and abroad, the populist publics see Duterte's drug war policy as proof of persistence of political will. To them, the critics appear to be surrogates of the interests of the powerful and the Establishment. Hence, Duterte's unresponsiveness to these criticisms is seen as a demonstration of his persistence and determination to fulfill his campaign promises. As one of the respondents would put it, it is putting "action" above "words and excuses". Furthermore, to many of these populist publics, the populist's persistence is rewarded

by support because it seen as defending their interests against a faceless but powerful bureaucracy. Duterte's disregard for due process and the law fits perfectly in this understanding of populism by the populist publics. It surfaces the action-orientedness of the previously discussed relational and experiential aspects of populism.

The “publics” in the populist publics

Public conversations have characterized populism as one-way demagoguery. Populist supporters are pejoratively portrayed as dumb and gullible voters that possess archaic prejudicial views. In this thesis, what is unraveled is a heterogeneity of populist publics that shares a widely resonant understanding of populism. In this section, the relational nature of populism, which refers to the dynamics of the relationship between the populist and its publics, is explored. This section offers an emergent typology of the populist publics.

The use of the plural “publics” instead of “public” in characterizing populist supporters is a reflection of the diversity and plurality of the community. Despite the prevailing homogenizing and pathologizing representations of the populist publics in the mainstream, they posses varying motivations in supporting populists. Furthermore, the populist publics asserts that they are not unwilling victims of what is traditionally characterized as populist demagoguery. To them, it is a voluntary and mutually beneficial partnership: the populist stands in for them in the political sphere while the legitimacy of the populist is drawn from the support given by the populist publics. Using their varying motivations as a distinguishing feature, the following are identified as the three emergent types of populist publics: rational, protesting, and illiberal.

Rational populist publics resemble the classic voter in rational choice theory (Downs 1957) in that they are motivated by a pursuit of their preferences. Voting and general political support is considered as a medium of preference satisfaction. In the case of the rational populist publics, support for the populist is given because it is capable of satisfying their policy preferences such as economic redistribution or restoration of peace and order. For instance, this type refers to a segment within Duterte's supporters whose support is dependent on the president's continued pursuit of criminals and those who are involved in the illegal drug trade industry. To them, they have always been concerned with peace and order. Duterte's entry into national politics gave them an opportunity to fulfill their standing policy preference. Yet unlike the classic rational choice voter, they also demand that the populist perform while fulfilling their preferences. For example, the urgency of the security situation in the country requires an accompanying rhetoric and style fit for that situation. In cases where this is not fulfilled, the rational populist publics retreat as classic rational choice voters throwing their support to politicians that will best advance their interest.

On the other hand, the protesting populist publics are motivated by their dissatisfaction with traditional politics. Electoral support for populists is seen as an expression of frustration on the inability of pre-existing political institutions to address their needs. As such, vote is given to the politician that can best represent their dissatisfaction with the political system. For example, the populist publics in this type throw support to the populist Duterte since he is perceived to be unaffected by the corruption and hypocrisy of traditional political elites. Seen as an outsider, the protesting populist publics see him as a partner in articulating their dissatisfaction as

well as reforming the system. To many protesting populist publics, their political support is both an expression of restlessness and hope. Furthermore, this type of populist publics, along with the last type, share a fascination and demand for incivilities on both the populist as well as their fellow populist supporters.

The illiberal populist publics are motivated by their authoritarian fantasies. To them, populists are just one push away to being authoritarian leaders. They are gravitated towards leaders who profess disregard for the rule of law, due process, and sometimes even democratic deliberations. The support of the illiberal populist publics is for a strongman that is capable of exercising unconstrained government power to fulfill his promised agenda. Their unfortunate experiences with the unresponsiveness of political institutions towards their suffering have attracted them to strongman and authoritarian-like rule. In the case of the Philippines, Duterte's authoritarian fantasies (Arguelles 2017; Curato 2017) resonate with them the most. They harbor dreams of the return of the country to an authoritarian period or the birth of the Philippine version of the famous strongman ruler of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew. Interestingly, many of those who fall into this type were usually overseas workers who have worked in economically developed but democratically insufficient states. Because they are usually fuelled by strong visions of a utopian society, the illiberal populist publics also exhibit the most antagonism towards critics of the populist.

Yet despite possessing a wide variety of motivations for populist support, the populist publics are characterized by a high degree of political awareness and reflexivity. The prevailing characterizations of populist supporters as unthinking voters were challenged. Many of the populist publics are able to identify populists and dissect

populism as a political phenomenon. Furthermore, despite passionate support for the populists, they still subject them to a high degree of scrutiny and accountability. To them, while populist politicians may be different in some aspects when compared to traditional politicians, they are still politicians. The populist publics are aware that whatever the context is, all politicians are prone to be corrupted by the power that they wield. The populist's relationship with the populist publics can only do so much in keeping the populist in check. As such, the populist publics do not abandon political vigilance and reflexivity.

Conclusion

At the risk of being charged with committing populism myself, this thesis shifted the center of the discussion on populism towards “the people”. After all, the historical experience with populism suggests that it is about the populist publics as much as it is about the populists. It navigated the question of what populism means for populist supporters and how they understand it in their everyday contexts. This thesis is an exploratory and preliminary attempt at a grounded re-conceptualization of populism using surfaced perspectives from the populist publics.

In Chapter 1, existing research on populism, especially the dominant conceptual approaches to the study of populism, was critiqued. It revealed the theoretical and empirical shortcomings of theorizing populism without the populist publics. Despite common recognition among varying conceptual approaches of the significance of “the people” in populism, whether it is treated as a thin-ideology, discourse, strategy, or style, the perspectives of the populist supporters had been mostly excluded in the current literature. Furthermore, studies that focused on measuring individual-level populist attitudes suffers from conceptual weakness due to a posteriori conceptualization of populism. I argued to fill this gap in the literature by investigating on-the-ground perspectives of populist supporters.

The second chapter zeroed on the methodology of this thesis. In sum, this is a political ethnographic research that is founded on a considerable wealth of qualitative data of 47 individual in-depth interviews, two rounds of focus group discussions, and seven discontinuous months of participant observation in one of the biggest and vote-rich community of populist publics in the Philippines. To answer the research question, I

used the case and built on the experiences and perspectives of the supporters of Philippine populist president Rodrigo Duterte.

The empirical chapters 3 and 4 are where the main question of this thesis was addressed. What is surfaced is a rich and nuanced, sometimes even a bit counterintuitive, but familiar understanding of populism. To the populist publics, populism is best understood as a political performance by the populist, characterized by an enmeshment of style, rhetoric and actions, perceived to serve as a surrogate voice for the miserable, bring authenticity- as opposed to hypocrisy- in politics, and show persistent political will.

Furthermore, an emergent typology of populist publics is identified. They are distinguished by their varying motivations for populist support: the rational, protesting, and illiberal populist publics. By using the plural “publics” instead of “public”, I argued for the heterogeneity of the community of populist supporters. The prevailing pejorative representations of the populist publics in public and academic conversations were likewise challenged. Furthermore, it had been unraveled that while populism is traditionally characterized as one-way demagoguery, the populist publics see it as a mutually beneficial relationship.

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