

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Tears of Sugar: Red-Tagging on Negros During the Duterte Regime, 2016-2022.

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF STRATEGIC STUDIES

CENTRE FOR MILITARY, SECURITY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

July 2026

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Abstract

During the administration of then-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, violence by state and non-state forces against activists, workers, and dissidents was routinely encouraged and condoned by the President. Harassment often accompanied acts of physical violence against workers in the sugar fields on the island of Negros. Using the label of counterinsurgency, the Duterte regime ascribed those who opposed the Duterte regime as insurgents or terrorists involved with the New People's Army and Communist Party of the Philippines (NPA-CPP); this is called "red-tagging." This thesis uses an interpretive framework methodology and a single case study methodology to argue that the Duterte administration's organisation of troops/police and red-tagging of sugar workers on Negros constitutes an act of state terrorism for the purpose of dissuading dissent against the Duterte regime. This research draws on journalistic accounts of violence and speeches by state/non-state actors within the context of the political, geographic, historical, and sociocultural makeup of Negros. The thesis' theoretical background is grounded in postcolonial theory, especially necropolitics, which centres a state's primary ability to dictate who lives and dies. This theoretical background is used to understand how Negros' violence during the Duterte administration is shaped by the Philippines' experience with Spanish and American colonialism.

Preface

This thesis is original and unpublished work written solely by the author, Miles Joaquim Xavier.

Acknowledgements

The list of people and organisations that have supported me through this thesis' writing process are nearly innumerable, though this is an attempt to capture those most important to me.

The effort of my supervisors, Dr. Cameron and Holden, to make sense of my illegible scribbles and rambles has changed my academic career for the better. I am privileged to have worked with two of my academic idols to make this thesis what it is. I owe my most immense gratitude for standing by my work and supporting me throughout my degree. To you both, I hope to achieve a sliver of your intellectual capacities.

To my partner Jennalyn, *ikaw ang buhay ko*. This thesis would not have been possible without your existence, for you were the wind in my sails. This thesis is yours as much as it is mine; all of my chartered paths and endeavours lead back to you.

To my family members, here and those departed, I could not have asked for a firmer foundation built upon such love and grace. From the earliest days of my life, you have been there; this is only another step in my life that you have held my hands through. I love you all dearly.

To my closest friends, thank you for enduring my missed hangouts and inconsistencies. I am grateful to have shared endless meals and laughs with those who I've grown up with.

There is a particular place for the art that has contributed to my thesis as well. In particular, many works of ambient music were the backdrop to my studies. Of note, William Basinski and Susumu Yokota's works were particularly inspiring and have soundtracked much of my prolonged research and writing.

Lastly, to Vicente Rafael, who's seminal works guided this thesis, may you rest easy. I do not know if we would have crossed paths, but I owe a degree of my intellectual foundation to your works.

Dedication

During the writing of this thesis, 19 people were killed on April 19th, 2026 on Negros Occidental by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, six of the nineteen activists, two of the nineteen children. This thesis is dedicated to those who've been targeted on Negros and the archipelago writ large for their resistance to the grating machinations of the island's economy. To the organisations like Malaya, Anakbayan, and the plenty across the globe who push for human rights and better standards of living for Filipinos everywhere, your work is now more important than ever.

For Lyle, Alyssa, Maureen, RJ, Errol, and Kai.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Illustrations, Figures, and Graphs	viii
Introduction	2
Background	2
Literature Review and Theoretical Background	7
Necropolitics	10
Critical Terrorism Studies	11
Filipino Studies	19
Peace and Violence Studies.....	23
Case Study Justification.....	27
The Merits of the Single Case Study	28
Temporal Considerations	29
Economic Considerations	31
Violence and Crime Considerations.....	33
Interpretive Frameworks.....	34
Source Selection.....	39
Chapter 1: Typologising Violence: Towards a Theory of Necro-Semiotic Terror	42
Nebulising Violence.....	42
Violence, Objectification, and Worthlessness	55
Chapter 2: The Necro-economy of Negros	60
Necro-Economic Theory: Accumulation, Surplus, and Death.....	60
The Spanish Way: 1840-1898	63
America's Bloodied Invisible Hand: 1899-1946	69
Sugar Kills: 1946-1965	74
Spoilage: 1974-1986	77
Wither: 1986-2022	81

Chapter 3: Duterte in the Sugar Fields	97
Duterte: Social Bandit by Day, Neoliberal by Night	97
Sovereignty, Emotion, and the Arbitrary	101
Sweet Tears: The 2018 Sagay Massacre	109
Encountering The All-Seeing Eye: OPLAN Sauron.....	112
You Really Deserve To Be Hit, You Fools: The 2019 NPA Ambush.....	118
Evidence of Things Unseen: Miscellaneous Killings	123
Conclusions	129
Interpretive Findings	130
Limitations and Further Research	132

List of Illustrations, Figures, and Graphs

Figure 1.1. Map of Negros in Relation to the Philippines

Figure 1.2. Map of Negros in Relation to Panay and Cebu

Figure 1.3. Map of Negros, Split into Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental

List of Symbols, Abbreviations, & Nomenclature

ACLED – Armed Conflict Location & Event Details
AFP – Armed Forces of the Philippines
ATA – Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020
CARP – Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program
CPP – Communist Party of the Philippines
CTS – Critical Terrorism Studies
EJK – Extrajudicial Killing
GWOT – Global War On Terror
HSA – Human Security Act of 2007
LCA – Land Cultivation Area
LGU – Local Government Unit
NFSW – National Federation of Sugar Workers
NPA – New People’s Army
NTF-ELCAC – National Task Force to End the Local Communist Armed Conflict
NUPL – National Union of People’s Lawyers
PC – Philippine Constabulary
PKP-1930 – Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (1930)
PNP – Philippine National Police
PVS – Peace and Violence Studies
RPA-ABB – Revolutionary Proletarian Army – Alex Boncayo Brigade
SIDA – Sugarcane Industry Development Act of 2015
SRA – Sugar Regulatory Administration
WOD – War on Drugs
WOT – War On Terror

“Shit happens during operations.”

- Ronald Dela Rosa, Former Chief of the Philippine National Police, currently wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Introduction

Background

Regarding the previous presidency of Rodrigo Roa Duterte, many Filipinos remain divided on the nature of Duterte's rule over the Philippines from 2016 until 2022. On the matter of Duterte's outwardly violent and unapologetic usage of state force and condoning of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) against drug users, the spectacle of violence against drug users has resonated with supporters of Duterte while others have decried human rights abuses.¹

Concomitant to Duterte's War on Drugs (WOD) was an equally brutal campaign of state violence under the ambit of counterterrorism, namely against the political, military, and civil wings associated with the Communist Party of the Philippines. Similar to the WOD were the rampant false or exaggerated accusations against the victims of state/state-sponsored violence who had been deemed to be leftists of any ilk. Many of those accused were public defense lawyers, farmers, or members of various activist groups who would face both state and/or vigilante violence. In one case, nine indigenous Turandot people were killed and 16 were arrested by the Philippine National Police (PNP) in the province of Aklan after being deemed "rebel sympathizers," though environmental and legal rights groups outwardly demonstrated that those killed and arrested were targeted due to their opposition to the nearby construction of two major dam projects.²

¹ Danilo Andres Reyes, "The Spectacle of Violence in Duterte's "War on Drugs"," *Journal of Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2016): 111-37; Sol Iglesias, "Populist Appeal or Fearful Support? Examining the War on Drugs in the Philippines under Duterte," *Pacific Affairs* 98, no. 2 (2025): 217-44; Imelda B. Deinla et al., "Punitiveness and atrocity: Why do some Filipinos support mass violence?" *Punishment and Society* 27, no. 2 (2025): 296-314

² Jun N. Aguirre, "Indigenous leaders killed in Philippines were 'red-tagged' over dam opposition," *Mongabay News*, 8 February 2021, <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/02/indigenous-leaders-killed-in-philippines-were-red-tagged-over-dam-opposition/>

This process of ascription is one of many iterations of “red-tagging,” which can be generally defined as the process of attributing an individual or organization to the cause of a Communist ideology or organization. One region stands out for its frequency of red-tagging: Negros Island. During the Duterte presidency, Negros was an area of focus during his WOT, especially through the comparatively extensive usage of the National Task Force to End the Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) alongside police and military assets against alleged rebels on the Island. Noted for its highest employment of agricultural workers in the entirety of the Philippines and a concentration of both violence- and red-tagging-related incidents during the Duterte administration, Negros also maintains some of the highest wealth inequality and poverty reinforced by an entrenched Spanish-American colonial class system.³

Generally, this thesis asks to what extent is red-tagging under the Duterte regime a form of state terrorism? Firstly, this thesis will discuss and problematize the concepts of red-tagging and state terrorism embedded in the question, while also interrogating the context, mechanisms, and policies of the Duterte regime as its foundation. As a general outlook, this thesis seeks to examine the process of red-tagging and the accompanying physical violence taken up against those who have been red-tagged, while also implying such a relationship is deliberately condoned, if not undertaken, by the Philippine state under Duterte in a systematized matter that equates to state terrorism. Methodologically, a single case study accompanies an interpretive framework methodology to explore red-tagging on Negros. Theoretically, this thesis draws on the post-positivist discourses of postcolonialism and poststructuralism that understand social

³ Tomas Buenaventura, “The communist insurgency in the Philippines: A ‘protracted people’s war’ continues,” *Armed Conflict Locations & Event Data*, 13 July 2023, <https://acleddata.com/report/communist-insurgency-philippines-protracted-peoples-war-continues#:~:text=ACLED%20data%20show%20that%20fighting%20between%20state%20forces%20and%20the%20communist%20rebels&text=ACLED%20data%20illustrate%20that%20the%20NPA%20is%20most%20active%20in%20Negros>

phenomena to be shaped both by colonial, political, historical, and linguistic constraints. This thesis seeks, in an interdisciplinary manner, to interrogate knowledge and values within the scope of language and symbols and their relation to the usage of violence. Before discussing the methodologies and their justifications, the guiding interpretive propositions of this thesis need to be discussed as they provide an outline for this thesis' procession and grounding within the various bodies of literature it operates within.

Firstly, this thesis argues that understanding Negros as a “necro-economy” illuminates the political logic behind the actions taken by state and non-state actors aligned with the Duterte administration to red-tag individuals opposed to the socioeconomic and political system on Negros in a way that traditional counterinsurgency frameworks cannot.⁴ Secondly, this thesis understands that the physical violence mentioned above is accompanied by an equally violent form of semiotic violence, which operates as a form of what Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitics.”⁵ Thirdly, this thesis views red-tagging as a form of state terrorism that was designed to maintain the Duterte administration's power over Negros. These frameworks will be elaborated upon in a more comprehensive methodological section.

This thesis will explore a set of primary source documents relating to the Duterte administration's conduct on Negros in conjunction with relevant secondary literature. This will be expounded upon and justified in a separate section within the case study justification. Briefly, the primary sources include journalistic accounts of killings related to red-tagging from both Philippine/Southeast Asian News outlets (the Philippine Star, Rappler, *Karapatan*, the Philippine

⁴ Elliott Prasse-Freeman, “Necroeconomics: dispossession, extraction, and indispensable/expendable laborers in contemporary Myanmar,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 49, no. 7 (2022): 1472-80; Fatmir Haskaj, “From biopower to necroeconomies: Neoliberalism, biopower and death economies,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 44, no. 10 (2018): 1148-68.

⁵ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

Daily Inquirer, ABS-CBN News, GMA News, the Manila Bulletin, Al Jazeera, the Straits Times), official government statements/press releases and legal memoranda from the Philippine and Negros Island governments, and other police and military reports related to the Communist Insurgency.

The general structure of this thesis begins with its methodological and theoretical choices, first by discussing the theoretical underpinnings of the various fields and the thesis' epistemic boundaries, departures, and dialogues. The first literature of interest is the field of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS), specifically the field's discussions of necropolitics and state terrorism in post-colonial states in Africa, Latin America, West Asia, and Southeast Asia. Secondly is the field of Filipino Studies and its interrogations of the Duterte regime, the history of Negros, and critical evaluations of Filipino history, politics, and political economics. Thirdly is the literature of peace and violence studies (PVS), which underpins the thesis' later discussion of semiotic and performative violence and their contributions to the field of PVS. The thesis then justifies the single case study and expands upon the thesis' guiding interpretive frameworks and their parameters followed by a brief explanation of the sources used.

The bulk of the thesis is divided into three chapters. First is a predominantly theoretical typology of violence and necropolitics that engages with red-tagging and state terrorism. The second chapter discusses the historical formation of Negros, especially as it pertains to the socioeconomic policies of regional and national governments on the island and the mediation of resistance to what can be called a "necro-economy."⁶ The third chapter discusses the Duterte regime's deployment of state terrorism as a means of social control in service of the regime's

⁶ Fatmir Haskaj, "From biopower to necroeconomies: Neoliberalism, biopower and death economies," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44, no. 10 (2018): 1148-68; Elliott Prasse-Freeman

socioeconomic policies of neoliberal development. The concluding portion of the thesis summarises its interpretive findings alongside the implications for the literatures addressed by the thesis and further research more broadly. Firstly, a literature review must be conducted before any methodological grounds can be established, as this will firmly ground the justification for the case study at hand in the fields of CTS, Filipino Studies, and PVS.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The broad outlook for this thesis is informed by the intellectual practice of critical theory and the post-positivist theories of postcolonialism and poststructuralism. The post-positivist theoretical position operates in dialog with and simultaneously departs from the dominant intellectual paradigm of rationalist and positivist research by tending towards a subjective understanding of knowledge as a product of cultural context(s), which the researcher is imbued with from the onset of research and experimentation.⁷ Amidst the complex study of violence, the Philippines, and terrorism lie implicit assumptions and contested concepts with regards to what the fields know, what can be known, and how it can be known as a matter of epistemological and ontological inquiry. What does it mean to be a sovereign and Filipino nation? What is terrorism? What is violence? Such questions which underline this thesis require a sort of intellectual reflexivity whereby the researchers of these fields themselves, for the sake of intellectual advancement and rigour, prod at the boundaries of knowledge and “reveal the discourses that shape our work and open possibilities for thinking about our work as we get on with it.”⁸ This is done, according to Paul Hart, by analysing the immediate intellectual “reflexes” or responses of researchers when complex phenomena and issues present themselves as they emerge in the real world.⁹ This thesis thus seeks to interrogate the nature of violence, political sovereignty, and terrorism by understanding how power itself informs such concepts within not only the fields of CTS, Filipino studies, and PVS, but also within the Duterte administration itself.

⁷ Ruth Groff, *Critical Realism, Post-Positivism and the Possibility of Knowledge* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 12-35; Thomas J. Biersteker, “Critical Reflections on Post-Positivism in International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1989): 263-7.

⁸ Paul Hart, “Transitions in thought and practice: links, divergences and contradictions in post-critical inquiry,” *Environmental education research* 11, no. 4 (2005): 399.

⁹ Hart, “Transitions,” 399.

To understand such concepts of violence, nationhood, and sovereignty, this thesis draws on the intellectual works of Achille Mbembe and Michel Foucault as respectively postcolonial and post-structural theorists who have explored the essences of life, death, sovereignty, and violence. Postcolonialism operates under the ambit that much of the present experience, including knowledge, identity, theory, history, praxis, relations, and spatiality, are informed by the experiences of colonialism and thus subjected to the power relations of the coloniser and colonised, whereby the normative aims of postcolonialism are to interrogate the colonial ways of thinking and in the case of decoloniality, dismantle such knowledge systems and posit new decolonial ways of thinking.¹⁰ Much of the above definition, which operates as a rough amalgamation of various perspectives from the disciplines of postcolonial geography, literary studies, sociology, philosophy, and political studies, generally converges on the ways that colonialism has created a set of discourses and ways of knowing that govern life in post-colonial states. Note the addition of the hyphen that implicates an after-period (post-colonial) beyond formal institutional decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s, and the lack thereof in the term postcolonial, where the project of post/de-coloniality recognises the imperative to deconstruct totalising colonial discourses and narratives towards a viewpoint of subjectivity.¹¹ The movement towards subjectivity and the idea of multiplicity/multitudes in place of objectivity is in dialog with the works of poststructuralist theorists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, of whom

¹⁰ Tariq Jazeel, *Postcolonialism*, (Routledge, 2019), 1-21; Jazeel, *Postcolonialism*, 125-148; Gurminder K. Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15-33; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2012), 245-74; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 65.

¹¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 271-5.

much of the works on power, discourses, and knowledge synergise with understandings of colonial power, discourse and knowledge.¹²

Postcolonial ways of thinking and research emerged from the 1950s through to the 1970s in the field of literary studies and psychology as a reaction to the onset of formal decolonisation and wars in formerly colonised states in Africa and West, South, and Southeast Asia. This emerging field encouraged new ways of writing and thinking within Western institutions that prioritised an epistemic “disobedience” against “hierarchies of being and practices that Western knowledge legitimates.”¹³ Postcolonialism and decoloniality recognise the persistence of colonial metanarratives, even after much of the formal colonial institutions had been eliminated; the “continuities of power relations that were born in colonialism.”¹⁴ To this end, this thesis, especially its second chapter, seeks to understand how colonial power relations shape the definitions of the modern Philippine state as both a “post-colony” and a “postcolonial Philippine state,” especially within the justifications of the Duterte administration’s actions on Negros and the more broadly, the study of violence, counterterrorism, and postcolonial nationhood throughout the history of the Philippines.

Largely written during the 1960s and 1970s, post-structural works question how structures of power and overarching metanarratives construct society’s perception of truths, knowledge, objectivity, and reality without necessarily attributing them to any one overarching power structure as postcolonialism does. Like postcolonialism, however, poststructuralism understands epistemologically that universal ideas or metanarratives, especially those developed

¹² Aniruddha Chowdury, *Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity and History: Phenomenology, Critical Theory, and Postcolonial Thought* (Brill, 2013), 155-9; Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2016), 537-555; Bhabha, *Location*, 200-35.

¹³ Ali Mehji, *A Critical Synergy: Race, Decoloniality, and World Crises* (Temple University Press, 2023), 35-37.

¹⁴ Mehji, *Critical Synergy*, 48.

in Enlightenment-era theories of rationality, cannot exist without some subjugation of an alternative way of knowing, whether it be the knowledge suppressed by industrial capitalism or the political repression of totalitarian regimes in Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union.¹⁵ Much of the post-structural thinking of the 1960s and 1970s was brought on by various European countries' reckoning with colonialism and the legacies of fascism and communism, thus tending to grapple with largely European intellectual traditions. Overall, the works of poststructuralism and postcolonialism share a degree of intellectual synergy in their understanding of subjectivity and knowledge production, though poststructuralism may go further than postcolonialism by outright rejecting the postcolonial metanarrative of coloniality. This does not contradict, however, much of the methodological and epistemological synergy that the two fields share, and such a debate lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Necropolitics

One major body of work that engages with postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and the study of violence is that of Achille Mbembe, most notably known for his work *Necropolitics*. Mbembe's focus on the postcolonial issues of violence and enmity within the context of Africa and West Asia were developed in response to an integral post-structural figure, Michel Foucault, for which the theory of necropolitics (a politics of letting die) was developed in dialog with Foucault's understanding of biopolitics (a politics of making live).¹⁶ Mbembe's reflexive post/decolonial instinct recognizes that the biopolitics/biopower that Foucault discussed simply could not account for the complexities of the African and Palestinian colonial experiences, especially

¹⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1979), 29-30; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-197*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper (Vintage Books, 1980), 109-133.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Society must be defended: lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (Picador, 2003), 254; Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 65.

the precarious conditions of postcolonial life as a consistent exposure to near-death conditions.¹⁷

Mbembe also entertains a larger discussion about the nature of the Westphalian democratic project in the present day as an inherently exclusionary system, alongside discussions of how modern technologies of war and neoliberalism routinely expose those in postcolonial states to routine danger and varying forms of violence.¹⁸ Through understanding Mbembe's work, many throughlines can be drawn from the broader postcolonial and post-structural understandings within CTS, Filipino studies, and PVS.

Critical Terrorism Studies

Within the field of terrorism studies, the field of CTS stems from the meeting of terrorism studies and the post-discourses that inform this thesis. CTS sees the traditional study of terrorism from the 1970s and 1980s into the present day within the context of a society that remains largely "Western" and biased in its epistemology and ontology.¹⁹ CTS relies on broadening the field of terrorism studies to other disciplines outside the scope of international relations and security studies while also challenging the dominant metanarratives of security studies' largely Eurocentric epistemological, ontological, discursive, and methodological practices informed by rationalism and scientism.²⁰ By advocating for a recognition of knowledge as a product of subjectivity and circumstance, where knowledge is understood "as a social process constructed through language, discourse, and inter-subjective practices," CTS operates by understanding subjectivity and undertaking critical interrogations into ideas or concepts taken to be as

¹⁷ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 42-65.

¹⁸ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 9-41; 93-116.

¹⁹ Marie Breen Smyth et al., "Critical Terrorism Studies – an introduction," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1-4.

²⁰ Smyth, "Critical Terrorism Studies," 3-4; Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglas, "The terrorist subject: terrorism studies and the absent subjectivity," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008): 28-30.

apparently objective, given, rational, or natural.²¹ The debate between traditional and critical terrorism studies need not be rehashed ad nauseum, but rather it should be understood that the intellectual practice of reflexivity and subjectivity in CTS must be seen as a reflection of both its epistemological roots in critical theory and critical security studies and its synergy with postcolonialism and poststructuralism more broadly.²²

The concept of terrorism remains contested, meaning that much of the fields of critical and traditional terrorism studies still struggle to agree on a definition of terrorism. The contestation of defining terrorism as a concept can be traced to issues with defining its constituent elements and the structural issues of who “gets” to do the defining.²³ As discussed by Melissa Finn, Bessma Momani, and Gilbert Ramsay, the act of agreeing on or defining terrorism already “problematize[s] research and practitioner assumptions,” where traditional terrorism studies’ quest for definitional uniformity undermines the utility of heterogenous concepts of terrorism within different political contexts.²⁴ CTS’ disobedience with defining terrorism is critiqued by more traditional scholars for only promoting a lack of consensus, Othering traditional scholars, and not offering definitional utility for policy or further analysis.²⁵ This

²¹ Richard Jackson, “The core commitments of critical terrorism studies,” *European Political Science* 6, no. 3 (2007): 246.

²² Lee Jarvis, “Three waves of critical terrorism studies: agenda-setting, elaboration, problematisation,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 3 (2024): 477.

²³ Mark Youngman, “Building ‘Terrorism Studies’ as an Interdisciplinary Space: Addressing Recurring Issues in the Study of Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 5 (2020): 1091-1105; Melissa Finn and Bessma Momani, “Building foundations for the comparative study of state and non-state terrorism,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2017): 379-403; Gilbert Ramsay, “Why terrorism can, but should not be defined,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 8, no. 2 (2015): 211-228; Timothy Shanahan, “Betraying a certain corruption of the mind: how (and how not) to define ‘terrorism’,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3, no. 2 (2010): 173-190; Lee Jarvis, “The Space and Faces of Critical Terrorism Studies,” *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 1 (2009): 5-27; Alex Schmid, *Political terrorism: a new guide to actors, authors, concepts, data bases, theories, and literature* (Transaction Publishers, 2005).

²⁴ Finn and Momani, “Building Foundations,” 379; Ramsay, “Why terrorism,” 211.

²⁵ John Horgan and Michael J. Boyle, “A case against ‘Critical Terrorism Studies’,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008): 51-64; Torsten Michel and Anthony Richards, “False dawns or new horizons? Further issues and challenges for Critical Terrorism Studies,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 2, no. 3 (2009): 399-413; Asta Maskaliūnaitė, “Divided by Ethical Choices? New or Old Debates between ‘mainstream’ Terrorism Scholars and

difference among CTS and traditional terrorism studies in their approaches to terrorism can be traced to fields' ontological and conceptual differences regarding the usage of the concept of terrorism itself.

Much of the traditional terrorism studies literature understands terrorism from a tactical perspective, that is violence as an instrument for political aims largely at the sub-state level, and works from this standpoint to typologise and explain various actor behaviours.²⁶ For CTS, terrorism is more of a narrative-based concept that centres how societies and governments come to define who terrorists are, what terrorism is, and how they develop the methods of countering such terrorism, and thus posits a different approach to the study of terrorism by identifying biases and preconceptions among those who are defining or utilising the concept of terrorism.²⁷ CTS should thus not be seen as a complete refutation of traditional terrorism studies, but rather as a related but separate project that is geared towards understanding the role of power within narratives about terrorism and terrorists. There is synergy between CTS and the postcolonial and post-structural approaches regarding the deep complexities and social realities of studying such a diverse concept as (counter)terrorism within the context of various post-colonial states.

CTS continuously offers a productive and intriguing discussion of the concept of state terrorism. The concept of state terrorism within the CTS literature is informed by not only the experiences of the Holocaust in Europe, but also much of the colonial and post-colonial regimes of Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and Latin America during the Cold War.

Their Critics," in *Ethics and Counter-Terrorism*, eds. Magdalena Badde-Revue and Marie-Des-Neiges Ruffo de Calabre (Brill, 2018), 58-64.

²⁶ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism, Third Edition* (Columbia University Press, 2017), 38-40; Dipak K. Gupta, *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence: The life cycle of birth, growth, transformation, and demise* (Routledge, 2008), 1-14; Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, 5-28.

²⁷ Finn and Bomani, "Building," 383-4; Lee Jarvis and Michael Lister, "State terrorism research and critical terrorism studies: an assessment," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7, no. 1 (2014): 48-50; Ramsay, "Defined," 216-23.

Generally, state terrorism emerged as a concept within the international relations and critical security studies literature (see Chomsky and Herman's *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism: The Political Economy of Human Rights – Vol. 1*) and later within CTS to counteract a perceived overemphasis on non-state armed groups in much of traditional terrorism studies' analysis. This reflex was a response to state violence in regimes like Guatemala, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile during the 1970s and 1980s, Apartheid South Africa writ large, and many American-backed regimes in Southeast Asia like Indonesia, South Vietnam, and the Philippines.²⁸

Three major strands of thought come from the discussion and definition of state terrorism. Firstly, and most importantly, the implementation of fear and terror within a general populace is integral to much of the CTS literature on state terrorism, especially coming out of the Latin American context and later grafted onto various political contexts. As discussed by Raphael and Holden and their respective discussions of Colombia and the Philippines' utilisation of death squads who are abetted by or even staffed by state security forces, a "climate of fear" stems from the threat and usage of violence against those dissenting against the state.²⁹

²⁸ Tamir Bar-On and Miguel Paradela-Lopez, "Limitations and inconsistencies of using the four waves of modern terrorism to understand Latin America," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 16, no. 4 (2023): 744-766; Simon Taylor, "Status Quo Terrorism: State-Terrorism in South Africa during Apartheid," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35, no. 2 (2023): 304-20; Ruth Blakeley, *Neoliberalism and State Terrorism: the North in the South* (Routledge, 2009), 85-91; Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism: The Political Economy of Human Rights – Vol. 1* (Haymarket Books, 2014); Michael Stohl, "States, Terrorism and State Terrorism: The Role of Superpowers," in *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism*, eds. Robert O. Slater and Michael Stohl (Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).

²⁹ Sam Raphael, "Paramilitarism and state terror in Colombia," in *Contemporary State Terrorism*, eds. Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy and Scott Poynting (Routledge, 2009), 165; Ruth Blakeley, "State violence as state terrorism," in *The Ashgate research companion to political violence*, ed. Marie Breen-Smyth (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012); William N. Holden, *President Rodrigo Duterte and the War on Drugs: Fear and Loathing in the Philippines* (Lexington Books, 2020), 128-30.

Secondly, both CTS and traditional terrorism studies discuss the diversity of the actors involved in state terrorism, many of whom are directly a part of the state, or at the very least, condoned by state. While state terrorism is present in traditional terrorism studies, the concept remains underrepresented and often privileges the role of non-state groups under contract by the state rather than discussions of the state actively utilising its security forces against its citizens as a “state terrorist.” This is the case in many of the discussions about the United Kingdom’s role in the Troubles in Northern Ireland; that “there is an implicit sense that states do not commit terrorism directly, but they may support non-state groups that do.”³⁰ The difference in definitions underscores the different projects of traditional terrorism studies and CTS, and as such, CTS problematises the implicit claims over who can commit a terrorist act, whether it be non-state groups or the state themselves.

In the above examples of Colombia and the Philippines, the state(s) directly condones or legitimates the violence used by non-state groups, many of whom are staffed by state security forces, though much of CTS’ discussion of state terrorism centres the violence directly undertaken by state security forces. The centering of state violence in state terrorism can be found in Ariel Heryanto’s discussion of Suharto-era Indonesia during the 1960s, Ruth Blakeley’s discussion of the British and American repression of independence movements in Kenya, Malaya, Korea, and the Philippines during the 1950s and 1960s, or Victoria Mason’s allegations of Israeli violations of international humanitarian law in its targeting of Palestinians in Operation Cast Lead from 2008-2009.³¹

³⁰ Richard Jackson, “The ghosts of state terror: knowledge, politics and terrorism studies,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 3 (2008): 381; Shir Daphna-Tekoah and Ayelet Harel-Shalev. “Beyond Binaries: Analysing Violent State Actors in Critical Studies.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no.2 (2017): 253-273.

³¹ Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2005); Blakeley, *Neoliberalism*, 81-91; Victoria Mason, “‘No permission to shoot in Gaza is necessary’: Israeli state

Thirdly, the expanded typology of violence under the banner of state terrorism has come to include not only civil violence (i.e. violence of a government against its own citizens), but also the utilisation of terrorist tactics under the auspices of international counterterrorism through drone warfare or even the day-to-day security regulations of a state. An extensive sub-literature within CTS has discussed the foreign policy of the United States in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq after the September 11th attacks as form of state terror, especially through the utilisation of drones as panopticon-esque means of instilling fear in people within said countries.³² Others have also discussed various states' "active cultivation of a politics of fear" through a discourse of risk management to justify surveillance measures on their own citizens that violate the civil rights of citizens as a form of state terrorism, especially under the ambit of the Global War on Terror (GWOT).³³

Mbembe's necropolitics has been used in conjunction with state terrorism in some cases to bolster the discussion of expanded typologies of violence and the role that states have in fostering terror within a population as a means of exercising "the power to kill... or to expose to death... under the guise of war, resistance, or the war on terror."³⁴ Necropolitics has been used to discuss the utilisation of drone warfare by France, the United States, and the United Kingdom in Africa and West Asia under the ambit of counterterrorism. Marina Espinoza and Ezenwa E. Olumba argue that the "essentially hostile and aggressive gaze(s) of intelligence analysts and

terror against Palestinians in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead," in *Counter-Terrorism and State Political Violence: the 'war on terror' as terror*, eds. Scott Poynting and David Whyte (Routledge, 2012).

³² Marina Espinoza, "State terrorism: orientalism and the drone programme," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 376-93; Ruth Blakeley, "Drones, state terrorism and international law," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 2 (2018): 321-41; Shala Cachelin, "The U.S. drone programme, imperial air power and Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 16, no. 2 (2023): 287-304.

³³ Luca Mavelli, "The Governmentality of Terrorism: Uncertainty, risk management, and surveillance," in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies*, ed. Richard Jackson (Routledge, 2016); Oscar Gakuo Mwangi and Catherine Waithera Mwangi, "Securitisation and space of terrorism in Kenya's National Police Service counterterrorism discourse," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 1 (2024): 66-89.

³⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 66.

military officials” ameliorates the distinctions between civilians and the “terrorist suspects,” creating a dehumanising discourse of (counter)terror amongst populations of “bad guy[s]” within the cordoned-off “terrorist hot spots” and a program of surveying and administering fear and violence against “populations worthy of being put to death [and] thus precluding discrimination.”³⁵ The combination of necropolitics and state terrorism remains comparatively under-utilised in CTS and overtly focused on the GWOT, though this thesis utilises such an approach to understand the complexities of state violence utilised by the Duterte regime on Negros.

On the topic of the terrorism studies and the Philippines, both traditional terrorism studies and CTS centre the role that the GWOT has been extended to and utilised by the Philippine state in the context of Islamic fundamentalism, especially in the discussions of non-state groups like the Abu Sayyaf, the Jemaah Islamiyah, and the Moro Islamic/ Moro National Liberation Fronts. Mirroring the broader trends of study within traditional terrorism studies and CTS discussed above, much of the Philippine-GWOT discussions respectively discuss the role that non-state Islamic terrorist groups and the Philippine state have in the utilisation of (state) terrorist tactics under the ambit of the GWOT.³⁶ This discussion of the Philippine state within CTS and terrorism studies, however, has infrequently discussed the related utilisation of state terrorism against leftists and red-tagged individuals within the Philippines outside the work of few scholars.³⁷ Much of the discussion of the Philippines centres transnational, non-state, and

³⁵ Espinoza, “State terrorism,” 380-4; Ezenwa E. Olumba, “The necropolitics of drone bases and use in the African context,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 18, no. 1 (2025): 147.

³⁶ Maria A. Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda’s Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia* (Free Press, 2003); Jim Glassman, “Imperialism Imposed and Invited: The “War on Terror” Comes to Southeast Asia,” in *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence*, eds. Derek Gregory and Allan Pred (Routledge, 2007).

³⁷ William N. Holden, “Ashes from the phoenix; state terrorism and the party-list groups in the Philippines,” *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 4 (2009): 377-93; William N. Holden, “Neoliberalism and state terrorism in the

religious groups within the largely international counterterrorism discourse on the GWOT, where the study of anti-left-wing violence in the Philippines is relegated to other literatures on civil society, political activism, and genocide studies.³⁸ This is a particular blind spot in terrorism studies broadly (and especially CTS), as terrorism studies has demonstrated its ability to extensively explore state-led anti-left-wing counterterrorism efforts in other contexts such as Northern Ireland and Spain.³⁹ This thesis thus seeks to expand on the comparatively understudied trend of red-tagging and anti-leftist violence in the Philippine context, especially through the methods and theories within the field of CTS.

Overall, the CTS literature expands the conceptions of knowledge from traditional terrorism studies by problematizing notions of objective or consensus-based knowledge, alongside the immense conceptual contributions of state terrorism within postcolonial and post-structural concepts. This thesis seeks to contribute to and expand upon the CTS literature by expanding on the field's discussions of necropolitics and state terrorism within the context of the Philippines and red-tagging. As such, this thesis employs similar interpretive and critical research methods, especially the post-structural and postcolonial analytical frameworks employed in both Mbembe's and CTS' interrogations of (state) terrorism. By expanding the ambit of study to the Philippines as well, the field of Filipino studies must be examined for its pertinent trends, especially in the study of the Duterte regime.

Philippines: the fingerprints of Phoenix," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4, no. 3 (2011): 331-50; Rolando B. Tolentino and Sarah S. Raymundo, *Kontra-Gahum: Academics Against Political Killings* (IBON Books, 2006), 182-202

³⁸ Dahlia Simangan and Jess Melvin. "'Destroy and Kill 'the left'': Duterte on Communist Insurgency in the Philippines with a Reflection on the Case of Suharto's Indonesia," *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 2 (2019): 214-26.

³⁹ Eleanor Leah Williams, "Counterterrorism and just intelligence, an oxymoron? The ethical analysis of internment without trial in Northern Ireland," *Critical Terrorism Studies* 16, no. 1 (2023): 42-61; Inaki Sagardoy-Leuza, "The Altasu case: terrorism without terrorists," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13, no. 2 (2020): 296-311.

Filipino studies, which broadly encompasses the study of the Philippine society and culture, has experienced an immense intellectual shift in terms of both the knowledge base (what is being studied) alongside a large demographical shift (who is doing the studying) from its early origins.⁴⁰ Early Filipino studies dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was largely then called Philippine studies, was driven by a flurry of mostly Spanish and American academic interest in the colony of the Philippines following both Spain and the United States' colonisation of the Philippines. Much of the Spanish and American history written on the Philippines in early Filipino studies emerged as an expression of the “discovery” of the Philippines and its subsequent colonisation: an expression of Filipino studies as a history or a “credible written record of events” written by “the white, or European race [that] is, above all others, the great historical race,” lauded in immense “mystery surrounding this reported paradise... [as] there was a scramble... for an opportunity to join in the crusade [of] this lucrative colony.”⁴¹ Thus, the initial intrigue in the Philippines was largely colonial for its attempts to justify the Spanish and American colonisation of the Philippines.

The intellectual practices of Filipino studies strayed from its American-centric roots beginning in the 1970s and 1980s into the present day, as more Filipino scholars have begun to study the Philippines within the social sciences and humanities at major universities like the University of the Philippines at Diliman alongside diasporic Filipinos at various American and Canadian institutions. Some of Filipino studies' forerunners like Zeus Salazar and Remigio E.

⁴⁰ Martin F. Manalansan and Augusto Espiritu, *Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora* (New York University Press, 2016).

⁴¹ David P. Barrows, *A History of the Philippines* (American Book Company, 1905); F.D. Millet, *The Expedition to the Philippines* (Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899).

Agpalo, alongside their intellectual successors like Susanah Lily L. Mendoza, Reynaldo C. Ileto, Epifanio San Juan Jr., Vicente L. Rafael, Martin F. Manalansan, and Augusto F. Espiritu, developed an interdisciplinary mix of post-structural and postcolonial approach to studying the Philippines. The seminal works in Filipino studies address the pitfalls of colonial knowledge and discourses within Philippine society as an epistemological throughline in the study of Filipino identity, education, languages, political institutions, history, sexuality, culture, and literature.⁴²

The postcolonial and post-structural undercurrent in modern Filipino studies has focused on the long historicisation of current events in relation to Spanish and American colonisation. One aspect of this historicisation is a discussion of the Philippines' history with authoritarianism and authoritarian rhetoric/discourse. For Gene Segarra Navera, a post-structural discourse analysis of the language used by previous dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. is key to historicising authoritarianism, where Navera discusses the role that "the ghost of constitutional authoritarianism" has shaped how the present Filipino society "talk[s] about democracy, peace and security, rebellion, the military solution, political stability, dissent, and criticism of the national leadership."⁴³ For Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, modern discourses on authoritarianism are driven by the legacies of colonisation alongside emerging economic and political undercurrents outside of the Philippines.⁴⁴ As such, much of the scholarly attention on authoritarianism in the Philippines has centred not on a debate on the defining characteristics of authoritarianism itself

⁴² See especially: Augusto Fauni Esposito, *Five Faces of Exile: the Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals* (Stanford University Press, 2005); Zeus A. Salazar, "The *Pantayo* Perspective as a Discourse Towards *Kabisanan*," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, no. 1 (2000): 123-152; Vicente L. Rafael, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language Amidst Wars of Translation* (Duke University Press, 2016); Susanah Lily L. Mendoza, *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora: The Politics of Theorizing Filipino and Filipino American Identities* (Routledge, 2002).

⁴³ Gene Segarra Navera, "Metaphorizing Martial Law: Constitutional Authoritarianism in Marcos's Rhetoric (1972-1985)," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 66, no. 4 (2018): 446.

⁴⁴ Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "The Philippines: predatory regime, growing authoritarian figures," *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 3 (2009): 335-353.

(patrimonialism, corruption, plunder, the co-optation of state security forces, etc.), but rather how the throughline of colonial authoritarianism in Philippine society has shaped authoritarianism among different leaders within Filipino society. Another major trend of this historicisation of authoritarianism is the discussion of the almost immunological nature of the Philippine state in targeting progressive or left-wing dissident movements as particular enemies of the state through the different paths and methods undertaken by the various administrations at different points in Philippine history.⁴⁵

Filipino studies' focus on authoritarianism increased in intensity with the ascendancy of Duterte to the presidential office in 2016, especially regarding the primacy of violence and impunity as a central theme in many discussions. As discussed by Sol Iglesias, the violence deployed by Duterte's state forces serves as an indicator for democratic backsliding in the Philippines, which is a particularity of the Duterte regime when compared to other authoritarian regimes in the Philippines and their co-optation of electoral competition.⁴⁶ For Mark R. Thompson, the violence of the WOD is a primary indicator of the authoritarian populist style of Duterte, which departs from the perceived corrupt "liberal reformism" of previous presidential administrations.⁴⁷ Immense scholarly attention on Duterte's utilisation of violence and authoritarianism has focused on his WOD, though comparatively little to no discussion has been made of Duterte's WOT and the utilisation of violence in such context as an expression of

⁴⁵ Vicente L. Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte* (Duke University Press, 2022), 89-93; Holden, "Ashes from the phoenix," 377-93; Colleen Woods, *Freedom Incorporated: Anticommunism and Philippine Independence in the Age of Decolonization* (Cornell University Press, 2020); Colleen Woods, "Seditious Crimes and Rebellious Conspiracies: Anti-communism and US Empire in the Philippines," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 1 (2018): 61-88; Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Sol Iglesias, "Violence and Impunity: Democratic Backsliding in the Philippines and the 2022 Elections," *Pacific Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2022): 580-1.

⁴⁷ Mark R. Thompson, "Duterte's Violent Populism: Mass Murder, Political Legitimacy and the Death of Development in the Philippines," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 52, no. 3 (2022): 406-8.

authoritarianism.⁴⁸ Many of discussions of Duterte's WOD also analyse either purely national perspectives (for example, Duterte's whole-of-nation approach to the WOD) or sub-national/municipal politics (for example, the mechanisms of power of the Duterte administration in the WOD in Bagong Silang).⁴⁹ While there is an extensive literature on the political and socioeconomic history of Negros preceding the Duterte administration, the author of this thesis could find only one discussion of the Duterte regime's national or sub-national level policies in the WOT that include Negros as a primary area of analysis, with most including Negros as a tertiary or passing example.⁵⁰ This thesis seeks to remedy such a gap by solely focusing on Negros as a special site for the deployment of state terrorism during the Duterte regime's WOT, as will be discussed in depth in a later section.

A subset of the discussion on authoritarianism and violence also uses the theories of postcolonialism and necropolitics as central theoretical perspectives, much of which has exclusively focused on, in the context of the Philippines, the Duterte regime. Both William Holden and Noah Theriault discuss how Duterte intensified his own brand of authoritarian state terror with the "violent colonial foundations on which the Philippine state is built" to not only expose environmental activists, dissidents, and the country's poor to conditions of death, but also by creating an equally paralysing sense of anxiety about the Philippine environment and its climate vulnerability.⁵¹ In the context of urban violence, necropolitics is used by Jose Kervin

⁴⁸ Sol Iglesias, "Violence and Impunity: Democratic Backsliding in the Philippines and the 2022 Elections," *Pacific Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2022): 580-81.

⁴⁹ Steffen Bo Jensen and Karl Hapal, *Communal Intimacy and the Violence of Politics: Understanding the War on Drugs in Bagong Silang* (Cornell University Press, 2022); Aries A Arugay and Justin Keith A. Baquisal, "Bowed, Bent, & Broken: Duterte's Assaults on Civil Society in the Philippines," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 42, no. 3 (2023): 328-49.

⁵⁰ Karl Hapal et al., "Protecting land activists from state violence: the case of NFSW and KMP in Negros, the Philippines," *Journal of the British Academy* 10, no. 3 (2022): 57-77.

⁵¹ Noah Theriault, "Euphemisms We Die By: On Eco-Anxiety, Necropolitics, and Green Authoritarianism in the Philippines," in *Beyond Populism: Angry Politics and the Twilight of Neoliberalism*, eds. Jeff Maskovsky and Sophie Bjork-James (West Virginia University Press, 2020), 194-9; William N. Holden, "Climate Change,

Cesar B. Calabias and Arnisson Andre C. Ortega to discuss how the Duterte regime's deployment of both physical and structural violence in Manila expressly targets the urban poor by exposing them to conditions of death, tending towards a political discourse of the poor as "waste/garbage" within the "Necroburbs" (a combination of necropolitics and the term "suburb" to describe urban necropolitics).⁵² This thesis seeks to further this line of inquiry to understand how Duterte's WOT can be understood as an expression of necropolitical authoritarian politics while also typologising the forms of violence deployed by the Duterte regime on Negros. Before undertaking such a project of typologising violence in the Duterte regime, the literature on peace and violence studies must be interrogated to understand the methodologies and perspectives in studying violence.

Peace and Violence Studies

Similar to the differences between traditional and critical terrorism studies, peace and violence studies (PVS) emerged as a different intellectual project when compared to its companion of strategic studies. The preceding field of strategic studies emerged largely within the United States following the end of the Second World War, driven by a post-war economic boom that generated a political climate for American post-secondary educational institutions to begin studying both the historical implications and emerging trends of warfare and the use of military force.⁵³ The expressed goal of strategic studies was to explore "the conditions that make the use of force more likely, the ways that the use of force affects

neauthoritarianism, necropolitics, and state failure: the Duterte regime in the Philippines," *Asian Geographer* 40, no. 2 (2023): 145-67.

⁵² Arnisson Andre C. Ortega, "Exposing Necroburbs: Suburban Relocation, Necropolitics, and Violence Geographies in Manila," *Antipode* 52, no. 4 (2020): 1175-95; Jose Kervin Cesar B. Calabias, "Death's Capital: Urban Poor Political Ecology and the Aesthetics of Salvaging by the Nightcrawlers of Manila," in *Environment, Media, and Popular Culture in Southeast Asia*, eds. Jason Paolo Telles, John Charles Ryan, and Jeconiah Louis Dreisbach (Springer Singapore, 2022)

⁵³ Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 212-5.

individuals, states, and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, and engage in war.”⁵⁴ Concomitantly, the project of PVS emerged within the United Kingdom following the Second World War as an inversion of strategic studies, especially as it had inverted strategic studies’ referent focus on war and replaced it with a study of peace.⁵⁵ Thus, PVS normatively positioned itself in opposition to strategic studies by demanding it study how societies can become more peaceful and find conditions more conducive to peace rather than war.⁵⁶

PVS developed its own set of methodologies and intellectual traditions, one of which was the impetus to expand and develop theories of violence beyond the traditional scope of strategic studies’ study of the use of military force. One example of this expansion of the theory of violence was a series of articles written by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, namely exemplified in his 1969 article entitled “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.”⁵⁷ Galtung understood violence as acts that violate an individual’s capabilities, seeing that “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.”⁵⁸ Such an article challenged what could be defined as violence, setting forth an interdisciplinary debate over what constitutes violence within not only international relations, but also sociology, philosophy, legal studies, gender studies, communication studies, political science, anthropology, geography, and psychology.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Walt, “Renaissance,” 212.

⁵⁵ Conrad G. Brunk, “Shaping a Vision: The Nature of Peace Studies,” in *Patterns of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, eds. Larry J. Fisk and John L. Schellenberg (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 11-33.

⁵⁶ Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167.

⁵⁷ Galtung, “Peace Research,” 167-90.

⁵⁸ Galtung, “Peace Research,” 168.

⁵⁹ Vittorio Bufacchi, “Two Concepts of Violence,” *Political Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2005): 193-204; Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence* (MIT Press, 2018); Joseph Betz, “Violence: Garver’s Definition and a Deweyan Correction,” *Ethics* 87, no. 4 (1977): 339-51; Manfred B. Steger and Nancy S. Lind, *Violence and its Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1999); Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (Picador, 2008)

The debate, concisely summed up by Vittorio Bufacchi, remains between those who define violence by its characteristic use of physical force between humans (a “minimalist conception of violence”), whereas others define violence as an act of violating something’s capabilities or functions (a “comprehensive conception of violence”).⁶⁰ The debate need not be rehashed now, but there are ideas and concepts that are illuminated by expanding the concept of violence that aid this thesis’ understanding. These two concepts extracted from PVS’ expanded study of violence are the related concepts of performative violence and semiotic violence, which will be briefly stated here and later expanded on in the first chapter.

Performative violence draws on much of the thought surrounding the conception of the “spectacle” and semiotics, as well as the ideas of performances, audiences, gazes, and objectification coming from the works of linguistics, philosophy, communication, and media studies.⁶¹ Performative violence is a comprehensive type of violence that focuses not only on an act of violation (whether the act is an assault, shooting, theft, etc.) but also its symbolic and communicative aspects, especially regarding to whom the act is meaningful.⁶² As discussed by Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, acts of violence often produce a secondary performance that can constitute a meaningful discourse for a group of individuals, whereby the discourse mediates an intersubjective reality that can be interpreted differently by witnesses, aggressors, and the aggrieved.⁶³ To this extent, performative violence is a composite phenomena where physical violence communicates meaning, and in the case of necropolitics and CTS, entails what

⁶⁰ Bufacchi, “Violence,” 197-198.

⁶¹ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-31; Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, “Understanding collective violence: the communicative and performative qualities of violence in acts of belonging,” in *Criminological Approaches to International Criminal Law*, eds. Ilias Bantekas and Emmanouela Mylonaki (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 288-315; Gavin Rae and Emma Ingala, *The Meanings of Violence: From Critical Theory to Biopolitics* (Routledge, 2018).

⁶² Charles Tilly, *The politics of collective violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 102-29.

⁶³ Murer, “Understanding collective violence,” 288-315.

behaviours or which subset of a population the act of violence seeks to dissuade against, discipline, or eviscerate from the sphere of public life.

Another related concept that studies the interrelationship of meaning and acts of violence is the concept of semiotic violence. Emerging from the works of feminist scholar Mona Lena Krook, semiotic violence operates within the comprehensive frameworks for violence that like performative violence, analyses the relationship between symbols/signs and their study (semiotics) and the study of political violence. Unlike performative violence, physical violation is completely absent in semiotic violence, as for Krook, the feminist case against semiotic violence is about “drawing on and reinforcing gender inequalities by using words and images - and in some cases, body language- to injure, discipline, and subjugate women.”⁶⁴ Semiotic violence hinges on the conceptualisation of violence as the intent to restrict an individual or group’s capability to express one self. According to Krook, semiotic violence “render[s] women invisible” or “render[s] women incompetent” in the political sphere through photographic or pornographic manipulation of women in political positions, ignoring, interrupting, or denying women’s speeches in public settings, or willful language choices that all generate “psychic injury” to such victims.⁶⁵

Semiotic violence emphasizes seemingly mundane or everyday occurrences of violation against a certain subset of the population. This theory informs the discussion of red-tagging in the Philippines.⁶⁶ This literature intersects with the projects of CTS and narrative claims of being a terrorist or terrorist sympathiser and Filipino studies’ discussion of authoritarian politics and

⁶⁴ Mona Lena Krook, “Semiotic Violence against Women: Theorizing Harms against Female Politicians,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 47, no. 2 (2022): 375.

⁶⁵ Krook, “Semiotic Violence,” 377-89.

⁶⁶ Nelson Mangaldan Buso, “The semiotics of red-tagging: hateful affects against the community pantry movement,” *Multimodal Communication* 13, no. 2 (2024): 359-74.

the targeting of dissidents under authoritarian regimes. Additionally, the theory of semiotic violence synergises with Mbembe's discussions of necropolitical power and its relation to the "society of enmity," especially by recognising the symbolic representation of dissenting populations "as type-images" or "bad objects" and thus subject to a symbolic "annihilation."⁶⁷ Having centred this thesis in said literatures, a justification of this thesis' case study must be undertaken in such context.

Case Study Justification

Choosing one of over the roughly 7,600 islands on the Philippines merits an extensive discussion as to why Negros was chosen. On the matter of a single case study methodology as a viable research method, there is an academic debate over the merits of external vs. internal validity. Case studies generally allow for the development of "evidence-based concepts... where phenomena might be revealed and theory developed" within the context of their study.⁶⁸ The usage of the case study methodology in this thesis thus distinguishes "a phenomenon from its context, [which] involves identifying an element in the social field that is of particular interest, defining the important aspects of it, describing its characteristics, and suggesting its function or importance in the social field."⁶⁹ As Carl G. Hempel discusses, case studies integrate both epistemic inquiry (for example, is it true that red-tagging is a form of state terrorism?) and substantive inquiry (for example, if it is (not) true that red-tagging is a form of state terrorism, what are the circumstances of this (non)relationship?), where said substantive inquiries delimit the boundaries of the epistemic inquiry.⁷⁰ In this case, the presumed general thesis is that red-

⁶⁷ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 46-7.

⁶⁸ Mary S. Morgan, "Case Studies: One Observation or Many? Justification or Discovery?" *Philosophy of Science* 79, no. 5 (2012): 671.

⁶⁹ Morgan, "Case Studies," 672.

⁷⁰ Carl G. Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (Free Press, 1965), 333-35.

tagging was a form of state terrorism on Negros during the Duterte regime, broadly seeking to address the epistemic links between red-tagging and state terrorism within the substantive contextual boundaries of the Duterte regime and Negros.

The Merits of the Single Case Study

Case study validity is the essential merit of the case study's central argument, where a strong internal validity entails an extensive and demonstrable relationship amongst variables within the confines of the case study. A strong internal validity, however, can come at the expense of a weak external validity, which relates to the applicability of the case study's findings and demonstrated relationships among variables to other contexts or conditions.⁷¹ A weakness in the thesis' single case study methodology is the lack of external validity, where the single case study almost exclusively relies on an immense amount of internal validity for its merits. By disavowing any other regional comparisons –such as a comparison to Northern Luzon, Panay, or Mindanao which rely on similar industries as Negros– or even a broadened (inter)national case study comparison, the thesis lacks a degree of generalizability to other sociopolitical, geographic, or temporal circumstances. A comparatively strong internal validity, however, can equally demonstrate intensive and merited research by providing proof of a strong correlation among variables within a certain context all while inviting the possibility for further research to employ a similar methodological design in different contexts and investigation. By studying memoranda and reports exclusively pertaining to Negros during the Duterte regime, this thesis sets out to exclusively explain the relationship between red-tagging and state terrorism within a set of strict research parameters at the expense of external validity. Overall, this means that this thesis serves

⁷¹ Cátia Quintão, Pedro Andrade and Fernando Almeida, "How to Improve the Validity and Reliability of a Case Study Approach," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education* 9, no. 2 (2020): 269.

to expand the collective study of necropolitics and state terrorism within the ambit of a single case study; to make the argument that Negros during the Duterte regime represents a particularly brutal example of both necropolitics and state terrorism.

Temporal Considerations

The selection of Negros and the Duterte regime as a case study requires justification, especially considering the varied and broad history of the Philippines. Firstly, the selection of the Duterte administration as a timeline for this thesis rests primarily on the intensification of state violence in the name of counterterrorism and policing on Negros, which bears both similarities and differences to how Negros has been treated under other administrations.⁷² Upon entering the Philippine presidency in 2016 after his long political career in Davao City, much of the academic and public focused on the almost immediate usage/condonation violence against drug users, much of which occurred in urban spaces like the National Capital Region (NCR), Cebu City, and Davao City.⁷³ Duterte as a political figure alone marks a departure from traditional Philippine politicking, due in part to his appeal to penal populism and his vulgar style of political “authenticity” and the extended willingness to use violence.⁷⁴ Comparatively, there is a lack of academic focus on the extended deployment and condonation of violence under the banner of counterterrorism during the Duterte regime, especially against the New People’s Army (NPA).

The willingness to use and condone violence under the Duterte administration as an extension of “moral politics” (of differentiating between “good” and “bad” citizens) is a key

⁷² Holden, “Ashes from the phoenix,” 377-93; Peter Kreuzer, “Police Use of Deadly Force in the Philippines: Comparing Levels and Patterns Before and Since Duterte,” *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 149-66.

⁷³ For example: Sol Iglesias, “Explaining the pattern of “war on drugs” violence in the Philippines under Duterte,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 15, no. 2 (2023): 164-84.

⁷⁴ Wataru Kusaka, “Bandit Grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politics,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2017): 49-75; Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 109-14.

factor in this thesis' choice for the Duterte administration as a timeline and object of analysis.⁷⁵ Duterte's special focus on Negros as a site of necropolitical leverage over its allegedly "bad" citizens has not been studied. Negros was a focal point for the deployment of troops throughout the Duterte administration, especially from 2018-2019. In this time period, Duterte authorised Memorandum Order No. 32 that specifically "coordinate[d] the immediate deployment of additional forces of the AFP and the PNP to suppress lawless violence and acts of terror in the provinces of Samar, Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental, and the Bicol Region" alongside OPLAN Sauron. Additionally, the Duterte administration routinely condoned the vigilante killings of rights activists on Negros, such as Zara Alvarez who headed the human rights watchdog publication *Karapatan* (meaning rights in Tagalog) who was shot by unidentified assailants in Bacolod city on Negros.⁷⁶

The intensification of violence on Negros during the Duterte administration falls within the ambit of necropolitics and the sovereign exercise of violence, and as an extension of moral politics as a necropolitical project. Much of the fear stemming from the use of violence by the Duterte administration and the violence itself, although more attuned to Duterte's WOD, has been discussed as a form of state terrorism.⁷⁷ The lack of a combined discussion of red-tagging within Negros and state terrorism, however, remains the centre of attention for this thesis. The tenable link between Negros and the Duterte administration this requires a justification for Negros this thesis' case study.

⁷⁵ Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy, and the Urban Poor* (Kyoto University Press, 2017); Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 78-9.

⁷⁶ Ted Regencia, "Human rights leader killed in Philippine 'war against dissent'," *Al Jazeera*, 19 August 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/19/human-rights-leader-killed-in-philippine-war-against-dissent>

⁷⁷ Simangan and Melvin, "“Destroy and Kill ‘the left’,” 224; Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 128-34.

Economic Considerations

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), an online non-profit conflict monitor, pins Negros as a primary hotbed for NPA activity and the subsequent “continuing abuse, maltreatment, and even outright violence against farmers during times of unrest” that has characterised the history of Negros writ large.⁷⁸ This is backed up by much of the historical study of Negros’s poverty and inequality by Alfred W. McCoy, Michael S. Billig, and Filomeno V. Aguilar.⁷⁹ The choice of Negros primarily rests on two major factors: extensive wealth inequality and resistance during the reign of Duterte. When compared against other nearby islands like Cebu or Panay, there is a lack of industrial diversity and comparatively higher income inequality on Negros.

Much of this inequality (and the resistance to it) is due to the maintenance of the sugar industry that concentrates income and land ownership within the haciendas and their land-owning families juxtaposed against the landless working population.⁸⁰ Haciendas are centrally-owned sugar plantations that are not share-cropped (where farmers who do not own the land still gain a share of profits from the exported sugar) nor tenant-cropped (where farmers own the land and gain a share of profits from the exported sugar), but rather owned by a central businessperson who owns and expropriates most of the profits from the sugar exports.⁸¹ The Spanish-led colonial development of haciendas exploited the unique volcanic soil on Negros for the monocropping of sugar, which generated an economic and political institution ensuring

⁷⁸ Buenaventura, “The Communist Insurgency.”

⁷⁹ Alfred W. McCoy, “Sugar barons: Formation of a native planter class in the colonial Philippines.” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19, 3-4 (1992): 106-41; Mark S. Billig, “The rationality of growing sugar in Negros.” *Philippine Studies* 40, no. 2 (1992): 153-82. Filomeno V. Aguilar, “Sugar planter-state relations and labour processes in Colonial Philippine Haciendas,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 22, no. 1 (1994): 50-80.

⁸⁰ McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 109-10.

⁸¹ McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 109-10.

sugar remains the only viable crop of Negros while vesting political power into the few land-owning sugar barons over the landless workers.⁸² This inequality on Negros has generated chronic issues of malnutrition and persistent resistance to land reform policies from the time of their institution into the modern day.⁸³

In wake of the decline of the NPA across the span of the Duterte administration, much of the resistance to the socioeconomic issues on Negros has come from peasant advocacy groups and unions like the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) and the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL). Groups who oppose the socioeconomic policies of the Duterte administration continue to be attributed to the NPA's actions on Negros, despite both civil society's disavowal of such allegations and the NPA's willingness to come to peace talks with the Duterte administration.⁸⁴ Civil society rights advocacy from groups like the NFSW were met with routine violence from the Duterte administration on Negros, leading to the Philippines being the deadliest country for land activists in 2019 according to the human rights watchdog group Global Witness.⁸⁵ Thus, understanding the unequal political, economic, and geographic development between Negros and its neighbours is integral to this thesis' selection of Negros as an area of study. The economic considerations factor into the intersecting theories of biopolitics and necropolitics and the administration of grating and slow socioeconomic poverty and income inequality as a form of social death, as discussed by Foucault and Mbembe respectively. The

⁸² McCoy, "Sugar barons," 110.

⁸³ Gradon Diprose and Andrew McGregor, "Dissolving the sugar fields: Land reform and resistance identities in the Philippines," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 30, no. 1 (2009): 52-69.

⁸⁴ Regencia, "War against dissent"

⁸⁵ Global Witness, "Defending the Philippines," 24 September 2019, <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/defending-the-philippines/>; Al Jazeera, "'More dangerous every day': Land rights defenders killing surge," 29 July 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/29/more-dangerous-every-day-land-rights-defenders-killing-surge>; Luke Lischin, "Bloody Violence Haunts Philippine Sugar Plantations," *The Diplomat*, 30 May 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/bloody-violence-haunts-philippine-sugar-plantations-in-negros/>

systematised inequality on Negros, understood as bare subsistence or bare living, makes the island an apt case study. In addition, the resistance to this inequality is key to the routine violence on Negros, which also makes it an apt candidate to discuss a politics of death as a matter of human security and peace and violence studies.

Violence and Crime Considerations

The prevalence of death on Negros differs disproportionately when compared to other regions during the Duterte administration. As mentioned above, OPLAN Sauron explicitly targeted Negros as a heightened area for NPA activity. Another justification for Negros is the demographic makeup of the Duterte administration's targets, which overrepresents public legal counsel, trade unions, media, and human rights groups who resist the extant socioeconomic inequality. The 2018 Sagay massacre in particular started off a string of violent and public targeted extrajudicial killings on the island after 9 members of the NFSW were murdered by unidentified assailants over an alleged land dispute, all 9 of which had been posthumously red-tagged by state forces.⁸⁶ Weeks after the Sagay Massacre, Benjamin Ramos, an associated lawyer for the affected peasants of the Sagay Massacre and founder of the NUPL was shot in front of a store in Kabankalan City in Negros Occidental after being depicted on a poster circulated by the PNP that pinned him as an NPA member.⁸⁷ In April of 2019, Bernardino Patigas, a member of the human rights watchdog *Karaptan*, was shot on his motorcycle in Escalante city after being

⁸⁶ ABS-CBN News, "PNP claims slain Negros farmers' org is Red legal front," 23 October 2018, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/video/news/10/23/18/pnp-claims-slain-negros-farmers-org-is-red-legal-front>; CNN Philippines, "NPA may be behind Negros Occidental attack – PNP," 22 October 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181022153255/http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/10/22/pnp-negros-occidental-npa.html>

⁸⁷ Carlos Conde, "Another Rights Lawyer Murdered in the Philippines," *Human Rights Watch*, 7 November 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/07/another-rights-lawyer-murdered-philippines>

depicted on that same poster as Ramos.⁸⁸ Death threats were sent to members of the Negros chapter of *Karapatan* following Patigas' death.⁸⁹ In August of 2020, the education head of *Karapatan* and research officer for the Negros Health Integrated Program, Zara Alvarez, was shot dead in Bacolod City after being depicted on that same police-circulated public poster that pinned her as a member of the NPA.⁹⁰ The inextricable link between the spate of killings on Negros throughout the Duterte administration and the constant public guilt by association undertaken to link the NPA to those poised against the socioeconomic standards of Negros justifies the selection of Negros. Now, having justified both Negros and the Duterte administration as areas of focus for this thesis, this thesis will discuss the interpretive framework methodology and this thesis' guiding interpretive frameworks more broadly.

Interpretive Frameworks

In line with the thesis' research question and usage of a single case study, this thesis interprets the complexities, relationships, and contexts of violence on Negros during the Duterte administration as a "wicked problem."⁹¹ As such, this thesis uses three major interpretive propositions to understand violence on Negros through socially constructed behaviours that compose reality; as an exploration of violence amongst "the complexities and conundrums of the immensely complicated social world that we inhabit."⁹² The usage of the interpretive framework methodology is rooted in works of sociologist Max Weber and the general concept of a *Verstehen*

⁸⁸ International Federation for Human Rights, "Philippines: Killing of Mr. Bernardino Patigas and death threats against Ms. Cristina Palabay and Ms. Clarizza Singson," 13 May 2019, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/the-philippines-killing-of-mr-bernardino-patigas-and-death-threats>

⁸⁹ International Federation for Human Rights, "Mr. Bernardino Patigas"

⁹⁰ Human Rights Philippines, "Zara Alvarez," accessed 23 September 2025, <https://humanrightphilippines.org/case-studies/zara-alvarez/>

⁹¹ Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1973): 155-69.

⁹² Keith Richards, *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 6.

or interpretive understanding, whereby social reality is to be studied and understood as a constructed and subjective experience.⁹³ The interpretivist framework methodology rests on the interpretation, in this particular case, of the Duterte regime's violence within the context of the social reality found on Negros. Doing so predisposes the thesis to ask certain questions, seek certain answers, and determine a set of evidentiary standards to hold these questions and answers to, all within the Negros' sociocultural, political, economic, geographic, and historical context. This thesis owes this methodological grounding to much of the research found in the CTS literature that adopts similar methods, especially within the context of CTS' core epistemological and ontological commitments to subjectivity and meaning-making within the study of terrorism outlined above. This thesis' broad goal is to construct a robust description and narrative story of the procession of state and state-sponsored violence across the history of Negros (rooted in both CTS and Filipino studies) and the meanings that both contextualise and are derived from these acts of violence (rooted in CTS and PVS).

Furthermore, in line with the methodological backing that this thesis finds in CTS and postcolonialism, the interpretation of the phenomena in this thesis are inextricably bound by this thesis' core assumptions and biases of its sole author, or simply, the author's positionality. Partially, this thesis eschews the ethnic and national commitments of Filipino studies and postcolonialism more broadly (i.e. that Filipino studies and postcolonial studies emphasises the epistemological commitments of "Filipinos talking about Filipinos" and not necessarily the Western world talking about the postcolonial world) due to the author's position as an ethnically-European researcher at a Canadian University.⁹⁴ Such a positionality continues to be debated in

⁹³ Adil Abdul Rehman and Khalid Alharthi, "An introduction to research paradigms," *International Journal of Educational Investigations* 3, no. 3 (2018): 55-6; Anol Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research Principles, Methods, and Practices* (Global Text Project, 2012), 103-11.

⁹⁴ See notes 10 and 42 of this thesis for this dynamic.

the literatures, especially within the field of CTS.⁹⁵ This reflexive point of note against this thesis' theoretical and ontological commitments, however, need not negate the usage of postcolonial theories to attempt to understand violence on Negros within the context of the island's colonial history. By utilising theories and sources derived from postcolonial thinkers such as Mbembe and Rafael (and the fields of CTS and Filipino studies more broadly), especially within the context of the Philippines' experiences with colonialism, this thesis centres a distinctly post-colonial (towards a decolonial) basis of knowledge as an explicit commitment to advance the decolonial normative aims of the literatures it pulls from.⁹⁶ Additionally, the usage of sources that centre the experiences and recounting of state violence from the victims themselves seeks to offset much of the inherent state-centric bias found in CTS research.⁹⁷ In many ways, this thesis eschews the biases found in traditional terrorism studies and political violence (as supported in the project of CTS) by seeking to understand violence on Negros from the perspective of the people targeted by the state and not take the state's adoption of a counterinsurgency framework (and the associated traditional study of such a framework) as the frame of analysis. This is furthered by this thesis' push for interpretivist methodologies found in Filipino studies and CTS that do not seek to necessarily apply positivist methodologies to complex issues such as Filipino nationalism or the study of political violence.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Rabea M. Khan, "A case for the abolition of "terrorism" and its industry," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (2024): 1019-42; Kodili Chukwuma, "The *critical terrorism researcher*: identity, positionality, and (de)coloniality," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (2024): 854-77.

⁹⁶ Ramon Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 211-23; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Essays on the Coloniality of Power, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Khan, "Abolition,"; Chukwuma, "Critical terrorism researcher"

⁹⁷ Chukwuma, "Critical terrorism researcher"

⁹⁸ Michael Livesey, "To look for another thing, and in another way: revitalising criticality with multimodal methodologies," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (2024): 903-29.

Embedded in this thesis' approach is the normative project of naming and understanding the processes of state violence as a commitment to those who are targeted by the violence. This perspective predisposes this thesis to look at how coloniality as a top-down historical and political project renders people killable in relation to their economic livelihoods, much of which is derived from an explicit usage of local Filipino sources from local civil societal organisations to describe their experiences and interactions with the different forms of violence on Negros. Thus, while understanding that the strict positional frame of the Western researcher's gaze towards the rural postcolonial subject bears resemblance to the coloniser's study of the colonised, the methodological, epistemological, and ontological foundation of this thesis displace such a gaze by studying how coloniality and state violence impact the livelihoods of those who resist Negros' economy.

The first interpretive proposition of this thesis is that the violence on Negros can be understood in relation to the concept of the "necro-economy," in which both the Duterte administration and non-state actors aligned with the state red-tag individuals opposed to the socioeconomic and political system on Negros. Firstly, the concept of the necro-economy implies that the overall engine of an economy and its generation of capital does not focus on the production of commodities, but rather focuses on the negation of the labouring's livelihoods and exposing those who operate within the necro-economy to conditions of death.⁹⁹ Those who are red-tagged are deemed by the state to have resisted the necro-economy, and thus their resistance is met with violence. This deliberately expands upon the previous study of Philippine counterterrorism and counterinsurgency by integrating the political economic perspective on

⁹⁹ Warren Montag, "Necro-economics: Adam Smith and death in the life of the universal," *Radical Philosophy* 134 (2005): 14-7.

Negros' sugar industry while still remaining in boundaries of the field of CTS. This proposition explicitly contextualises the phenomena of violence within Negros' economy as a matter of interpretative method.

The second proposition is that the physical violence on Negros and its accompanying semiotic violence represents what Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitics.”¹⁰⁰ The brief definition of physical violence is the minimalist conception of violence discussing the use of intentional physical force to injure. The accompanying semiotic violence discussed above thus presupposes some linguistic or symbolic act that further demeans the subjects exposed to physical violence. The first portion of this proposition addresses more the of the substantive “how” of the violence undertaken by the Duterte regime, while the latter portion focuses on how this integrated form of violence operates constitutes necropolitics. Much of this operates within the boundaries of the field of CTS, Filipino studies, and PVS as well, as guides the thesis study on how intersubjective meanings, especially those derived from Filipino historical experience with colonialism, shape the procession of violence against those targeted by the Duterte regime. The third proposition is that red-tagging was undertaken as a form of state terrorism to maintain the Duterte administration's power over Negros in line with neoliberal policy aims. This proposition is most explicitly rooted in CTS, as it calls on the context of state terrorism and its utilisation in the study of the Philippines, but expands upon it by exploring red-tagging and its associated forms of violence as the phenomena to analyse. Such frameworks offer various lenses and frames to observe the case study through, while also driving much of this thesis' source selection.

¹⁰⁰ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*

Source Selection

Briefly, the sources selected are methodologically and analytically important. This thesis relies on primary journalistic and first-hand accounts of state-led violence against activists or those related to activists on Negros as its primary analysis. Essentially, anyone or any entity in the Philippines involved in violence against activists on Negros during the Duterte administration is up for analysis, whether they are victims or perpetrators. Such accounts come from multiple different perspectives and mediums. Much of the governmental discourse on red-tagging and anti-terrorism operations is available as open-source documents published by the Official Gazette of the Philippines (the government-run Philippine News Agency), government agency websites, journalistic interviews (from both local and international news outlets) and the social media accounts of involved Philippine politicians. The PNP, NTF-ELCAC, and AFP, which were all involved in anti-terrorism operations during the Duterte administration, also maintain archived public records of memoranda including both photo-visual assets (namely the posters circulated about possible terrorists on Negros) and textual assets (memorandum orders, press releases, statements from officers, etc.). Government sources thus provide an essential political and discursive lens to interpret the Duterte administration's policy actions through, especially as it relates to the discussions of semiotic violence and the red-tagging of those targeted by state-aligned/state-run groups on Negros. The study of government sources also fulfills the earlier-discussed relationship between the postcolonial and post-structural focus on intersubjective meanings and discourses as sources of meaning by creating and interpreting a cogent government discourse on red-tagging and anti-terrorism. This interpretation of a discourse on red-tagging and anti-terrorism on Negros thus

generates meaning about both the characteristics of the policy actions being undertaken and the context that they operate in.

The other essential sources to be analysed are the accounts of state violence by the aggrieved, especially those published in international human rights activist sources (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch), local activist accounts (*Karapatan*, personal blogs of activists), and in traditional/online media accounts (Rappler, ABS-CBN, Philippine Star, Manila Bulletin, etc.). The interpretive and discursive nature of the postcolonial and post-structural study of narratives is also fulfilled from multiple perspectives, where this thesis generates its analysis by observing the top-down (statist) and bottom-up (activist) meanings and discourses about state violence within the context of state terrorism. Equally important is the context gleaned from such accounts, which is bolstered by previous secondary analyses of Negros. Interviews of those involved in/affected by the WOT on Negros could have been conducted to further bolster an analysis of either perspective, though there are ethical issues regarding the conduct of such interviews about the Duterte administration in the Philippines whereby the safety of both the researcher and the interviewees (especially those who have been red-tagged) can be compromised by vigilante and state interference through harassment or outright murder.¹⁰¹ Therefore, this thesis is justified in studying secondary source accounts of violence to glean an essential and initial phenomenological account of the violence itself, while interpreting the narratives and discourses that are intertwined in the discussion of political violence and state terrorism on Negros during the Duterte administration.

¹⁰¹ William N. Holden, "Fear and loathing in the Philippines: the ethics of researching President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs," in *Ethical Dilemmas in International Criminological Research*, eds. Michael Adorian and Rosemary Ricciardelli (Routledge, 2023), 149-64.

Having laid out the methodological and theoretical basis for this thesis, the first chapter will theorise a form of violence called necro-semiotic terror. This will be accomplished by finding overlaps in various existing strains of thought on the study of violence, namely performative violence, semiotic violence, necropolitics, red-tagging, violence in neoliberal capitalism, and state terrorism. While red-tagging is a predominantly Philippines-specific phenomenon, necro-semiotic terror can be understood as a generalizable form of a violence moving beyond the context of Negros. The development of necro-semiotic terror will not simply synthesise the various studies of violence, but rather it will demonstrate how they effectively interact to form a new phenomenon. By exploring the theory of necro-semiotic terror as distinct form of violence, the thesis can later develop the theory within the context of Negros in its second and third chapters.

Chapter 1: Typologising Violence: Towards a Theory of Necro-Semiotic Terror

Nebulising Violence

Essentially, this chapter sets out to typologise the various intellectual currents in the study of violence presupposed within the concepts of necropolitics, red-tagging, and state terrorism and their overlaps. The core overlap of these fields will be explained in depth in this chapter yet will be stated briefly here. The overlap generates a form of political violence called *necro-semiotic terror*, which integrates the existing conceptual underpinnings of performative, semiotic, and physical violence such that the distinctions between the semiotic and the physical cannot be disentangled within the phenomenon. Summarised, necro-semiotic terror is defined in two major parts that will be explored:

- The violence of necro-semiotic terror creates devalued *objects* on one end, and fully human subjects on the other.
- The effect of necro-semiotic terror is a form of social control, where the violence dissuades people from behaviours that may cause them to become devalued objects.

In order to parse through the components of this definition, this chapter will first locate the constituent elements of physical, performative, and semiotic violence within the concepts of necropolitics, red-tagging, and state terrorism. Quickly, however, this process demonstrates that the definitional overlap of each type of violence within the concepts of necropolitics, red-tagging, and state terrorism, tends towards the phenomenon of necro-semiotic terror, where categorical separations between the colonial, physical, temporal, spatial, performative, and semiotic are collapsed in a fashion similar to the works Denise Ferreira da Silva's

conceptualisation of the “wounded captive bodies in the scene of subjugation.”¹⁰² The chapter will then parse through both points of the definition above, namely the violence against objects, and the utility of necro-semiotic terror as a means of social control through the ascription of value.

Necro-semiotic terror illuminates a dark spot within the broad study of violence. As Vittorio Bufacchi points out, a growing requirement to advance the study of violence and the postcolonial practice is to understand the relationships between colonality (understood as both a historical process of injustice and an ongoing set of sociological and political ideas shaped by the experiences of colonialism within a given (post)colonial context) and violence; to underline that “a proper understanding of violence is necessary to understand the injustice of colonialism.”¹⁰³ This thesis studies the relationship between the colonial, temporal, spatial, physical, performative, and semiotic realms of violence that Bufacchi and Mbembe discuss in their works. This is done through the discussion of necro-semiotic terrorism as not a relationship between two separate phenomena (the external “moral justification” or speech act as one act of violence accompanied by an act of physical violence), but as an integrated whole act of necro-semiotic terror; a contained uniform moment within a given space and time.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, by charting necro-semiotic terror as a distinct phenomenon, this chapter lays groundwork for the further development of such a phenomenon within the context of Negros during the Duterte regime in

¹⁰² Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg Press, 2022), 257-95.

¹⁰³ Note: the term (post)colonial is used henceforth in recognition that the term “postcolonial” is different from “post-colonial” or the after-period following formal decolonisation in most African and Asian colonies in the middle-to-late 20th century. (Post)colonial, terminologically, maintains that colonality remains a spectre of sorts that permeates the globe in the post-colonial present. It recognises that colonality is difficult to parse from the present time, all while referring to the throughlines from the era of colonialism beginning in the 16th century and ending in the middle-to-late 20th century towards the global present. Vittorio Bufacchi, “Violence and Social (In)Justice: An Interview with Vittorio Bufacchi” in *Making Sense of Radicalization and Violent Extremism*, eds. Mitja Sardoc (Routledge, 2022), 36; Vittorio Bufacchi, “Colonialism, Injustice, and Arbitrariness,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 48, no. 2 (2017): 197.

¹⁰⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 36.

the subsequent chapters. First, however, violence must be understood in its various forms as it is studied within various spheres of literature.

Violence is continuously debated within various spheres of study and as such it remains a contested concept as it struggles to be unanimously defined or agreed upon.¹⁰⁵ Key points of debate centre around the extent to which physicality matters, who/what experiences violence, whether violence is about force or solely violation, and whether violence requires intention. Vittorio Bufacchi sums these debates up by typologising violence into two spheres of theorisation found within numerous studies: minimalist conceptions of violence and comprehensive conceptions of violence.¹⁰⁶ Minimalist conceptions of violence hinge on the strictly physical and intentional injuries that happen in interactions between two or more people, which is something that is reaffirmed by studied authors on violence such as Charles Tilly in his book *Politics of Collective Violence* and C. A. J. Coady in his book *Morality and Political Violence*.¹⁰⁷ Comprehensive conceptions of violence, however, problematize much of the core assumptions of minimalist conceptions of violence, namely by interrogating how force may operate indirectly, unintentionally, through both physical and non-physical means, and amongst a variety of different institutional/actor arrangements. Comprehensive approaches to violence were spearheaded by the works of Johan Galtung, who defined violence as anything that influences human beings “so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations,” or simply a victim’s capabilities are hindered beyond what they intend to do (read:

¹⁰⁵ Willem de Haan, “Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept,” in *Violence in Europe*, eds. Sophie Body-Gendrot and Pieter Spierenburg (Springer, 2008), 27-40; Ekkehard Coenen, “Contested Understandings of Violence: Refiguring Modern and Postmodern Perspectives,” *Society* 61 (2024): 421-30.

¹⁰⁶ Bufacchi, “Two Concepts,” 195-9.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Tilly, *Collective Violence*; C. A. J. Coady, *Morality and Political Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

violation).¹⁰⁸ This thesis utilises one variation of the expanded conceptualisation of violence, integrating physical violations with both performative and semiotic violations to outline the complete phenomenon of necro-semiotic terror. Thus, locating the constituent elements of physical violence, performative violence, and semiotic violence requires an overview of some of the key aspects of each phenomenon.

Physical violence implies any act of violation hindering, damaging, or injuring the physical state of a body or object, operating in the minimalist sense of the term on a continuum of aggression putting “minor acts of aggression (e.g., pushing) at the low end of the spectrum and violence (e.g., homicide) at the high end of the spectrum.”¹⁰⁹ In the maximalist sense, however, violence can include intentional and unintentional injurious physical conditions resulting from certain structural-institutional arrangements, such as those effects brought on by unsafe and exploitative labour practices, environmental hazards, and exposure to hazardous materials.¹¹⁰ In the minimalist and maximalist definitions, physical violence becomes a matter of inflicting physical injury on something to the effect of violating something’s state of being, whether it be to disfigure, maim, or flat out kill/destroy. Physical violence is thus understood as any act that tends towards destroying (but not completely eradicating) the experience of something’s materiality, whether it be one’s flesh, organs, or a set of objects, of which the act of physical violence violates its intended state of being.¹¹¹ This working concept of physical violence can be easily found within necropolitics and state terrorism.

¹⁰⁸ Galtung, “Peace Research,” 168; Bufacchi, “Two Concepts” 196-7.

¹⁰⁹ Johnie J. Allen and Craig A. Anderson, “Aggression and Violence: Definitions and Distinctions” in *The Wiley Handbook of Violence and Aggression*, eds. Peter Sturmen (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 2-4.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin Etzold, “Violence, Mobility and Labour Relations in Asia,” *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 50, no. 1-2 (2019): 8-10; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 45-67.

¹¹¹ Theimo Breyer, “Violence as violation of experiential structures,” *Phenomenology and the cognitive sciences* 16, no. 4 (2017): 737-51.

The physical violence of necropolitics in (post)colonial states, according to Mbembe, exists in the sovereign's capacity to routinely permit or perpetuate "the material destruction of human bodies and populations" of colonial subjects, slaves, and perceived "undesirable" populations in a selective and intentional manner:

[A] potential situation of extremity is constituted by every situation of structural subjugation, at least for those subject to it. This was the case of the colonial experience... On the part of those tasked with implementing it, conquest and colonial occupation demanded not only an extraordinary aptitude for indifference but also for norm-defying capacities to perform properly repugnant acts... Massacres, butchery... assaults on bodies and goods... decapitations, dismemberings, torture, and forms of sexual abuse.¹¹²

Thus, the deployment of physical violence by the (post)colonial state is innate to the necropolitical project, especially as it pertains to the traditional idea of the sovereign's absolute power of subtraction or actively "making die."¹¹³ Necropolitics is built upon a symbolism that state-led violence inscribes on the postcolonial subject's body, whereby those who are killed are given the societal status of "simple residues of unburied pain; emptied and insignificant corporeities," and those left scarred or maimed by such violence are "replaced by fragments, folds, and even immense wounds and scars... to display [a] morbid spectacle."¹¹⁴ For Mbembe, the visceral symbolic discipline and morbidity state violence imposes upon subjects excluded from society (the "natives, wild beasts, reptiles, microbes,[and] mosquitos" as put by Mbembe) is the centrepiece of modern counterinsurgency and counterterrorism; the performative aspect of the immediate physical force causing injury or death.¹¹⁵ Mbembe also recognises how the

¹¹² Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 68; 127.

¹¹³ Foucault, *Society*, 247; Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 65.

¹¹⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 42-7.

exercise of making people die through physical violence is also implicated in the process of a state terrorising a demarcated undesirable population, or simply state terrorism.

Locating physical violence within the concept of state terrorism is achieved not only through Mbembe's discussion of state terrorism as necropower, but also by other scholars relating the sovereign capacity to deploy physical violence as a means to terrorise. State terrorism, especially in the postcolonial studies of the phenomenon, is essentially linked to the concomitant roles of fear (exemplified in Mbembe's "being in pain") with the exercise or threat of physical violence by the state or state-aligned actors.¹¹⁶ The presence of physical violence is what, as argued by Scott Englund and Michael Stohl, distinguishes it as terrorism and not necessarily larger acts of repression or oppression; terrorism as a whole is a phenomenon requiring the threat or use of physical violence to create fear.¹¹⁷ State terrorism thus takes on a physical form, generating fear through the threat of violence as a means of engendering social control. For Vicente Rafael, the actions of Duterte-era police and vigilante death squads against supposed drug users impugn a sense a fear amongst witnesses to such murders and mutilations, discussing how state terrorism performs a necropolitical act to make the witness feel like they are similarly vulnerable to such violence; "the face of the corpse turned toward him causes him to feel that he is dying. It is as if he becomes a corpse himself."¹¹⁸ This definition overlaps with Mbembe's discussion of necropolitics, such that physical violence is one aspect of the maintenance of social control in a (post)colonial form. The discussion of fear, however, also operates in the symbolic realm with a discussion of semiotic violence.

¹¹⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 91.

¹¹⁷ Scott Englund and Michael Stohl, "Can states be terrorists?" in *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*, eds. Richard Jackson and Daniela Pisoiu (Routledge, 2018), 61-3.

¹¹⁸ Rafael, *The Sovereign Trickster*, 113.

Much of the discussion of semiotic violence stems from the feminist sub-literature on misogynistic violence and the mobilisation of sexist words that “injure, discipline, and subjugate women.”¹¹⁹ Semiotic violence can move beyond the discipline of feminism, however, and be brought into a general study of Semiotics, or the study of symbols. Semiotic violence differs from Pierre Bourdieu’s “symbolic violence” through the active usage of language and images to “dehumanise, belittle, disparage, exploit, or degrade people on the basis of their ascriptive group memberships as manifestations of violence” rather than the passive internalisation of structural violence or hegemonic discourses per Bourdieu’s definition(s).¹²⁰ In this sense, semiotic violence operates by mobilising broader structural violences through the medium of images and words with the intent of reifying said structural violence. Of interest are the forms of semiotic violence that objectify and annihilate. Objectification is the usage of words and images to attack one’s agency and self-expression in order to highlight one’s physical utility and reduce one’s humanity. In Krook’s case, sexual objectification is the reduction of someone to their body parts and their sexual ability.¹²¹ A general reduction to physicality/materiality is the key logic, however, when defining objectification as semiotic violence. The semiotic violence of annihilation requires the “rendering invisible” or “rendering incompetent” of people to reinforce discriminatory norms and dynamics through making certain people appear in symbolic spaces, absent or reduced.¹²²

The semiotic violence of necropolitics is found in the acts of delineation and hate speech marking certain populations of not only being worthy of physical death (the threat of physical violence), but also the subtle administration of tropes and symbols depicting targeted populations

¹¹⁹ Krook, “Semiotic Violence,” 372.

¹²⁰ Krook, “Semiotic Violence,” 372; Michael Burawoy, *Symbolic Violence: Conversations with Bourdieu* (Duke University Press, 2019), 59-75; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹²¹ Krook, “Semiotic Violence,” 387.

¹²² Krook, “Semiotic Violence,” 377-8.

in various lights. In the (post)colonial sense, the comparison of indigenous or colonial populations to primates or vermin is a common form of semiotic violence by symbolising people as animals undeserving of humane treatment, which is a form of administering social death through objectification in Mbembe's terms.¹²³ Semiotic violence as both objectification and annihilation involves the linguistic portrayal of indigenous and colonial populations as an inherently non-human object rather than as human subjects, and thus removed from the spaces of discourse and communication (and more broadly, existence);

Humanity's division into native and foreign populations is far advanced. If, with Schmitt or Heidegger, yesterday's fundamental demand was to find the enemy and bring him out into the open, today it suffices to create him so as to rise up against him, to confront him with the prospect of total annihilation and destruction. For, indeed, these are enemies with whom no communication is either possible nor desirable. No understanding is possible with those who lie beyond the confines of humanity.¹²⁴

Such semiotic violence seeks to ascribe people worthy of death through signification, which is interrelated with the practice of red-tagging and state terrorism. Red-tagging reimposes the inter-linked symbolisms of terrorism and Communism/leftism to re-signify its victims with the judicial, moral, and societal structures permeating the Philippine state (as will be discussed in the second and third chapters). Red-tagging operates not only through disparaging remarks or legal denominations, but also through the dissemination of posters depicting images of red-tagged activists (who are often associated with left-wing groups without conclusive evidence) with Communist/leftist symbols or phrases like "executioners," "wanted," "violators," or digitally-altered photos of prominent activists holding prison mugshot signs as if they were

¹²³Karen Stollznow, "Dehumanisation in language and thought," *Journal of Language and Politics* 7, no. 2 (2008): 177-200.

¹²⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 64.

prisoners.¹²⁵ The act of semiotic annihilation functions here by rendering those targeted by red-tagging as lesser beings through the guilt by association with terrorism/insurgency, ultimately even reducing one down to a non-human object. Such claims, all from Duterte himself, are exemplified below:

- “*Hayaan ang human rights.*” [“Ignore human rights,” in reference to how alleged terrorists/rebels should be treated.]¹²⁶
- “You want money? I’ll give you money... I will make it 20,000 pesos per head.”¹²⁷
- “*Di lang daw mo patyon. Pusilon lang mo sa bisong arong, Og wa na ma’y bisong, wa na ma’y silbi.* [We won’t kill you. We will just shoot your vagina, so that if there is no vagina, it would be useless.]” Mentioned in reference to NPA rebels.¹²⁸

Each quote above denotes some form of semiotic violence through the objectification and dehumanisation of those who are terrorists/rebels/insurgents (and by extension, those red-tagged). Generally, semiotic violence describes how linguistic and visual representations can be mobilised against one’s intended state-of-being within a given societal-structural context with the

¹²⁵ Preeti Jha, “How Filipino activists ended up on a ‘wanted’ poster,” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 5 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54144623>; Bulatlat, “City councilor, lawyer, activists included in Negros town police’s poster of Reds,” 16 April 2018, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2018/04/16/city-councilor-lawyer-activists-included-negros-town-polices-poster-reds/>

¹²⁶ Office of the President of the Philippines, “Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the Joint Meeting of the National Task Force-Regional Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict in Northern Mindanao (NTF-RTF-ELCAC X),” 5 March 2021, <https://pco.gov.ph/presidential-speech/speech-of-president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-during-the-joint-meeting-of-the-national-task-force-regional-task-force-to-end-local-communist-armed-conflict-in-northern-mindanao-ntf-rtf-elcac-x/>

¹²⁷ Ted Regencia, “Rodrigo Duterte offers ‘per head’ bounty for rebels,” *Al Jazeera*, 15 February 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/2/15/rodrigo-duterte-offers-per-head-bounty-for-rebels>

¹²⁸ Office of the President of the Philippines, “Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the Merienda with the Former Rebels,” 7 February 2018, <https://pcoo.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/20180207-Speech-of-President-Rodrigo-Roa-Duterte-during-the-Merienda-with-the-Former-Rebels.pdf>

intent to harm, especially in the context of the discursive meaning behind terms like “terrorist,” “rebel,” or “Communist.” To this extent, semiotic violence and physical violence share the fact that there is both a context that violence operates within and also a meaning that is generated or *performed* by violence.

Performative violence underlines the necessity of a targeted audience and actor who commit an act of violence; a phenomenon that makes violence “[un-] isolated from its context... embedded in elaborate rituals and performances... enacted by, and on, socially situated actors.”¹²⁹ Performative violence does not necessarily prescribe a minimal or comprehensive formulation of violence, as it modifies the form of violence that it be undertaken to communicate a certain message to an audience within a given context. Performative violence can also constitute a community by forcefully delineating its boundaries through selective killings (physical violence) or by integrating the violence into speech acts through hate speech (semiotic violence), such that groups are dissuaded from behaving in a certain way, as described by Jeffery Stevenson Muller.¹³⁰ Additionally, hate speech functions in an equally performative way if, for example, a politician utters that a certain demographic deserves to die during a speech. Thus, performative violence requires actors who play out meaningful acts of violence (in any form) to a socially-relevant audience.

Such was the case with Duterte’s vigilante groups who murdered drug users and displayed their mutilated bodies in Davao City during Duterte’s mayorship. In support of such acts, Duterte maintained the credible threat that suspected drug users should and would be killed (“you commit all sorts of things and you harm the public, then *kaaway mo na ako. Kapag*

¹²⁹ Carleen Basler, Thomas L. Dumm, and Austin Sarat. “How Does Violence Perform?” in *Performances of Violence*, eds. Austin Sarat, Carleen R. Basler, and Thomas L. Dumm (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 1.

¹³⁰ Murer, “Understanding collective violence,” 288-315

bumalik kayo sa dati kagaya noon, patong-patong na naman ang patay dito” [“then I am your enemy. If you return to old ways, there will be piles of bodies again and I will surely hunt you down”]).¹³¹ Here, two acts of performative violence are undertaken. The acts of physical violence convey directly that drug dealing and drug usage will result in death, which is significant for both his supporters (in a populist, community-affirming manner) and those targeted (in a deterrent manner). The hate speech undertaken by Duterte integrates semiotic violence with a meaningful discourse to his supporters that drug users are deserving of death and thus should be killed. Beyond the example above, performative violence is implicated in necropolitics as a comprehensive gesture (physical, symbolic, and/or linguistic), reinforcing who lives and dies as dictated by the (post)colonial sovereign, largely because acts of physical violence and hate speech undertaken by (post)colonial leaders serve to exclude a given population. According to Mbembe, the performative aspects of necropolitics are the acts of violence that symbolically fulfill and derive meaning from the fantasies and desires to annihilate the excluded populations of (post)colonial states.¹³²

Red-tagging is a form of performative semiotic violence. Red-tagging can be understood in its working definition as an act of ascribing the behaviour of an actor to acts of political subversion by left-wing groups (this working definition will be expanded on extensively later in the second chapter). In the case of the Philippines, much of red-tagging relies on linking actors to groups like the NPA, CPA, or NDF, often relying on key terms such as “terrorist,” “insurgent,” “rebel,” or “Communist” with the intention of delegitimising the targeted actor, often without

¹³¹ Llancesca T. Panti, “Duterte admits instructing police to ‘encourage’ criminals to fight,” *GMA News Online*, 28 October 2024, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/925168/duterte-police-criminals-fight/story/>; Rodrigo Roa Duterte, “President Rodrigo Duterte’s 5th State of the Nation Address (SONA) 7/27/2020,” RTVMalacanang, 7 July 2020, 2:01:26, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEMXabR2MWo>.

¹³² Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 115.

factual or legal basis.¹³³ The link between terrorism and Communism is essential for red-tagging, as the former term implies a degree of illegitimate violence against the Philippine state and public (due in part to the juridical-discursive understanding of terrorism as a form of illegitimate violence) and the latter offers a signifier for who is subverting the state.¹³⁴

In this sense, the performative aspect of red-tagging operates through a public speech act redefining an actor under the label of “terrorist,” “rebel,” “insurgent,” or “Communist” and thus offers to delegitimise any of their actions. Red-tagging also makes any act of accompanying physical violence legitimate (through the mandate of counterterrorism or counterinsurgency) and thus meaningful to a given audience. This audience, in the strict legal sense of terrorism/insurgency in the Human Security Act of 2007 and Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, is the entire Philippine public.¹³⁵ Red-tagging thus operates as a performative pitting of the red-tagged against the whole of society, and thus any accompanying act of violence is made legitimate as a means of countering left-wing terrorism or insurgency by any means. Red-tagging as performative violence then delineates what is, and is not, acceptable in public action by delineating, both linguistically and physically, who is and is not deserving of death. Generally, this means anyone who red-tags an individual or organisation signifies their victim(s) to a given audience, which generally accompanies an act of violence. Inherently linked to this narrative act of red-tagging is the understanding of state terrorism as a form of performative violence. As

¹³³ Global Witness, “What is red-tagging and how does it harm climate action?” 15 July 2025, <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/digital-threats/what-is-red-tagging-and-how-does-it-harm-climate-action/>

¹³⁴ Frances M. Kamm, “Terrorism and Several Moral Distinctions,” *Legal Theory* 12, no. 1 (2006): 20; Jørgen Staun, “When, how and why elites frame terrorists: a Wittgensteinian analysis of terror and radicalisation,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3, no. 3 (2010): 403-20.

¹³⁵ See especially Section 2 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, which defines terrorism as “inimical and dangerous to the national security of the country and to the welfare of the people, and to make terrorism a crime against the Filipino people, against humanity, and against The Law of Nations.” Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, “Republic Act No. 11479,” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 3 July 2020, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2020/07/03/republic-act-no-11479/>

addressed above, state terrorism operates, in one way, through the labelling and narrative act of ascribing an actor's behaviour as terrorism, insurgency, or rebellion as a precursor to subjecting them to counterterrorist/counterinsurgent violence.¹³⁶ This is the performative act of state terrorism, which requires violence as a performance or message to compel or intimidate a select population into not partaking in certain behaviours through the threat of violence.¹³⁷ Red-tagging and state terrorism embody forms of performative violence, contributing to necro-semiotic terror, which leads into the form of violence that is purely symbolic: semiotic violence.

Necro-semiotic terror, especially when deployed by state, serves what Elsa Dorlin calls "the reversal of attack and defense," where a subject's own attempts to reclaim their identity ultimately begets a societal discourse that frames their self-defence as aggression or a doubling-down on the CPP-NPA cause:

The reversal of attack and defense, aggression and protection, within a framework that allows their terms and legitimate agents to be structurally assigned irrespective of the efficacy of their gestures, tends to transform such actions into anthropological markers, delineating a color line that discriminates against bodies and social groups that it forms thereby... It separates those who are agents of their own defense from those whose power of action has an entirely negative form, in the sense that they can only ever be agents of pure violence... Social groups constructed as "at risk" are attributed an exclusively negative power of action.¹³⁸

The utility of red-tagging within necro-semiotic terror renders action on behalf of the subject it targets as entirely negative in intention, and that the reclamation of oneself from this objectifying discourse makes one an agent of violence and subversion.

¹³⁶ Wolfram H. Dressler and Will Smith, "Blood, timber, and plantations: the violence of enclosing lives and livelihoods in the Philippines," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 50, no. 6 (2023): 2418; Holden, "Phoenix," 342; Holden, "Ashes," 378-89.

¹³⁷ Heryanto, *State terrorism*, 180.

¹³⁸ Elsa Dorlin, *Self Defense: A Philosophy of Violence* (Verso Books, 2022), xv

As has been demonstrated, each form of violence can be located in necropolitics, red-tagging, and state terrorism, forming a nebulous concept out of the conceptual and theoretical overlap that can be called *necro-semiotic terror*. This overlap demonstrates that necropolitics, red-tagging, and state terrorism in this theoretical case, all tend towards a similar end. This end is the total elimination of a victim's subjectivity through concomitant physical and semiotic violence (necro-semiotic) for the purposes of social control through terror. The essential link between the realms of the physical (the body) and the semiotic (the representation of the body) are attacked, disciplined, spoken for, and reorganised beyond one's intended state of being in necro-semiotic terror. The aspect of state terrorism is thus the categorical targeting, through the deployment of violence, of a certain subjectivity for the intents of political dissuasion and delegitimization. It is in this nexus of society, language, space, and time that power operates against humans and thus alters the conceptualisations of worth and value, leading to a societal imposition of a value system derived from and through violence. Thus, one must explore how violence interacts with value systems in an attempt to explore how necro-semiotic terror operates.

Violence, Objectification, and Worthlessness

As it is understood above, violence is contextual. Thus, violence can be interrogated in the context of the current state of the world, which is the general form of neoliberal capitalism.¹³⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of neoliberalism is best outlined by both Walden Bello and David Harvey. To Bello and Harvey, neoliberalism constitutes an economy system in favour of the “the champion[ing of] the market as the prime regulator of economy activity” and

¹³⁹ See generally David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

the “favour[ing] of individual private property rights... freely functioning markets... free trade... and the individual right to freedom of action, expression, and choice... [backed] by the state and its “monopoly of the means of violence to preserve these freedoms at all costs.”¹⁴⁰ The economic transformations undertaken through neoliberal reforms beginning in the 1980s and 1990s into the present-day have generated a value system transcending simple economic organisation principles and fusing into the social and cultural realms, and this value system according to Sayak Valencia, is inseparable from the violence of achieving such transformations.¹⁴¹ Quoting at length, Valencia states that:

The logic and the economic evolution of this type of capitalism [neoliberalism] makes it philosophically relevant to analyze both the system and how it informs a global search for meaning and the production of narratives or discursive innovations that create new categories of thought. Through the establishment of hyperconsumption, capitalism—as the sole relational logic on the horizon, both materially and epistemologically—creates a neo-ontology that reposit the fundamental questions of any subject...it is also relevant to ask how extreme violence, gender, death and thanatopolitics have been converted into a new form of fierce and unapologetic capitalism.¹⁴²

Here, violence is not just a factor of modern neoliberalism, but rather an innate characteristic of it. Violence permeates the value judgments neoliberalism puts forth, namely that violence reorients objects and society’s relation to objects through a discourse on value and labour. Thus, it is important to understand how violence captures this sense of value and enforces the objectification and dehumanisation of humans within a value system. Generally, those who oppose neoliberalism through collective bargaining or public resource ownership become the prime targets for various forms of violence, direct and indirect. Necro-semiotic terror captures

¹⁴⁰ Walden Bello, “Neoliberalism as hegemonic ideology in the Philippines,” *Transnational Institute*, 27 October 2009, <https://www.tni.org/en/article/neoliberalism-as-hegemonic-ideology-in-the-philippines>; Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 64.

¹⁴¹ Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (Semiotext(e), 2018), 82-3.

¹⁴² Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 82-3.

the innate violence of neoliberalism, creating objects out of humans that are deemed worthless under the guise of neoliberalism and overcoming the subjectivity that people attempt to maintain. Thus, when an act of necro-semiotic terror is undertaken in the Philippines, the victim is unable to reclaim their sense of being beyond what they are depicted as; labour activists become terrorists, and the label is unable to be shaken in public discourse. A victim's subjectivity is transformed by an objectifying discourse beyond the point of reclamation. If someone is killed after being publicly red-tagged by state forces in the Philippines, their murder is judged and justified by virtue of them being a left-wing terrorist, which is to essentially categorise their life as worthless. Posthumous red-tagging, where someone is killed and then red-tagged as a justification, offers a similar value judgment. To this end, the attack-and-defense reversal that Dorlin describes above enters, where no one resistor is viewed in a positive light. Any of one's actions, whether it be labour advocacy, *pro bono* legal work for farmers, or collective protests, are all reorganised to not only circumscribe the oppositional societal stakes of violence, but to also make the violence of said resisters seem total and overwhelmingly violent. Thus, the proponents of neoliberalism call on the power of law enforcement to reinforce its hegemony, but under a discourse of defence:

Since bodies that have been made into minorities represent a threat, since they are a source of danger as the agents of every conceivable violence, the violence that is continuously enacted on them (beginning with that of the police and the state) need never appear as violence that it is: it is secondary, protective, defensive – it is a reaction, a response that is already legitimate.¹⁴³

The other portion of necro-semiotic terror are the people who are not objectified; those who are terrorised into maintaining a given subjectivity. By subjecting people to gratuitous violence and making them objects, other people seek to avoid such violence. This creates human

¹⁴³ Dorlin, *Self-Defense*, xvi.

subjects on the opposing end who work and live within the confines of neoliberal capitalism. Societal worth increases as support for neoliberalism increases. Necro-semiotic terror captures this value judgment, permitting those who accept “neoliberal hegemony;” the ideal neoliberal subject supports smaller government, rejects those who oppose neoliberal reforms, rejects resource redistribution, and does not resort to collective bargaining due to their belief in the neoliberal system.¹⁴⁴ Necro-semiotic terror affirms neoliberal hegemony in the Philippines through violence by the state and state-aligned forces by removing dissent and protecting purveyors of neoliberalism. Necro-semiotic terror upholds major wealth inequality, especially on Negros, by continuously concentrating wealth in ideal neoliberal subjects and private companies at the expense of the livelihoods of the poorest citizens; here, societal worth begets financial gain, where a slow, structural violence upholds a set of value judgments about who lives and who dies.¹⁴⁵ The innocuousness of this system is reinforced by delineating those who resist neoliberalism as agents of violence and as separate from the pale of society. Those who do not necessarily support neoliberalism in the Philippines, yet are terrorised by the threat of violence, exist in a middle position that makes them acquiescent despite their possible lack of support for neoliberal governance.¹⁴⁶ This acquiescence leads to a subjectivity that is almost invisible; a life that does not lead to a public red-tagging nor does it lead to a sense of an idealised celebrity-like life that is brought on by immense wealth and fame.¹⁴⁷

Overall, this chapter demonstrates how different forms of violence overlap to form necro-semiotic terror. Necro-semiotic terror operates by objectifying people and assigning them a sense

¹⁴⁴ Holden, “Fingerprints of Phoenix,” 333-4.

¹⁴⁵ Galtung, “Peace Research;” Holden, “Fingerprints of Phoenix,” 345-6.

¹⁴⁶ Victoria Collins and Dawn Rothe, *The Violence of Neoliberalism: Crime, Harm, and Inequality* (Routledge, 2020), 84-97; Holden, “Fingerprints of Phoenix,” 345.

¹⁴⁷ Collins and Rothe, *The Violence of Neoliberalism*, 73-5.

of value. This value is ascribed on both the physical body of the person targeted and their representation. This value is dictated by neoliberal capitalism, which in the case of necro-semiotic terror, operates by deeming objects worthless for their opposition to neoliberalism. Those who support or are subjected to neoliberalism are given more social value than those who oppose it, and thus they do not face the direct violence of necro-semiotic terror but rather operate with the looming threat of violence alongside persistent wealth inequality.

Having discussed necro-semiotic terror, it is important to contextualise this thesis discussion' within the history, geography, politics, and culture of Negros. In the upcoming second chapter, the historical development of Negros's sugar fields will be explored. Through a careful reading of primary archival and secondary academic sources on Negros's development during Spanish and American colonisation, this thesis will explore the historical relationship between coloniality, violence, and economic development through to the Duterte regime. Doing so relates to the first chapter's discussion of value and violence through necro-semiotic terror, which is essential to the concept of the *necro-economy* that will be explored in the second chapter. By characterising Negros as a necro-economy, this allows the thesis to explore some of the economic and geographic determinants of Negros as it relates to the comparatively high incidence of state violence.

Chapter 2: The Necro-economy of Negros

Necro-Economic Theory: Accumulation, Surplus, and Death

When talking of the instrumentalization of violence by the state for economic means, it begs the discussion of death and by extension, the discussion of how death interacts with economic value. By using and developing the theory of the “necro-economy,” this chapter argues the economic history of Negros’s sugar industry is one exchanging capital and value by subjecting the “surplus” local population to death and extracting social value from their death in addition to resource extraction.¹⁴⁸ Most importantly, this chapter charts the “disposability logic” of Negros’s local resource economy supporting a discourse the labouring population who resist this economic system deserve to be condemned to death.¹⁴⁹ This disposability logic, in the case of Negros, entails necro-semiotic terror; the bodies of resistant workers are disposable and worthless, and this disposability is performed through counterinsurgency and vigilantism. This chapter demonstrates the theory of the necro-economy is particular to Negros, despite its connections to the economic systems of neighbouring provinces and broader (inter)national markets

Before exploring Negros in particular, the necro-economy must be explored. The theory of the necro-economy stems directly from Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics, though it explores how death becomes not only a social process, but a commodity in itself. This has been explored by Elliott Prasse-Freeman, who outlines the concept in the context of jade mining in Myanmar¹⁵⁰ The essential characteristics of the necro-economy according to Prasse-Freeman are:

laborers driven by debt, dispossession, and existential desperation; extraction

¹⁴⁸ Prasse-Freeman, “Necroeconomics,” 1472-80.

¹⁴⁹ Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (Routledge, 2006),

¹⁵⁰ Prasse-Freeman, “Necroeconomics”

processes that spatially, mechanically, and politically require death-making; and a ‘blunt biopolitics’... in which governmental regimes tacitly encourage the carnage of extraction – ‘necroeconomy identifies a moment or logic immanent to capitalism that is always already there, yet takes on specific clarity in certain spaces, particularly in the global south, illuminating the broader logic at work.’¹⁵¹

Without wading too far into the particulars of the necro-economy, its essential logic is how death is condoned and utilised by the state as a means of generating value for a local economic system; how workers are “hyper-exploited up to death, but also able to amass as a band of violent laborers.” The politics of the necro-economy, similarly described in the discussion of necro-semiotic terror, begins with the ideal neoliberal subject on one end of its spectrum and the elimination of resistance through physical and semiotic violence on the other end, straddling those in the sugar industry in an area of exploitation. Accumulation under the necro-economy, occurs both in the context of death and resource extraction, making various forms of violence an engine of economic activity.

The necro-economy creates a class of labourers called surplus labourers, which is accomplished by gradually concentrating more of the preferred economic activity (and its generated capital) into higher strata of the economy away from the labouring population. The surplus labourers become unable to involve themselves in a system’s predominant industries, rendering them “excluded...redundant... and dispensable... with nothing to lose, not even the chains of wage-slavery.”¹⁵² Surplus labourers, according to Prasse-Freeman differentiate into two camps; absolute-surplus and relative-surplus. Absolute-surplus are those who become unproductive to the economy as a whole; those who are not deemed useful by the state to the economy in any purpose.¹⁵³ Relative-surplus labourers are those who are excluded by the state

¹⁵¹ Prasse-Freeman, “Necroeconomics,” 1471.

¹⁵² Prasse-Freeman, “Necroeconomics,” 1471-3.

¹⁵³ Prasse-Freeman, “Necroeconomics,” 1472.

from the primary accumulation of resource extraction, but can be involved in other forms of economic activity.¹⁵⁴ This study of the lower strata of the necro-economy fills a previous gap in the literature that often prioritised the study of the higher strata.¹⁵⁵

This returns to the first interpretative proposition of this thesis, where the stakes of Negros's politics and economy begin with exploitation and end at death, with workers forced into various forms of contentious politics to stake out their survival. It is theorised that workers who turn to protest and resistance against this necro-economy face violence (condoned) by the state in the form of necro-semiotic terror. If workers do not choose to accept the dominant economic system of the time, they enter the area of surplus labour where violence begets further precarity; dissident labour becomes surplus and thus entirely replaced. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the disposability logic of Negros' necro-economy ensures that any protesting labourers (absolute-surplus) are replaceable by alternative labour forms (relative-surplus), and thus the violence of necro-semiotic terror renders the former as worthless. In reference to Prasse-Freeman's contextual indicators of a necro-economy (debt, dispossession, and exploitation) this thesis will now explore how Negros historically fits this mold from the genesis of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines into the Duterte era. This thesis will also explore how the necro-economy creates surplus labourers to be red-tagged and killed for the purposes of generating social value through necro-semiotic terror.

¹⁵⁴ Prasse-Freeman, "Necroeconomics," 1472-3.

¹⁵⁵ Michael S. Billig, "The Death and Rebirth of Entrepreneurism On Negros, Philippines: A Critique of Cultural Theories of Enterprise," *Journal of Economic Issues* 28, no. 3 (1994): 659-78; McCoy, "Sugar barons;" Aguilar, "Sugar planter-state relations,"

Negros is located in the western portion of the Visayas, flanked by modern-day Cebu to its east and Panay to its northwest. In the island's centre, the large Mount Kanlaon volcano and its surrounding mountains separate the island into two distinct halves; Negros Occidental is the western half, with its capital city being Bacolod City, and Negros Oriental in the east, its capital city being Dumaguete City (See Figures 1.1-1.3). Mount Kanloan's surrounding volcanic soil makes Negros extremely well-suited for agriculture. Most of Negros, especially along the western coast of Negros Occidental, was developed throughout Philippine history by indigenous sedentary farmers who farmed rice, yams, coffee, and cacao.¹⁵⁶ During the period of Spanish colonisation beginning in the 16th century, Negros was largely sidestepped by colonial administrators for the most part in favour of nearby colonial stronghold of Panay until the middle of the 19th century.

From the 1840s forward, sugar became the predominant crop grown in the low-land western and northeastern portions of Negros Occidental. The Spanish style of sugar farming was first introduced on Negros under the hacienda system. The hacienda system was predicated on sharecropping, where *hacenderos* (those who owned the plantation) gave up a share of their plantation to a tenant who would be paid a salary to plant crops and then sell said crops to market for profit with the intent to return a portion back to the *haciendero*. Tenants served as an intermediary class as they also oversaw farmers that tended to do much of the agricultural legwork of harvesting and processing the sugarcane before it could be sold to market. The two central premises of the hacienda system were debt and dispossession, which are two of the key

¹⁵⁶ John A. Larkin, *Sugar and the Origins of Modern Philippine Society* (University of California Press, 1993), 36-37.

tenets of a necro-economy.¹⁵⁷ Debt, according to both Aguilar and McCoy, was the socioeconomic relation that “minimise[d] problems of social control,” often reducing the share of profits that tenants could accrue, aggrandizing the *hacendero* class, and further dispossessing landless “debt-bound wage labourers” in a system of stratified “debt bondage.”¹⁵⁸

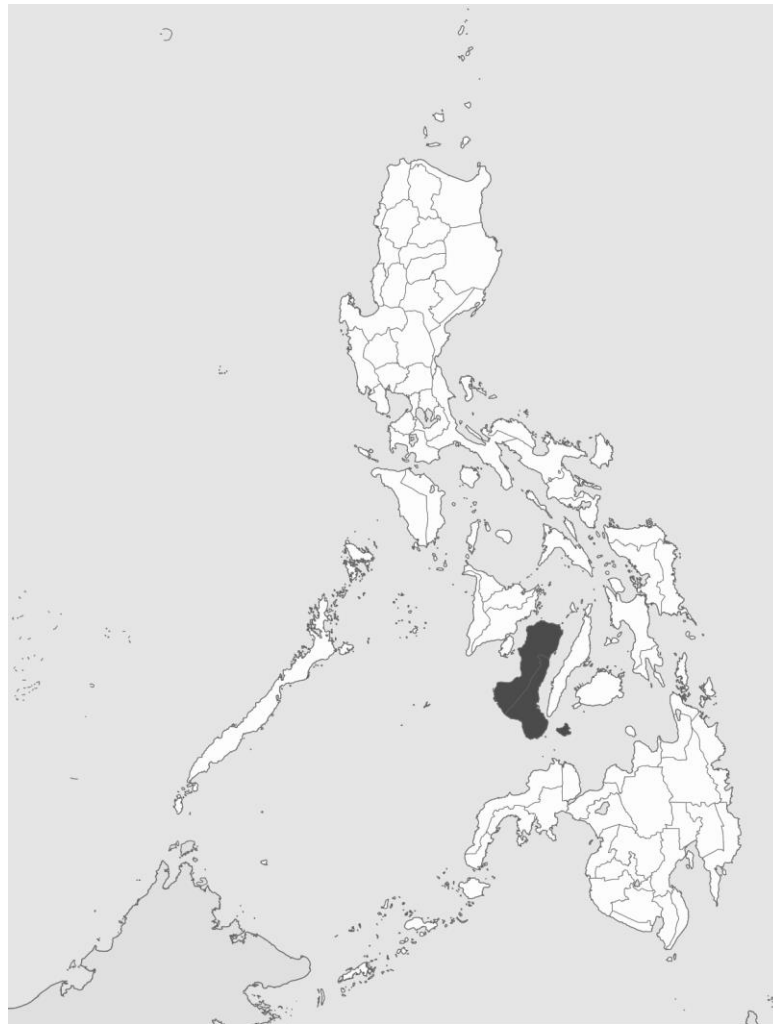


Figure 1.1. Map of Negros in Relation to the Philippines (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

¹⁵⁷ Aguilar, “Sugar planter-state relations,” 65-6; McCoy, “Sugar Barons,” 120

¹⁵⁸ Aguilar, “Sugar planter-state relations,” 65-6; McCoy, “Sugar Barons,” 120



Figure 1.2. Map of Negros in Relation to Panay and Cebu (Source: Geoportal PH, <https://geoportal.gov.ph/>)



Figure 1.3. Map of Negros, Split into Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental
 (Source: Geoportal PH, <https://geoportal.gov.ph/>)

While *hacenderos* and the tenant class often worked with each other to extract profits from the export of sugar, *indios* (Indigenous peoples) and the growing body of Christianised poor labourers comprised the majority class of dispossessed farmers underneath the tenant-*haciendero* arrangement. *Indio* farmers were often deemed by the colonial state and the emerging native “baron” families to be criminals or *malhechores* (evil-doers) for rejecting sharecropping agreements built on perjured land-titles signed by the colonial state and land-owning families.¹⁵⁹ When *indios* in particular demanded better working conditions, *sacar* (illegal migrant labourers) from Panay and Cebu were called in by *hacenderos* to render indebted labourers as unusable surplus labour.¹⁶⁰ To compound alleged labour shortages, *hacenderos* would also illegally pilfer labourers from competing haciendas while publicly declaring that the indigenous were unreliable workers and criminals.¹⁶¹

When *indio* worker-led disputes occurred on plantations into the 1880s and 1890s, *hacenderos* would often call on the *Guardia Civil* (the Civil Guard, the Spanish colonial paramilitary force) to enforce the sharecropping agreements on workers; one *haciendero* embroiled in a worker dispute described these farmers as “ungrateful Filipinos [opposing] a life of civilization and progress from a state of the most abject savagery and barbarism.”¹⁶² This system created a dynamic in the late Spanish era where political elites on Negros would simultaneously rely on both illegal and legal (though manipulative) tactics to dispossess *indios* into absolute surplus status, threatening different forms of violence if they did not capitulate to the colonial labour system. By integrating judicialised land appropriations and the enforcement

¹⁵⁹ McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 113-119.

¹⁶⁰ Filomeno V. Aguilar, “Phantoms of capitalism and sugar production relations in a colonial Philippine island” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1992), 246, ProQuest (303969071)

¹⁶¹ Aguilar, “Phantoms of capitalism,” 258-9.

¹⁶² McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 120.

mechanisms of the *Guardia Civil*, the Spanish colonial state laid the foundations that tied hacienda property protection to colonial state violence. The impetus for dispossessing *indios* into the realm of absolute surplus was the necropolitical pacification of indigeneity which was viewed in opposition, as evidenced in the quote above, to growing upper-class colonial views on civilisation. This generated social value by pitting indigeneity (and later, labour dissidence) against the civilizational aims of the entire colonial project on Negros, despite the economic contradictions from the social instability of pushing *indios* to revolt.

In 1898 amidst nationalised revolutionary agitation against the Spanish, hacienda workers under the leadership of *indios* like Papa Isio waged sporadic and localised violent attacks on *haciendero* families in plantation-dominated areas like Isabela, Zamboanguita, and La Carlota.¹⁶³ Local *haciendero*-class elites responded by waging and supporting crude counterinsurgency efforts alongside American colonising forces against revolting workers to suppress dissent and reinforce *haciendero* hegemony.¹⁶⁴ Overall, while the debt-dispossession system of the haciendas remained relatively stable for close to 50 years, the cultivation of an unequal land tenure system and the dispossession of *indios* entered the stakes of labour politics into a state of concerted physical violence. The state of the hacienda system's labouring class by 1898 can be described as an "excluded population with nothing to lose, not even the chains of wage-slavery... [who became] able to amass as a band of violent laborers" in opposition to the colonial state and the co-opted *haciendero* class.¹⁶⁵ This early hacienda system comprised an effective necroeconomy that thrived on the indebteding and dispossession of *indio* farmers to the point of revolt. This

¹⁶³ McCoy, "Sugar barons," 120-1.

¹⁶⁴ McCoy, "Sugar barons," 120-1.

¹⁶⁵ Prasse-Freeman, "Necroeconomics," 1472.

system worsened after the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, setting forward the American colonial period.

America's Bloodied Invisible Hand: 1899-1946

As the United States colonised the Philippines in the early 20th century, American agriculturalists, military servicemen, and diplomats took the Philippine sugar industry to be synonymous with the overall health of Negros. According to Brigadier-General William H. Carter in 1905, “there is no better land anywhere for the production of sugar-cane than in the island of Negros.”¹⁶⁶ Carter also stated that the “existing economic conditions and consequent lack of employment” have created “[o]rganized bands of robbers... from amongst the idle... [having] kept the whole body of people in a state of fear,” only to be saved by the “intelligent Visayans [who can] restore order and give protection to life and property.”¹⁶⁷ In a 1912 handbook from the American Department of Agriculture on Negros’s sugar industry, the authors state that “the sugar industry in these Islands has existed in a very precarious state... modernized only by persistent effort... and the measure in which a thorough spirit of cooperation among the Filipino people may be brought about.”¹⁶⁸ A 1902 report from the American War Department stated that Negros Occidental in particular was “infected with ladronism,” and “it will be a work of patience and time before they can be wholly suppressed.”¹⁶⁹

These three sources demonstrate a certain disposability logic found in American colonial policy regarding Negros that is inextricably linked to economic viability. This disposability logic,

¹⁶⁶ William H. Carter, “Economic Questions Affecting the Visayan Islands,” *The North American Review* 180, no. 582 (1905): 688.

¹⁶⁷ Carter, “Visayan Islands,” 688.

¹⁶⁸ G. E. Nesom and Herbert S. Walker, *Handbook on the Sugar Industry of the Philippine Islands: In Two Parts* (Manila Bureau of Printing, 1912), 17.

¹⁶⁹ War Department, “Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1902. Volume X. Report of the Philippine Commission. Part 1,” 18, *Government of the United States of America*, 1903.

differentiates between the “good” hard-working Filipino labourer who coalesces (or in the case of the 1912 handbook, “cooperates”) with the capitalist intensification of the sugar industry and the surplus “bad” labourer who advocates for better working conditions yet is deemed a bandit, subversive, or criminal. The disposability logic thus operates against the dissident labourer who faces retribution from political elites in the form of counterinsurgent violence. This form of subtle moral politics continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and while this period was not particularly violent in Negros, moral distinctions were utilised by American and Filipino elites to categorise and justify counterinsurgency against alleged leftist subversives. While the American colonisation of the Philippines is often studied in the context of the brutal Philippine-American War and its atrocities, there is also a need to emphasise how the subtle portions of the United States’ anti-Communist politics of the early-to-mid-20th century would lay the foundation for necro-semiotic terror in the emerging colonial state and its necro-economy.

After the end of the Philippine-American War, many of the *haciendero*-class families alongside American corporations like the Hawaiian-Philippine Company and Victorias Milling Company (VMC) backed massive sugar industrialisation efforts on Negros Occidental to boost exports and secure American capital investment into the country.¹⁷⁰ A part of this investment was the removal of the tenant class, which allowed the *hacienderos* to expand the class differences between the dispossessed farmer class and the upper elites on Negros by controlling a larger share of sugar export profits. In place of sharecropping, the sugar mills developed a three-pronged upper class system of national-level mill-owning absentee families, trader/broker-types who dealt with international clients, and localised planter elites acting as brokers for national

¹⁷⁰ Wall Street Journal, “PHILIPPINE SUGAR FINANCING: Faith in Island’s Industry Expressed by Bankers Agents—Tariff Concessions Vital,” 29 September 1923; McCoy, “Sugar Barons,” 125.

policies in Negros's sugar mills.¹⁷¹ In addition to the removal of the tenant class, much of the newly-garnered investments from the 1900s into the 1920s were put towards streamlining the milling technologies responsible for the processing and refining of raw sugar-cane. Much of this technology remained beyond the reach of the farming class, however, who still toiled under manual labour as many do today.

Concomitant to this growing upper class was the development of local and national political power, where local Filipino planter elites and their national counterparts in Manila “forged a unified ‘sugar lobby’ capable of shaping national government policy on tariffs, investment policy, and relations with the United States.”¹⁷² This period of intensified investment into the sugar mills of Negros ran concomitantly to the expansion of national finance institutions (the Philippine National Bank, or PNB) and national police and military forces like the Philippine Constabulary (PC) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).¹⁷³ This relationship to the burgeoning Philippine state led to a further consolidation of land in the baron class at the expense of sugar labourers, fully enforced by the PNB through “debt foreclosure[s], deed manipulation, and outright violent appropriation of the holdings of small farmers” backed by the PC.¹⁷⁴ Despite renewed investments in the sugar mills and the intensive integration of Negros into the broader national economy, farmer wages stagnated through the late 1920s into the Great Depression, ravaging much of the export viability of sugar while the upper class maintained boom-era profit levels.¹⁷⁵ Thus, this era of American tutelage embedded much of debt-dispossession features of the older haciendas into the new mill system, which was directly

¹⁷¹ Billig, “Entrepreneurism”

¹⁷² McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 124-127.

¹⁷³ McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 124-127.

¹⁷⁴ Billig, “Entrepreneurism,” 665.

¹⁷⁵ McCoy, “Sugar barons,” 128.

tied to Negros's emerging political elite and their leverage over police and military forces and national financial policy.

The United States' red-scare of the 1930s reflected in the Philippines as well when in 1931, the PC began to believe that the Philippines would experience its own subversive Communist plot in due time.¹⁷⁶ As the labour force expanded, so did the propensity for unionisation. In 1931, the *Federacion Obrera de Filipinas* (FOF) negotiated a series of strikes in Negros to protest sinking wages and worsening worker conditions as the Great Depression raged on. In response, various sugar mills elites who commanded sects of the PC to break up said strikes and introduce scab labourers to restart sugar production.¹⁷⁷ To this extent, this dynamic of introducing scab/replacement labour in place of those who were protesting reaffirms that protest further pushes resistance into the area of absolute surplus and thus worthlessness; that dissident labour can be supplanted, even in an economic downturn. In this brief moment in the early 1930s, the sugar barons, and by extension the police and military forces, laid bare the nexus between policing, the necro-economy, and the paranoia about leftist labourers. The broader paranoia of anticommunism amongst the central Manila government began to develop in lockstep with the political power on Negros, where:

Even prior to the official formation of the Communist Party of the Philippine Islands (CPPI) in 1930, US and Philippine officials increasingly interpreted labor and peasant unrest as the result of what they believed to be a top-down communist organisation... some officials like Philippine Secretary of the Interior, Tomas Confesor admitted, that the 'big plantations' had produced a class of 'discontented tenants who have been mercilessly exploited...' most officials maintained that international communism turned the inequalities of the colonial political economy to their own advantage. In 1931, Manuel Quezon, President of the Philippine Senate, for example, claimed that demagogues and communists... took advantage

¹⁷⁶ Wood, "Seditious Crimes," 61-2.

¹⁷⁷ McCoy, "Sugar barons," 129-30.

of the ‘feeling of discontent due to the economic depression,’ thus giving rise to the peasant protests.¹⁷⁸

Here, the politics of good and bad labourers factors into the differentiation between Filipino citizens and dissident labouring peasants. The moral politics of the early American pacification efforts on Negros and the earlier Spanish stratification in the hacienda system thus laid the foundation for the anti-Communist fervor gripping the Philippine state going forward. This is not to say leftism was not developing in the Philippines amongst disaffected labour groups. The CCPI, the *Katipunan ng mga Anakpawis sa Filipinas* (KAP, translated into “Sons of Sweat”), the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, or Communist Party of the Philippines) all formed within the nexus of labour discontent, international Marxism, and anti-American imperialist thought entering into the 1930s. As Wood points out above, however, it was the persistent paranoia every labour protest was a Communist plot that drove much of the expansion of the PC and later the PNP, which was tied to the dissident labour struggle on Negros. In this sense, necro-semiotic terror gets its foundation in many parts during the period of relative non-violence on Negros.

The major point of the necro-economy under the American colonial system was the debt and dispossession of the indigenous farmer class embedded into both the formal (political-economic institutions) and informal (sociological institutions) institutions of Negros. By tying the expansion of the national police and financial sector to the continued expansion and investment into sugar mills on Negros, the ability to maintain stability in this sector relied on policing dissidents agitating against the system. This intersects with Mbembe’s theory of the “society of enmity,” where the necro-economy drives the societal stakes of Negros towards a

¹⁷⁸ Wood, “Seditious Crimes,” 62.

“state politics that, by clearly distinguishing between its own citizens – those fellow beings – from other people, keeps at arm’s length all those non-fellow beings.”¹⁷⁹ By othering those who opposed the debt-bound agricultural institution of the sugar plantation, colonial officials on Negros and their counterparts in Manila embedded societal difference between good and bad labourers into the tenets Negros’ colonial viability. As argued by Mbembe, “this permanent work of separation (and thus differentiation) was partly a consequence of an anxiety of annihilation.... Numerically inferior but endowed with powerful means of destruction... [living] in perpetual fear of being surrounded on all sides by “evil objects”.”¹⁸⁰ Mbembe’s arguments find a home in Negros’ political and socioeconomic state entering and existing beyond the era of Philippine independence, fully laying bare its violent tendencies against labouring dissidents.

Sugar Kills: 1946-1965

Immediately after independence from the United States, the sugar baron class managed to lobby the central government in Manila for favourable access to American markets in the Jones-Costigan Act of 1947, maintaining an established sugar quota of a 15 percent share of all sugar entering the United States to come from the Philippines until 1974.¹⁸¹ This was later affirmed by the Laurel-Langley Agreement in 1954 affirming special market access for Philippine sugar, especially from Negros.

As the Manila government tied Negros to the post-war economic boom in the United States through increased sugar exports, Negros’ baron class consolidated its rule on the island with necro-semiotic terror. The story of Moises Padilla and the governorship of Rafael Lacson

¹⁷⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 42.

¹⁸⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 46.

¹⁸¹ Michael S. Billig, “Entrepreneurship,” 665-666.

exemplifies the blueprint for what successive national and provincial leaders would typify on Negros. TIME Magazine dubbed then-Governor of Negros Occidental, Rafael Lacson, as the “undisputed boss of Negros Occidental” and an ally of the sugar planters who ran his Special Police (SP) as an extrajudicial vigilante force to intimidate political rivals and labourers.¹⁸² When a mayoral race for the town of Magallan in Negros Occidental was set to take place in 1951, Lacson unduly pressured opposing political rival Moises Padilla to bow out to his preferred mayoral candidate. When Padilla refused to bow out and lost the election, he was subsequently murdered by the private police force of Governor Lacson.¹⁸³ Leading up to the killing, the Lacson-backed sugar-baron mayor of La Castellana, Manuel Ramos, stated:

[It's] either Moises Padilla or Mayor Gayona. Why should (you) select Moises Padilla. He is a criminal. During the guerilla times he killed many people. He had my brother killed. He even ordered to kill my brother. Now his time has come. He has got to pay his debt. Why should (you) elect Moises Padilla when he is a trump. He is a bum-brown (bum around). He could hardly buy his drawers. He used to beg here in Negros and also in Manila. He is a dissident or Hukbalahap.* He is going to organize communism here in Negros. Why should you vote for Padilla. He is a communist.¹⁸⁴

Lacson himself also stated that:

Then as Moises bets on the horse, he will ride on the horse and run to the mountains, and there he would organize Hukbalahaps. Why would you vote for Padilla? Because he is a dissident, I saw him, he was going with. Luis Taruc in Manila. Why should you vote for him when lie would place the town in danger. In order that the town of Magallon will have peace, and there will be help from me,

¹⁸² TIME Magazine, “THE PHILIPPINES: Justice for the Governor,” September 6, 1954, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,820089,00.html>; Alfred W. McCoy, *Priests on Trial* (Penguin Books, 1985), 102.

¹⁸³ LawPhil Project, “GR. No. L-18188, February 23, 1961. PEOPLE v. RAFAEL LACSON,” Accessed 8 February, 2026, https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1961/feb1961/gr_1-18188_1961.html; * Note that *Hukbalahap* refers to an early left-wing group who fought off Imperial Japanese forces during the latter’s occupation until the end of the Second World War and later aligned itself with the PKP-1930. The *Hukbalahap* or the “Huks” were founded by Luis Taruc and largely operated in Central Luzon (another sugar-intensive area of the Philippines). They were later eliminated by the Philippine government in 1954 with aid from the United States amidst the Philippines’ own red scare.

¹⁸⁴ LawPhil Project, “LACSON”

vote for Jose Gayona, Jr. This Padilla is a criminal. In order that Magallon would be peaceful, it should be better to eliminate Padilla.¹⁸⁵

Padilla was tortured, shot ten times by the SP, and dragged around various Negros towns according to the Washington Post and the New York Times.¹⁸⁶ In the 1961 court case against Lacson for Padilla's murder, Lacson was quoted stating that due to his patronage in securing President Quirino's electoral victory, he could undertake the killing with relative impunity and jail dissidents despite "doubts about his [Padilla] having committed sedition."¹⁸⁷ The killing of a political rival who brushed up against the political power of Negros's sugar baron class would be typified in the following years on Negros. This killing was an early instance of necro-semiotic terror, whereby the state marked a perceived dissident to the sugar fields as essentially waste or completely surplus to Negros' society. While Padilla had no tenable links to the PKP-1930, the act of necro-semiotic terror against him rendered him a Communist criminal; as he was dragged through the streets of various rural Negros towns, his mutilated and tortured dead body served to dissuade anyone in the rural sugar areas from brushing up against the Negros sugar barons. This period in particular represented the embedding of necro-semiotic terror in the levers of Negros' political power, where politics on the island entered the stakes of death due its links to the necro-economy. The killing of Padilla ensured that performative violence and death-making would define the societal relations between labourers and the state.

¹⁸⁵ LawPhil Project, "LACSON"

¹⁸⁶ The Washington Post, "Loser in Philippine Vote Tortured, Slain," 19 November 1951, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fnewspapers%2Floser-philippine-vote-tortured-slain%2Fdocview%2F152322450%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838>; New York Times, "FILIPINO CANDIDATE IS BEATEN TO DEATH: Troops Are Rushed to Negros After the Slaying of Opposition Politician." 18 November 1951, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fnewspapers%2Ffilipino-candidate-is-beaten-death%2Fdocview%2F111769048%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838>

¹⁸⁷ LawPhil Project, "LACSON"

Much of the post-independence violence on Negros occurred as the Philippine state expanded its judicial and law enforcement powers to crackdown on dissidence within the sugar industry and better align itself with the United States. The set of laws for the suppression of dissent from the left began amongst the backdrop of Negros's labour movements. The 1957 Anti-Subversion Act effectively outlawed the PKP-1930 and banned public association with the group and any of its successor or splinter groups (which would later include the 1968-formed NPA), though provisions about "association" remained deliberately vague.¹⁸⁸ The formal distinctions between association and membership did not matter insofar as the foundations for necro-semiotic terror were laid by linking terrorism and subversion with labouring dissidents. This institutionalised the suppression of leftist dissidence which continued upon the election of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in 1965 and later through his establishment of martial law in 1972. While sugar barons still enjoyed favourable access to the American economy leading into the martial law period, pressures mounted as Marcos consolidated his rule.

Spoilage: 1974-1986

The sugar industry consolidated itself into a necro-economy writ large as the embedded dispossession and institutionalised power mechanisms of Negros came to fruition in the early 1970s and 1980s. In 1974, the US failed to renew the Laurel-Langley agreement. This coincided with the Marcos administration's nationalisation of the sugar purchasing powers in 1975. Marcos administration purchased sugar from the millers and sold it abroad under the control of the newly-formed Philippine Sugar Commission (PHILSUCOM), staffed by Marcos crony and

¹⁸⁸ LawPhil Project, "Republic Act No. 1700: An Act to Outlaw the Communist Party of the Philippines and Similar Associations, Penalizing Membership Therein, and for Other Purposes," https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1957/ra_1700_1957.html

planter-class elite Roberto S. Benedicto.¹⁸⁹ As trade liberalisation surged and the United States gained access to different sugar markets in what can be called an international sugar boom, the Philippine government short-changed the domestic mills and extracted profits from already tenuous deals with various international trading partners. Existing debts to the sugar mills = mounted as the sugar fields entered, fittingly, a *tiempo muerto*, or a “dead season” in 1975, where jobs in the sugar fields dropped due to an interim pause in mill activity. This particularly impacted the major haciendas in Negros Occidental, as workers began to support greater land reform efforts, with some even entering the NPA’s ranks as economic opportunities dried up.¹⁹⁰ The dead season effectively forced sugar workers into either relative and absolute surplus by gutting their jobs, further exacerbated by the expanding debts owed by the government leading into the fall of the Marcos regime.

Resistance to the necro-economy on Negros had been building since the early 1970s. A 1970 New York Times article described Negros’s haciendas as dehumanizing, stating that “the hacendados do not distinguish between their human workers and their carabao (cattle). In fact, they take better care of their carabao because cattle are valuable property and there always are plenty of workers.”¹⁹¹ By 1985, famine had gripped the island. Many farmers had joined or co-founded Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), where community-level organising by bishops and priests of local dioceses in urban and rural communities fused aspects of Christian theology

¹⁸⁹ Billig, “Entrepreneurism,” 666.

¹⁹⁰ Nick B. Williams Jr., “The Dead Season: A Time of Waiting, Hunger and Growing Insurgency,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 5 September 1985, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-09-05-mn-24770-story.html>

¹⁹¹ Philip Shabecoff, “Hard and Hungry Life Gives Filipino Cane Cutters Look of Defeat, but Unrest Is Growing,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1970, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fnewspapers%2Fhard-hungry-life-gives-filipino-cane-cutters-look%2Fdocview%2F119120915%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838>

with left-leaning labour theory and mutual aid networks across Negros.¹⁹² The political climate of anti-communism and anti-subversion engendered by the political elites on Negros and the broader Marcos regime institutionalised a paranoia against various faith-based groups and their associated labour organisations.

Killings of labourers and labour activists continued during the turbulence of the 1980s. In early 1981, the town of Kabankalan in southern Negros Occidental was a rural stronghold for sugar baron families, as town Mayor Pablo Sola was himself a *hacendero*. After two bodies of local BCC members were found on Sola's hacienda, "seven [other] peasants were [found] hog-tied and buried alive in a cane field only 150 meters from Mayor Sola's front door... as has become quite common in Southern Negros... Constabulary torturers had evidently taken time and pleasure in inflicting some horrific wounds."¹⁹³ The BCC that the peasants were members of was headed by Irish Columban priests, Father Brian Gore and Niall O'Brien, both of whom were red-tagged and detained by the AFP, and especially the Philippine Constabulary, for allegedly ordering the 1982 murder of Mayor Sola (which had been publicly and explicitly undertaken by the NPA and not the priests).¹⁹⁴ These instances of violence on Negros during the Marcos administration were almost exclusively undertaken by the PC and other sects of the AFP, with the PC operating through a mix of military, law enforcement, and hybrid paramilitary forces, one of which was the Marcos-formed Civilian Home Defence Force (CHDF). The CHDF was staffed

¹⁹² Henry Kamm, "Plight of Sugar Workers Major Issue in Philippines," *New York Times*, 2 October 1971, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/119232186?accountid=9838&parentSessionId=8Cz2VxolbVWOzmnLH0tt1PCMkMtYX%2FEpH5J8ei7sWEA%3D&parentSessionId=uzph7jUIAbte6eTyffQJ32FuNZsdbCobf2Zm2qT256I%3D&pq-origsite=primo&sourcetype=Newspapers> Shabecoff, "Unrest," Christopher Moxham, *Christianity and Radical Democracy in the Philippines: Building a Church of the Poor* (Routledge, 2023).

¹⁹³ McCoy, *Priests*, 189-90; Henry Kamm, "Poor Filipinos Lose Farms, Then Lives: 2 Bodies Are Found," *New York Times*, 29 January 1981, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fnewspapers%2Fpoor-filipinos-lose-farms-then-lives%2Fdocview%2F121514422%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838>

¹⁹⁴ McCoy, *Priests*, 190-3.

by militiamen that were primarily beholden to local governors and municipal mayors, many of whom were often relatives of older sugar baron personal police squads. According to Human Rights Watch, the CHDF, staffed by “active reservists, private security guards... [and] unemployed thugs looking for guns and a little money,” “became the most notorious human rights violators of all [in the Philippines].” The Marcos era formalised what had been nascent since the independence of the Philippines, where the formal Philippine forces operated in lockstep with “greyer” hybrid forces that often relied on civilian-supported/-staffed forces that straddled the line between vigilante groups and paramilitaries. Both formal and hybrid forces continued to abuse the human rights of sugar workers on Negros through to the end of the Marcos era.

The most egregious example of necro-semiotic terror before the Duterte era was the Escalante Massacre of 1985, where two paramilitaries operating on Negros shot and killed anywhere from 20-30 civilians at a 5000-person peaceful strike and protest in the town of Escalante.¹⁹⁵ The spate of killings sponsored by the baron class on Negros against labouring dissidents consolidated a pattern of necro-semiotic terror where the state red-tagged farmers and activists and subsequently murdered them throughout the 1970s and 1980s. By leaving many of the victims’ bodies in public squares and across the hacienda fields, the violence reinforced the differentiation between good and bad economic work; the stakes of the local economy became necro-economic. Overall, the period of post-independence violence in the late 1940s leading into the mid-1980s on Negros can be directly tied to the rise and fall of the sugar industry. In this period, political baron-class elites garnered not only popularity and support through the killings

¹⁹⁵ LawPhil Project, “G.R. No. 70748 October 21, 1985. LAURENTE C. ILAGAN vs. HON. JUAN PONCE ENRILE,” https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1985/oct1985/gr_1-70748_1985.html; Karl G. Ombion, “19 Years After ‘Bloody Thursday,’ Terror Still Stalks Escalante,” *Bulatlat*, 19 September 2004, <https://www.bulatlat.com/news/4-33/4-33-escalante.html>

but also profits generated from the continued expropriation of a shrinking pool of capital. When sugar could not be bought and sold by the baron class by the 1980s, the bodies of dissidents garnered new social value for the perceived killings of alleged terrorists or subversives.

Wither: 1986-2022

Even after Marcos Sr. was ousted in the 1986 EDSA revolution with Corazon Aquino succeeding him, Negros maintained its sugar milling system amidst piecemeal reforms. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) of the Aquino administration maintained that the sugar fields were “low priority” in terms of industrial intensification.¹⁹⁶ Philippine sugar exporters struggled to compete within the modern international sugar market amongst massive multinational corporations. Neoliberal trade liberalisation efforts of the successive administrations from Aquino through to the Duterte administration eroded much of the economic and political power tied to the sugar fields on Negros by extension.¹⁹⁷ This was facilitated by letting a few baron-class families maintain certain ownership titles over existing mills, while the Philippine government allowed international food-processing corporations to take over much of the plantations. This made the sugar industry relatively uncompetitive to the point that the Philippines began importing sugar from other countries under the Aquino and Ramos administrations.¹⁹⁸ By the dawn of the 1990s and the predominance of the Washington Consensus, the tenets of neoliberalism and trade reform essentially rendered the sugar industry a boondoggle to the national economy that was tied to extensive violence.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, there

¹⁹⁶ Michael S. Billig, ““Syrup in the Wheels of Progress:” the Inefficient Organization of the Philippine Sugar Industry,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (1993): 30.

¹⁹⁷ Billig, “Progress,” 123.

¹⁹⁸ Michael S. Billig, “The Interests of Competing Elites: Fighting over Protectionism and “Free Markets” in Philippine Sugar,” *Culture & Agriculture* 29, no. 2 (2007): 70-5.

¹⁹⁹ Billig, “Competing Elites,” 75; Billig, “Entrepreneurism,” 667-8.

was a stigma imparted on the labouring force by the state, especially against those involved in leftist unions, that the workers essentially owed their dispossession to the sugar market, and that by remaining, they were essentially participating in a leftist-worker dominated industry.²⁰⁰

Despite the political stigma and growing internationalisation of the sugar market at the national level, one Philippine-based corporation, Victoria Millings Company (VMC), maintained its status as the largest sugar company in the Philippines today and “the most powerful and influential corporation in the province [of Negros].”²⁰¹ VMC, owing to its long-standing history on Negros dating back to its formation in 1919 and trade history with the United States, lobbied the Philippine state to maintain extensive monopolised control over most of the sugar milling and refining capacity on Negros beginning in the early 1990s. Other smaller mills had appeared in the post-Marcos era, but none could fulsomely compete with VMC. The shrinking sugar market on Negros forced VMC and other mills to adopt guise of neoliberal austerity guidelines provided by the Philippine state in order to maintain some economic structure on the island; according to Patrick Oabel, “all levels of government viewed these as necessary measures given Victoria Milling’s strategic role in the Philippine sugar industry and its significance to both the local and provincial economy.”²⁰² Through the 1997 financial crisis in Southeast Asia, VMC sought the patronage of multinational Philippine-based conglomerates like the LT Group to prevent the company from defaulting on 6.5 billion PNP of debt.²⁰³ Despite seeking debt relief from the

²⁰⁰ Rosanne Rutten, “Who Shall Benefit? Conflicts among the Landless Poor in a Philippine Agrarian Reform Program,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, no. 2 (2010): 212-3.

²⁰¹ Billig, “Rationality,” 172.

²⁰² Patrick Vince Oabel, “Workers of the Mill: Local Labour Market Change and Restructuring of the Sugar Industry in Northern Negros Occidental, Philippines 1946-2008,” (PhD. diss. University of British Columbia, 2011), 194.

²⁰³ Cris V. Paraso, “Victorias Milling Co., Inc. Decline of an institution,” *BusinessWorld*, 19 March 1997, <https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=bswrl0020010929dt3j00f3q&drn=drn%3aarchive.newsarticle.bswrl0020010929dt3j00f3q&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

state, the company undertook mass layoffs through the 2000s. Sugar workers attempted to hold onto a shrinking pool of jobs in agriculture, though many were “retrenched” into other LT Group ventures or other sectors of the expanding VMC portfolio such as Victoria’s Golf & Country Club (many of the courses were built on old hacienda land) and Victorias Agricultural Land Corporation (VALCO); as stated by VMC chairman Omar Byron in 2007, “Alcohol needs molasses and virgin cola needs refined sugar.”²⁰⁴

By prioritising other commodities and diversifying the sugar industry’s priorities in place of commodity exporting, the sugar mills on Negros became tertiary to broader economic goals and thus sugar production became a part of a broader post-Fordist corporate structure. Concomitant to the VMC’s diversification (as well as the smaller mills on Negros Occidental like that owned by Southern Negros Development Corporation), livelihoods were upended as the opportunities for agricultural work in the generations-long sugar industry withered. Negros’ viability as an economy essentially rested on its diversification away from its institutionalised primary focus on sugar, though those who remained in the industry were subjected to neoliberal discipline that privileged technological flexibility over agricultural methods. This created a dichotomised dynamic between flexible, multi-sector workers within the VMC in comparison to the older agricultural workers who focused on milling, processing, harvesting, and planting sugar. By making sugar a lower industrial priority, the spatial relationships to major milling cities of the agricultural labouring force were uprooted; cities like Kabankalan, Victorias City, and smaller rural towns were driven into poverty as Negros’ institutional preferences shifted. Unions were essential to protecting the livelihoods of sugar workers, though they were growingly

²⁰⁴ Doris Dumlao, “Staying the pink of financial health.” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 July 2008, <http://business.inquirer.net/money/features/view/20080711-147721/Staying-in-the-pink-of-financial-health>

viewed as impediments to neoliberal efficiency measures that both the state and corporations were implementing on Negros. Labour unions like the NFSW and the VMC's own labour union were heavily weakened due to the sugar industry's restructuring, and the justification for dwindling opportunities in the sugar mills was justified by the VMC's management through the process of relative surplus labour creation:

The dismantling of the institutionalized paternalism tied to the *centralista* factory regimes of the past began with the firm's retrenchment programmes which decimated the permanent Vicmican workforce, and drastically changed the social organization of the firm and the nature of labour discipline... Workers' acquiescence was strongly conditioned by the management's discursive and ideological apparatus of the "Recovery and Rehabilitation" of the "Vicmican Family" which preached the ultimate liquidation of the firm should these new measures and sacrifices not be accepted by employees. It was further used to justify the reduction of the workforce, the elimination of the institutionalized employment practices enshrined within the internal labour market, and to phase in the complete contractualization of the mill's labour force. For these reasons, the mill's restructuring practices were used to devalue labour in order to restore profitability and encourage the greater circulation of capital. It was a process where capital devalued labour in order to re-exploit it.²⁰⁵

The restructuring of the sugar market provided three possibilities for sugar workers: agricultural labourers could remain in the sugar industry on Negros, which continuously demanded flexibility backed by the threat of precarity, become a relative-surplus labourer by joining other industries of the VMC conglomerate or other industries, or resist the necro-economy and enter the era of absolute surplus through labour resistance. Despite the encroachment of neoliberal restructuring practices, labour resistance on Negros continued, however, to lead to death and harassment.

In Northern and Southern Negros from late 1980s through to the early 2010s, various vigilante-based and army-led killings targeted left-wing activists and labourers involved in the

²⁰⁵ Oabel, "Restructuring," 230-1.

sugar fields under the guise of counterinsurgency, despite no solid proof of the activists' involvement in the NPA.²⁰⁶ The diversification of forces on Negros is important to this post-Marcos period into the Duterte era, as much of the Negros elites and the multiple levels of government involved in Negros began to contract counterinsurgency out to civilianised paramilitary groups. The AFP undertook human rights training under the auspices of improving the human rights track records during the Aquino and Ramos administrations, though much of the AFP derided the training for “coddling Communists,” where “many within the military, in fact, appeared to see the defence of human rights and conducting counter-insurgency operations as mutually exclusive.”²⁰⁷ An aspect of the AFP’s ‘interest’ in human rights practice involved the devolution of AFP regional unified commands to the local level, which appointed “officers to commands in their home areas.”²⁰⁸ Concomitantly, the PNP was formed as a successor to the PC in 1990 by Republic Act No. 6975 amidst a broader push towards civilian involvement in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism programs. As a consequence, much of the local Negros officials were given “operational supervision and control” over detachments of the PNP and AFP, citing that “the State shall bolster a system of coordination and cooperation among the citizenry, local executives, and integrated law enforcement.”²⁰⁹ Civilianisation formalised a level of citizen buy-in into involvement in the AFP through groups like Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVO) and Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs), which subsequently created a knock-on effect of vigilantism. Many CAFGU members were ex-CHDF members from the Marcos era and other state-aligned right-wing groups like the Alsa Masa and Power Spirit groups; both

²⁰⁶ Amnesty International, “Philippines: Unlawful Killings by Military and Paramilitary Forces,” March 1988, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ASA350021988ENGLISH.pdf>, 18-22; 32-4

²⁰⁷ Amnesty International, “Unlawful Killings,” 14-15.

²⁰⁸ Amnesty International, “Unlawful Killings,” 13.

²⁰⁹ Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, “Republic Act No. 6975.” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 13 December 1990, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1990/12/13/republic-act-no-6975/>

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have stated that Power Spirit vigilantes had participated in counterinsurgency operations alongside the CHDF and the 7th Infantry Battalion of the AFP throughout the 1980s and 1990s.²¹⁰

The shift toward CAFGUs throughout the near 30 years leading into Duterte's presidency was a particularity of the anti-Communist counterinsurgency, which relied on hiring locals who understood the local culture, economy, and politics to carry out various tasks related to suppressing labour dissent under the guise of counterinsurgency. Many CAFGU and CVO members were Negrenses who operated predominantly in or around haciendas where labour dissidents tended to congregate. The issue with CAFGUs, however, were their documented human rights abuses that marred their counterinsurgency efforts. According to a 2000 report from the Philippine government's Commission on Human Rights (created in 1987 under President Aquino Sr.), "about 853 cases consisting of murder, execution, torture, disappearance, illegal arrest, and detention were filed with the Commission against 1,070 CAFGU members."²¹¹ Despite these documented abuses, CAFGUs were a particular staple for the Philippine state's counterinsurgency on Negros. This continued the dynamic that began in the Marcos administration, which relied on the synergy between civilianised/hybrid paramilitaries and the formal AFP as a form of counterinsurgency that could specifically target dissenting activists from Negros sugar fields.

Many of the killings related to supposed "encounters" between the AFP, CAFGUs, vigilante groups and labour activists on Negros were gratuitously violent, as many victims of

²¹⁰ Amnesty International, "Unlawful Killings" 26-9; 34; Human Rights Watch, "The Philippines: violations of the laws of war by both sides," 41, August 1990.

²¹¹ Commission on Human Rights, "On the Revival of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units," *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 23 March 2000, http://www.chr.gov.ph/MAIN%20PAGES/about%20hr/advisories/pdf_files/abthr009.pdf

state forces were found stabbed, shot, burned, sexually assaulted, bound, tortured, and in the case of sugar-worker Norberto Gallines, even beheaded.²¹² Despite the plurality of actors involved in the violent acts, much of the violence against these laborers bore similar levels and types of gratuitous and unnecessary force, which brings into question the degree of collusion within both state and extra-state forces. For example, Juanito Lobaton, a member of a sugar grower's association, was murdered by AFP soldiers from a local CAGU in Calatrava, Negros Occidental after being interrogated by the same members for his alleged NPA sympathies. Lobaton had been stabbed, had his teeth pulled, and bound when he was found by nearby children.²¹³ In August of 1991, the AFP's 61st Infantry Battalion murdered a labour organiser and his family in their home in Murcia, Negros Occidental; the AFP reported that it was actually an NPA-led attack that killed the organisers.²¹⁴ Neither of these cases were ever prosecuted for excessive force. The two cases amongst many more on Negros prove that those who advocated for and worked with the sugar labourers continuously faced resistance by the state.

Despite the 1992 repeal of the 1957 Anti-Subversion Act, the institutionalised paranoia of communist infiltration into various civil society organisations (CSOs), especially workers' unions and associated groups like *Karapatan*, pervaded long into the period before Duterte's rise. According to a 2006 Amnesty International Report, then-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had sought to "crush the CPP-NPA" within ten years."²¹⁵ According to the Arroyo-directed 2002 OPLAN Bantay Laya and the AFP instructional PowerPoint entitled "Knowing the Enemy: Are

²¹² Amnesty International, "Unlawful Killings," 32-3.

²¹³ Amnesty International, "Philippines: Killing Goes On," January 1992, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/asa350011992en.pdf>

²¹⁴ Amnesty International, "Killing Goes On"

²¹⁵ Amnesty International, "Political Killings, Human Rights and the Peace Process," 2006, [https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/asa350062006en.pdf#:~:text=38%20AFP%20briefing%20presentation%2C%20Knowing%20the%20Enemy%20briefing%20listed%20non%2Dgovernmental%20organizations%20\(NGOs\)%20infiltrated%20o](https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/asa350062006en.pdf#:~:text=38%20AFP%20briefing%20presentation%2C%20Knowing%20the%20Enemy%20briefing%20listed%20non%2Dgovernmental%20organizations%20(NGOs)%20infiltrated%20o)
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We Missing The Point?,” the AFP was tasked with targeting alleged members of the CPP and NPA who were believed to be a part of legal civil societal groups deemed as “sectoral front organisations” for the CPP and NPA. Various sugar workers who were involved with the *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas* (KMD, or Peasant Movement of the Philippines) and *Karapatan* were targeted by state forces for their alleged relations to the CPP and NPA, the former of which organized activities for land reform activism on Negros regarding sugar workers and hacienda democratisation.²¹⁶ Directives of OPLAN Bantay Laya intensively focused on labour resistance and political activists, and tactics were governed by a doctrine of “neutralization” which included tactics of enforced disappearances, warrantless or trumped-up arrests, extrajudicial killings, state-sponsored “encounters” with “rebels,” and torture.²¹⁷ One of the first victims of the knock-on vigilantism that came from the implementation of OPLAN Bantay Laya was Armando Dolorosa, then-Vice President of the NFSW, who was shot 23 times by vigilantes in front of his wife and child after being red-tagged for his land reform activism.²¹⁸

OPLAN Bantay Laya was bolstered by the passing of the 2007 Human Security Act (HSA) (Republic Act. 9372), which created extremely vague definitions of terrorism and accomplice/accessory to terrorism crimes by defining terrorism as the “sowing and creating [of] a condition of widespread and extraordinary fear... to coerce the government” as a modifier to crimes ranging from vandalism to murder.²¹⁹ The broadening of the definition of terrorism in the HSA and the implementation of OPLAN Bantay Laya created two primary concerns for human

²¹⁶ Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, “About,” accessed 7 March 2026, <https://peasantmovementph.com/about/>

²¹⁷ Tricontinental Centre, “Keeping Score: Recounting Seven Years of Terror and People’s Resistance.” 18 August 2009, <https://www.cetri.be/Keeping-Score-Recounting-Seven?lang=fr>

²¹⁸ International Federation for Human Rights, “Extra-judicial killing of Mr. Armando Dolorosa – PHL 001/0608/OBS 099,” 11 June 2008, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/philippines/Extra-judicial-killing-of-Mr>

²¹⁹ Senate of the Philippines, “Republic Act No. 9372,” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 6 March 2007, <https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/2/5340>

rights. The first is related to the broadening of terrorism-related charges with the purpose of suppressing dissent. By wielding terrorism and accomplice/accessory charges, which also carried 40-year imprisonment penalties under the HSA, labour activists who supported sugar workers and workers themselves were often deemed to be accomplices to terrorists like the NPA. This was often exacerbated by AFP-CAFGU torture techniques to generate false or exaggerated “admissions” that were given by their detainees under duress, as was the case of Flaviano Arante who was red-tagged and detained by the AFP for his supposed NPA membership and subsequently tortured for his admission.²²⁰ The HSA and OPLAN Bantay Laya essentially legalised much of the red-tagging that had gripped Negros’ security forces and political officials, which gave red-tagging legal precedent to “neutralize” dissenters. In this case, Arroyo simply judicialized much of the necro-semiotic terror that characterised the necro-economy.

The second concern relates to the impunity and tolerance of vigilantism and extrajudicial killings that were aligned with state objectives. The knock-on effect of vigilantism, especially under OPLAN Bantay Laya, was generated by the unwillingness of the Arroyo administration or any of the officials on Negros to fulsomely denounce necro-semiotic terror against dissidents. The nature of killings, especially on Negros, mimicked much of the past history of killings by the AFP, where often gratuitous and public violence would be performed against dissidents. This is demonstrated by the killing of Benjamin Bayles, who was shot 11 times by two masked armed vigilantes on a motorcycle in Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental in broad daylight on 14 June

²²⁰ World Organization Against Torture, “Addressing the Economic, Social, and Cultural Root Causes of Torture and Other Forms of Violence in the Philippines,” 28, November 2008, https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/ceser_philippines_omct_alt_report_2020-12-11-144629.pdf; PhilStar News, “Court rejects Writ of Amparo filed vs. GMA, AFP officials,” 18 May 2008, <https://www.philstar.com/cebu-news/2008/05/18/62778/court-rejects-writ-amparo-filed-vs-gma-afp-officials>

2010.²²¹ Bayles was a lay minister of the Philippine Independent Church involved in sugar worker advocacy.²²² The assailants were later revealed to be members of the local 61st Infantry Battalion, the same battalion known for their gruesome torturing and murder of sugar workers during the 1990s.²²³ Knowing this, the PNP hindered the investigation by not pursuing witnesses and downplayed the military's involvement in the killing.²²⁴ Bayles was posthumously re-tagged after his murder, while Bayles' family members were publicly harassed and denounced as CPA-NPA members.²²⁵

As argued by the Tricontinental Centre in their report on OPLAN Bantay Laya, “in almost all reported cases [of violence], the physical attack on a target is preceded by a military instigated vilification campaign that brands the victim and his or her organization as “communist”, “terrorist” or “enemy of the state.””²²⁶ The plurality of actors, whether it be AFP battalions, CAFGUs, or vigilantes, demonstrated that much of the counterterrorism/counterinsurgency discourses and practices synergised and bolstered violence against left-aligned labourers and workers. Overall, the state of paranoia and the program of “neutralisations” under the auspices of Arroyo administration’s counterterrorism/counterinsurgency programs were explicitly programs of necro-semiotic terror,

²²¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “The Benjamin Bayles Case - by Atty. Ben Ramos, September 21 Movement – KARAPATAN,” Accessed 9 March 2026, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session13/PH/PCPR_UPR_PHL_S13_2012_ThePromotionofChurchPeoplesResponse_Attachment7_E.pdf

²²² Human Rights Defender Memorial, “Benjamin Bayles,” Accessed 9 March 2026, <https://hrdmemorial.org/pt/hrdrecord/benjamin-bayles/>; World Council of Churches, “Extrajudicial killings of two lay ministers in the Philippines,” 29 June 2010, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/extrajudicial-killings-of-two-lay-ministers-in-the-philippines>

²²³ Human Rights Watch, “No Justice Adds to the Pain: Killings, Disappearances, and Impunity in the Philippines,” 18 July 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/07/19/no-justice-just-adds-pain/killings-disappearances-and-impunity-philippines>

²²⁴ Human Rights Watch, “No Justice”

²²⁵ World Organization Against Torture, “Assassination of Mr. Benjamin E. Bayles,” 30 June 2010, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/assassination-of-mr-benjamin-e-bayles>

²²⁶ Tricontinental Centre. “Keeping Score”

where democratic, left-leaning advocacy organisations were targeted by the state for their resistance to the necro-economy.

In 2007, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo deployed over 1,000 CAGU members alongside regular AFP forces to “crush the insurgency” in the Visayas, much of which was concentrated in Negros, which was considered a “top priority in the Army’s counterinsurgency operations in the Visayas.”²²⁷ Under OPLAN Bantay Laya, the CAGU deployments in Negros were concentrated in Negros Occidental in particular, especially in rural areas dominated by sugar workers as well as urban centres across both Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental like Kabankalan, Bacolod, and Dumaguete where many local chapters of human rights groups resided. During the troop deployment, Flaviano Arante, member of the local Negros peasant group *Nagkahiusang Mag-uuma sa Santa Catalina* was abducted and tortured by the AFP’s 61st Infantry Battalion after being red-tagged and accused of terrorism-related crimes by the AFP.²²⁸

Arante had lobbied against the owners of the local sugar mills owned by the Santa Catalina Tolong Milling Corporation and the Rivulet Agro Industrial Corporation, both of whom had attempted to evade land reform plans that would cede control over a hacienda to sugar farmers.²²⁹ The hacienda land in question was going to be converted for the production of biofuels in support of the recently-passed 2006 Biofuels Act (Republic Act 9367). The Biofuels Act classified biofuel production as a petroleum product under the Philippines’ newly-deregulated oil industry (*a la* Republic Act 8479), which was a centrepiece of the Philippines’

²²⁷ BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, “Some 2,000 troops to boost anti-communist campaign in central Philippines,” 5 November 2007, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fwire-feeds%2Fsome-2-000-troops-boost-anti-communist-campaign%2Fdocview%2F460878705%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838>.

²²⁸ World Organization Against Torture, “Philippines,” 28; PhilStar News, “Writ of Amparo filed vs. GMA, AFP officials”

²²⁹ Jessica Hermosa and Johanna Sisante, “Iggy Arroyo to use biofuels law to evade CARP?” *VERAFiles*, 6 April 2008, <https://verafiles.org/articles/iggy-arroyo-to-use-biofuels-law-to-evade-carp>

neoliberal trade strategy.²³⁰ Coincidentally, those who authored and passed the Biofuels Act A. had some form of direct or indirect monetary gains from investing in the burgeoning biofuel industry on the back of the sugar industry's diversification B. were all born out of families of the sugar baron class and C. all related to then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who had ordered the troop relocation to Negros.²³¹ Here again, the neoliberal diversification of the sugar industry, which produced resistance from the sugar workers allowed the AFP and the Philippine state to effectively render dissident labourers as absolute surplus to the dominant economic model on Negros. By committing acts of necro-semiotic terror against these organisations and their members who resisted the diversifying industrial encroachment on the Negros, the Philippine state further consolidated the long-standing institutional relationship between the state's law enforcement and military forces against dissenting sugar workers.

OPLAN Bantay Laya advanced the targeting of workers and labour activists on Negros through the successor administration of Benigno Ninoy Aquino Jr. This was largely undertaken under OPLAN Bantay Laya's successor, OPLAN Bayanihan. Though popularised by Duterte, it was Aquino Jr.'s OPLAN Bayanihan that spurred the term "Whole-of-Nation" in the AFP's approach to counterinsurgency.²³² Here, OPLAN Bayanihan states that the goal of counterinsurgency is to demonstrate through "social pressure" that the NPA's cause is "unacceptable to any civilized society."²³³ The Whole-of-Nation approach emphasises that "ordinary citizens and the entire Filipino nation are active contributors to internal peace and

²³⁰ Hermosa and Sisante, "CARP," Senate of the Philippines, "Republic Act No. 9367," *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 24 July 2006, https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%209367.pdf

²³¹ Hermosa and Sisante, "CARP"

²³² Armed Forces of the Philippines, "Internal Peace & Security Plan," 25, 2010, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session13/PH/PCPR_UPR_PHL_S13_2012_ThePromotionofChurchPeoplesResponse_Attachment1_E.pdf

²³³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, "Peace," 30.

security.”²³⁴ This Whole-of-Nation approach effectively justifies vigilantism from both a doctrinal and legal point of view, as it emphasises that state-aligned vigilante forces have a role in “coordinative and cooperative relationships” in “focused” military operations alongside the AFP, especially through “empowering communities to take the lead in their own peace and security efforts.”²³⁵

OPLAN Bayanihan routinely makes reference to human rights as the centrepiece of the Philippines’ counterinsurgency program, especially by encouraging a “people-centered” involvement of the “entire citizenry.”²³⁶ In its section on human security, OPLAN Bayanihan “puts primacy to human rights... [the] freedom from fear and freedom from want... to live with dignity [and] the absence of violence conflict.”²³⁷ The attempt to centre this version of human rights through a language of human security, however, is undercut by a contradiction in the mandate of “internal security,” which emphasises the “intensified and relentless” pursuit of the NPA.²³⁸ Here, the AFP underlines, unintentionally, the disposability logic of internal security through counterinsurgency against the NPA, whereby those targeted are deemed to exist beyond the pale of “mainstream society” and are thus absolute surplus to the mainstream socioeconomic system.²³⁹ Those targeted by OPLAN Bayanihan can “return” or “reintegrate” into society, which equates to becoming relative surplus by reinscribing oneself in socioeconomic “development.”²⁴⁰ Taken together, the framing of the “whole-of-nation” approach through internal security reinforces vigilantism through citizen buy-in into the broader counterinsurgent process by pitting

²³⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” 25.

²³⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” 28-30.

²³⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” v.

²³⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” 25.

²³⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” 30.

²³⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” 30.

²⁴⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Peace,” 30-1.

the aim of dissident labourers against the whole of society, which implicitly condones a degree of vigilante justice against alleged “terrorists,” “guerillas,” or “insurgents.”

Despite OPLAN Bayanihan’s emphasis on peacebuilding and human rights, a spate of reported arrests, killings, and harassment of activists and farmers related to the sugar fields on Negros were documented by groups like *Karapatan* and local newspapers. A 2011 Human Rights Watch report discussed the killing of Rene Quirante, a Negros farmer-turned-vice-chair of the leftist party, *Anakpawis*, where witnesses recalled that Quirante was beaten and subsequently shot in his friend’s house by a known CAFGU member in plain clothes.²⁴¹ After the killing, Quirante’s family was harassed by the AFP and local citizens, stating that they too would be killed.²⁴² In 2011, *Karapatan* and news organisation *Bulatlat* reported that three NFSW farmer-activists from Negros Occidental were violently abducted by the vigilante paramilitary group, the Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayo Brigade (RPA-ABB); the three farmers have not surfaced since their abduction.²⁴³ One of the names of the arrested farmers, Michael Celeste, was later cited in an affidavit released by the AFP stating that Celeste was a member of the NPA who had orchestrated the killing of an AFP member in March 2010, which was not substantiated by any further investigation.²⁴⁴ A report on red-tagging from the International Peace Observers Network (IPON) from 2014 outlined how activists like Negros agricultural activist Zara Alvarez, who was later murdered by vigilantes during the Duterte regime, faced intimidation by the AFP, trumped-up charges related to the murder of AFP officers, surveillance by the AFP, PNP, and

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, “No Justice”

²⁴² Human Rights Watch, “No Justice”

²⁴³ Ronalyn V. Olea, “Groups call for probe on abduction of 3 farmers in Negros,” *Bulatlat*, 10 August 2011, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2011/08/10/groups-call-for-probe-on-abduction-of-3-farmers-in-negros/>; *Karapatan*, “Just like Arroyo’s OBL, Aquino’s OpBay attacks leaders of people’s organizations, rights defenders,” accessed 9 March 2026, https://www.karapatan.org/media_release/just-like-arroyos-obl-aquinos-opbay-attacks-leaders-of-peoples-organizations-rights-defenders/

²⁴⁴ *Karapatan*, “OPBay,”

CAFGUs, and public denunciations on AFP radio shows and public forums.²⁴⁵ Overall, the Aquino Jr. administration's countering of labour dissidence on Negros represented a degree of continuity with past administrations by tolerating the extrajudicial killings of activists with little condemnation for the acts.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated that the various stages of Negros' sugar fields constitute a relatively stable necro-economic system. The chapter has laid the foundation for the discussion of the Duterte regime's treatment of Negros by discussing the historical relationship between state violence, Negros' sugar economy, and the labour movement. Due to the Spanish and American support for the hacienda system on Negros, political and economic power was channelled into local *hacendero* elites during the expansion of Negros' rural townships and cities surrounding major haciendas and milling facilities. By tying the economic viability of the sugar industry to (neo-)colonial state and later, neoliberal enterprise, Negros experienced its own localised development of the Philippine constabulary, military, and law enforcement to police the expanding sugar fields and their nearby cities. Throughout Negros' history, the debt and land tenure mechanisms of the haciendas have generated resistance amongst the labouring class due to continued dispossession and the expanding wealth disparity, which rendered dissident labourers as relatively surplus to the sugar economy. Relative surplus labour was often replaced (or "retrenched") if they rejected Negros' dominant economic system and subsequently targeted by counterinsurgent violence as they moved towards absolute surplus for their resistance. Negros represents a systemic effort on behalf of various levels of the (neo-)colonial governments to expose its residents to two types of necropolitical violence; one a structural "slow death" through

²⁴⁵ Nina Johnen, "The Modus-Operandi of Red-Baiting," *OBSERVER: A Journal on threatened Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines* 6, no. 1 (2014): 16-9.

debt and poverty mechanisms, the other brazen and gratuitous through necro-semiotic terror, all to reinforce the dominant economic paradigms of the elite sugar baron class.²⁴⁶

Despite the ties to national objectives and national policies of the Philippine state, the sugar economy on Negros has created a region-specific dynamic where the military targets local union chapters and their associated networks of various CSOs for being Communist fronts. While the Philippine state has continuously emphasised the national and professionalized image of the PC and AFP, Negros' law enforcement and military mechanisms historically emerged as patrons of regional/local sugar barons who were used to break up strikes and intimidate dissidents through necro-semiotic terror. Labouring dissidents were labelled as leftists, terrorists, insurgents, rebels, and enemies of the state by Negros' political and military elites, as these terms were used to justify localised counterinsurgency efforts in line with the broader national anti-Communist efforts dating back to American colonisation. Having laid out the context of Negros' necroeconomy, this thesis' next chapter will situate the Duterte administration's actions in an attempt to chart the continuities and changes when compared to previous administrations.

²⁴⁶ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 95-7.

Chapter 3: Duterte in the Sugar Fields

Duterte: Social Bandit by Day, Neoliberal by Night

In order to discuss how Duterte enacted his form of counterinsurgency on Negros, it is important to explore, briefly, the political career of Duterte. By discussing Duterte's style of politics, this chapter will explain how Duterte synergised and agitated against the history of Negros. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that Duterte's rule over Negros constitutes that of a "sovereign trickster" acting within the confines of Negros' necro-economy.²⁴⁷ The rise of Duterte to the presidency was the process of close to 40 years of his political career as mayor and vice mayor of Davao City. Duterte's rise and style of politics coalesces with many of the dynamics in Negros' history, despite living and ruling in Mindanao for most of his time. In the post-Marcos Sr. period, Duterte was appointed by the Aquino Sr. government to the position of vice-mayor of Davao City in 1986 and later ran for mayor in 1988, two posts he would oscillate between until his election to the presidential office in 2016. Duterte's campaigns, municipal and national, emphasised his commitments to social, political, and economic reforms to pit him against the perceived Manilla-based elites, putting him closer to "the people" both in class and regional origin. Duterte branded himself as a lower-middle class Visayan man who lived on Mindanao, spoke Cebuano, cussed, opposed the corruption of Tagalog-speaking Manila elites, and strongly supported justice throughout his political career.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Rafael, *Sovereign Trickster*

²⁴⁸ Cebuano is predominantly spoken in the central Visayas and northern Mindanao alongside the national languages of English and Tagalog. It carries similar sociolinguistic distinctions as the differing class connotations between Scouse and Received Pronunciation dialects of English. Cebuano, despite having a large linguistic base, was deemed a secondary language by the National Language Institute during American colonisation, which was a predominantly Tagalog-English-speaking organisation dominated by colonial elites. See Vicente L. Rafael, "The War of Translation: Colonial Education, American English, and Tagalog Slang in the Philippines," *Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 2 (2015): 283-302; Joseph Baumgartner, "The Controversy About the National Language: Some Observations," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (1989): 168-72; Meriam A. Bravante and

Duterte's utilisation of populism was also linked to his penchant for vigilantism and violence, often relying on moral politics to pit the whole of Philippine society (of whom he was the protector) against perceived societal ails such as insurgents, poor people, or drug users to justify violence.²⁴⁹ The throughline of violent punishment in his brand of populism, or what can be called penal populism, relied on "tough-on-crime" policies that depicted criminals and insurgents as less-than-human, coupled with a revanchist edge that threatened to "terrify the population into self-discipline and compliance."²⁵⁰ By doing so, Duterte utilised a form of moral politics that pitted the whole of Philippine society against corrupt political figures, criminals, and insurgents, which included a discourse specific to Negros that explicitly targeted both Negros' sugar barons and the CPP-NPA. In fact, Duterte explicitly targeted Negros' private sugar mills and the lack of comprehensive land reforms from sugar barons. Duterte, in reference to a set of private contracts where hacienda owners attempted to buy their land from the government and sell it back to farmers, stated: "I will not honor that contract. Do not give me that shit... If you want to help your fellowmen, lend them money or buy their sugarcane."²⁵¹ In a 2018 news conference, Duterte called Negros a "feudalist" society, and that "the tenants should be in possession of the land immediately."²⁵² In that same breath, Duterte said the CPP-NPA were exploiting the lack of land reforms, and that the farmer federations who attempted to reclaim the

William N. Holden, "Austronesian Archipelagic Linguistic Diversity Amid Globalization in the Philippines," In *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map*, eds. S. Brunn (Springer, 2018), 1-17.

²⁴⁹ Ted Regencia, "'Kill them': Duterte wants to 'finish off' communist rebels," *Al Jazeera*, 6 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/6/kill-them-all-duterte-wants-communist-rebels-finished>; Philippine Daily Inquirer, "Duterte to poor: 'If you die, I'm sorry'," 26 March 2017, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/883818/duterte-to-poor-if-you-die-im-sorry>

²⁵⁰ Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 9-16.

²⁵¹ Arianne Merez, "Duterte says won't honor sale of land given to agrarian reform beneficiaries," *ABS-CBN News*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/09/19/19/duterte-says-wont-honor-sale-of-land-given-to-agrarian-reform-beneficiaries>

²⁵² Edith Regalado, "Duterte mulls placing Negros island under land reform," *PhilStar Global*, 29 November 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2018/11/29/1872529/duterte-mulls-placing-negros-island-under-land-reform>

land for themselves did not have the “privilege or right to go about occupying lands... you can lose your pants... and maybe your lives, but I will not hesitate to use force.”²⁵³ In 2019, Duterte targeted the CPA-NPA and communists more broadly, stating that he would “give them what they deserve,” calling them “parasites.”²⁵⁴

Duterte’s tirades against inequality, both at the hands of the CPP-NPA and Negros’ sugar barons, demonstrate that he considered himself a “social bandit” seeking “justice against the rule of the unjust,” appealing to the poor through a position opposed to economic wealth.²⁵⁵ Duterte’s appeal and branding through populist progression and advancement, however, did not advance the well-being of Negros’ sugar workers during his tenure. In fact, Duterte aligned himself with neoliberal policies on Negros that further dispossessed farmers to the benefit of the sugar baron class, despite saying that he would “follow the path of socialism” regarding Negros land redistribution to peasants.²⁵⁶ This was a noted reality of the Duterte administration in other regards, where Duterte would utilise pro-redistribution positions to garner electoral legitimacy to appear as if he had “grabbed state power,” which was a populist position against traditional previous political elites.²⁵⁷ Despite this social banditry, Duterte maintained that CARP and other redistributive projects were in support of the CPP-NPA who allegedly “abused” the programs and “poison the minds of the poor” to garner support for their base, and thus the sugar industry needed to be privatised and workers needed to avoid joining unions or worse, the NPA.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Regalado, “Negros island”

²⁵⁴ Nestor Corrales, “Tit for tat: Give NPA rebels what they deserve, Duterte tells military,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2 August 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1149413/tit-for-tat-give-npa-rebels-what-they-deserve-duterte-tells-military>

²⁵⁵ William N. Holden, “The Punisher of the Philippines: President Rodrigo Duterte, an Avenger Social Bandit,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture & Society* 49, no. 3-4 (2021): 207-8.

²⁵⁶ Bobby Lagsa, “Farmers to Duterte: Use iron fist vs. ‘untouchable’ landlords in Negros,” *Rappler*, 23 May 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/134007-farmers-duterte-iron-fist-untouchable-landlords-negros/>

²⁵⁷ Kusaka, “Bandit,” 52.

²⁵⁸ Kurt Dela Pena, “Day of the Landless: The failed promises of land reform in PH,” *Philippine Inquirer*, 31 March 2022, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1576211/day-of-the-landless-the-failed-promises-of-land-reform-in-ph>

Despite advocating for the poor in his electoral campaigns, Duterte linked peasant economic uplift through social programming to the plight of the CPP-NPA, which married the social goods of redistribution for peasants with the moral plight of an insurgent group. Thus, Duterte's pursuit of neoliberal policy positions reinforced both his own and Negros' moral politics where those pushing for genuine agrarian land reform were actually leftists recruited into the ranks of the CPP-NPA, whereby the "very conditionalit[ies] of social protections held captive to the marketplace."²⁵⁹

In 2018, Duterte cut funding for protectionist government efforts geared towards Negros sugar industry, namely the socialised credit for sugar farmers from the Aquino Jr.-era Sugar Industry Development Act (SIDA) and the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).²⁶⁰ Budget cuts for these social services were undertaken under the guise of deregulation, with the funds being reallocated to Duterte's budgetary priorities such as increased funding for the PNP and AFP.²⁶¹ By 2021, farmers alongside environmental and land activist groups on Negros had cited that Duterte's CARP promises had not materialised, especially in the sugar intensive areas of Negros Occidental, claiming that private/corporate hacienda/mill ownership still dominated the sugar fields.²⁶² These efforts are contextualised by neoliberalism's general opposition to redistribution and state intervention, especially against the dispossessed farmers on Negros.

Additionally, Duterte abolished the Negros Island Region (NIR) through Executive Order

²⁵⁹ Rafael, *Sovereign Trickster*, 32-3; Nicole Curato, "Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to Power," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Studies* 3 (2016): 91-109.

²⁶⁰ Philippine News Agency, "Negros, Panay sugar planters want huge SIDA budget cut restored," 11 April 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1053138>

²⁶¹ Leila B. Salaverria, "Duterte wants 3 agencies abolished," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 September 2017, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/929266/rodrigo-duterte-road-board-sugar-regulatory-administration-government-streamlining-war-on-corruption-mindanao-business-conference-and-expo>

²⁶² Carla Gomez, "Farmers demanding land tell Duterte at rally: You broke our hearts," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 February 2021, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1396141/farmers-demanding-land-tell-duterte-at-rally-you-broke-our-hearts>

No. 38, which was established during the Aquino Jr. regime to better coordinate Local Government Unit (LGU) efforts between Negros' two halves in the realms of transportation, CARP, infrastructure, health services, and other public services.²⁶³ This was justified by arguing that the NIR governments in Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental would no longer “compete with government priority programs and projects,” and that private intervention into major public projects would be better facilitated with backing from private sector advocacy groups.²⁶⁴ The NIR program had been supported by the Negros Oriental and Occidental governments since its inception during the Aquino Jr. administration, both of whom had argued that Duterte's dissolution would only make Negros more vulnerable to natural disasters and infrastructural degradation due to weakened state capacity and coordination.²⁶⁵ Thus, despite his political brand, Duterte's actions supported neoliberalism's encroachment on Negros sugar farmers, further bolstered by Duterte's willingness to use violence against those opposing his economic projects. This further encroachment of neoliberalism into the sugar fields during the Duterte era runs concomitant to the moral politics of Negros necro-economy, where Duterte's opposition to the CPP-NPA finds itself at home on Negros.

Sovereignty, Emotion, and the Arbitrary

A cornerstone of Duterte's politicking was the usage of various rhetorical and emotional movements during speeches and proclamations, often oscillating between anger, hopelessness, and laughter in different settings. This is what Vicente Rafael refers to in his concept of the

²⁶³ Department of Finance, “Executive Order No. 38,” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 7 August 2017, <https://customs.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/cmc-137-2017-Executive-Order-No.-38-Negros-Island.pdf>

²⁶⁴ Department of Finance, “Executive Order No. 38”; Mary Judaline Partlow, “NegOr biz chamber respects President's decision on NIR abolition,” *Philippine News Agency*, 9 August 2017, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1005510>

²⁶⁵ Marchel P. Espina, “Negrenses weigh in on possible dissolution of Negros Island Region,” *Rappler*, 10 October 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/148700-negros-island-region-possible-dissolution-reactions/>

“sovereign trickster,” arguing that Duterte often toyed with emotions, health (both his own and the nation’s, broadly), and language to maintain both necropolitical and biopolitical leverage over different parts of the citizenry.²⁶⁶ The sovereign trickster draws on ideas from both Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe in their reflections on sovereign power, and in the case of Rafael, how Duterte mobilised sovereign power for the purposes of the WOD. Sovereign power, according to Foucault and by extension, Mbembe, is the central governing authority’s direct “right to take life” or “make die” in order to define the boundaries of the state; Mbembe refers to this right as the central part of necropolitics.²⁶⁷ The byproduct and counterforce of sovereign power is disciplinary power, which is in the indirect regulation of individual behaviour within a society through the threat of force, surveillance, and control through other institutions like education, reform schools, hospitals, and psychiatric institutions; this is an arm of what Foucault calls “biopolitics.”²⁶⁸ Both sovereign and disciplinary power can also be contextualised in Duterte’s usage of necro-semiotic terror to reinforce neoliberalism on Negros’ sugar industry, ultimately through emotionally-charged proclamations and speeches that accompanied troop movements and vigilante violence against Negros’ dissidents. This form of politicking differed from much of the pro-liberalism and etiquette-concerned governance from previous administrations, which generally focused on respectability politics, the professionalization of the military and police, and a support for rules and codes of conduct in the military.

A key logic that emboldened and differentiated Duterte’s rule over Negros is arbitrariness. Arbitrariness in this case is the ability to suspend sovereign power, or the right to take life or make die, between the deliberate and the unintentional; the explicit and the implicit;

²⁶⁶ Rafael, *Sovereign Trickster*, 64-70; 78-84.

²⁶⁷ Foucault, *Society*, 247; Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 65.

²⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1977), 215-6.

the formal judicial state and the extrajudicial groups aligned with the state. Quoting Rafael at length, Duterte's usage of sovereign power:

Subtend[s] the biopolitical, [where] the necropolitical is the precisely the zone of never-ending catastrophe. But given the uncertainties of the marker, frequency of natural disasters, and more recently the violence of the drug war, anyone can fall into this zone, even putatively "responsible citizens": you can lose your job, you can run out of food... you can get robbed, get raped, get beaten up by local thugs, picked up and jailed or even killed by the police, targeted by police or vigilantes, and who knows what else. In the context of neoliberalism, the boundary between the "good" and the "bad" subject can easily blur.²⁶⁹

Duterte routinely appealed to a faux sense of happenstance and trickery, claiming that things may or may not materialise, or that people may or may not die. In this case, Duterte oscillated between positions of the formal state, which "makes die" through counterinsurgency, and the informal state, which Duterte "lets die" through tacitly condoned vigilante violence. Despite the distinction, both worked in tandem to ultimately reinforce neoliberalism on Negros through the necro-economy. Duterte's form of governance, which agitates against the norms of traditional state-centricity in counterinsurgency is characteristic of this suspension of sovereign power and the fracturing of the state that Mbembe describes; the "direct link that now exists between, on the one hand, deregulation and the primacy of the market and, on the other, the rise of violence and the creation of private military, paramilitary, or jurisdictional organizations."²⁷⁰ To this extent, this section will investigate the various murders and massacres on Negros during Duterte's rule, including the 2018 Sagay Massacre, OPLAN Sauron and the series of "encounters" on Negros Oriental, and the NPA's 2019 ambush of the PNP in Ayungon in the context of Duterte's trickery. In these cases, while the violence conformed to the long-standing necro-economic history of Negros, Duterte's actions intensified the logics operating on Negros with his own branding,

²⁶⁹ Rafael, *Sovereign Trickster*, 33.

²⁷⁰ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), 78-79.

constituting an emboldened form of state terrorism driven by arbitrariness, trickery, and explicit vigilantism.

In his 2016 campaign, Duterte stated that “a leader must be a terror to evil people; if I have to kill you, I have to kill you... Personally.”²⁷¹ Duterte, according to Rafael, “[shows] that he will not be bound by the norms of decency... just as he refuses to abide by the laws of due process and the protection of human rights.”²⁷² Much analysis has been given to Duterte as a “strongman” rife with anger, loathing, and an unabashed willingness to use violence, but Rafael’s analysis expands this logic by exploring how he uses jokes and happenstance to further reassert (necro)political sovereign power.²⁷³ When Duterte utilised the threat of carceral power through the PNP and the AFP, he posited that the state was strong enough to crush the CPP and NPA and that he himself is the sovereign strongman, sometimes evoking that he himself orders or does the killings. In a 2021 rally, Duterte argued to “forget about human rights. That’s my order. I’m willing to go to jail... I do not have any qualms about doing things that I have to do.”²⁷⁴ In other instances, however, Duterte deferred to happenstance; that violence or action may or may not happen at the hands of the state, and it may or may not catch someone in the crossfire. Additionally, Duterte posited that violence may have nonetheless happened beyond what he could control, namely through vigilante violence, but that it would ultimately be investigated by the PNP or AFP. This was a notable hallmark of Duterte’s WOD, where the PNP would “encounter” drug users while vigilante groups would extrajudicially kill drug users themselves with little interference or investigation from the police. In this case, the latter vigilante killings

²⁷¹ Rodrigo Roa Duterte, *The Duterte Manifesto* (ABS-CBN Publishing, 2016), 16.

²⁷² Rafael, *Sovereign Trickster*, 78.

²⁷³ For claims about Duterte’s “strongman” rule, see Charmaine G. Ramos, “Change without Transformation: Social Policy Reforms in the Philippines under Duterte,” *Development and Change* 51, no. 2 (2020): 485-505.

²⁷⁴ Regencia, “Kill them”

were always ready to be investigated by the PNP (though never fulsomely, as many investigations did not result in prosecutions), but nonetheless the outcomes were still aligned with state objectives of neutralising drug usage. This created a two-part dynamic that granted informal impunity for vigilante killings while allowing permanent plausible deniability when vigilante violence occurred. Such a dynamic offered the appearance of having one's hands tied or even innocence while still abetting and condoning violence. Furthermore, the dynamic also reaffirmed the state's role in re-asserting its sovereign power through the formal state by providing a constant reason to expand police powers or (re-)deploy troops to quell violence caused by extra-state forces, whether it be the CPP-NPA or vigilantes. Given the moral politics of Negros necro-economy, however, Duterte willingly condemned, vilified, and targeted the actions of the CPP-NPA (and their associated "front" organisations) through sovereign power while paying little mind to the vigilantes in service of the state.

Duterte's populist rhetoric emboldened his efforts at reasserting sovereign power as well. In reference to his WOD, Duterte was insincerely apologetic when critiques were levied for targeting the urban poor; "Well, I am sorry. I have to clean up... the streets," stating those killed "accidentally" were "collateral damage."²⁷⁵ In another case, Duterte disavowed violence completely; I "do not want anyone killed anymore, from both sides," then completely contradicted by the following statement that I "will act accordingly if anyone will disobey [my] order."²⁷⁶ The oscillation between various positions made it appear as if Duterte was constantly in contention with his own preference to use violence and other forces beyond his control,

²⁷⁵ Philippine Daily Inquirer, "If you die," Carlos H. Conde, "Children have become collateral damage with the Philippines' "Drug War" scarring a generation," *Human Rights Watch*, 4 June 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/04/children-have-become-collateral-damage-philippines-drug-war-scarring-generation>

²⁷⁶ Nanette Guadalquiver, "PRRD wants violence stopped in Moises Padilla," *Philippine News Agency*, 9 May 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1069301>

despite the fact that both judicial and extrajudicial actions achieved similar outcomes. By diffusing sovereign power between the state and vigilante groups, Duterte ultimately wielded control over almost all of the violent acts that target Negros' dissidents.

Before discussing the mechanisms of sovereign power further, it is important to discuss how Duterte targeted sects of the population, namely CSOs and dissidents, through red-tagging. To briefly restate, red-tagging, sometimes referred to as red-baiting, refers to the broad process of accusing someone or an organisation of membership in the CPP-NPA.²⁷⁷ Historically, red-tagging began during the American era of colonisation, as it was the purview of the Philippine Constabulary and later the AFP for the purposes of counterinsurgency. The audience for this process were the various agencies and units involved in counterinsurgency, namely formal law enforcement organisations. Thus, red-tagging was tied to both the military and civilian process of delineating which sects of the population were and were not alleged insurgents, which was standard counterinsurgency practice for the United States during the colonisation of the Philippines and later standard practice for the AFP, PC, and PNP going forward. Red-tagging thus served a historically different objective based upon its actors and its targets than its purpose during the Duterte regime, as it was a process by and for the state's counterinsurgency policies.

The diffusion of sovereign power to vigilantes in conjunction with Duterte's moral politics is what made red-tagging (and necro-semiotic terror more broadly) particularly dangerous during the Duterte administration. As discussed earlier, the powers of surveillance, a form of disciplinary power, were largely the purview of the state, as they were tasked with surveilling alleged insurgent organisations and getting tips from local populations. This process was reinforced by the traditional Weberian idea of sovereignty and even the Foucauldian

²⁷⁷ Global Witness, "Red-tagging"

understanding of pre-modern sovereign power, where sovereignty was the ability of the state to maintain a monopoly on the use of force to take life if need be.²⁷⁸ Thus, red-tagging was the purview of the state to delineate who lives and dies by naming them as leftist insurgents. Duterte reiterated this form of traditional sovereign and disciplinary power through judicialized red-tagging in Proclamation No. 374 and later the ATA of 2020, which formally declared the CPP and NPA as terrorist organisations and declared them illegal for the first time in Philippine legislative history.²⁷⁹ Duterte, however, also partially contracted the state's monopoly to red-tag (a monopoly over semiotic violence) to the public and vigilante groups, alongside his own expansion of red-tagging through his own jokes and public speech acts. This mirrors what Mbembe refers to as the contradictory dissolution of the Weberian form of sovereignty, the monopoly of the state over the use of force, for the purposes of expanding necropolitical leverage over a select group of the population.²⁸⁰ For Mbembe, the purposeful opening up of the processes of counterinsurgency to the public ensures that:

coercion itself become[s] a market commodity... Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill... Segments of armed men split up or merge with one another, depending on the tasks to be carried out and the circumstances involved. Polymorphous and diffuse organizations... characterized by their capacity for metamorphosis. They sometimes enjoy complex links with state forms (from autonomy to incorporation).²⁸¹

In the case of the Duterte administration, both in the case of semiotic violence through red-tagging and the violence of counterinsurgency, Duterte opened up sovereign and disciplinary

²⁷⁸ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 84.

²⁷⁹ Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, "Proclamation No. 374," *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 5 December 2017, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2017/12dec/20171205-PROC-374-RRD.pdf>

²⁸⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 84.

²⁸¹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 84-5.

power to the informal state by emboldening and encouraging the usage of vigilantism in the processes of counterinsurgency.

During the Duterte administration, red-tagging became not only a process of state-led counterinsurgent violence, but also a widespread societal phenomenon undergirded by the violent expression of loathing and anger against leftism. Publicly, the red-tagging of various CSOs and their members as leftist organisations, by the state, the public, and vigilante groups, constituted a form of semiotic violence that ascribed legitimate and legal actions to the causes of insurgency. Additionally, by diffusing the possibility for violent acts to vigilante groups alongside the formal state in counterinsurgency, Duterte also permitted vigilantes to red-tag alleged leftists themselves and commit violence against them, emboldened by the discursive opposition between the depravity of the CPP-NPA and the moral justice of the Philippine people in carrying out vigilante violence.²⁸² Red-tagging became less of a formal step in counterinsurgency and more of a social discourse that reiterated that vigilantes and upright citizens could target who they thought were CPP-NPA members and that such an act would be morally justified. Red-tagging under Duterte became a state-encouraged process of diffused sovereign power and even disciplinary power; the possibility of being named an insurgent, communist, rebel, or any other leftist-aligned term by a vigilante, citizen, or government entity cultivated a “politics of anxiety” that emphasised both punishment and consistent surveillance from both the state and the citizenry.²⁸³ As will be discussed in the coming paragraphs, the diffusion of red-tagging was distinctly on brand with Duterte’s populist brand and moral politics; Duterte could appear close to the people by letting them vent their anger or loathing towards

²⁸² Allen Estabillo, “Communism no longer relevant: PRRD,” *Philippine News Agency*, 14 June 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1072324>;

²⁸³ Curato, “Politics of Anxiety”

insurgents and partake in the brazen heroism of killing a “group of others defined as deviant and whose existence unite[d] the public in righteous indignation against them.”²⁸⁴ As such, various instances of necro-semiotic terror will be explored in the context of the Duterte’s sovereign trickery.

Sweet Tears: The 2018 Sagay Massacre

The 2018 Sagay Massacre refers to the vigilante killings of nine workers from the NFSW on Hacienda Nene on Sagay, Negros Occidental who had staged a protest that Duterte had deemed to be off-limits months after; a *bungkalan* (tilling).²⁸⁵ *Bungkalan* refers to a squatting style protest where sugar farmers till and farm unceded hacienda land (referred to as land cultivation areas or LCAs), often pursued by agricultural activists to resist private plantation ownership in favour of community-based tilling during the *tiempo muerto* or “dead season.” The *tiempo muerto*, when climate conditions make it untenable to plant or harvest sugar, often entails a two-month furlough of sugar workers due to the lack of work. Leading up to the *bungkalan*, the 303rd Infantry Brigade of the AFP stated that both the NFSW and the practice of the *bungkalan* itself were directly linked to the “higher echelons of the Communist Party of the Philippines.”²⁸⁶ The bodies of the nine NFSW members were found inside charred tents on a mill lands; all nine had been shot, with three also burned.²⁸⁷ After the killing, workers and children who had participated in the LCA arrangement on Hacienda Nene were interrogated by both the AFP and

²⁸⁴ Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 11.

²⁸⁵ Jose Monfred C. Sy, “Bungkalan as natural praxis: Peasant agroecology in the land struggle in Hacienda Luisita, Tarlac,” *Social Science Diliman* 17, no. 2 (2021): 60-1; Carlos H. Conde, “Philippine Sugar Plantation Massacre: Negros Killings Spotlight Peasants’ Long Struggle for Land,” *Human Rights Watch*, 22 October 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/22/philippine-sugar-plantation-massacre>

²⁸⁶ Eugene Y. Adiong, “NPAs own farms to fund cause – Army,” *The Manila Times*, 2 April 2018, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/04/02/news/regions/npas-own-farms-to-fund-cause-army/389961>

²⁸⁷ Nanette Guadalquiver, “Gunmen massacre 9 sugarcane workers in NegOcc,” *Philippine News Agency*, 21 October 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1051686>

PNP, treated as both “witness[es] and suspect[s].”²⁸⁸ NFSW secretary John Milton Lozande alongside a band of civil societal organisations reiterated that they believed that the killings were committed by the RPA-ABB alongside the Philippines’ Special Civilian Active Auxiliary, a sub-unit of CAFGUs involved in hacienda policing; as demonstrated earlier, the style of killings, which included arson and gratuitous shootings, bears historical similarity to CAFGU-led killings on Negros.²⁸⁹

The PNP later filed murder charges against NFSW members for the Sagay massacre and the *bungkalan*, with the PNP and AFP both reiterating that they believed that the killings were committed by the NPA posing as NFSW members; these charges did not result in any prosecution.²⁹⁰ The AFP also stated that the killings were undertaken to overthrow Duterte in a “Red October” plot; no charges of sedition or treason were levied.²⁹¹ Despite this, the Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office stated that nobody should “make conclusions without concrete evidences and bases,” a week after the PNP’s Western Visayas director stated that the CPP-NPA had incited the incident without an investigation or evidence proving so.²⁹² Weeks after the massacre, the lawyer involved in defending the Sagay victims’ families (who had also been a labour advocate through the National Union of People’s Lawyers or NUPL, an

²⁸⁸ Raymund Villanueva, “NDFP: Sagay massacre child survivor needs protection from police,” *Davao Today*, 26 October 2018, <https://davaotoday.com/human-rights/ndfp-sagay-massacre-child-survivor-needs-protection-from-police/>.

²⁸⁹ Ronalyn V. Olea, “40 days after Sagay massacre, groups condemn ‘heightening state terror’,” *Bulatlat*, 30 November 2018, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2018/11/30/40-days-after-sagay-massacre-groups-condemn-heightening-state-terror/>.

²⁹⁰ Emmanuel Tupas and Gilbert Bayoran, “Murder raps filed vs. Sagay massacre suspects,” *PhilStar Global*, 28 October 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2018/10/28/1863727/murder-raps-filed-vs-sagay-massacre-suspects>

²⁹¹ Nestor Corrales, “AFP chief: ‘Sagay 9’ massacre part of CPP’s ‘grand design’ to oust Duterte,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 25 October 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1046952/afp-chief-sagay-9-massacre-part-of-cpps-grand-design-to-oust-duterte>

²⁹² Philippine Daily Inquirer, “Massacring hungry farmers,” 23 October 2018, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/116943/massacring-hungry-farmers>; Panay News, “‘Avoid making premature conclusions on Sagay slays,’” 30 October 2018, <https://www.panaynews.net/avoid-making-premature-conclusions-on-sagay-slays/>

organisation which he founded) was also shot to death by vigilantes outside of a restaurant in Kabankalan City; investigations yielded no suspects.²⁹³ The suspects in the killings of both the Sagay sugar workers and their associates had remained inconclusive, though the patterns of violence had pointed towards the state and its associated vigilante groups.

Duterte, in response to the killings, reiterated that the "families of the victims of this cruel act can count on the government that it will enforce the full wrath of the law against its perpetrators."²⁹⁴ Immediately afterwards, however, Duterte reiterated that the *bungkalan* was illegal and that it would be met with state violence wherever it was practiced: "Do not do it ever again because I have issued an order to the police. If you insist on occupying an area like what happened in Bacolod, I will order your arrest... My order to the police is to shoot them. If they resist violently, shoot them, and if they die, I do not care."²⁹⁵ In such a statement, Duterte reiterated that the Sagay massacre, albeit a series of acts of vigilante violence, synergised with police action and the policy aims of the state. This is due in part to the nature of the *bungkalan* itself, which opposes the neoliberal policy positions of private property ownership and the reluctance to redistribute land through the CARP.²⁹⁶ Duterte reiterated that opposition to neoliberalism begets death, and that if the dissidents died, that he simply did not care. Here, necro-semiotic terror rendered dissidents as disposable absolute surplus for operating against the sugar industry and Duterte himself. Duterte also leveraged necropolitical sovereignty over the

²⁹³ International Commission of Jurists, "Philippines: Government must act to ensure justice in killing of lawyer Benjamin Ramos," 15 November 2018, <https://www.icj.org/philippines-government-must-act-to-ensure-justice-in-killing-of-lawyer-benjamin-ramos/>

²⁹⁴ PhilStar Global, "Palace: 'Full wrath of the law' vs Negros sugar workers' killers," 22 October 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/10/22/1862206/palace-full-wrath-of-the-law-vs-negros-sugar-workers-killers>

²⁹⁵ Ken E. Cagula, "President Duterte encourages the mass murder of Filipino farmers-KMP," *Davao Today*, 30 October 2018, <https://davaotoday.com/human-rights/president-duterte-encourages-the-mass-murder-of-filipino-farmers-kmp/>

²⁹⁶ Sy, "Praxis"

dissidents by again appealing to happenstance and certainty in the same breath; the phrases “My order” and “If they die” both reaffirm that Duterte is simultaneously in control of and also subservient to an extrajudicial course of action that both result in the death of dissidents. This implicates Duterte’s willingness to enforce death on haciendas through both neoliberal structural violence, especially during the *tiempo muerto*, and necro-semiotic terror. Duterte’s resort to violence, however, is discursively laden with plausible deniability and the possibility of death, threatening those who resist Duterte’s policies with the possibility that they may die either at the hands of the state or by vigilantes. To this extent, Duterte invoked these discursive tricks to assuage concerns that he was coordinating, or at the very least condoning, vigilante violence. This differs from the previous administrations, who routinely couched AFP and PNP operations in professional discourses that emphasised human rights and the controlled use of force.

Encountering The All-Seeing Eye: OPLAN Sauron

In contravention of Duterte’s promises to the families of the Sagay Massacre’s victims, the “full wrath of the law” was enforced upon the CSOs investigating the Sagay Massacre rather than its perpetrators. Later in 2019, NFSW’s Lozande and 58 CSO members from Gabriela (a woman’s advocacy group), *Karapatan*, the NFSW, and the NUPL, were arrested and detained by the PNP on firearms and explosives possession charges following coordinated raids on the CSO; these charges did not result in any prosecution.²⁹⁷ The CSOs in question were investigating the Sagay Massacre alongside their continued advocacy for peasant rights. Such arrests were justified, not by congressional approval or legislation, but by presidential decree through Memorandum Order No. 32 (MO32), dubbed “Reinforcing The Guidelines For The Armed

²⁹⁷ Karapatan, “At least 59 activists arbitrarily arrested in widespread crackdown on people’s organizations in Negros and Manila,” 31 October 2019, https://www.karapatan.org/media_release/at-least-60-activists-illegally-arrested-in-widespread-crackdown-on-peoples-organizations-in-negros/

Forces Of The Philippines And The Philippine National Police In The Implementation Of Measures To Suppress And Prevent Lawless Violence.”²⁹⁸ The specific geographic boundaries of action under MO32 were to target “lawless elements” in Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, Samar, and Bicol in order to “bring the whole country back to a state of complete normalcy as quick as possible... and prevent such violence from spreading and escalating elsewhere in the country.”²⁹⁹ MO32 was born from the Sagay Massacre, undergirded by the AFP-PNP position that the NPA had killed the nine NFSW members despite inconclusive evidence to prove so. MO32 also formalised the “whole-of-nation” approach initially spearheaded by Aquino Jr., calling on law enforcement and other state bodies in agriculture, infrastructure, and finance to partake in a formal counterinsurgency plan under the auspices of what would come to be the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), later formalised by Memorandum Order No. 70.

The NTF-ELCAC wasted no time before resorting to necro-semiotic terror, undertaking OPLAN Sauron under the directive of MO32. The NTF-ELCAC, which still exists today, was outwardly a counterinsurgency plan from its onset involved in the re-development of previously-held CPP-NPA areas at the *barangay* or sub-municipal level. The operations taken at *barangay* level were dubbed “clearing projects,” targeting rural communities with “marginalized population[s] [that were] physically and socio-economically separated from the mainstream society.”³⁰⁰ Clearing projects were designed to eliminate NPA influence for the implementation of neoliberal economic programs, spearheaded by “promoting entrepreneurship and helping for

²⁹⁸ Office of the President of the Philippines, “Memorandum Order No. 32,” 22 November 2018, https://lawphil.net/executive/mo/mo2018/pdf/mo_32_2018.pdf

²⁹⁹ Office of the President of the Philippines, “Memorandum Order No. 32”

³⁰⁰ National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, “Barangay Development Program,” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, Accessed 15 April 2026, <https://www.ntfelcac.gov.ph/bdp>

self-employment activities,” even by encouraging “reintegrated” rebels to open up small businesses that sold and produced products using crops that were planted on private haciendas that they once fought for.³⁰¹ This ran concomitantly to the enhanced surveillance efforts by *barangay* governments, the Department of the Interior and Local Governments, and local police detachments to investigate and monitor suspicious “left-wing” behaviour, where each organisation relied on local tips that were unvetted.³⁰² Infrastructural investments were also promised by the NTF-ELCAC, but very few materialised during Duterte’s rule. Routinely, the NTF-ELCAC reiterated that those marginalised by NPA terrorism could reintegrate themselves into Philippine society by accepting the tenets of neoliberalism, namely individual business acumen, micro/small-level enterprising, private property ownership, and hard work in place of government redistribution. If rebels did not re-enter the local economy and continue to resort to violence, the NTF-ELCAC would reinforce the necro-economy by subjecting them to counterinsurgent violence.

During OPLAN Sauron’s initial stage in December of 2018, the 302nd Infantry Brigade of the AFP alongside the Police Regional Office 7 and the Negros Oriental Police Provincial Office raided various barangays in Negros Oriental under the banner of Simultaneous Enhanced Managing Policing Operation 1 (SEMPO 1).³⁰³ The raids were predominantly undertaken by civilian-clothed police officers with rifles and masks, as reported by survivors.³⁰⁴ Six people were killed in the process of SEMPO 1, though PNP Chief Debold Sinas claimed that five of the

³⁰¹ National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, “Barangay,” National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, “Livelihood Products from Former Rebels,” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, Accessed 15 April 2026, <https://www.ntfelcac.gov.ph/products>

³⁰² PhilStar Global, “CHR cautions on move to revive concept of ‘Alsa Masa,’” 19 November 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/11/19/1869930/chr-cautions-move-revive-concept-alsa-masa>

³⁰³ Carla Gomez and Nestle Semilla, “6 Killed, 15 captured in Negros Oriental police operations,” *Inquirer*, 27 December 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1066945/6-killed-15-captured-in-negros-oriental-police-operations>

³⁰⁴ Mark Z. Saludes, “Death comes unprovoked upon Negros Island,” *Rappler*, 30 July 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/236573-negros-killings-death-comes-unprovoked/>

people “encountered” had resisted the execution of warrants.³⁰⁵ In another conference, the PNP alleged that those killed were also NPA members.³⁰⁶ The PNP and AFP’s usage of the term “encounter” was purposeful, as this was the term frequently used by the PNP to describe and justify the killings of those involved in the drug trade during the WOD, which carried a particular script that those targeted by the police fought back after being attacked by the shooter despite the lack of evidence to support such claims.³⁰⁷ The term also implies a degree of passivity, in the sense that the people killed were waiting to entrap or kill the officers executing the warrants, thus justifying that they were deserving of the subsequent counterinsurgent violence; this here is the reference to the “attack-and-defense” reversal that Dorlin describes above, a key logic of necro-semiotic terror.³⁰⁸ The bodies of the six killed in SEMPO 1 were dragged out of their homes and left in the street to be seen by the public before being taken away by the PNP for investigation.³⁰⁹ One of the men killed during the raid, Jesus Isugan (a member of the *Unyon ng Manggawa sa Agrikultura* (UMA) which represents farmers in CARP litigation/land disputes), was shot in front of his wife and child whom would have their family house burned down by vigilantes afterwards.³¹⁰ During Simultaneous Enhanced Managing Policing Operation 2 (SEMPO 2) in March of 2019, 14 were also killed after having “encountered” the security forces, with claims by the PNP that SEMPO 2 was targeting “communist rebels.”³¹¹

Just after the pronouncement of OPLAN Sauron and MO32, Duterte stated that despite formal NPA and PNP coordination, “The only thing missing is my own sparrow unit... [a]

³⁰⁵ Marty Go, “5 nanlaban umano sa pulis, patay sa Negros Oriental,” *ABS-CBN News*, 27 December 2018, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/12/27/18/5-nanlaban-umano-sa-pulis-patay-sa-negros-oriental>

³⁰⁶ Pinoy Weekly, “Bloodiest attack of Negros peasants yet,” 31 March 2019, <https://pinoyweekly.org/2019/03/bloodiest-attack-on-negros-peasants-yet/>

³⁰⁷ Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 88-91.

³⁰⁸ Dorlin, *Self-Defense*, xv.

³⁰⁹ Go, “Negros Oriental,”

³¹⁰ Saludes, “Negros Island”

³¹¹ Hapal, “KMP,” 67; “Negros Island”

Duterte death squad against the sparrow... I will match their talent also for assassinating people.”³¹² The term “sparrow unit” refers to a play on the acronym SPARU or Special Partisan Unit, the NPA’s urban units formed in the 1980s. Duterte laughed with the crowd of AFP soldiers in his delivery of the line, speaking in Bisaya, followed by jokes and a curse-laden ramble about how he would construct lounges for soldiers stationed in Bacolod City to be “served by beautiful woman in shorts.”³¹³ Minutes before, Duterte joked and cursed, stating “If you are going to shoot him, then shoot him. Kill him. Shoot to kill. Do not shoot and then bring him to the hospital because I would just have to spend money on him... If they resist violently... shoot motherfucker.”³¹⁴ Duterte told the AFP in attendance to not worry about human rights and that they would not be sued for human rights abuses, arguing that the justification for any killing is solely determined by a soldier’s claim to self-defence.³¹⁵ Duterte joked and fraternised with the AFP, referring to the counterinsurgency in terms of unabashed and gratuitous armed force on behalf of the AFP and PNP, promising rewards with sexual favours, alcohol, and an air of swagger. Duterte also referred to the usage of a “Duterte death squad” alongside the AFP, a play on the acronym DDS that refers to various permutations of vigilante groups in support of the WOD dating back to Duterte’s tenure as Davao City’s mayor.³¹⁶ In MO32, Duterte also described terrorism and insurgency in almost pathological and sterile terms, citing the “spread”

³¹² Deutsche Welle, “Duterte plans anti-communist ‘death squad’,” 28 November 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/duterte-plans-anti-communist-death-squad-in-philippines/a-46484215>

³¹³ Presidential Communications Operations Office, “Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte During His Visit to Camp Rajah Sikatuna and Turnover of AFP-PNP Housing Units,” <https://pco.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/20181127-SPEECH-OF-PRESIDENT-RODRIGO-ROA-DUTERTE-DURING-HIS-VISIT-TO-CAMP-RAJAH-SIKATUNA-AND-TURNOVER-OF-AFP-PNP-HOUSING-UNITS-1.pdf>

³¹⁴ Presidential Communications Operations Office, “Camp Rajah”

³¹⁵ Presidential Communications Operations Office, “Camp Rajah”

³¹⁶ Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 70-75.

of “lawless elements,” bolstered by his rhetoric that dissidents were “parasites” and an “affliction.”³¹⁷

Duterte’s speeches accomplished three things. First, they positioned resistors to Negros’ necro-economy against the whole of society, deeming them discursively worthless both as sterilised targets for counterinsurgency and also as butts of jokes in a similar manner to Duterte’s treatment of drug users. Secondly, they reinforced both the role of the formal state law enforcement and extrajudicial vigilante violence in executing counterinsurgency, bolstered by the whole-of-nation project that the NTF-ELCAC prioritised. Thirdly, the formal state and vigilantes under Duterte were beholden to supporting liberation and progression through both neoliberalism and counterinsurgency concomitantly, which falls in line with Duterte’s branding as a social bandit and penal populist. This third point is recognised and reinforced by the levers of law enforcement, exemplified in a statement made by PNP Director Oscar Albayalde:

We are calling on the people of Negros Oriental to maintain their allegiance to the sovereign power of the state, reject and deny the promotion of arms struggle being viciously inculcated in the minds and hearts of the people by the CPP/NPA/NDF terrorists for this is the greatest hindrance to progress and development that everyone is entitled to enjoy.³¹⁸

Duterte and those who support his counterinsurgency efforts rebranded Negros’ necro-economy through populist and faux-leftist discourses of progression, progressivism, and revitalisation of a stagnant agricultural market. This discourse, however, is contradicted by Duterte’s tacit allegiance to neoliberalism in the sugar industry. This constitutes a degree of trickery and doublespeak that ultimately exposes those on Negros to neoliberal structural violence that has existed since the 1990s. Additionally, Duterte reasserted necropolitical leverage over Negros

³¹⁷ Corrales, “Tit for Tat”

³¹⁸ Juancho Gallarde, “‘Oplan Sauron’ to continue in Negros Oriental,” *Philippine News Agency*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1075740>

through the open condonation of brutal violence that was tacitly utilised by previous administrations. In previous administrations, formal state-led counterinsurgency was given precedence over vigilante violence, despite the latter's frequent occurrence. In the case of Duterte, vigilante violence was condoned and at times welcomed. For Duterte, the vigilante underbelly of OPLAN Sauron was a key component of sowing terror in Negros' populace, as violence may or may not have been Duterte's doing, though it would come back to support Duterte's neoliberal encroachment.

You Really Deserve To Be Hit, You Fools: The 2019 NPA Ambush

NPA activity during the Duterte regime was on the rise after years of various isolated incidents. On Negros, the NPA continued to target sugar mill infrastructure, hacienda owners, the PNP, AFP, and even local civilians and businessowners who refused to pay revolutionary taxes.³¹⁹ On the island, the NPA's nadir in the 1990s through to their relative resurgence in the 2010s was due in-part to the government's unwillingness to address the issue of land reform and redistribution (which still remains an issue today). Administration after administration, pundits (even Duterte himself) would routinely describe that the lack of comprehensive land reform on Negros was the source of the NPA's unrest; this is not untrue. In fact, the neoliberalisation of Negros economy has continuously bolstered the NPA's cause as the government strayed away from comprehensive land reforms, which was generally accompanied by increasingly militarised counterinsurgency and broad-base support for increased law enforcement efforts, spurring reciprocal actions by the NPA and emboldening a cycle of precarity. Duterte explicitly knew about this action-reaction cycle and made it a campaign promise to end the violence against the

³¹⁹ Mary Judaline Partlow, "'Reds' torch PHP3-M heavy equipment in NegOr town," *Philippine News Agency*, 26 February 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1062981>

police by the NPA, as exemplified in earlier parts of the chapter. In fact, Duterte has relied on recruiting ex-NPA members who were sympathetic to his WOD by promising wealth or public office positions.³²⁰ Duterte had contracted out NPA sparrow units during his tenure in Davao City to pursue his WOD by relying on a mix of anti-corporatist and anti-drug syndicate rhetoric, and different sects of the NPA even supported his more recent national WOD. In 2016, the NPA claimed that:

The CPP reiterates its standing order for the NPA to carry out operations to disarm and arrest the chieftains of the biggest drug syndicates, as well as other criminal syndicates involved in human rights violations and destruction of the environment... The biggest and most notorious drug traffickers are those in the top echelons of the AFP and PNP, who are also in cohorts, with key officials in the local and national bureaucracy. It is apparent that President Duterte is fully aware of such.³²¹

Despite this early pronouncement, this was by no means a uniform policy of the NPA by the end of the Duterte administration, as Holden cites that this early support for Duterte was due in part to decent prospects of peace talks and the infancy of the administration itself.³²² Duterte also backed amnesty initiatives for an NPA splinter group, the RPA-ABB, which had remained loyal to the Duterte regime and participated in OPLAN Sauron.³²³ In this albeit uncommon phenomenon of recruiting the (ex-)NPA for his purposes of counterinsurgency, Duterte engaged in a form of violent societal reintegration that rendered those once beyond the pale of Filipino society as viable violent entrepreneurs in service of the state. Those who once fought against the state were paradoxically absorbed into the machinations of violent action in support of the state;

³²⁰ Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 152-5

³²¹ ABS-CBN News, "NPA backs Duterte fight vs drugs," 4 July 2016, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2026/4/28/sasakyan-pinaulanan-ng-bala-sa-edsa-2-pasahero-sugatan-2223>

³²² Holden, *Fear and Loathing*, 155.

³²³ Supreme Court of the Republic of the Philippines, "PROCLAMATION NO. 1092, February 05, 2021," *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 22 February 2021, <https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/7/92840>

a retrenching, or movement from absolute surplus into relative surplus, through violent exchange.³²⁴ More broadly, through his support for neoliberalism, Duterte gave himself the ability to continuously provide the conditions for the NPA's rise and even contracted out ex-rebels, only to reassert the state's power over them in a "tit-for-tat" manner; this left, unfortunately, much destruction in this cycle's wake.

The NPA's violence reached a zenith on Negros in July of 2019 when it ambushed a patrol of 4 PNP policemen in Ayungon. The NPA took credit for the killing and cited retribution for the Sagay massacre. The immediate outpouring of support for the PNP officers stemmed from the highest ranks of the AFP, PNP, and Duterte himself. Grief was mobilised for revanchism, with the President immediately leaping towards a discourse of retribution. In a press conference over the death of the PNP members, Duterte asked if any members of *Karapatan* were in attendance, stating that "you really deserve to be hit, you fools."³²⁵ Duterte also offered a bounty for the killers, who could be taken "dead or alive."³²⁶ PNP spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Kimberly Molitas referred to the NPA as predators who were "still not satisfied with the blood of their prey," determined "to wage [their] campaign of terror and oppression against the peasants and tribal communities in the countryside."³²⁷ Duterte decried that the police were "killed with impunity... the land disputes in Negros have escalated to killings" and that "[the NPA] have arbitrarily chosen who will own the lands."³²⁸ To cap off the statement, Duterte's spokesperson Salvador Panelo stated that "the President vows to replicate the atrocious acts done by the

³²⁴ Jensen and Hapal, *Communal Intimacy*, 42.

³²⁵ Voice of Asia, "Duterte Offers Bounty for 'Head' of Lead Killer of 4 Police," 25 July 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_duterte-offers-bounty-head-lead-killer-4-police/6172620.html

³²⁶ Musico, "PPRD"

³²⁷ Christopher Lloyd Caliwan, "Negros Oriental ambush another proof of Reds' treachery," *Philippine News Agency*, 19 July 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1075484>

³²⁸ Musico, "PPRD"

communist rebels to the civilians... to serve and protect the Filipino people... and to fiercely save the Republic from imminent ruin.”³²⁹

Duterte routinely isolated the context of the NPA’s violence on Negros and mobilised a narrative of total control and terror at the hands of the NPA. Duterte reinforced that the NPA was irrational, pathological, arbitrary, or sociopathic with their violence. Duterte reaffirmed the insensibility and irrationality of the actions of the NPA by referencing a lack of order and discipline (“killed with impunity,” “arbitrarily chosen”), reaffirming that the NPA existed beyond the pale of Filipino society writ large. Throughout these statements, Duterte reiterated the sovereign force of the state in making certain lives intelligible and others ungrievable through revanchist violence. Duterte reiterated the need to grieve the lives of the police officers, often humanising the officers while dehumanising those who murdered them (and by extension, organisations opposed to his rule, exemplified in his threats towards *Karapatan*), delineating the borders of who deserves to live, who deserves to die, and who deserves to be grieved as an ultimately wielding of (necro)political sovereignty. As Judith Butler states:

[some] frames are operative... according to which certain lives are perceived as lives while others... fail to assume perceptual form as such.... [forms of power] instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable.³³⁰

By rendering those who oppose his regime as “collateral damage” or beyond the pale of society, and those who enact his policies as lawlessly murdered family-men, Duterte reiterated the boundaries of normalcy through death and grievability. This grievability was only made

³²⁹ Musico, “PPRD”

³³⁰ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Verso Books, 2016), 24.

intelligible by describing the stakes of counterinsurgency as existential and by vowing to protect the Philippines and the “good” Filipinos from outside “evil” forces, which is inherently a necropolitical project of separation through violence.³³¹

The other point of necropolitical sovereignty that Duterte mobilised in the case of Ayungon is the willingness to offer bounties for the police’s killers. During the Duterte administration, no other bounty had been offered in any investigation for any killing besides the ambush of the four police officers in Ayungon. As discussed by Stefan Jensen and Karl Hapal, the usage of bounties or cash rewards in exchange for the deaths of dissidents within the general moral politics of worth and worthlessness reinforces a system where “human life is price-tagged.”³³² This system of “violent exchange” can be contextualised within the second chapter’s discussion of Negros’ necro-economy and the role of absolute surplus.³³³ To the extent that the NPA and left-wing resistors existed beyond the pale of Negros’ society as surplus, Duterte reiterated that the lives of left-wing resistors writ large are worthless. This worthlessness, however, can be subverted by their own death, where their bodies were price-tagged to the point that their bountied dead bodies could then be exchanged with for the lives of police officers. Violent exchange, to this end, can be further contextualised within the necro-economy through the distinction between good neoliberal subjects and bad resistant subjects. By rendering the bodies of dissidents as valuable only through violent necro-semiotic death, the Duterte administration permitted violence against dissidents as a generally valuable process. By promising revanchist violence in retaliation to the NPA, as well, Duterte reiterated a degree of exchange, where social and financial value could be extracted by subjecting dissidents to

³³¹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 46.

³³² Jensen and Hapal, *Communal Intimacy*, 42.

³³³ Jensen and Hapal, *Communal Intimacy*, 42.

violence. Ultimately, Duterte's revanchist "tit-for-tat" phrase simultaneously implied revenge and an exchange of value between dead dissidents and valuable life, ultimately modulating an exchange between good and bad neoliberal subjects.

The reiteration of sovereign power was backed by the credible threat made by Duterte a month later to implement martial law on Negros in response for the killings, only to double-back on the statement by reiterating that "there will never be a time when I will declare martial law" and that he was bound by judicial guardrails.³³⁴ Duterte's wielding of political sovereignty through sadness and anger was utilised to reinforce the boundaries of Philippine society, especially through the acts of necro-semiotic terror that sought to reorganise, dehumanise, and render dissident life as surplus and beyond Philippine society. Here, the matter at hand is not to excuse the NPA's actions, as they too contributed to the necro-economic system in their own right, but rather to point out how lives were differentially grieved and how grief was mobilised for the purposes of justifying necro-semiotic terror.³³⁵

Evidence of Things Unseen: Miscellaneous Killings

While this chapter has tended to focus on major incidents of necro-semiotic terror on Negros, there have been a litany of killings that occurred on a one-off basis that resemble necro-semiotic terror on a smaller scale. These killings may not be as ubiquitous or casualty-laden as the Sagay Massacre or the Ayungon Ambush, but they nonetheless represent a deeply personalised and pervasive form of counterinsurgency. In 2016, Rappler and the Defend Negros

³³⁴ Christina Mendez and Emmanuel Tupas, "Duterte not declaring martial law in Negros," *Philstar Global*, 7 August 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2019/08/07/1941183/duterte-not-declaring-martial-law-negros>

³³⁵ For an example of a plethora of Duterte-style NPA killings, see Marchel P. Espina, "Negros Occidental town councilor shot dead in front of family," *Rappler*, 31 March 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/elections/227080-negros-occidental-councilor-jolomar-hilario-shot-dead-home-march-31-2019/>

organisation developed a compendium of killings on Negros Island relating to both the WOD and WOT ranging from June of 2016 to August of 2019. The inclusion criteria for the list was based simply on the fact that someone had to have been killed on Negros in the given period, though the list also compiles information about name, age, occupation, assailant demographics, circumstances of death, and identity to further establish some demographical data for the killings. According to official corroborations by Rappler and the Defend Negros organisation, 55 of the 116 people killed were conclusively confirmed to be farmers, peasants, or CSO members directly associated with the sugar industry; this includes the Sagay Massacre and SEMPO 1 & 2.³³⁶ Defend Negros actually pins the number of those murdered at 87 in their own list, but this number includes various civilians who's demographical information either remains unknown and thus cannot be corroborated, or unrelated to the sugar industry.³³⁷ The other 61 people mentioned in the Rappler-Defend Negros list who were killed were members of other unions, people involved in the illicit drug trade, local politicians, unidentified civilians, radio broadcasters, and teachers; thus, the highest plurality of those killed on Negros were related to the sugar industry. Some of the 61 killed, such as Barangay Mabato Chief Sunny Caldera or school principal Arthur Bayawa, were broadly left-wing officials who were also red-tagged by the police and citizens for alleged involvement with the CPP-NPA for their support for land redistribution.³³⁸

³³⁶ Note that the figure of 55 of those confirmed to be red-tagged and killed only includes official and direct relations to the sugar industry. Jodesz Gavilan, "MAP: Negros Killings since July 2016," *Rappler*, 28 August 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/features/newsbreak/iq/238672-map-negros-killings-since-july-2016/index.html>

³³⁷ Gaea Katreena Cabico, "CHR calls for objective probe into Negros killings amid heated rhetoric," *PhilStar Global*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/08/02/1940018/chr-calls-objective-probe-negros-killings-amid-heated-rhetoric>

³³⁸ Marchel P. Espina, "Village chief tagged in cops' ambush in Negros Oriental dies," *Rappler*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/236118-village-chief-suspect-ambush-cops-negros-oriental-dead-july-2019/>; Kodao Productions, "Survivors' tales show 'most evil intentions' in Negros Oriental killings," 7 April 2019, <https://kodao.org/survivors-theses-show-most-evil-intentions-in-negros-oriental-killings/>;

Outside of the major mass-casualty events against red-tagged civilians listed above, almost all the non-police related single killings shared similar circumstances, where victims were shot numerous times in the head and chest by unidentified vigilantes, often in public streets or on haciendas from drive-by assailants. Other notable single killings after 2019, such as the public vigilante killing of long-time activist Zara Alvarez in August of 2020; Alvarez was shot six times in the head and chest by an unknown assailant, though the PNP immediately cited the “victim’s affiliation with leftist groups” as an aggravating circumstance in her death.³³⁹ Alvarez had been red-tagged for years by the AFP and PNP, with the Department of Justice deeming her a suspected “terrorist” beforehand.³⁴⁰ Two Negros nurses and health advocates who spoke out against SEMPO 2, Alvarez’ killing, and other various PNP operations in the WOD were shot 15 times by vigilantes after being red-tagged not long after Alvarez.³⁴¹

In every case of a sugar worker or sugar-worker advocate’s killing, investigations never panned out with regards to suspects, and in some cases, no formal investigations were launched whatsoever. By the middle point of the Duterte administration, vigilantism was recognised as an issue on Negros by the Philippine Senate and Supreme Court, yet very little investigative resources were dedicated to those killed by necro-semiotic terror.³⁴² Much of the lack of investigation was justified by the PNP and AFP shifting the blame to the NPA. According to PNP Chief Albayalde, the NPA was consistently “purging their own... They normally do that. They

³³⁹ Regencia, “War against dissent”

³⁴⁰ Regencia, “War against dissent;” Phil Robertson, “Two More Philippine Activists Murdered: Duterte Administration Had Once ‘Red-Tagged Both as Insurgents,” *Human Rights Watch*, 18 August 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/18/two-more-philippine-activists-murdered>; Carlos H. Conde, “Philippines Terrorist Petition Virtual Hit List,” *Human Rights Watch*, 8 March 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/08/philippines-terrorist-petition-virtual-hit-list>

³⁴¹ Ted Regencia, “Outcry after Filipino doctor on front line of pandemic shot dead,” *Al Jazeera*, 16 December 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/16/doctor-killed-philippines-pandemic>

³⁴² Senate of the Philippines, “Report: Investigate vigilante groups in Negros killings,” *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 27 January 2020, https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2020/0127_prib1.asp

sacrifice their own and then blame it on security forces.”³⁴³ Such a justification makes reference to the fact that the NPA, especially beginning in the 1980s, has undertaken internal purges of their membership through acts of targeted killings on the basis of commitment to the NPA or CPP’s central principles; much of these killings have spawned splinter groups and factions who have come to oppose different sects or chapters of the NPA, such as the RPP-ABB.³⁴⁴ Even when investigations were promised, the Duterte administration routinely sidestepped judicial independence by encouraging the primacy of law enforcement in the investigations of vigilante killings. In fact, when the Senate sought to investigate vigilante killings of citizens, the PNP recommended that the Senate and House of Representatives increase the PNP budget and reassert its role in countering the NPA through counterinsurgency rather than fulsomely investigate the vigilante killings.³⁴⁵

Law enforcement investigations into killings on Negros contained a core contradiction that hindered investigations from their onset. The PNP and AFP operated under the fact that investigations were knowingly non-independent, given the fact that many vigilantes have historically, especially in Negros’ history, been A. off-duty or ex-AFP or PNP servicepeople, and in the case of Duterte specifically, B. directly in support of the NTF-ELCAC which was dominated by the PNP and AFP.³⁴⁶ Additionally, the promised investigation of vigilante killings

³⁴³ Catherine Gonzales, “PNP to probe alleged existence of Kagubak death squad,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 29 August 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1158815/pnp-to-probe-alleged-existence-of-kagubak-death-squad>

³⁴⁴ See especially Patricio N. Abinales, “When a Revolution Devours Its Children Before Victory: *Operasyon Kampanyang Ahas* and the Tragedy of Mindanao Communism,” in *The Revolution Falters: the Left in Philippine Politics After 1986*, eds. Patricio N. Abinales (Cornell University Press, 1996), 154-79; Patricio N. Abinales, “Kahos Revisited: The Mindanao Commission and Its Narrative of a Tragedy,” in *Brokering a Revolution: Cadres in a Philippine Insurgency*, eds. R. Rutten (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 144-87; Robert Francis Bobby Garcia, *To Suffer Thy Comrades: How Revolution Decimated Its Own* (Anvil, 2008); William N. Holden, “The True Believers in the Land of Promise: The New People’s Army in Mindanao,” *Asia Mindanaw* 1, no. 1 (2014): 115-54; William N. Holden, “Deep Roots of Revolution: The New People’s Army in the Bicol Region of the Philippines,” *Canadian Journal of Tropical Geography* 2, no. 2 (2015): 1-15.

³⁴⁵ Senate of the Philippines, “Investigate”

³⁴⁶ For allegations and evidence of PNP/AFP involvement in vigilante killings in the WOD and WOT, see Senate of the Philippines, “IS THERE AN AFP DEATH SQUAD? Statement of Sen. Leila M. De Lima on the Negros

gives the Duterte administration a degree of plausible deniability by constantly deferring the processes of violence on Negros to extra-state groups. This shifting of blame allows the state to reinforce its own sovereign power over extra-state groups through both investigation and counterinsurgency, which gives the Duterte administration a perennial justification to stem the flow of violence from the NPA despite that fact that more people were killed by the state or state-aligned groups than were killed by the NPA during the Duterte administration.

Overall, Duterte's rule over Negros can be characterised as sovereign trickery, designed to further install neoliberal politics over the island. By first charting Duterte's brand of politicking as a mix of penal populism, revanchism, and social banditry, this chapter was able to contextualise Duterte's rule within Negros' necro-economy. Furthermore, this chapter explored the relationships between counterinsurgency, neoliberalism, and moral politics within the context of Duterte's rule over Negros. Duterte routinely reiterated that leftists writ large were not productive members of society, and that counterinsurgency measures such as OPLAN Sauron, the NTF-ELCAC, and MO32 and MO70 sought to reinforce this difference. By doing so, Duterte was able to justify necro-semiotic terror against dissidents on Negros by deeming them as beyond the pale of Filipino society. In addition, Duterte utilised various emotional turns and rhetorical strategy to assuage concerns that his administration was responsible for the various killings on Negros during his rule. While Duterte conformed with the long history of Negros' necro-economy, his usage of sovereign trickery marked a departure from the rhetorical and

Killings," *Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 30 July 2019, https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2019/0730_delima3.asp; PhilStar Global, "CHR laments PNP's refusal to share information on Negros killings," 27 August 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/08/27/1946850/chr-laments-pnps-refusal-share-information-negros-killings>; Peter Kreuzer, "'If they resist, kill them all': Police Vigilantism in the Philippines," *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*, 2016, 24-5, https://www.prif.org/fileadmin/Daten/Publikationen/Prif_Reports/2016/prif142.pdf; Christopher Lloyd Caliwan, "PNP chief agrees with PRRD on arming anti-crime volunteers," *Philippine News Agency*, 27 June 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1145115>

discursive branding on Negros when compared to previous administrations. Most importantly, Duterte's style of penal populism publicly emboldened vigilantism as a diffused form of sovereign power over the island, which differs from the generally state-dominant forms of counterinsurgency pursued by previous administrations.

Conclusions

From its onset, this thesis has sought to interrogate how the Duterte regime's rule over Negros constitutes state terrorism. To accomplish this, this thesis has attempted to historicise and interrogate Duterte's rule over Negros by charting the roots, conformities, and departures in policy and rhetoric towards the counterinsurgency and the sugar industry from previous administrations. This task was first broached by a discussion of necro-semiotic terror as an entangled concept that integrated discrete forms of physical, semiotic, and performative violence into a single phenomenon. By approaching necro-semiotic terror as a comprehensive violation that stipulates societal value, this thesis was able to contextualise violence in a political, economic, and sociological manner. Doing so underlines the link between a state's dominant economic paradigm and the state's role in maintaining its hegemony through state terrorism. This original reading of necro-semiotic terror was later applied and grounded in the history of Negros' necro-economy, which charted how death and terror were unleashed upon the haciendas of Negros from the Spanish colonial era into the Duterte administration for the purposes of generating social, human, and economic capital. Historicising the relationships between political power, economic value, and violence on Negros demonstrated that while effectively different with regards to rhetoric and vigilantism, much of Duterte's rule synergised with the violence and moral politics of Negros' history. Overall, Duterte furthered the project of neoliberal development on Negros dating back to the days of the Aquino Sr. regime, though this was accomplished through enhanced counterinsurgency programs and various rhetorical and discursive tricks.

Interpretive Findings

Driven by this thesis first interpretive proposition, this thesis' second and third chapter explored how death, either through necro-semiotic terror or the slower structural violence of the sugar industry, defined the relations of the sugar industry. Since their inception, the hacienda and mill mechanisms of Negros' sugar industry embedded political, social, and economic power in the elite *hacenderos* and mill-owning classes; such power was derived from the impoverishment of its farmers and the expropriation of wealth from the sugar industry. The larger industrial decline of the sugar industry during the Duterte administration led to a relative decline in farmer livelihoods due to withering social protections that were slashed or severely hindered by the Duterte administration, namely programs/legislation like CARP and the SIDA. By the early 2000s, the sugar industry's decline redirected its economic and political priorities towards increasing efficiency and economic diversification, ultimately through retrenching relative surplus workers into other sectors (oil and gas, telecommunication, food processing, etc.) and reducing the amount of resistant absolute surplus labourers involved in unions and civil societal organisations. This thesis has demonstrated that the Duterte administration, in conformity with the history of Negros' necro-economy, has red-tagged those resisting the sugar industry's dominance. The demonstration of this proposition furthers both the study of CTS and Filipino studies by providing a worker-centred perspective on the violence that defines Negros' sugar industry, a perspective that is also furthered by the third proposition.

Turning toward the second interpretive proposition of this thesis, this thesis has demonstrated that the violence on Negros during the Duterte administration has been intentional, and that said violence integrates physical and semiotic violence into necro-semiotic terror. On the strict basis of physical violence can still demonstrate the state intentionally undertook a program

of physical violence through the NTF-ELCAC that directly led to the death of Negros' sugar workers, namely through OPLAN Sauron and SEMPO I and II. Such a position is only bolstered by an expanded view of state terrorism and political violence that demonstrates that the state deliberately condoned vigilante violence in support of state objectives. In addition, this thesis demonstrated that this physical violence was contextualised by an accompanying form of semiotic violence that sought to discursively render those who resisted Negros' necro-economy as disposable and worthless. This project of necro-semiotic terror, as demonstrated throughout the second and third chapters especially, can be interpreted as a form of necropolitics, whereby the policy of the Duterte administration deliberately separated labouring dissidents in the sugar industry from Filipino society and targeted them through the inherently necropolitical exercise of necro-semiotic terror. Such a study has implications for both the study of postcolonialism and Filipino studies by way of categorising Duterte's rule over Negros. Doing so also expands upon the comprehensive study of violence found within PVS, offering a perspective from the context of the Philippines that concretises much of the philosophical debate found within the field.

Lastly, the third proposition states that red-tagging was deliberately pursued by the Duterte administration to justify neoliberal encroachment on Negros. Firstly, this thesis' first chapter demonstrates that through necro-semiotic terror, red-tagging is inherently a discursive and violent project that opposes the tenets of leftism; such tenets of leftism are also expressly opposed by neoliberalism. By utilising violence or the threat of both state and vigilante violence through red-tagging, the Duterte administration deliberately terrorised labourers in the sugar industry into accepting neoliberal policies by deeming their resistance as either directly in support of the CPP-NPA or outright orchestrated by the CPP-NPA. Red-tagging thus emboldened a form of moral politics that violently opposed resistance to neoliberal policies. Additionally, the Duterte

administration's counterinsurgency programs were also in direct support of neoliberal development programs, such as the direct integration of entrepreneurship and business ownership in the NTF-ELCAC. This thesis has also demonstrated that the process of targeting the sugar industry was concentrated on Negros and that those targeted by red-tagging, namely the NFSW and the Negros chapters of various CSOs, were expressly red-tagged within the discursive and socioeconomic context of Negros' sugar industry. Through the evidence in support of this proposition, this thesis has contributed to the normative project of documenting state violence in its various permutations while expanding on the study of CTS (particularly state terrorism) and Filipino studies more broadly. To this broader end, this thesis has demonstrated strong evidence that the Duterte administration's rule over Negros constitutes state terrorism.

Limitations and Further Research

This thesis offers many new avenues for further research that could stem from the research presented. One of the larger constraints purposefully placed upon this thesis was the geographical scope and comparative study. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the single case study methodology gives a researcher a large degree of specificity at the expense of the generalisability of the theories and conclusions derived from their experiment. In this case, the development of necro-semiotic terror and necro-economic theory was limited spatially and temporally to Negros under the Duterte regime; the theory developed only holds to the limited conditions outlined by this thesis' case selection. Thus, having made the case for Negros as an intensified site of necro-semiotic terror, other regions should be compared and explored further to test if necro-semiotic terror would be present under different conditions. Many regions in the Philippines such as Tarlac, Bukidnon, and Antique are all home to sugar mills and other agro-businesses; Tarlac has also had massacres related to the sugar fields similar to that of Negros, and

Bukidnon and Antique have seen similar instances of vigilante violence.³⁴⁷ Preliminarily, an increase in industrial intensiveness or entrenchment of the sugar industry seems to impact how violent clashes or altercations become, as Tarlac, Bukidnon, and Antique have not had an equivalent massacres to that of Sagay or Escalante.

Additionally, there are other countries that have developed their sugar industry in similar fashions. The annexed islands of Hawai'i had sugar plantations on the island of Kaua'i; such plantations were sites of violence against Filipino-organised labour strikes, such as the Hanapepe Massacre of 1924.³⁴⁸ Cuba had also experienced a litany of slave revolts and agrarian strikes throughout the 19th and 20th century in and around the same time that Spanish and American mill workers began to prioritise the industrial processing of sugars.³⁴⁹ To this end, further research should seek out different regions and industries to test if different industrial developments, comparative industrialisation levels, or regional geographies matter in necro-economic theory or necro-semiotic terror. The usage of comparative methodologies such as the most-similar-systems/most-different-systems methodologies could bolster or negate the findings of this thesis. Having mentioned other instances of killings in different places in the Philippines, this thesis also opens avenues for the study of the present. Sadly, as evidenced by the continued vigilante and AFP murders of sugar workers during the writing of this thesis, killings on Negros have proceeded unabatedly during the current Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos Jr. administration, son

³⁴⁷ Stephanie Dychiu, "After Luisita massacre, more killings linked to protest," *GMA News*, 11 February 2010, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/specialreports/183662/after-luisita-massacre-more-killings-linked-to-protest/story/>; Cong B. Corrales, "Pangantucan killings: Survivor says massacre, military says encounter," *VERAFiles*, 4 September 2015, <https://verafiles.org/articles/pangantucan-killings-survivor-says-massacre-military-says-encounter>; Mel N. Velez, "Suspect in beheading of 15-year-old girl in Valencia City arrested," *Philippine Inquirer*, 10 January 2026, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2166482/suspect-in-beheading-of-15-year-old-girl-in-valencia-city-arrested>

³⁴⁸ M.K. Jung, "Symbolic and physical violence: Legitimate state coercion of Filipino workers in pre-war Hawai'i," *American Studies* 45, no. 3 (2004): 107-37.

³⁴⁹ Aisha K. Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841-1844* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015)

of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.³⁵⁰ Other research should attempt to further develop the theory of necro-semiotic terror in the context of the Marcos Jr. regime, possibly even in conjunction with an expanded geographic scope.

Another avenue for further research is the study of red-tagging in the context of the Philippines. Much of this thesis' research involved the study of jurisprudence and studies on the Duterte regime to derive its theory of red-tagging, much of which is not found within academic sources. As a broader expression of Filipino studies' core epistemology and methodological practices, there ought to be a dedicated history of red-tagging to chart its national/regional evolution(s) from the point of American colonisation. Further research should also seek to situate such a discussion in the interdisciplinary study of political economy and political violence, as such a study could further the discussion of political violence in various contexts similar or different to that of the Philippines. Doing so purposefully not only expands the theoretical study of political violence, but grounds its theoretical developments in concrete contexts. This could also be bolstered by a comparative study of other ideological or political motivations for political violence on Negros that go beyond the aspects of economic determinism of this thesis. In the sugar industry on Negros, racial divisions have been explored as determinants of labour relations in past history, and in other regions, the development of communal intimacy at the *barangay* or mill level have also been explored as determinants of economic behaviour; all of these explorations have some viability in the study of political economy and political violence as well.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Velez, "Beheading;" Gilbert Bayoran, "Negros Occidental Execs defend Toboso encounter," *PhilStar Global*, 9 May 2026, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2026/05/09/2526680/negros-occidental-execs-defend-toboso-encounter>

³⁵¹ Jensen and Hapal, *Communal Intimacy*; Billig, "Rationality;" Oabel, "Restructuring"

Altogether, this thesis has sought to demonstrate that political violence remains deeply multifaceted and contextual; that every bullet fired or body exhumed is shaped by any entanglement of factors at varying levels. This thesis has charted how the history, economy, and geography of Negros have continuously defined the phenomenon of political violence on the island, and that Negros in particular demonstrates a particularly brutal concoction of sorts. This thesis has pointed at the broad systems at play on Negros to demonstrate how the extraction of sugarcane, a practice dating to the indigenous people of the island, has shaped who is deemed to deserve to die in the present day. This thesis has pieced together the various killings during the Duterte regime to make some sense of them, as the trend of necro-semiotic terror on Negros ought to be continuously studied and expanded for the normative end of studying violence to end violence. It suffices to say that so long as the sugar fields of Negros remain unequal and structurally violent, death will continue to define the way people seek out their livelihoods. The author of this thesis thus hopes that these findings become woefully obsolete.

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