



Drugs and the Marcos Dictatorship: The Beginnings of the Philippines' Punitive Drug Regime (1970–1975)

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RESEARCH



ABSTRACT

This article identifies the early dictatorship of former President Ferdinand Marcos as a significant moment in drug policy in the Philippines, as well as the wider Southeast Asian region. Using methods of critical discourse analysis and the notion of episodic history, it shows how the Marcos government capitalized on the idea of a 'drug menace' and narrativized the ideal of 'discipline' to justify its authoritarian regime and establish a heavily prohibitionist and punitive drug paradigm in the country. Conflating drug addiction, activism, Communist subversion, and criminality into an amalgamated boogeyman, Marcos was able to construct a singular 'enemy of the state' that warranted the imposition of martial law and the launch of a drug war. This discourse was co-constructed with various actors and institutions across civil society, including the Catholic Church, academics, filmmakers, and the numerous drug-related nonprofits that proliferated during the time. By elucidating the sociopolitical construction of Marcos' drug war, this article demonstrates how punitive drug policies take shape, garner popular support, and legitimize state efforts to move toward authoritarianism. Moreover, it situates drug wars not as exceptions to history, but as parts of a continuum determined by global policy currents and geopolitical influences; as co-constructed narratives built on enduring, popular attitudes toward drugs and drug use, and past drug regimes and drug wars. In the case of Marcos' drug war—itself heavily molded by American forces at the time—it provided the foundations for the region's prohibitionist drug ideologies and future drug wars, including the exceptionally violent war waged during the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte (2016–2022).

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The drug war in the Philippines during Rodrigo Duterte's presidency (2016–2022) was exceptional in the extent and scale of its violence. Within its first six months, over 43,000 'drug personalities' were arrested and, more disturbingly, over 4,000 individuals slain extrajudicially (Rappler.com 2016). Countless eyewitness accounts told of victims—already apprehended—begging for their lives, only to be summarily shot, belying the police force's repeated claims of these individuals fighting back ('nanlaban') during arrest and thus being slain in self-defense (see Cupin 2016). Many of the dead were found in public places with cardboard sheets saying, 'Pusher ako. Huwag tularan' (I'm a drug pusher. Don't follow my example), or variations thereof (see Pacia 2016), adding to the 'spectacularization' of the drug war (Lasco 2020). By the end of Duterte's term, tens of thousands were thought to have been killed in the bloody campaign popularly known as 'Oplan Tokhang,' which scholars and activists have characterized as genocide (Pernia 2019; Simangan 2018).

Presently, the question remains: How do we situate Duterte's drug war in terms of the history of drug policy in the Philippines and the wider Southeast Asian region? One well-trodden path has been to look at the country's situation at the time he took office as an exceptional, historical moment, and to view his violent approach to drugs as a continuation of his policies as long-time mayor of Davao City (e.g., Teehankee 2016; Thompson 2016). After all, one of the fearsome elements in the city he ruled for over 20 years was the Davao Death Squad, a vigilante group whose existence has been corroborated by numerous witnesses and reports from human rights organizations (Coronel 2019; Kine 2017; McCoy 2019; Neistat & Seok 2009). Indeed, framing Duterte, from his mayoralty to his presidency, as a man obsessed with fighting drugs and the people who use them could very well be the dominant, present-day narrative.

However, this frame disregards the broader question of why drugs have been persistently viewed by society as a social evil—evident, for example, in the enduring popular support both for Duterte and his drug war throughout his term (Social Weather Stations 2019; Social Weather Stations 2022)—and why, long before Duterte came to power, the Catholic Church in the Philippines released in 1972 a pastoral statement on 'drug abuse' that mirrored the future president's rhetoric: '...A country whose youths are mental and physical wrecks will be hopelessly doomed... [Drug dealers and smugglers] are the worst saboteurs and are worthy of the highest punishments... [T]hey destroy the youth, the hope of the land' (Alberto 1972: para. 14).

Neither does Duterte's drug war explain how, in 1988, when he was still a nationally unknown, first-term mayor of Davao, the country's Supreme Court penned a decision that curiously shared his worldview: '... Drug addicts become useless if not dangerous members of society and in some instances turn up to be among the living dead... The peddlers of drugs are actually agents of destruction. They deserve no less than the maximum penalty' (Gancayco 1988: para. 16).

What, then, were the conditions of possibility that produced, or at least enabled, Duterte's drug policy? What were the sociopolitical contexts that informed this drug war, as well as people's attitudes toward drugs and those who use them? In this article, we contend that Duterte's drug war was a culmination—rather than an exception—to the Philippines' drug paradigm, which has become increasingly punitive through the decades and characterized by killings, both judicial and extrajudicial. Instead of regarding it as an isolated phenomenon in history, we demonstrate how this war should be seen as part of the progression of drug policies in the country; as a particularly gory episode in the people's long-held views toward drugs.

We consider one period in Philippine history that predates Duterte's drug war, as well as those in neighboring Southeast Asian countries: the early years of former President Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship. While anti-drug legislation in the Philippines dates back to the American colonial period in the early 20th century, with the episcopal bishop Reverend Charles Brent instrumental in instituting global drug control (Foster 2019), it was during the Marcos years that drugs gained political valence as a perceived threat both to the body politic and to the youth. As we illustrate in this article, in the years surrounding the 1972 declaration of martial law, Marcos mobilized his government to combat a so-called 'drug menace'; moreover, civil-society entities like the Catholic Church, private nonprofits, academics, and filmmakers participated in amplifying the

moral panic around drugs (see [Tan 1995](#)). Ultimately, the reification of this menace paved the way for a more punitive drug regime, the defining consequences of which were the passage of Republic Act 6425 or the [Dangerous Drugs Act of 1972](#), and the subsequent creation of the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB).

APPROACH

In focusing on a circumscribed period in Philippine political history, we borrow the notion of ‘episodic history,’ which ‘treats in a more condensed and concise manner clusters of historical details and reflections that do not easily fit into a larger whole’ ([Rafael 2014: 4](#)). By ‘[lingering] on the threshold of meanings [and] dwelling in the shadows of details, [episodic histories] convey the eventhood of events,’ which is to say, ‘the conditions of possibility and impossibility for [their] historical emergence’ (4).

In this article, we focus on how drugs figured in official policies, as well as political and public discourses, during the early Marcos dictatorship. We utilized two main data sources. The first were the speeches delivered in the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of the president, understood as an important indicator of the government’s annual priorities and policy directives, and complemented by an examination of important legislations enacted in relation to drug policy and the attendant political debates that surrounded their passage. The second were culled from nongovernment actors and civil society, the latter construed herein as the constellation of ‘all social, cultural, religious, and non-profit... organizations outside government but operating within the framework of the law’ ([Wurfel 2004: 215](#)). Hence, we looked to the media (e.g., newspaper accounts of drug use, cinematic depictions of people associated with drugs), religious institutions like the Catholic Church (mainly through pronouncements inscribed in official statements of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines [CBCP]), and the academe (e.g., scholarly books, journal articles, letters).

Taken together, these sources were framed and analyzed textually to demonstrate the discourses on illegal drugs and the people associated with them. The reading of these texts was informed by the methods of critical discourse analysis, particularly the discourse-historical approach, which ‘perceives both written and spoken language as a form of social practice’ and highlights the ‘dialectical relationship between particular discursive practices and the specific fields of action (including situations, institutional frames and social structures), in which they are embedded’ ([Wodak 2001: 65–66](#)).

Additionally, in mapping the conditions of possibility that allowed the discourses on drugs to become means toward political ends during the dictatorship, we also build on the local Philippine scholarship, as well as the global literature, that has recognized drugs and drug wars as populist tropes. ‘There is something peculiar about populism that makes its association with anti-drug campaigns so nefarious,’ observed Kenny ([2019: 130](#)), also noting that ‘populists are both cause and effect: they drive popular concern over social issues like drug crime and addiction, but they also respond to and exploit them’ (132). Lasco ([2020: 2](#)) underscored the performative aspect of these popular concerns: ‘Drug wars rely on the performance of national crisis. Drug wars may take off from a milieu of concern over drugs, but they are inaugurated by political declarations of emergency...’ Still, to further understand this form of ‘penal populism’ ([Bottoms 1995; Pratt 2006](#)), we also need to ground the discussion on the country’s larger contemporary political history. As will be shown later, this history is inextricably part and parcel of the conditions of possibility that affect the Philippine experience of drugs and (illicit) drug use.

DRUGS AND THE MARCOS GOVERNMENT

The late 1960s and early 1970s were major turning points in Philippine history. As the country was plunged alongside the rest of the world deep into the context of the Cold War, the specter of what would become a brutal dictatorship became more apparent. In a bid to extend his rule, Marcos forged a means to enshrine himself as the one to bring the so-called ‘New Society’ to fruition, emphasizing at the core of his campaign the need for discipline amid the rapid reemergence of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the perceived rise of criminality in

the urban streets (see [Anastacio & Abinales 2022](#) for a thorough, contemporary appraisal of the dictatorship; see also [Liwanao 1988](#)). Expectedly, the discourse shaped by his administration underscored the necessity for a stronger state to combat the mounting threats to national security. Months away from his declaration of martial law, Marcos ([1972: para. 14](#)) pointed out in his January 1972 SONA that ‘one thing is undeniable: 1971 saddled [the Philippines] with crises—not singly but in battalia’, proceeding to portray the domestic scene as such:

[T]he reestablishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines... the creation of Communist front organizations, the Maoist uprisings, ... the corruption of our police agencies, the rise in the consumption of drugs and pornography, not to say the bloody conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao—all these struck us with simultaneous force. (para. 11)

Here, Marcos’ focus on drugs, framed as antithetical to peace and progress, was crystal clear. In this same speech, he announced what he called a ‘special crusade’ against drug trafficking, characterizing drugs and the people associated with them as such:

Drug addiction... [has] aggravated the peace and order problem... [Drugs] constitute a threat to the fabric of morality which is indispensable to the preservation of public order. They are perils against which we must be particularly watchful because they work insidiously, undermining the character and spirit of our people, and producing their peculiar form of destruction without force and violence. (para. 65)

Less than three months after that SONA, R.A. 6425, or the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1972, was passed. Among its novel impositions was the penalty of death for anyone caught using, transporting, selling, or distributing prohibited drugs. Needless to say, this law would become the predecessor for the country’s current legal framework, the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, which has inherited its punitive and prohibitionist approach to drugs and drug use. As well, R.A. 6425 officially established the DDB, tasked to craft rules and regulations in relation to the law, be the custodian of sequestered drug contraband, conduct drug-related research, train government personnel on dangerous drugs control, and develop educational programs, among other duties.

On 21 September 1972, Marcos declared martial law. A week later, his newly promulgated legal framework on drugs scored its first—and evidently, most significant—arrest with the capture of Lim Seng, head of a local syndicate that belonged to the Southeast Asian Golden Triangle network and was believed to have provided, at its peak, some 10% of the United States’ annual heroin supply ([McCoy 2003](#)). The circumstances surrounding Lim Seng’s arrest and eventual execution can be seen as representative of how the dictatorship maneuvered its way around and manipulated the discourse it sought to propagate on drugs. For one, prior to his arrest, Lim Seng was long known to the Marcos government; as early as February of that year, Marcos had already recognized the so-called ‘Chinese problem’ and created special committees to look into it,¹ and into the larger issue of narcotics, which were deemed a ‘social malady [that] threatens to corrupt and degrade the youth.’² In fact, Lim Seng’s arrest and the raids on his heroin laboratories in Manila could be attributed only to internal pressure within the national government, as well as from the US government ([Seagrave 1988](#)). Upon apprehension, Lim Seng even attempted to bribe the arresting agents with USD 150,000; subsequently, he was ‘able to bribe a member of the military tribunal to avoid the death penalty’ ([McCoy 2003: 401](#)). But, in a show of power and testament to the reification of his ‘New Society’s’ moral infrastructure, Marcos overturned the tribunal’s decision three months later and sentenced Lim Seng to death ([Seagrave 1988](#)).

The public execution of Lim Seng by firing squad in January 1973 was a major statement toward the rapidly militarizing state of the Philippines. To a considerable extent, it helped provide a pretext for the railroading of Marcos’ new constitution, which effectively made him president and prime minister, and abolished Congress—the decision, according to the government, of

¹ See Executive Order No. 374, s. 1972. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1972/02/11/executive-order-no-374-s-1972/>.

² See Administrative Order No. 318, s. 1972. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1972/02/08/administrative-order-no-318-s-1972/>.

98% of the population, or some 14.2 million voters in the nationwide citizens referendum held during the same week as the execution (Official Week in Review: January 12–January 18 1973).

The case of Lim Seng also reveals a more crucial discursive slant that came to shape the dictatorship: the conflation of the ‘drug menace’ with criminality, activism, and the Communist insurgency into a singular ‘enemy of the state’, a boogeyman of sorts composed of interchangeable parts. This could be seen, for example, in how the Philippine Constabulary, the police force at the time, and in particular the Constabulary Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) that had been deliberately established in 1972, operated. In large part, the CANU was formed with US intervention to crack down on American soldiers in the Philippines who were covertly participating in the drug trade (Seagrave 1988). But, while the US had provided the Philippines some USD 1.28 million to suppress the drug trade, considerable resources were being diverted by the Marcos government for ‘non-narcotics-related purposes’ (Kuzmarov 2012: p. 119), including for the dictatorship’s anti-Communist and anti-activist operations, leading Sales (2020: para. 2) to conclude that the war on drugs as state paradigm has always been ‘used to... police political dissent’.

The conflation of drugs with the Communist insurgency was also evident in how the image of drug addicts and smugglers, to use the government’s preferred language, was used to justify the dictatorship’s excesses and human rights abuses. One notable case involved 23-year-old Liliosa Hilao, a student activist who was abducted and tortured to death by the military in 1973. As revealed by the government defector Primitivo Mijares (1976: 234) in his groundbreaking exposé *The Conjugal Dictatorship*, after torturing Hilao to death, the military tried to justify their actions while also propagating the dictatorship’s narrative on drugs by manipulating Hilao’s mutilated body to make her look like an addict: ‘Hypodermic needles were deliberately jabbed into [her] arms to make it appear as if she was a drug addict’.

Even with the high-profile execution of Lim Seng, however, the drug trade still thrived during the dictatorship—lending further proof of drugs only being used as a trope to justify martial law. As Seagrave (1988: 325–326) recounted, ‘some Marcos diplomats were premier couriers, protected by diplomatic immunity... [and who were] free to come and go without baggage inspection’ when traveling; in 1971, an attaché at the Philippine embassy in Laos even managed to transport over 34 pounds of heroin all the way to Manhattan, New York, where he was unfortunately arrested at his hotel. More telling was the prosperous career of Jose ‘Don Pepe’ Oyson: Protected by the regime’s top officials, Oyson was one of the most powerful crime bosses of Manila, importing and distributing methamphetamine with impunity throughout the dictatorship (Sidel 1999), demonstrating ‘the state’s power to favor individual vice entrepreneurs within a covert netherworld’ (McCoy 2019: 14) and the culture of cronyism that marked the Marcos era.

Nevertheless, throughout the early years of his dictatorship, Marcos continued to drum up support for his drug war. In his 1974 SONA, Marcos (1974) heightened his campaign against drugs further by depicting addiction as ‘a matter of national security’ (para. 106), claiming the country now had ‘at least 60,000 drug addicts’ (para. 103). Declaring that ‘the campaign against drug addiction will now be waged more relentlessly’ (para. 104), he proceeded—quite tellingly—to invoke the amalgamated boogeyman of addicts, activists, and criminals in particularly connotative language:

Drug addiction is no longer just a threat. It has become a morbid and perplexing reality... In a sense, drugs pose a greater danger than crime itself. Addiction works insidiously to destroy private lives, and ultimately the life of the nation. The youth, many of them in the schools, are particularly vulnerable to it... Antinarcotics squads have a full-time job tracking down the monster to its many lairs... The most alarming fact is that the drug traffic has become an underground or rebel activity, and it has gone deeper since proclamation of martial law (para. 103).

The following year, at a 1975 presentation before the United Nations, the Marcos government even broadcast its drug paradigm to the international stage and lauded the success of its ‘New Society’ in curbing the ‘drug menace.’ In a document that again lumped criminality, Communism, subversion, activism, and drug addiction into one homogenous ill of Philippine society, the government justified its continuing imposition of martial law by claiming that,

prior to this imposition, an estimated '60,000 students were drug abusers' living in and around the capital of Manila, with '95 percent [becoming] addicts due to curiosity, or association with addicts'; that schools had become 'new havens for drug pushers'; and that 'most of these addicts turned to crime to satisfy their pernicious habit' (*The Peace and Order Condition in the Philippines—Past and Present* 1975: 5). With this 'New Society' under martial law, the presentation asserted, the number of addicts had supposedly dropped by as much as 70%, and 'discipline has become a way of life' (18).

DRUGS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The depiction of drugs as a social evil, and people who use drugs as worthy of eradication, was propagated not only by the Marcos government. At least during the dictatorship's early years, individuals and institutions across civil society also shared and disseminated this perspective.

There was, foremost, the Catholic Church—the country's most powerful religious institution—as can be gleaned from the CBCP's statements. The year preceding the declaration of martial law, the CBCP released two letters that echoed the state rhetoric in discussion. The first, in February 1971, portrayed drugs as one of the major 'ills of society' corrupting the youth: 'Drug addiction is on the rise. So are filthy movies and pornography. These are evils that erode most insidiously, the moral fiber of our people. Do we—and our students especially—see them in this light?' (Alberto 1971b: para. 10). This was followed five months later in July with another warning on 'the rampant addiction to drugs especially among our youth' (Alberto 1971a: para. 10). 'We shudder to think of the consequences of this evil', the letter said, 'which can destroy not only physical life but above all the moral and the spiritual' (para. 10). The following year, as if taking its cue from Marcos' SONA and the newly passed R.A. 6425, the CBCP released an all-out condemnation of drug use through the pastoral letter excerpted earlier in this article's introduction. In its 'conflation between youth and the image of the country whose future was being undermined by drug abuse' (Cornelio & Lasco 2020: 333), that letter stated:

... [T]he effects of these drugs ... are tantamount to the interference and the lessening of human freedom due to the loss of reason and self-control, [thus] even isolated use of narcotics for pleasure is immoral... Likewise, illicit trafficking in narcotics is gravely immoral and those who indulge in this illicit business... [only] prey upon human weakness for selfish gain. The smuggling of products that are legally forbidden as harmful or dangerous like narcotic drugs, is clearly sinful since the legal prohibition is declarative of the natural law (Alberto 1972: para. 16).

Aside from the Church, academics also participated in the state's discourse on drugs, often by defending the necessity of the government's draconian approaches and, to borrow from Abinales (2016: 58), '[helping] provide the dictatorship for a justification for its existence.' For instance, in a public lecture on the second anniversary of the declaration of martial law, the historian Teodoro Agoncillo (1974: 12)—widely regarded as a key proponent of a nationalist Philippine historiography—lauded Marcos' 'deep sense of history,' which he believed to be key to the President's 'decision to impose martial law... [without which] the country [would have wallowed] in poverty, chaos, bloodshed, and national economic perdition.' Prior to this declaration, Agoncillo averred, 'in urban centers, one could not walk the streets at night, and even in the daytime, without having a feeling of physical insecurity' amid the proliferation of 'social maladies... the rise of criminality [and] the popularization of marihuana [sic] and opium' (4–5).

In a public lecture the following year, the distinguished professor of law Maria Clara Campos (1975: 556) portrayed drug abuse as a 'growing cancer' that 'has crept into all strata of society,' from the country's slums to its wealthiest neighborhoods. Saying that '80% of all drug dependents in the country comes from the young generation,' Campos lamented 'this pitiful and painful waste of young lives' and exhorted Philippine society to 'admit that we indeed have a serious problem which not only deserves, but renders imperative, the concern of... government authorities, the community, the church, the family, the professionals and even the youth barangays' (556).

In line with Campos' sentiments, schools and academia in general frequently collaborated with the state in its anti-drug campaign, practically propagating the government's preferred discourse on drugs. The DDB, for instance, worked with many private institutions to develop anti-drug educational programs, such that by the 1980s, many of these schools already had their own standalone programs both as part of the curriculum and as extra-curriculars (Cudal 1976; Quejas 1983). Individually, academics also worked with government in ways that forwarded the anti-drug (and, in effect, pro-state) agenda. A notable example is the late sociologist Ricardo M. Zarco, pioneer of drugs research in the country, who incidentally worked for a full decade with the Narcotics Foundation of the Philippines (NFP) as consultant-researcher, producing during that time a two-volume monograph on drug use, including one among students (Zarco 1975; see also Gutierrez 2012). The medical establishment, too, participated in the discourse: An essay penned in 1972 by the director of the National Mental Hospital cited government-generated data (e.g., the statistic of 60,000 students who were addicts) to declare drug abuse as 'a problem of the first priority,' in part because students had supposedly become 'more "revolutionary"' (Goduco-Auglar 1972: para. 14).

But perhaps the most obvious form of civil-society participation in the state's discourse on drugs was the proliferation of nongovernment organizations that claimed to address various aspects of the 'drug menace.' Many of these NGOs focused on the concept of rehabilitation, effectively promoting the idea of people who use drugs as in need of curing and fixing; the widespread use of 'drug abuse' in nomenclature—as well as the conflation of 'users,' 'abusers,' 'addicts,' and 'dependents'—is telling of their ideological foundations.

The NFP was one such organization. Established in 1967 with the DDB's backing, it supposedly addressed all aspects of drug use, including through the creation of one of the first private, residential rehabs (Quejas 1983). In the early 1970s, it gained significant government support, earning the state's continuous endorsement (through official proclamations, no less) for fundraising drives,³ in turn attaining the stature to be able to fund researches on drug use, including those of Zarco's (US Department of State 1972). Besides the NFP, there was the Drug Abuse Research Foundation, which created Bahay Pag-asa (literally, 'House of Hope' in Tagalog), the first rehab in the country and in Southeast Asia to offer the treatment program known as the therapeutic community (Dausan & Virtudazo 2021). In Baguio City in 1972, Shalom House became one of the first DDB-accredited outpatient rehabs, supported by numerous civic organizations in the city (Quejas 1983; US Department of State 1972). In Olongapo City in 1973, Irish priest Father Shay Cullen founded Prevent and Rehabilitate Drug Abusers (now People's Recovery Empowerment and Development Assistance), a community-based rehab supported—again—by the DDB ('Who is Father Shay Cullen?' n.d.). These centers came to constitute the Drug Abuse Rehabilitation Network, Inc., which worked intimately with the government's Narcotics Command and was funded by the DDB (Quejas 1983).

International civic and humanitarian organizations also figured in this ersatz movement against drugs. In Butuan City in 1972, for example, Kiwanis International conducted anti-drug abuse seminars and public symposia at summer camps and local high schools and colleges, and aired daily educational campaigns on the radio ('Kiwanis in Action 1973 edition' 1973). Likewise, the Philippine National Red Cross included drug abuse prevention and control in its training for both professionals and volunteer instructors, while the Boy Scouts of the Philippines developed an educational program that aimed to reach some two million youth (Cudal 1976).

Lastly, cultural institutions like the film industry also participated in the moral panic around drugs. In 1972 alone, at least three films were released that all featured drug use cast in a negative or antagonistic light. Two of those were directed by Tony Cayado: *Living Dead* (1972), about a family fractured by the son's drug use and the father's involvement with a syndicate, and *Nardong Putik* (1972), based on the real-life case of the eponymous gangster and marijuana plantation owner who evaded capture for the longest time and survived multiple threats to his life (see Supreme Court of the Philippines En Banc 1981). The third was Augusto Buenaventura's *Kill the Pushers* (1972), which was awarded Best Picture and Director in 1973 by the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences, the country's oldest film award-giving body. Possibly one

3 See Proclamation No. 846, s. 1971: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1971/05/03/proclamation-no-846-s-1971/>; and Proclamation No. 1097, s. 1973: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1973/01/11/proclamation-no-1097-s-1973/>.

of the most prominent anti-drug art pieces at the time, it dramatized Marcos' drug war and the capture of Lim Seng, and even starred future Philippine President Joseph Estrada in one of his earliest leading roles.

Arguably, civil society would have been—to an understandable degree—compelled to follow the dictatorship's narrative surrounding drugs and the people associated with them. But these findings also show that some of these individuals and institutions already aligned with the government's perspective on drugs even before the declaration of martial law: The statements from the CBCP and the National Mental Hospital all predated that declaration; so, too, did the production and release of *Living Dead* and *Nardong Putik*.

DISCUSSION

This is not the first article to recognize the early Marcos dictatorship as a foundational, historical moment to the Philippines' present-day drug regime. Lasco (2020) already demonstrated how Marcos used drugs as a 'populist trope' by harnessing the image of destructive drug addicts to perform a national crisis for which the most suitable response was supposedly a drug war—one that foreshadowed future such wars beyond the country, including those launched by Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand in 2003 and Joko Widodo in Indonesia in 2015. Cornelio and Lasco (2020) likewise traced the influence of Marcos' drug war through the 'morality politics' espoused by the Catholic Church, demonstrating how the Church's brazenly anti-drug sentiments during the dictatorship resurfaced conspicuously at a crucial juncture of 21st-century Philippine politics, specifically the campaign period leading up to Duterte's election.

Instead, what our article provides is, first, an explicit, cross-temporal link between Marcos' drug war, the narrativization of discipline that props up authoritarian regimes, and the participation of civil-society actors in reinforcing this narrative. In historical isolation, scholars have dissected the centrality of this narrative to Duterte's drug war. Reyes (2016), for instance, theorized this war as a Foucauldian spectacularization of violence, in which dead bodies were used overtly to declare the state ideology and subliminally to inculcate the need for discipline among the citizenry. Kusaka (2020) illustrated how widescale support for Duterte's drug war, despite its known brutality, could be attributed to the 'emergent moral subjectivities' among people who saw themselves as disciplined, good citizens, and those who used drugs as undisciplined, evil citizens deserving of punishment. Meanwhile, Warburg and Jensen (2020) posited that the ruthlessness of policing methods during this war and the normalization of violence could be attributed in part to conceptions of discipline that perceived the law as subordinate to the need for order. Our findings furnish proof of precedent for these arguments: Insofar as the idea of discipline is concerned, Duterte was not the first to use it as justification for state policy; Marcos already did that, and for far longer.

Beyond the discipline narrative, it is possible, although admittedly facile, to consider that leaders turn to drug wars simply for political capital; that by mobilizing the issue of drugs, they distinguish themselves as better than their predecessors, who are thus portrayed as negligent and less capable. Indeed, Agoncillo (1974: 5) justified the Marcos dictatorship (and by implication, its drug war) this way, characterizing Marcos vis-à-vis his predecessors as a leader with 'historical sense' enough and the 'moral courage' to impose, at long last, the 'drastic measures' that Philippine society at the time allegedly required. Duterte, too, has been characterized this way, his appeal and the support for his drug war traced partly to his position in political history as a populist reformer amid the 'failure' of his predecessor's liberal leadership (Thompson 2016).

The more empirical and historically grounded position, however, is to view the emergence of a drug war not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a historical continuum. Our proposition in this article has been that Duterte's drug war emerged from Marcos'. But Marcos' drug regime itself was also the product of external, geopolitical influences and global policy currents. For instance, some scholars have hinted at the echoes of Richard Nixon's drug war in Marcos' (Lasco 2020), or expounded on the profound influence of the international drug conventions of the 1960s and 1970s on the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1972 (Yarcia 2021). Our findings, on the other hand, consolidate disparate accounts of the time to show how exactly Marcos' drug war and drug regime were shaped by American forces—through funding from the US government

itself; as a means for the US to weed out drug use among its agents in the Philippines; and, indeed, as continued exertion of American domination on its former colony amid the Cold War (see [Kuzmarov 2012](#); [McCoy 2003](#)). Furthermore, as much as Marcos' drug regime was co-produced by the US, it also came to shape drug policy in Southeast Asia way before the regional drug wars mentioned earlier even started. As [Yodmani \(1983\)](#) recounted, Manila during the Marcos dictatorship played a key role in initiating drug-policy decisions within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—among other momentous occasions, playing host to the organization's first experts' meeting on drug abuse prevention and control in 1972 and the signing of the ASEAN Declaration of Principles to Combat the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs in 1976. Regardless of when they surface, it is therefore important to emphasize, in our case, how drug regimes and drug wars only build upon existing regimes and existing wars.

This brings us to our final point: that drug regimes are sociopolitical constructions that resonate in particular historical moments. The significance of this point is underscored by existing scholarship demonstrating the impact of such constructions on actual drug policy—how, for example, government and media framings of drug issues can extensively shape political and legislative decisions, at times tending toward the punitive and prohibitive; how such framings can spell the difference between support for a life-affirming drug paradigm and one that views drug use as a reprehensible evil ([Euchner et al. 2013](#); [Ferraiolo 2014](#); [Lancaster, Duke & Ritter 2015](#)). So, too, are drug wars sociopolitically constructed, and the global implications of these constructions have been far-ranging: in the US, for example, worsening the racial slant of drug policies (see [Tiger 2017](#)); in Duterte's drug war, amplifying through media reportage the state discourse on the equivalence of drug use with criminality ([Soriano, David & Atun 2021](#)), or shifting the focus toward particular drugs and the people and social classes associated with them ([Lasco & Yu 2021](#)). As our article shows, Marcos' drug war was likewise concretized by the state, co-produced with the participation of various civil-society actors, and tapped into deep-seated popular views on drugs and drug use.

CONCLUSION

By elucidating the Marcos dictatorship's (co-)constructed narrative of drugs, we have demonstrated how drug wars take shape and garner popular support. These constructions eventually determine the policy landscape: A perspective that regards drugs as an unqualified evil consequently accepts without reservations any measure to neutralize people who use drugs, either judicially or extrajudicially. In this way, governments are then given the opportunity, with popular support, to impose draconian measures, effectively legitimizing efforts to move toward authoritarianism. Such has been the pattern—repeated twice, no less—that has led to a war on drugs in post-World War II Philippines and sustained the country's prohibitionist legal framework through the decades.

Given the foundational role of the various constructions of drugs in shaping policy at the national, regional, and global levels (see [Herschinger 2010](#); [Lancaster, Duke & Ritter 2015](#)), one future research direction is to look at Southeast Asia more broadly and trace the genealogy of the current 'drug-free ASEAN' paradigm (see [Stoicescu & Lasco 2019](#)), especially since the gaps we identified in the Philippines are most likely present in other countries in the region. While drug wars like that of Thaksin's and Duterte's have garnered scholarly and popular attention, our article stresses the need to look at these wars as moments of escalation—and not exceptions—in their respective milieus. Historical research—the need to historicize drug wars, and in turn, drug policy—is demanded in this case. Drug wars, after all, thrive on popularized claims and exaggerated rhetoric. Marcos relied on these tactics, as we have shown; so, too, did Duterte, asserting at the launch of his war in 2016 that the country was riddled with four million addicts—an inflated statistic, as government records have shown ([Ranada 2017](#)). Without firm, historical grounding, our scholarship is bound to fall short as far as the production of counternarratives is concerned, granting future politicians further leeway to capitalize on enduring, societal views toward drugs and launch their own iterations of a drug war. As drug policy in the region evolves rapidly, so must our critical understanding of the numerous contexts within which these changes unfold—and our critical engagement with drugs themselves, whether as populist tropes, discursive elements, or lived experiences.

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