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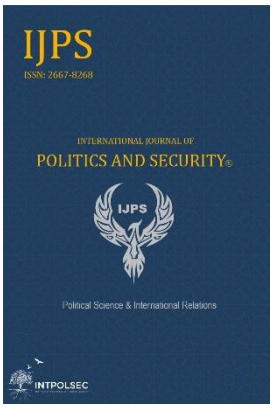

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Analyzing Antagonism in the Election of the Philippines Using Agonistic Democracy Paradigm

Christian S. Hipolao[1]

Abstract

Antagonism, in the context of the election in the Philippines, is manifested during the opposing preferences will meet as they will express their political color. This article will try to explain the nature of conflict during elections using the Agonistic Democracy framework of Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe explains that there is a conflict between opposing parties because neither of the parties recognizes the other as legitimate or important. Rather the conflict is gapped by friend/enemy relation. Using the framework of Chantal Mouffe, this article will argue that the divide neglects the electoral process and undermines the essence of democracy that is manifested in elections. One of the ways to overcome this problem is to recognize the impossibility of eradicating the different preferences of the people in choosing a candidate.

Keywords: *Agonistic, Antagonism, Divide, Election, Political Color*

1. Introduction

The Philippines embraced the values of democracy. However, the 2022 election shows a different story. While people insist on their political rights through political engagements such as being vocal about their political colors, there are instances that these engagements lead to intense conflict between people. This conflict leads to the extent of rejection, ridiculing opposing differences, and in some way making memes to make insults. For example, BBM-Sarah and Leni-Kiko rivalry. It is preferable to call it a rivalry because of the concentrated conflict between the two main camps. This is the result of the growing antagonism of the people during their engagement. Fr. Ranhilio Aquino wrote that the 2022 presidential election was a "war of the classes."[2] This war of the classes must not be understood as a typical divide between the rich and the poor but between the good and the bad. Although being "good" is determined by good education, choosing a moral candidate, is historically laden, and more on having a privilege[3]. However, the nature of the divide is still based on the preference of the people. This is the emerging identity between good and bad citizens. The citizenship of the people is reduced according to their political color. One is good if one chose a "moral leader" and bad if it is otherwise.

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[2] Fr. Ranhilio Aquino, "War of Classes," *The Manila Times*, February 16, 2022, https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/02/16/opinion/columns/war-of-the-classes/1833135?fbclid=IwAR0yFHS3np-VtUQbF-NTcbnX2m8fsN_t7JRfNZwMRMSSD7Sb78VGbz1UTbI.

[3] Ibid.

What differentiates the antagonism in the 2022 election in the Philippines from other elections is that the conflict does not rest entirely within the surface of the class divide- the divide between the rich and the poor, between the educated and non-educated. This divide morphed into the divide between good and bad voters. Especially, this divide is not visible only in local elections but in the national election as well. This is essentially the subject of the article. Although class division and the gap in educational attainment are one of the factors that determine the division.

The narrative of the antagonism in the election has little to no appeal to the scholars of Philippine politics. This is reflective of the lack of literature on the issue. One major problem is that the antagonism in elections, although very visible, lacks interest to some perhaps because of the subtle antagonism that needed deep analysis or perhaps many scholars failed to realize the implication of this conflict in the democratic ideology. This leads to downplaying another faction of division that is long rooted in history. Although several scholars in Philippine studies want to offer perspectives in terms of how the socioeconomic and political landscape of the Philippines runs, it is insufficient to explain the antagonistic narratives in the election, especially the implications of antagonism in Philippine democracy.

Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, for instance, is one of the important scholars in Philippine politics that offered useful insights. While the country may experience still the classical and traditional structure, namely patronage and elitist politics, another proposed democratic narrative is the contested democracy. His contribution explains how the movement from the forces below pressures the elite and patronage politics of the Philippines.[4] The antagonistic dimension is present but this is a structural, struggle between those who are in power and forces from below, either popular movement or armed struggle.[5]

While, elite democracy, on the other hand, maintains its relevance in explaining the domination of a few political actors. The moral politics of Wataru Kusaka also is a very insightful and interesting narrative in the concept of antagonism in the Philippines. Moral politics explains the antagonism between two distinct classes: the civic sphere, and the mass sphere. Although Kusaka already initiates the antagonism between good and bad citizenship, there are still conceptual gaps, especially in the context of the Philippine election in explaining the antagonism between voters.

[4] Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Review: Oligarchic Patrimonialism, Bossism, Electoral Clientelism, and Contested Democracy in the Philippines," *Comparative Politics* 37, no.2 (January 2005): 242, 10.2307/20072884.
[5] Ibid, 244.

Overall, the previously mentioned scholars and proposed narratives in Philippine politics do not fully comprehend the antagonism that is in the electorate and this antagonism needs special attention because it has a distinct form of narrative that is currently relevant to Philippine politics. They maintain their analysis of structural conflict and fail to capture the electoral conflict, the conflict between voters. There are two reasons. First, analyzing the antagonism in the election explains the continuous division in the Philippines that is rooted in history. Disregarding this problem will lead to the second reason, which is this antagonism poses a problem for democracy because the political expressions of the people were questioned and rejected.

The first intention of this paper is to revisit the landscape of the politics of the Philippines during the Spanish and American to recent years to provide a better angle in discussing the crystallization of the divide in the country. As part of the analysis, it is crucial to discuss patron-client, warlordism, and elitism since the antagonism in the election is deeply rooted in this structure. Several scholars were able to capture the different structures that run the politics of the Philippines, but they neglect the antagonistic aspect that resides in the voters. This emergence crystalized and made the divide morph into a more complex and subtle conflict that transcends the archaic. Considering the people's willingness to engage in "*political"*, it is not enough to look at antagonism only as structural, that is limited to the rivalry between people based on their relationship with their patrons or rivalry between elites themselves but also within the lens to the conflict in the electorate as they express their political color.

Lastly, after providing an analysis of the antagonistic narrative in the electorate, this paper will argue that the antagonism should be translated into an agonistic engagement. The problem of antagonism in the election is the failure in recognizing other political colors as legitimate. The reason for this is that the antagonism in the election disrespects the people's right to choose their preferred candidates and undermines the essence of democracy that is manifested in the election: to have an equal right to vote and equal opportunity to be respected when voting. Democratically speaking, so long as the people will choose whomever they wanted to vote for, they should be given equal rights and opportunities. By arguing agonistic engagement in elections, the antagonistic or the conflictual engagement will not dissolve but will remain so long as it is coupled with respect and recognition of others. Using Chantal Mouffe's *Agonistic Democracy*, this paper will argue that everyone should enjoy the same rights and opportunities during the election while embracing the differences of the preferred political color.

2. The History of the Divide of Politics in the Philippines

The nature of this divide is long rooted in the colonial history of the Philippines. The coming of the Spaniards to the Philippines landscapes the entire political and socio-economic institutions so long as the political set-up during the time is conditioned based on the colonial structure. The advent of the divide of the Spanish colonial times is manifested during the rise of bureaucracy, principles, and the landownership system. This advent helped mark a demarcated line between the administrators (colonizers) and the people (the colonized). Bureaucratization, for instance, is essentially hierarchical since it divides the control into central or national from provincial, city, municipal, and barrio levels from the commoners.[6] The significance of bureaucratization is designed to monitor and control local places.

On the other hand, the rise of landownership marks the social gap between the landowner from the common people or workers. One of the central agents of early landownership is the church friars. Accordingly, there are three strata of landownership: the state owner (at the top), the leaseholder or *inquilino* (in the middle), and the tenant-share cropper (at the bottom).[7] The owner usually is the church friars when they were granted to accumulate lands for their sustenance.[8] However, they exceed from mere sustenance to full commercialization leading to massive exploitation of the farmers.[9] When some acquire land through outright usurpation, many of the landgrabbers use the guise of legality to vacate the natives from their ancestral land since they fail to show documents that sustain their legitimacy over the claim of the land.[10] The fate of the native landowners becomes landless farmers working for the landowner of becomes tenants. Especially, when the hacienda system was then established to sustain the amass needs for commercialization.[11]

Meanwhile, as the rapid growth of economic changes in the middle to the late 1700s, social status had also adopted. According to Owen, Bureaucrats, mayors, illustrators, and other individuals who have positions or offices in the locality are considered principles.[12] Although

[6] Teodoro. A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People* (903 Quezon Boulevard, Quezon City: R.P. GARCIA Publishing Co.), 75.
[7] Carolyn, I. Sobritchea, "The Philippine Peasantry of the Early Colonial Period," *Philippine Sociological Review*, 29 (1981): 22.
[8] Teodoro. A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People* (903 Quezon Boulevard, Quezon City: R.P. GARCIA Publishing Co.), 67.
[9] Ibid, 130.
[10] Teodoro. A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People* (903 Quezon Boulevard, Quezon City: R.P. GARCIA Publishing Co.), 68; 125.
[11] Ibid, 126.
[12] Nornan G. Owen, "The Principalia in Philippine History: Kabikolan, 1790-1898," *Philippine Studies* 22, 3-4 (1974):302.

they have different functions and socio-political control, principals may refer, in the least sense, as a social stratum different from ordinary, poor, and uneducated locals. However, there is a new emerging principle concerning the rapid growth of the economy. Perhaps, these old principles had survived, but many are displaced and dispossessed when new principals acquired wealth, land, and the demand of the economy (this is the reentry of the Chinese mestizo).[13]

The rise of bureaucratization, land ownership, and principles lead to the growing divide of the archipelago through socio-economic and political. The nature of this divide is aristocratic, the divide between higher-ups (wealthy, landed, officials) and lower downs (peasants, farmers, indigenous, counter-colonial movement). This divide is even more crystalized when the Americanization of the entire landscape in the Philippines. The American regime paved the way for the *caciques* to expand their wealth and conjoin their wealth with political power to the extent these *caciques* became oligarchs.[14] However, this type of conflict is about power. It illustrates how colonizers were able to impose control on the colonized. The conflict in power is an illustration of the antagonism between those who are in power and those who are subjected to submit to power. Generally, the divide rooted in history is essentially aristocratic or class base and structural or between elites in their struggle for power.

3. The Structural Concept of Antagonism

Exploring the dyadic[15] structure of politics in the country can enlighten the flow of this paper. This section would discuss the narratives that illustrate the structural nature of antagonism. By revisiting the previous observations of the scholars, it helps envisage the dynamics of antagonism. The dyadic structure is more reflective of a patronage system, warlordism, and elitism. But the dyadic structure of relation is insufficient to explain the divide between the people during the election. It simply illustrates the structural nature of antagonism. This is the reason why the theoretical discussions of structural antagonism are insufficient in explaining antagonism in the electorate.

The caciques, during the time, is a class of distinct individuals from ordinary and natives since they had acquired wealth and education, they called themselves elites or

[13] Teodoro. A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People* (903 Quezon Boulevard, Quezon City: R.P. GARCIA Publishing Co.), 128.
[14] Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review*, 169 (1998), 11.
[15] The term "dyad" is associated with anthropology to denote a network of mutual aid relationships between pairs of individuals. This term is used by Teehankee (2022).

illustrados afterward.[16] The caciques have established their identity through wealth, education, and political control. However, it was until the Americans reform the political structure of the Philippines that these caciques prosper in their wealth and control. [17] Meanwhile, with the accumulation of political control, these elites formed private armies controlled by hacienda masters terrorizing illegal squatters, peasant unions, and left-wing political leaders, which created a "warlord" based power. This is about using private armies to function in consolidating political control.[18]

With the rise of the elite at the provincial to the national level, the dyadic relation enters the scene of politics. The patronage system has marked the landscape of the entire country. These patrons were landed elites that often influence the socioeconomic and political movements in local areas. The relationship between the patrons (usually the politicians) and the poor (clients) develops unequal dyadic relations. For instance, the debt of obligation.[19] Since there is an unequal distribution of state resources and services, the patrons can provide the means either through personal or state resources. The patrons have established themselves as providers in their areas and most likely will receive support from the people. Although there is a personal tie between parties, the people (clients) must ensure their support to their providers.

The personal ties between patron-client will collapse in a matter of time because there are emerging elites as well that wanted to establish their political bailiwick. Paul Hutchcroft, by distinguishing the difference between the patron-client and patronage system, clarifies that the patronage system relies heavily on the exchange of public service with the support of the people.[20] Political control is a reasonable means to ensure wealth and power. This leads to the emergence of other factional elites who wants the same personalistic aims. To maintain control, aside from providing the distribution of services through state resources or private income, violence entered the landscape.

[16] Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review*, 169 (1998), 8.
[17] Ibid, 11.
[18] Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review*, 169 (1998), 14.
[19] James C. Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," *Apsa* 66, no. 1 (March 1972), 93. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1959280.
[20] Paul Hutchcroft, "Linking Capital and Countryside: Patronage and Clientelism in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines'," (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 54.

It seems to be natural to think that violence and coercion are usual in the Philippine political structure. Aside from the fact that the Philippines is a *weak state*[21], the local elites want to consolidate their control and wealth. The only threat they have is their rival elites. To ensure their control, they formed a system of relations that leads to the crystallization of political dynasties, mafia-like control, and political clan. Because of the use of coercion and violence, these individuals are commonly known as *Bosses*.[22] John T. Sidel is aware that the use of violence, oppression, and coercion is a means to abolish the rival elites and oppress the people.[23] There are two ways to look at the control of bosses, these are by instilling fear and instilling debt in the people. It is unavoidable that people will fear these types of politicians since the politicians or local bosses have the means to control the lives of the people and this can put the lives of people in jeopardy. Aside from fear, these bosses are sometimes saviors of the poor people by giving money and protecting the locals from possible communist insurgencies.[24]

The dyadic relationship between clients and their patrons or bosses is not always direct. There is a "broker" that mediates the transactions between the patrons and the people. Instead of a dyadic relation, it becomes a triadic relation because of the broker system. The personal tie or connection collapses in this case.[25] This is due to the need to accommodate the high volume of clients. This means that the brokers have close contact with the people. However, their main goal is to carry out legal or illegal transactions for the patron to stabilize control in the locality.

Patronage, elitism, and bossism may have distinct natures in their structure, but the use of violence, coercion, and caring for the needs of the people are still based on reciprocity. This means that the patron or bosses will give something, and in return, the people will give their loyalty to their providers. If the people refuse to reciprocate after receiving service from a patron or bosses, violence will likely enter the scene. Although the patrons and bosses most likely benefit themselves from the system, their clients or the people still demand from their patrons so long as the people have the power to choose.

[21] The "weak state" thesis is used by P. D. Hutchroft and J. Rocamora (2003) to explain the domination of the elites that hinders the development of the state.
[22] John T. Sidel, *Capital, Coercion, and Crime* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 29.
[23] Ibid, 28.
[24] Gerry Arambala, "Radical Leadership in Post-Parojinog Ozamis Politics," *European Journal of Research* (November 2018):82. http://dx.doi.org/10.26739/2521-3252-2018-12-9.
[25] Julio C. Teehankee, "Dissecting Patronage Democracy in the Philippines," in *Patronage Democracy in the Philippines,* ed. Julio Teehankee and Cleo Anne A. Calimbahin (Quezon City, Philippines: BUGHAW, 2022), 8.

Even in the contemporary, the structure of politics still depends on a dyadic relation that is sustained either/or by violence or by providing for the needs of the people. As Scott explains that there is only a clear distinction of hierarchy between the patron and the people. The people may be heterogenous in class composition so long as they receive something from the patron.[26] The emergence of this structure leads to the concentration of division in the country. Christopher Ryan Maboloc wrote, that while the persistence of patronage and elitism in the country is a result of the Philippines' unable to move out from the dark colonial past, Philippine politics itself amplifies the divide.[27] This divide is not only by class but by culture, language, and history.[28] Especially, the centralized government excludes the people in Mindanao.

However, despite the different perspectives on the divide between patrons, elites, and bosses from the people, the division between people is often neglected. The unforeseen divide in elections is rooted mainly in the preference of the people for their candidates or politicians. Although the divide is based on the support of the people from their preferred candidates or politicians, it does not neglect that this divide is deeply rooted in the long course of dyadic relations in local and national politics and political rivalries. But over the years, when there is a vibrant distinction in social strata, it contributes to the formation of the landscape in politics. Wataru Kusaka explains this event that was completely revealed in the post-Marcos era. Aside from the distinction of level between patrons and their clients, there is an emerging conflict between the civic sphere and the mass sphere. This conflict leads to the moralization of politics.

To illustrate it simply, there is a civic sphere and the people in this class are moral, intelligent, righteous, and so on. On the other hand, there is a mass sphere, and the people in this class are often criminalized, squatters, with no educational background, and so on. [29] As the conflict between the civic communities and the mass sphere reached the election, the good and bad voters also added to the landscape. The middle-class elite individuals, see themselves as moral citizens: seeking clean and moral candidates, capable of choosing rightful leaders, and so on.[30] While the preference of the poor people is seen as a major issue during the election for their tendency to vote for corrupt and incompetent candidates. The capacity of the poor was

[26] James C. Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," *Apsa* 66, no. 1 (March 1972), 97, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1959280.
[27] Christopher Ryan Maboloc, " Philippine Democracy and Political Reform," *Active Democratic Leadership: Civil Society Empowerment in the Bangsamoro. Makati: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* (August 2020): 7.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 68, 75.
[30] Ibid, 130.

seen as a threat to the electoral process.[31] The conception of a good politician or candidate in the mass sphere is often downplayed due to the standardizing good of the middle class. However, the analysis of Kusaka is grounded in the phenomenon of the class base divide.

The literature above may explain the antagonistic divide that is persisting in the country from a general perspective, discussing the complexities of structural antagonism, but the explanations have failed in grasping the intense conflict of the people during elections. The antagonistic division in elections can only be seen in the interaction between people by being vocal about their political preferences. The election in the Philippines shows rather conflictual with democracy. People are vocal about their political color. For instance, the camp of BBM is branded as "Unity" while the camp of VP Leni is "Moral." The moralization of politics transcends the division between those who are in power from those who are ordinary people. One major example of this is the election parades. The divide is essentially based on the preference of the people. The problem is that this divide is marked by rejection and negligence of the differences that jeopardize the essence of democracy. By neglecting this problem, we are neglecting the implications of the divide that violates democratic values.

3.1. Antagonism in Election

The election in the Philippines exacerbates the growing divide in the country. The moralization of the electorates does not remain to be a class base, in contrast to Kusaka, but transformed into the expression of the differences in preferences. This leads to the dichotomy between good and bad people based on the background of their candidates. Before discussing this antagonism, it is important to discuss first Wataru Kusaka's account of antagonism from dictatorship to the people power movement.

The authoritarian regime during the days of the late Ferdinand Marcos nearly collapses the economy and formed in himself the supreme cacique.[32] As a result, there is an uprising of the extra-constitutional movement that is seeking for overthrowing the dictatorial power. Civil society in the dictatorial regime is the main protagonist in ousting Marcos Sr. With the emergence of civil society, there are individuals called "moral" because of certain efforts they made.[33] From that time, those who are tainted with a history of corruption and different issues

[31] Ibid, 132.

[32] Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams," *New Left Review*, 169 (1998), 14.

[33] Wataru Kusaka, *Moral Politics in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 87.

are branded as “evil” and those who will counter those “evil” ones are called “moral” individuals. Identifying or “branding” will reflect the people’s identity. The identity of the people is determined based on the chosen leader.

When the formation of moral and evil politicians had reached the level of the electorate, the person is reduced according to one’s political preference. It means that voters are determined according to their political preferences. Those who will vote for “evil” politicians will become evil and those who will vote for “moral” will be called moral. The recent 2022 national and local election shows this kind of narrative. For instance, the demarcated line between BBM-SARA (Ferdinand Marcos Jr and Sara Duterte) and LENI-KIKO (Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo and Francis Pangilinan).

The identity that is reflected in the candidates is rooted mainly in their past and present backgrounds. For instance, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, “son of late-president Ferdinand Marcos Sr. is a dictator of the past”. The usual image of “the son of a dictator” of President “Bongbong” Marcos is constantly brought up during the entire campaigning session. There are a lot of news, clip, and several instruments used to revisit and reawaken the past atrocities because of martial law. these strategies are done to convince the electorate not to vote for Marcus Jr. On the other hand, former Vice President Leni Robredo is linked as a “mother of the country,” “women empowerment,” and overall, a “moral leader.” In another way, Vice President Leni Robredo is often called by BBM supporters as “Bobo” (stupid or naïve) despite her degree and good achievements. Although there is an overlapping portrayal of both camps. This demarcated the conflict and divides the people.

As the moral distinction becomes clear, the gap between the people also intensifies. There is a moralization in the political exercise of the people in choosing a leader. People’s identity is reduced based on their preferences. One can be moral or evil only by choosing a candidate. This divide transcends the gap that is based on the socio-economic background of the people. This means that the camps (BBM camp or Leni camp and any other camps) are constituted of heterogeneous social class individuals.

Although the conflict is mainly within the preference of the people, undeniably, some institutions actively exacerbate the moralization in the election as these societal entities influenced several people. Especially, educational sectors and religious sectors are places where democracy and morality are introduced, debated, and protected. Some historians and clerics are at the forefront of defending the name “worthy”, “moral”, and capable candidate.

The members of the Catholic church blatantly endorse the Leni-Kiko tandem.[34] The Leni-Kiko was praised by the Church as the most worthy and qualified candidate because of their clean track record. Even praised VP Leni for standing against the men, "The Last Man Standing is a Woman."[35] On the other side, problematize the candidacy of Marcos. The problematization leads to the extent that some demonize the BBM-Sara tandem.[36] The camp of LENI-KIKO often sees itself as moral for siding with the truth and worthiness. The Leni-Kiko supporters may find others as an enemy to defeat, to defeat the historical distortion and the unapologetic. While BBM-Sara emphasized as "agila and tigre" (eagle and tiger) symbolize unity and strong leadership. The supporters of the camp may find each other as an enemy to overcome. This way contributes to the antagonism of the election.

3.2. The Influence of Church and University

Perhaps one of the controversial factors in the exacerbation of the divide in the election is the engagement of the church. In part of the Catholic church, the CBCP already clarifies that the engagement of the church in politics is a free exercise of the church.[37] This free exercise is not prohibited and is not a violation of any law. Surprisingly, some clergy in the Catholic church endorses certain candidates receiving affirmation, while the endorsement of the Iglesia ni Cristo was downplayed by some political analysts. Some critics of the INC endorsement would say that the voting population of INC cannot override the Catholics, that the Catholics are more active in politics than INC through EDSA participation, and that despite saying the endorsement of INC went on deliberation it is still downplayed as "endorsing a candidate without reason."[38] What does this mean in democracy? The issue is subtle, but arguably, there is an invalidation on part of the Church of Christ. Can this be a form of questioning the free exercise of the church's expression?

[34] Xave Gregorio, "Over 1200 Catholic clergy endorse Robredo- Pangilinan in 'battle for truth'," *philstar GLOBAL*, May 4, 2022, https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/05/04/2178710/over-1200-catholic-clergy-endorse-robredo-pangilinan-battle-truth.
[35] Friedrich Naumann Foundation For Freedom, "Leni Robredo: The Last Man Standing is a Woman," Friedrich Naumann Foundation For Freedom, April 19, 2020, https://www.freiheit.org/leni-robredo-last-man-standing-woman.
[36] Bea Cupin, "In vote-rich Quezon City, Uniteam promises 'New Society' but still no concrete plans," *Rappler*, February 15, 2022, https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/uniteam-bets-promise-new-society-without-concrete-plans-rally-quezon-city/.
[37] Robin Gomes, "Philippine Election: Bishops urge voters to keep at heart the common good," *Vatican News*, March 28, 2022, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2022-03/philippines-bishops-pastoral-letter-election-2022-common-good.html.
[38] Political observers downplay Iglesia ni Cristo's endorsement of Marcos' candidacy," *LiCAS.news Light for the Voiceless*, May 6, 2022, https://www.licas.news/2022/05/06/political-observers-downplay-iglesia-ni-cristos-endorsement-of-marcos-candidacy/.

The endorsement caused different reactions from the churchgoers. Expectedly, they have different preferences and questioned the endorsement from their respective churches. The endorsement of the Church of Christ can be influential since they have a bloc-voting system where the leader of the church expects their members to vote for the endorsed candidates. However, this does not stop members of INC from choosing others because they think whom they preferred is worthy. In the same manner, the Catholics have a similar division. What differs between the two is that Catholics themselves endorsed Leni, not the church herself and there is no block-voting. Nevertheless, there are differences in preferences even though it is endorsed by religious institutions.

Meanwhile, the top universities and universities in other provinces contribute too to the divide in the election. Many Universities' mock elections show their majority preference for the Leni-Kiko tandem.[39] Aside from the Universities' endorsement, there is a positive number of organizations and volunteers that expressed their unending support Leni-Kiko tandem. Historians and economists, for instance, shows their support. Undoubtedly VP Leni has all the qualifications. It is to the extent that Panfelo Lacson's party endorsed Leni.[40]

Many universities conducted their mock elections. De La Salle University, for instance, is one of the leading schools that endorsed Leni Robredo. However, among De La Salle schools, only the La Salle University- Ozamis have illustrated different results. Many speculations and narratives in terms of defense and reasons for the result have circulated. The simple point here is that, despite the engagement of different institutions, different preferences will still prevail. The reality of the differences will always prevail despite the expectations.

Moreover, one of the major contributors to the antagonism in the 2022 election is the repulsive attitude of the voters. Christopher Ryan Maboloc said,

"The main problem of the opposition is the "repulsive and condescending attitude of many Leni supporters, who believe that they are seated on a moral highchair, insisting that their choice is the most supreme so that all who belong to the other side of the political fence are simply labeled or canceled."[41]

It must not be denied that the opposing camps had been repulsive when approaching opposing parties. They have mutually repulsive characters in some measures.

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[39] Janvic Mateo, " Robredo, Kiko top university mock polls," *philstar GLOBAL,* April 4, 2022, https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/04/04/2172114/robredo-kiko-top-university-mock-polls.
[40] Marlon Ramos, "Ping Lacson's party Reporma shifts support to Leni Robredo," *INQUIRER.NET,* March 25, 2022, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1573385/pings-party-reporma-shifts-support-to-leni.

[41] Maya Padillo, "EDSA failed, a Marcos is back: AdDU Prof," *EDGE DAVAO Serving a seamless society, May 12, 2022,* https://edgedavao.net/latest-news/2022/05/12/edsa-failed-a-marcos-is-back-addu-prof/?fbclid=IwAR0O2kKIicWl7b9K63Ba6ogqvNewY4JZ9PC0_jsFtNGzENs0eSZPXmDAwi4.

The endorsement of these institutions makes election becomes a domain in determining the individuals sitting on a moral highchair from people perpetuating the country's discontents-the good and the bad. Rather than celebrating the people's right to vote and employing their concepts of the good by choosing a leader that is good for them. Philippine election becomes paradoxical. It becomes a domain where the reductionism of individuals is intense instead of enjoying rights to engage in political participation in elections.

3.3. Agonistic Democracy

The agonistic democracy is developed because of the problem of inclusivity. The inclusivity demarcated the relation of the "we" and "they". The "we" and "they" relation marks the conflict between parties and this conflict is ineradicable and inevitable. The ineradicable and inevitable nature of conflict is the ground of the Agonistic democracy framework of Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe distinguished the difference between *politics* and *political*. Politics, explained by Mouffe, "indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of the "political." On the other hand, political is "the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emergence in a different type of social relations". This means that there is a *political* dimension in politics.

Where does this political come from? There should be two ways to look at the foundation of a political dimension. First is the conflict because of the politics of exclusion. The politics of exclusion is expressed in the deliberative model of democracy. The main aim of deliberative democracy is to achieve rational consensus and democratic legitimacy.[42] To express simply, deliberative democracy aims to achieve an agreement that everyone will accept. One of the thinkers of deliberative democracy is John Rawls. For Rawls before proceeding in determining what principles of justice are to be chosen, the equality of the people must first realize. Equality is necessary because there are people who are advantaged and disadvantaged by one another. To realize this, the first principle, the liberty principle, should be realized and this is only possible in agreement.[43] Agreement happens when people will be at an initial starting point, the original position, where the lifeworld background of the people

[42] Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism* (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 2000), 3.
[43] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice (*United States of America: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1999), 16.

will be disregarded, including the advantages and disadvantages. Since there is an initial starting point, everyone is equal. But who is everyone? Everyone is considered, in the context of an agreement, in the enclosed group who is part of the process, and part of the rational engagement. This is an inclusive sphere. The availability of the sphere is reduced based on agreement and mutual recognition. A sphere created by everyone, or "we" precludes the possibility of contestation.[44] For Mouffe, the political dimension is at stake in this case because of the possible elimination.[45] The type of "agonism" of the deliberative democracy they have had already eliminated the antagonistic dimension which is supposedly inherent to the political dimension. As Mouffe calls it an agonistic without antagonism. But this antagonism can only be found beyond agreement.[46] This means that there will always be opposition after the agreement or there is unsettled discourse beyond the agreement.

Second, is the nature of the human person. Antagonism is always with the human person. In politics, there is political, and in the political dimension, there is antagonism. It is not that Mouffe insisted that the nature of human beings is always bounded by conflict or hostility, but the antagonism is impossible to eradicate and avoid in the context of social relations.[47] It means that the social relation of the human person is bounded by conflict and opposition because differences are always present and inevitable. Democracy is lacking if there is no antagonism.[48]

The only way to achieve an alternative is to accept that antagonism is impossible to avoid, eradicated and itself important. In this case, the difference must not be seen as a threat or an enemy to be destroyed but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and needed to be tolerated.[49] This means simply that the differences will be treated in a way that the ideas will be questioned but not the right to defend the ideas.[50] From antagonism, it becomes agonism because the differences will no longer be seen as subject to elimination or something that is to be destroyed but to be seen as the legitimate conflict that necessarily is respected. A struggle that needs to be recognized. As Mouffe defines democracy, emphasizes that the very essence

[44] Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism* (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 2000), 8.
[45] Chantal Mouffe, *Return of the Political* (New York: Verso 1993, 1993), 1.
[46] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso 2000, 2000), 134.
[47] Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism* (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 2000), 15.
[48] Chantal Mouffe, *Return of the Political* (New York: Verso 1993, 1993), 4.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism* (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 2000),15.

of democracy itself is unconceivable and unachievable.[51] This means that the definition of democracy must be in a continuous process of rediscovering its meaning because defining democracy is itself contradicting. Democracy remains to come.

3.4. Avoiding Paradox in Election

There is antagonism in the election, especially when people will engage in political discourse especially when people will be vocal about their preferred candidates. But the biggest problem is not about questioning the decision itself because it is an expression of right in engaging in political discourse, it is when expressing the political decision of other people by their concept of the "good" becomes a moral question. This questioning leads to intense rejection of differences. Each camp sees one another as enemies in the sense that they have different and morally troubling decisions. On the one hand, the other camp is bad because they preferred a candidate who is demonized. On the other, the camp is bad because of a repulsive character. The rejection that manifested in the election exacerbated the divide of the people, moralizing the election. However, this divide is not merely rooted in the socio-economic status of the people. Rather, based entirely on *personalistic* aims or what people want to vote for based on their preferred candidates.

The problem of antagonism in elections undermines democracy by wanting to eliminate differences and disrespecting the rights of the people to engage and exercise their political voice. Disrespecting the rights manifest during the clash. For instance, one will be determined as "bobo" if one will speak about one's political color. Saying "bobo" (stupid or naïve depending on the context) delineates the very right of the person so long as invalidation and rejection of the right of the person. Another is that wanting to eliminate the differences manifests during dichotomizing good and bad. This dichotomy implies that everyone should follow the good as a morally worthy decision and avoid the bad.

In the lens of agonistic democracy, everyone should accept that the differences in people's preferences in choosing a candidate are impossible to eradicate. It presupposed that every decision is an expression of their concept of the good. It is impossible to disregard the reason behind every preference or personalistic aim. For instance, if one will vote for candidate A either influenced by the patronage system, dynastic control, or bossism type system of relation. These influences may hinder the purpose of the election which is to choose a leader that will realize change and ensure welfare, but elections remain to be personalistic- deciding

[51] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso 2000, 2000), 137.

what they think is best for them. Perhaps a way to overcome this is simply recognizing the fact that there will always be a different idea and this difference cannot be avoided. In recognizing the ideas and preferences of others, everyone will understand that acceptance is a necessary end in democratic engagement. Acceptance does not mean that there will be no conflict. The conflict will remain as a form of different ideas and preferences- *agonism* (since antagonism will not exit the scene of conflict). In the election, questioning and engaging in discourse about the chosen political color is good but not to the extent of eliminating, degrading, and even questioning the very right to defend one's right in defending the decision. This is where antagonism has transformed into agonism in the public sphere. The problem of dichotomization (which is identifying the good and bad voters) will be avoided in the election. The moralization of politics is detrimental in the election yet it reached the electorate. As Maboloc said, "Election is the heart of the soul of democracy." He added, "The voters must be empowered to exercise their political will in electing good and competent leaders."[52] Agonistic engagement in elections will be the way of empowering people's rights and radicalizing elections. It will also be a way of reconciling the differences in preferences and the intense rejection.

4. Conclusion

This paper intends to analyze the antagonism in the election of the Philippines. Historically, there is already a divide between the colonizers and the colonized. The divide is even more visible after the Americans came into the country since the elites saw the opportunity to expand their wealth and control. Moreover, several works of literature discussed antagonism in the Philippines, but the discussion is limited to the structural form of antagonism. Scholars have failed to grasp the antagonism in the electorate, the conflict between voters. This conflict has implications for the democratic values that the country embraces and antagonism in the election is an insult to democracy. How much insult would it be if this aspect of antagonism is neglected?

There is also a division in the electorate aside from class-based and structural divisions. This division is a demarcated line between the good and the bad. This identity is determined according to the preferred political color. This persisting narrative not only worsen the historical gap between people of different class, language, and ethnicity but also disrespects

[52] Christopher Ryan Maboloc, " Philippine Democracy and Political Reform," *Active Democratic Leadership: Civil Society Empowerment in the Bangsamoro. Makati: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* (August 2020): 101-102.

the essence of democracy itself. Instead of enjoying the right to vote, the right to defend their preference is questioned. The alternative to this issue, as argued in the paper, is to accept simply that there will always be a different decision from the people given that there are other options. Following Chantal Mouffe's idea, the differences of preference are always conflictual and this conflict is impossible to eradicate and avoid. Wanting to eradicate and avoid this conflict means there is exclusion and violation of the freedom to exercise political engagement. Recognition transcends good and bad narratives in elections. If we do not recognize the impossibility of differences, it is a mere election with less democracy. Recognition of differences may be a way of empowering people. Thus, agonistic engagement radicalizes the election in a way of reconciling differences with respect.

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