

Transnational Affect and the Making of a Moral Public: The War on Drugs in the Philippines

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sro**Paul-François Tremlett** 

The Open University, UK

Abstract

In 2019, IBON International and the Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines UK (CHRP-UK) made preparations for some relatives of some of the victims of former Philippine President Duterte's war on drugs to travel to meet members of the European Parliament as well as diasporic and other publics in Europe and the UK. At the same time, the play *Tao Po!* – 'Is Anybody There?' – a dramatic monologue exploring different perspectives of those involved in Duterte's drug war including those of victims and perpetrators, was touring Europe. These affectively saturated actions and performances were accompanied by social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, among other platforms, using hashtags such as #Stopthekillingsph and #Warondrugsph. I juxtapose two very different interpretations of these actions and performances. On the one hand, I frame them as elements of a political strategy performed to solicit particular affective responses as a means of assembling a transnational public that could bring international political pressure to bear on the Duterte regime. On the other hand, I suggest that these actions were performed to cultivate a sense of belonging to a moral public. I conclude by arguing that the enactment of affects such as grief and loss – affects which are constitutive of the war on drugs – suggests a model of social and political change that works from the bottom-up, with affective experience as the primary catalyst.

Keywords

affect, Bourdieu, Foucault, moral public, Philippines, transnational

Introduction

This essay focuses on two organisations which campaign on human rights in the Philippines – the Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines (CHRP-UK), which is based in London, and IBON International, which has offices in Manila, Brussels, Nairobi,

Corresponding author:

Paul-François Tremlett, Department of Religious Studies, School of Social Sciences & Global Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK.

Email: paul-francois.tremlett@open.ac.uk

and Dakar – and their linked 2019 campaign to highlight the so-called war on drugs prosecuted by the Duterte administration in the Philippines. The groups had made preparations for some relatives of some of the victims of the war on drugs to travel to meet members of the European Parliament as well as diasporic and other publics in Europe and the UK. At the same time, the play *Tao Po!* – ‘Is Anybody There?’ – a dramatic monologue exploring the different perspectives of those involved in Duterte’s drug war including those of victims and perpetrators, was touring Europe. These affectively saturated actions and performances were accompanied by social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, among other platforms, using hashtags such as #Stopthekillingsph and #Warondrugsp and led to the European Parliament passing a resolution on the Philippines expressing serious concern about the human rights situation there in September 2020.¹ Following Massumi (2015), I am interested in affect ‘as an active pressure towards taking-form’ and as the ‘ongoing force of the social taking form’ (p. 205), in particular, the compositional affordances of affect in transnational processes of social and political change. As such, I juxtapose two very different interpretations of these affectively saturated actions and performances. On the one hand, drawing from Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), I frame them as elements of a political strategy performed to solicit particular affective responses as a means of assembling a transnational public that would bring international pressure to bear on the Duterte regime. On the other hand, I suggest – following Michel Foucault (1990, 1991) – that they were performed to cultivate a sense of belonging to a moral public. For the first, moral action is reduced to a matter of political calculation that mobilises certain affects to generate specific political outcomes. For the second, the deliberate cultivation of troubling affects such as grief and loss constitutes a technique through which a public can come to understand itself as a moral public. Finally, I argue that the enactment of affective experiences constitutive of the war on drugs suggests a model of social and political change that works from the bottom-up and that has affective experience as its primary catalyst.

Contexts

The research for this project was conducted during lockdown in the UK at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. I got in touch with CHRP-UK and IBON International, conducted online interviews with activists, attended meetings and events remotely, and explored their respective websites where they curate their activities, while searching hashtags on Instagram and Twitter. CHRP-UK was launched in London in 2006, in response to a spike in extra-judicial killings during the technocratic Presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Amnesty International (2006) had released a highly critical report on the human rights situation in the archipelago, and the group was established by volunteers to try to apply pressure on the Filipino government to stop the killings first by raising awareness in the UK about the human rights situation in the Philippines and second, by highlighting British trade and investments implicated in human rights violations across the islands.² The group is affiliated with Filipino advocacy organisations in the UK, such as Kanlungan and British and Filipino trades unions, and it has links with human rights organisations including Amnesty International, the International Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), the Filipino organisation Karapatan, and

Human Rights Watch. CHRP-UK has organised events, including talks, demonstrations, and performances, as well as releasing numerous reports and statements. It has publicised and curated these activities on its web pages and through social media platforms including Twitter and Facebook.

IBON³ International is a much larger organisation, with salaried staff and offices in Europe and Africa, as well as in Manila. The IBON Foundation was founded in 1978 and was part of the resistance to the Ferdinand E. Marcos dictatorship. IBON International was conceived in 2005 and, through its international offices, it works with social movements and civil society organisations to support and enhance democratic participation and human development. IBON International has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). IBON International's mission is facilitative, occupying an intermediary role among various Filipino and international non-governmental and civil society organisations so that it can, 'through networks and partnerships' build 'consensus on development issues. We [then] help . . . bring this consensus to wider global arenas through engagement in international processes' (IBON International, 2021).

Both CHRP-UK and IBON International are in the business of making publics, by which I mean that, through organising events disseminating knowledge and best practice and by generating publicity around specific issues, they seek to create sites and occasions around which publics can coalesce, to try to secure particular social, developmental, and political objectives. For example, in 2015, CHRP-UK began a campaign against Glencore, a multinational Anglo-Swiss company with offices London, in concert with a variety of national and international partners including PIPLinks and War on Want. Glencore had a significant stake in the Tampakan gold and copper mine in Mindanao, the southernmost island of the archipelago, and Filipino advocacy groups had evidence that Glencore had been facilitating the militarisation of local communities, that it was engaged in land-grabbing, and that it had been involved in the illegal detention of anti-mining activist Romeo Rivera Jr. Working with its partners, CHRP-UK organised a series of events including a picket of Glencore's 2015 AGM in London as well as a number of public meetings with trades unions, NGOs, and Filipino organisations. Importantly, the CHRP-UK campaign was one element of a wider global campaign against Glencore and its mining interests, not just in the Philippines but elsewhere in Africa and the Americas as well. Glencore eventually withdrew from Tampakan, although it is unlikely that the actions taken by CHRP-UK by themselves caused Glencore to leave the Philippines. But, by the same token, it would be churlish to argue that the protests had no effect at all; they did, after-all, contribute to a growing chorus of negative publicity for Glencore around the world.

CHRP-UK, then, in coordination with other groups located in the Philippines and elsewhere, enabled the formation of a public that was mobilised through a conjunction of empathic feeling for the plight of others and a sense of indignation at the behaviour of a powerful global corporation, by employing a blend of repertoires (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015) from the street politics of a picket with accompanying banners, flyers, and sonics (chanting and singing), to a digital network-enabled global day of action using multiple hashtags on Twitter (e.g. #Tampakan, #Glencore, #Philippines, #Indigenouspeople, and #humanrights) to tell the story, on the one hand, and to share

and amplify it, on the other hand. The campaign was documented by CHRP-UK and used to be curated on their website until a recent revamp and was described to me by one activist as ‘a pretty good campaign’.

Transnational moral publics

Before I move on to outline the campaign against the war on drugs, I want to spend a little bit of time clarifying two of my terms, namely ‘transnational’ and ‘moral public’. I use the term transnational to denote relatively informal interactions, exchanges of ideas, information, materials, and social practices between groups and individuals across national and regional borders. Groups like CHRP-UK and IBON International do not operate in a vacuum but are akin to gravitational nodes within networks. Such networks are not like sewage or railway systems with fixed lines connecting concrete points in space. Rather, these networks are constantly mutating as new groups emerge, and others disappear.⁴ The lines connecting them fade as communications slow or emerge again if and when exchanges re-commence. Gravities weaken or grow more compelling, creating, respectively, more distant or closer orbits among groups. My focus on CHRP-UK and IBON indeed simplifies a complex global eco-system that participated in the campaign against the war on drugs, and which included a range of Filipino and international partners including Karapatan and the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP). Yet, transnational does not only refer to the networked exchanges of these groups which have of course been further enabled, mediated, and intensified by digital media. It also refers to a range of other informal exchanges among Filipino diasporic networks which have a strong presence in Europe. The different scales and intensities of these interactions are precisely what generate publics in the first place. It is important to bear in mind that transnational publics may coalesce for a variety of reasons to perform a variety of actions, from the kinds of voluntary self-help communities for Filipino transnational migrants in the United Arab Emirates documented by Hosoda (2013) to the fandom publics described by Fuller (2018). Rather than beginning with apparatuses such as the state, I am interested in contingent and emergent interactions and their capacity to catalyse the formation or composition of publics and particular forms of action (see Abrahamsen, 2016).

My second term ‘moral public’ is perhaps more complex. It brings together Michael Warner’s (2002) work on publics and counter publics with Emile Durkheim’s suggestion – which he articulated in terms of *anomie*, individualism, and pathology – that modernity has unleashed forces so corrosive to the social fabric as to threaten the very possibility of moral action. More recent scholarship has continued to ask Durkheimian questions concerning the disintegrative and secularising forces of modernity. For example, Kathleen Lynch and Manolis Kalaitzake (2020) have argued that Western modernity emerged from two intellectual traditions, on the one hand, the utilitarian and contractual liberalism of Hobbes and Locke and, on the other hand, the Protestant tradition which foregrounded the individual’s relationship with God above relations with others. According to them, the ‘self-responsibilized individualism’ privileged by these traditions of thought are largely ‘antithetical to universalistic, affective forms of solidarity’ (Lynch and Kalaitzake, 2020: 246; see also Cabot, 2016; Kurasawa, 2004). For the Durkheim of *The*

Division of Labor (2014 [1893]), morality and moral action were largely about rules, obligations, and sanctions which, for complex reasons, had lost their sanctity and purchase in the maelstrom of modernity. Durkheim's approach suffused the social with moral concern but at the cost of tying that concern to corroding social structures, sanctions, and rules. In daily life, moral conceptions and concerns saturate choices about what to eat, what to wear, what to watch, and whether to intervene. The secularisation of public life may indeed augur the eclipse of once hallowed institutions and the hegemony of egoism and self-interest, but it does not negate the fact that moral decision is pervasive in ordinary life (Lambek, 2010).

The term moral public has been used before, notably by Alessandro Jedlowski (2018). Jedlowski draws from Warner's work on publics and Warner's (2002) claim that a public is a self-organising entity that exists 'by virtue of being addressed' (p. 50), in this case by some moral or ethical dilemma or problematic in society such that it is 'called upon to decide who is responsible for what happened' (Jedlowski, 2018: 244). As such – and in the specific context of research at the Frantz Fanon Centre in Turin in northern Italy – Jedlowski became interested in the use of film as a tool for generating reflective discussion in psychotherapeutic settings. Jedlowski (2018) watched the Nigerian film *Ebuwa* – which is about the trafficking and prostitution of Nigerian women in Italy – with a group of trafficked Nigerian women and argued that *Ebuwa* and films like it might best be understood as 'open cultural objects that provoke moral discussions' and which can have a 'fundamental role in the creation of specific moral publics' (p. 237). For Jedlowski, the term 'moral' does not point to a set of sacred rules and principles but rather to the everyday and lived sense in which people make moral judgements and choices about the world around them.

Given the above, a transnational moral public is a public grounded not in political ties of belonging to a nation-state or other sovereign territory, but rather one that emerges and coalesces in response to a particular problem in society. Geoffrey Pleyers (2023) asks, 'how do we study the global dimensions and connections in movements rooted in experience, subjectivities and ephemeral collectivities rather than organizations?' This essay offers one answer to that question by investigating the role of affect in articulating the transnational moral public as a catalyst for social and political change.

Affect and affective publics

Affect has a certain Filipino cultural resonance. According to the Filipino historian Reynaldo Ileto, *damay* – which refers to a kind of phenomenological participation in or re-enactment of another's suffering – was a key structure of the 19th-century Filipino *pasyon*, which, by enabling identification with the suffering of Christ, created space for the consequent transformation of the listener's inner, moral dispositions (*loob*). As such, the *pasyon* provided 'lowland Philippine society with a language for articulating its own values, ideals and even hopes of liberation [from Spanish colonial rule]' (Ileto, 2011: 12). In short, the Filipino *pasyon* became a means for Filipinos to reflect on their own suffering and that of the Philippines under Spanish rule, which in turn became a basis for revolutionary solidarity (Ileto, 2011: 85–86). Similarly, Vicente Rafael has noted the centrality of *damay* to early 20th-century Filipino nationalist plays during the American colonial

period, and the importance of mourning to the anti-colonial struggle. According to Rafael, mourning and memory reassemble the ‘ties between the living and the dead’ and ‘the past and the future’, affectively re-constituting ‘the historical . . . boundaries of the national community’ (Rafael, 2000: 49).

For both Ileto and Rafael, then, *damay*, as a Filipino cultural idiom, generates affection or solidarity through its capacity to engender sympathy for the plight of others and provokes self-reflection on one’s own moral positionality in relation to suffering.

The anthropologist Fenella Cannell conducted fieldwork on Bicolano Catholicism and healing, exploring expressions of pity for the suffering of Christ and for the dead. According to her, ‘Filipino culture constitutes the self through exchanges of indebtedness and gratitude with others, and vitally so with superiors, with whom one must place oneself in a debt relation in order to ensure a degree of protection’ (Cannell, 1995: 389). For Cannell, pity and moral reflection are similarly sites and occasions for the re-constitution of relations between the weak and the powerful.

For Cannell, as for Ileto and Rafael, then, *damay* is an idiom for addressing power. However, sympathy, pity, and mourning clearly have cultural purchase well beyond the Philippine archipelago, as Zizi Papacharissi’s (2015) powerful, personal anecdote about the student uprisings in Greece in November 1973 makes clear (pp. 1–3). The student uprisings of 1973 were centred on Athens Polytechnic. Students had barricaded themselves inside the campus to protest against the actions of the military junta. They built a radio transmitter and began broadcasting locally. Before long, the protests had spread beyond the ranks of the students leaving the junta facing a crisis of legitimacy. On 17 November, tanks rolled into the campus and the broadcasts by the students ceased. The junta collapsed shortly after as local and international outrage grew. What happened was ‘shocking’ (Papacharissi, 2015: 2) and, amid the grief and mourning for those who had been killed, commemoration was institutionalised as a means of affirming Greek identity and democracy. Reflecting on the events in Greece in 1973 but also on her research about the Arab spring and the Occupy movement as they were mediated on social media which similarly mobilised powerful feelings of indignation and empathy, Papacharissi (2015:11) situates the compositional affordances of affect against Max Weber’s (1978: 24) conception of rational self-interest as the cement of modernity. Noting some of the classical theories of ritual and culture developed by Mary Douglas, Arnold Van Gennep, and Victor Turner, she suggests that the power of affect

lies in liminality, in pre-emergence and emergence, or at the point at which new formations of the political are in the process of being imagined but not yet articulated. The form of affective power is pre-actualized, networked, and of a liquid nature. (Papacharissi, 2015: 19)

The affective turn (Mouffe, 2014) in social theory is marked by the displacement of classical sociological conceptions of structure and society and the privileging of ‘encounter’, ‘intensity’, and the ‘promissory’ (Massumi, 2015: 208–209). The result is arguably an unstable sociological terrain. According to Patricia Ticineto Clough (2009: 50), affect displaces ‘subject formation and ideological interpellation’ as objects of sociological investigation, and replaces them with a focus on a nebulous background of pre-social, neurophysiological forces which, in the words of Bryan Massumi, turns

sociology towards ‘the transindividual modulation of fields of relation rather than the representation of a subjective point of view’ (Massumi, 2015: 200). Moreover, the open-endedness of affect theory suggests a fluidity to social worlds reminiscent of Bruno Latour’s flat ontology (Abrahamsen, 2016; Latour, 2005). Massumi (2015) privileges the compositional affordances of affect ‘as an active pressure towards taking-form’ and as the ‘ongoing force of the social taking form’ (p. 205) yet is reticent when it comes to crucial questions relating to power and agency. For example, to what extent do particular social formations ‘capture, solicit or generate particular affects’ (Pile, 2019: 108)? But by the same token, if certain ‘affects, fantasies and reason have always been entangled, [and] their deployment has always sought to intensify people’s feelings about injustice and adversity to ensure the creation of solidarities and alliances’ (Pile, 2019: 110), then it is important to investigate the particularities of those entanglements and their implication within specific asymmetries of power, knowledge, and experience, and the contingent forms they give rise to.

The war on drugs

Efforts to hold the Duterte administration to account for the numerous reports of human rights abuses linked to the so-called war on drugs began in earnest with the indictment of Duterte by the International People’s Tribunal in Brussels in September 2018, in which IBON International worked alongside the ICHRP, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), the European Association of Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH), and the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers. Then, in a change of tack, in 2019 IBON brought some relatives of some of the victims of the war on drugs to meet members of the European Parliament, members of the European External Action Service, and Parliamentarians from Belgium and other institutions, while the play *Tao Po!* toured Europe. In addition, CHRP-UK in collaboration with the School of Oriental and African Studies brought the play to London and arranged for a mother of one of the victims to speak to the audience afterwards. A CHRP-UK activist later noted to me that they recruited a couple of new members that evening, describing the performance as ‘touching’ and ‘poignant’. For both IBON and CHRP-UK, this was an opportunity to engage with the Filipino diaspora and wider publics, to build support for the campaign and amplify opposition to the Duterte administration among European audiences and the European Filipino diaspora, and connect it to oppositional groups in the Philippines and elsewhere. As one IBON activist explained to me,

Yes, that was a very emotional time, actually. They came here [the relatives], and they met with the [Parliamentarians] . . . it’s like really being confronted with . . . you see I’m going to cry . . . You know it’s happening but when you hear them, you hear their testimonies, it’s like, it brings a whole different dimension. It’s not just me I think, it’s also the people that we met, the Parliamentarians that we met, the officials that we met, it was a different dimension than just hearing about it in the news or watching on the internet for example. It was also a European wide activity – so they went to the UK, they went to Iceland, they went to Germany, they went to Italy, and they came to Belgium and the Netherlands. Aside from it being an occasion for the various diasporas to gather, to receive them and even to watch the play *Tao Po!* because there

was an accompanying play with that. I think that leg, that tour produced, I can be wrong, after that, it's probably also a lot of work for other organisations. After that the European External Action Service came up with a report . . . and of course, later on, the European Parliament came up also with a resolution on the Philippines expressing concern about the human rights issues in the Philippines. Of course, there's no guarantee that it's a direct correlation.

On 17 September 2020, the European Parliament passed a resolution expressing serious concern about ongoing human rights violations in the Philippines and Duterte's war on drugs. A political objective, namely gaining the support of international partners to apply political and diplomatic pressure to the Duterte regime's self-styled war on drugs, was secured although, as the activist quoted above indicates, it is not possible to draw a strict cause and effect relationship between the campaign and the resolution passed by the EU parliament, although it would be mischievous to deny any relationship at all between them.

Importantly, the campaign against Duterte's self-styled war on drugs was not the only campaign constituted through affectively saturated actions and performances; the campaign against the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) involved extensive work with farmers organisations and indigenous peoples' organisations (as well as international partners in Indonesia and India in particular) to translate the likely impacts of a highly technical set of economic proposals on their livelihoods. In 2017, this included the staging of a protest by the People Over Profit network who brought 'workers, peasants [and] fisherfolk' into a closed-door venue in Manila to present their concerns and demands directly to the Filipino government negotiating team (bilaterals.org, 2017). Although not framed by activists in terms of affect, bringing farmers face-to-face with government officials – in common with the bringing relatives of victims of the war on drugs to give evidence to diplomats and parliamentarians – afforded a clear opportunity to, in the words of one activist, 'disturb those who are not yet disturbed'.

My interest lies with the way these campaigns and their different actions were deliberately saturated with 'disturbing' affects. Of course, in the case of the war on drugs, there was the careful process of working with EU parliamentarians and diplomats, and of abiding by the mechanisms and protocols of the EU Parliament to provide empirical evidence of human rights abuses that could in turn provide a clear rationale for a resolution. At the same time, however, the mode of address to the European Parliament among others included embodied performances of grief that enacted the lived experience of the war on drugs in such a way as to generate affection and empathy between audiences and performers. According to Michael Warner (2002: 82–89), publics are conventionally imagined according to an ideology of language, that privileges critical readers and rational scrutineers. At one level, the campaign against the war on drugs was presented in these terms; evidence about human rights abuses was documented for informed scrutiny and for rational judgement by European parliamentarians, diplomats, and diasporic and European publics, among others. However, at another level, the campaign called upon parliamentarians and others to be embodied witnesses to violent deaths and bereavement. For Warner, publics that do not subscribe to the ideology of language are 'counter publics', but perhaps a better description is, following Papacharissi (2015), 'affective publics', given the centrality of violent death and mourning to the mode of address.

Affect, moral action, and social change

As the foregoing makes clear, for both CHRP-UK and IBON International, in order to bring international pressure to bear on the Duterte administration and its self-styled war on drugs, it was not enough to simply document the killings; additionally, parliamentarians, diplomats, and other audiences would have to be witnesses to enactments of the very affective experiences that were constitutive of the war on drugs, namely mourning. It would not be enough to simply offer a rational account of the killings or to document the impunity of the Duterte regime; by being present to the emotional trauma of grief and bereavement, an affection could be generated which would have solidarity-inducing effects. But were these performances of affect calculations in a political strategy performed to solicit not only particular affects but also moral responses? Or, alternatively, was the deliberate cultivation of troubling affects a technique through which an audience could come to understand itself as a public, and thereby seek out new conditions of possibility for itself as a moral agent (Dave, 2010: 372)?

Critical sociological approaches to morality and ethics in ordinary life have tended to take the view that '[moral] values merely reflect structures and interests defined by economic relations' (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014: 651). Marx's insistence, in the 'Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy', that law, politics, religion, art, and philosophy are not autonomous realms of human activity but rather form a 'superstructure' – that is a vast collection of 'ideological forms in which men become conscious' (Marx, 1992: 426) of the changes taking place around them and through which they come to understand society – renders moral stances as 'covert competitive strategies' (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014: 652) and as strategic positions in struggles for power (Lambek, 2010: 21). On this view, politics is a game of 'manipulation' characterised by 'treating people as things in terms of their properties and their supposed known reactions' (Castoriadis, 2005: 77). Pierre Bourdieu's work is exemplary of this approach to moral action, precisely because of his tendency to reduce a wide range of social practices and actions from pedagogy to the sense of self, to a competition where groups and individuals compete for access to and possession of 'symbolic power' (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014). For example, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, education is, in reality, a site and occasion at which the dominant groups and classes in a given social formation manage the transmission and distribution of cultural capital. But as Pellandini-Simányi (2014) points out (p. 658), during the 1990s Bourdieu himself became increasingly involved in political activism, leaving him with the problem of reconciling his own ethical and moral actions with his previous theoretical position, which rendered such actions as the pale reflections of class power.

In 2019, IBON brought relatives of victims of the war on drugs to meet members of the European Parliament, members of the European External Action Service, and Parliamentarians from Belgium and other institutions, while the play *Tao Po!* toured Europe. In addition, CHRP-UK in collaboration with the School of Oriental and African Studies brought the play to London and arranged for a mother of one of the victims to speak to the audience afterwards. Were these really just moves in a game played against the Duterte regime, in which grief and mourning were assets to be mobilised to secure particular political objectives in full knowledge of their power to solicit particular kinds

of affection and solidarity? If this seems plausible but also in its cold instrumentalism somehow sticks in the throat, it is nevertheless possible to interpret these actions differently, specifically in light of Michel Foucault's conception of moral action in *The Use of Pleasure* (1990) 'as a process of becoming' (Dave, 2010: 372). If Foucault's early work privileged discursive systems and institutions, his later work – refracted through his own activism – attended to the self as a site of moral cultivation and action. For example, Foucault's analyses of French penal practices began with the founding of the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* on 8 February 1971. The aim was to collect evidence about conditions inside French jails. As he explained in 1972,

What is fascinating about prisons is that, for once, power doesn't hide or mask itself; it reveals itself as tyranny pursued down to the smallest details; it is cynical and at the same time pure and entirely 'justified' because its practice can be totally formulated within the framework of morality. Its brutal tyranny consequently appears as the serene domination of Good over Evil, of order over disorder. (Foucault in Miller, 1993: 190)

Foucault's analysis of French penal practices was not an exercise in value-free or scientifically detached and neutral data collection. Indeed, in *Remarks on Marx* (1991), in a series of interviews with the Italian journalist Duccio Trombadori, Foucault forged a distinction between two kinds of book. The first kind of book demonstrated a particular truth. However, the second kind sought something else entirely, by throwing into doubt the accepted and the taken for granted. He called it an 'experience book':

When . . . [*Discipline and Punish*] came out, various readers – particularly prison guards, and social workers, etc. – gave this singular judgement: 'It is paralysing. There may be some correct observations, but in any case it certainly has its limits, because it blocks us, it prevents us from continuing our activities'. My reply is that it is just that relation that proves the success of the work, proves that it worked as I had wanted it to. That is, it is read as an experience that changes us, that prevents us from always being the same, or from having the same kind of relationship with things and with others that we had before reading it. This demonstrates to me that the book expresses an experience that extends beyond my own. The book is merely inscribed in something that was already in progress; we could say that the transformation of contemporary man [sic] is in relation to his sense of self. On the other hand, the book also worked *for* this transformation; it has been, even if in a small way, an agent. That's it. This, for me, is an 'experience-book', as opposed to a 'truth-book' or a 'demonstration-book'. (Foucault, 1991: 41–42)

For Foucault, research, reading, and writing, as particular types of activity, transform one's relations with oneself and one's relations with others. As such, I want to suggest that, when in 2019 relatives of victims of the war on drugs were brought to meet members of the European Parliament and other European audiences while the play *Tao Po!* was touring Europe, IBON International, CHRP-UK, and other advocacy groups and organisations were not (or not only) executing a political strategy designed to assemble a transnational public to bring international pressure to bear on the Duterte government. They were also, through the deliberate re-enactment of the lived affects of the war on drugs, offering an opportunity for audiences to re-evaluate themselves in relation to grief

and death and to experience themselves instead as members of a moral public able and willing to respond and take action.

There is one further point to add about the role of affect in this story. When IBON International and others began the process of trying to bring international political pressure to bear on the Duterte administration for its excesses in 2018, the initial field of confrontation was international law. This field was focused on policies, laws, and institutions. It was a focus that presupposed that social and political change could be enacted from the top down following the rational scrutiny and judgement of experts. The decision to bring relatives of the victims of the drug war to Europe significantly shifted that focus. In privileging affect and the traumatic experiences of violent death, grief, and bereavement experienced by some of the most vulnerable communities in the archipelago, that direction of change was altered so that it could flow from the bottom-up.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have detailed how two organisations – IBON International and CHRP-UK – worked in tandem to bring some relatives of some of the victims of President Duterte’s war on drugs to meet members of the European Parliament as well as diasporic and other publics in Europe and the UK while the play *Tao Po!* – ‘Is Anybody There?’ – a dramatic monologue exploring the different perspectives of those involved in Duterte’s drug war including those of victims and perpetrators, was touring Europe. These events were amplified by social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, among other platforms, using hashtags such as #Stopthekillingsph and #Warondrugsph. I juxtaposed two very different interpretations of these actions. On the one hand, I framed them with reference to critical sociology and the work of Bourdieu as elements of a political strategy performed to solicit particular affective responses as a means of assembling a transnational public that would bring international political pressure to bear on the Duterte regime. On this reading, moral actions were ultimately moves in a wider struggle with the Duterte government for cultural capital and symbolic power, in which grief and mourning were assets to be mobilised to secure specific political objectives, in full knowledge of their power to solicit particular kinds of affection and solidarity. On the other hand, I suggested that the deliberate cultivation of affect constituted a technique through which a public could come to understand itself as a moral public with the capacity to take moral action. Finally, I argued that the re-enactment of affective experiences constitutive of the war on drugs suggested a model of social and political change that works from the bottom-up because it has lived, affective experience at its centre.

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ORCID iD

Paul-François Tremlett  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6249-7495>

Notes

1. JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the situation in the Philippines, including the case of Maria Ressa| RC-B9-0290/2020| European Parliament (europa.eu).
2. For purposes of full disclosure, I have been a member of CHRP-UK since 2006.
3. 'Ibon' means 'bird' in Tagalog.
4. For example, in its early years, CHRP-UK partnered frequently with PIPLinks, a Filipino indigenous advocacy organisation that is now defunct, although its activities have been archived (see PIPLinks, 2015).

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Author biography

Paul-François Tremlett is a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the Open University. He is interested in religion and social change and is currently working on literacies and disinformation.

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