

POPULISM, DUTERTISMO, AND THE REDEMPTIVE VIOLENT MODEL OF THE PENAL SUBSTITUTION- SATISFACTION SOTERIOLOGY

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Populism is a political approach, program or movement that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by real or perceived elite groups. It grounds itself on a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.” It argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. In its contemporary understanding populism is most often associated with an authoritarian form of politics. Duterte’s style of governance represents a populist brand of politics. His rule of the country with an iron fist finds theological ally and justification in the redemptive violence stream of the atonement model of soteriology. A sound Christian response to the unholy political-religious alliance must be rooted in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the sincere desire of the Philippine Catholic Church to learn from its stormy engagement with the former president even as it pursues its mission of salvation to re-evangelize the faithful in politics.

Key terms: populism, atonement theology, penal substitution, redemptive violence, extra-judicial killings, dutertismo

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary phenomenon of populism in the form of political parties in recent memory could be traced back to the early 2000s particularly in Europe. Populism gained traction starting 2008 when the banking crisis turned into a sovereign debt crisis. The elite class – the wealthy bankers – were for the first time identified as more or less responsible for the crisis which impacted

most of the society. Societal changes like multiculturalism and globalism, and more concrete crises could be behind as well the rise of populist parties in Europe¹

The spread of populism has not been confined to the European continent. Elsewhere in other parts of the world, populism emerged with a strong mass appeal capturing the peoples' dream of a better future long deprived of them by elite-led liberal democratic regimes. In the Philippines, a beneficiary of the failure of the past administrations to deliver in the area of social and economic justice was the former mayor of a southern city in Mindanao, President Rodrigo Duterte.² The man who styled himself as one-among-the-ordinary people was catapulted to power by the tide of widespread disgust and frustration over what his supporters perceived as the inability of the previous administrations to efficiently and effectively stamp out the evils of corruption and criminality. Running like a populist candidate and projecting himself as someone with political will he was able to capture the imagination of 16 million voters hungry for clean governance and peace. His track record (well-publicised by his paid social media including trolls) in transforming the once crime-ridden and economically backward Davao City to a peaceful and prosperous metropolis that it became at the end of his term as mayor convinced the voters that he was the coming messiah. His signature punching closed-fist image got successfully projected into public consciousness thirsting for peace and clean governance. The Davao experiment conducted under Duterte's authoritarian rule could be 'nationalised' to bring the country to the kind of progress that would benefit the poor, a progress that would be possible in a peaceful and orderly social order.

This paper contends that the rule of the country with a strong arm and a clenched fist finds a theological ally or support in the discredited redemptive violence approach of the atonement

¹ Martin Bull, Director of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR), cited in David Molloy, "What is populism, and what does the term actually mean?" March 6, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-43301423>.

² See Julio C. Teehankee, "Was Duterte's Rise Inevitable?" in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 37-56.

model of soteriology. A sound Christian response to the unholy political-religious alliance must be rooted in the magna carta of Christianity which is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with particular focus on the prophet's teachings on non-violence. Moreover, the Philippine Church's experience during Duterte's term of office offers a graced opportunity for the Church to continue the project of a renewed re-evangelization in the context of political realities and to undertake a humble examination of its prophetic role and gospel-rooted witnessing.

WHAT IS POPULISM?

It is not easy to find a one-size-fits-all definition of populism. The researchers, Yascha Mounk and Jordan Kyle and Jordan Kyle of *The Atlantic*, put it this way: "If you ask three scholars about the nature of populism, you are liable to get five different answers. Besides (it) is not like a light switch that is either on or off; some leaders exhibit certain (but not all) classic characteristics of populism."³ Populism can be defined as "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."⁴

Mounk and Kyle, in their 2018 study, assembled a list of 66 leading peer-reviewed journals in political science, sociology, and regional studies on the subject of populism, as well as political leaders linked with the ideology or movement. Vetting each potential case study while consulting with country and regional

³Yascha Mounk and Jordan Kyle, "What populists do to democracies," December 26, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/hard-data-populism-bolsonaro-trump/578878/>.

⁴This is Cas Mudde's definition which for the political theorist Paulina Ochoa Espejo is the most useful (Paulina Ochoa Espejo, "Power to Whom? The People between Procedure and Populism," in *The Promise and Perils of Populism: Global Perspectives*, ed. Carlos de la Torre (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 62), cited in Carmel Veloso Abao, "Engaging Duterte: That Space Between Populism and Pluralism," in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 302.

experts was an integral part of their study. In their working definition, populist governments “are united by two fundamental claims: (1) Elites and “outsiders” work against the interests of the “true people,” and (2) since populists are the voice of the “true people,” nothing should stand in their way.”⁵

Populism, albeit associated with an authoritarian leader, could situate itself in a liberal democratic system although it is considered a threat to democratic ideals and principles. In terms of parties, it spans the ideological spectrum from the left to the radical right.⁶ In the European context, populism is generally identified with the right although this “is not an iron rule.”⁷ The populist leader insists that he represents the unified “will of the people.” He embodies “opposition to the enemy, the establishment, aiming to ‘drain the swamp’ or tackle the ‘liberal elite’.”⁸ Lacking refinement, the typical populist leaders associate themselves with traits like bad manners, or behaving in a way that does not typify politicians.⁹

David Molloy cites Prof. Nadia Urbinati from Columbia University who believes that populist leaders who are catapulted to power are “‘forced’ to be in a permanent campaign to convince” their people “that they are not establishment - and never will be.” She argues that populist content is “made of negatives” - whether it is anti-politics, anti-intellectualism, or anti-elite. Urbinati acknowledges that a major strength of populism is its extraordinary power to adapt to all situations.¹⁰

Professor Martin Bull, Director of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR), points to another common thread running through populist leaderships: they tend to dislike the “complicated democratic systems” of modern

⁵ Mounk and Kyle, “What populists do to democracies.”

⁶ Mudde as quoted by David Molloy has observed that although the Left has its own share of populist leaders, the “most successful populists today are on the right, particularly the radical right.” See David Molloy, “What is populism and what does the term really mean?” March 6, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-43301423>.

⁷ Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Participation*, cited in Molloy, “What Is populism?”

⁸ Molloy, “What is populism?”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

government. Instead, they prefer direct democracy like referendums. That is why populist leaders prefer an authoritarian “strongman” brand of leadership which is born of the people’s lack of trust in the established system. This emboldens the leaders to make decisions that are not possible in traditional democracies, Bull adds.¹¹ In today’s contemporary world “populism is most often associated with an authoritarian form of politics”¹² under a charismatic leader. Populist politics revolves around his persona who appeals to and claims to embody the will of the people. Through this dynamic he is able to consolidate his own power. André Munro has observed that “(s)ome forms of authoritarian populism have been characterized by extreme nationalism, racism, conspiracy mongering, and scapegoating of marginalized groups.”¹³ Each of them serves “to consolidate the leader’s power, to distract public attention from (his) failures, or to conceal from the people the nature of the leader’s rule or the real causes of economic or social problems.”¹⁴

Populist leaders, particularly of the right-wing bent, can even use religious language and concepts to strengthen identity politics and solidify support. Yilmaz and Morieson consider the addition of religion to right-wing populism as particularly potent as proven. They mention the major religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity as having been commandeered by right-wing populist leaders and parties. They are most often in the service of a populist programme in which religion helps to define a ‘virtuous community,’ a community that can then be mobilized against ‘elites’ and ‘others’ who are categorized as a threat to this community. Significantly, while right-wing populism is generally nationalist in orientation, the addition of religion allows populists to define the virtuous community in religion-

¹¹ That sentiment is perhaps best embodied by the late left-wing Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who once said: "I am not an individual - I am the people" (Molloy, "What is populism?")

¹² André Munro, "Populism," <https://www.britannica.com/topic/populism> (accessed June 1, 2022).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

based civilizational terms.¹⁵

Populist discourse and narratives can generate and heighten intense emotions by painting events, in-groups, and out-groups in certain light (such as harmful vs. beneficial). For this purpose, religion serves as an important source of social categorization and assists in “creating, tailoring, and stabilising (meta-)cleavages in line with the populist ‘us’ versus ‘others’ dichotomy. Populists often enter into alliance with marginalised textualist religious actors and blend existing ethno-nationalism with the identification with a particular religious identity to create exclusionary narratives.”¹⁶ How did the former President Duterte embody populism during his term of office from 2016 to 2022?

THE POPULIST DUTERTE

Carmel Veloso Abao identifies Duterte’s style of governance with the politics of populism.¹⁷ She describes populist leaders as “often products of overwhelming electoral victories.”

¹⁵ Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Morieson, “A Systematic Review of Literature of Populism, Religion and Emotions,” *Religions* 12 (2021): 3. The authors cite Salmela, Mikko, and Christian von Scheve, “Emotional Roots of Right-wing Political Populism,” *Social Science Information* 56 (2017): 567–95; Idem, “Emotional Dynamics of Right- and Left-wing Political Populism,” *Humanity & Society* 42 (2018): 434–54; William J. Brady, Julian A. Wills, John T. Jost, Joshua A. Tucker, and Jay J. Van Bavel, “Emotion Shapes the Diffusion of Moralized Content in Social Networks. *Proceedings of the NAS* 114 (2017): 7313–18; Jesse Graham, Brian A. Nosek, Jonathan Haidt, Ravi Iyer, Spassena Koleva, and Peter H. Ditto (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101: 366–85; Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy, *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Duncan McDonnell, , and Luis Cabrera, “The Right-wing Populism of India’s Bharatiya Janata Party,” *Democratization* 26 (2019): 484–501.

¹⁶ Yilmaz and Morieson, “A Systematic Review of Literature,” 3.

¹⁷ Carmel Veloso Abao, “Engaging Duterte: That Space in Between Populism and Pluralism,” in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 37-56, 305-310. The respected Filipino sociologist-writer, Professor Randy David, describes Duterte both as fascist and populist (See Randy David, “Dutertismo,” May 1, 2016, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/94530/dutertismo>).

Once they are in office, they “are often backed by majority parliamentary support.”¹⁸ In the context of my study, I settle with Abao’s characterization of PRRD as a populist leader and his administration as a populist regime.¹⁹ Randy David has coined the term “Dutertismo” to refer to Duterte’s populism.²⁰

Even during the previous months leading to the May 2016 national elections the presentation of “the people versus others” was already discernible with matching popular mobilization.²¹ The concocted “the People’s Call for Change” was the milestone in the drumbeating for his candidacy.²² The slogan “change is coming” was very effective because he was perceived to be not power-hungry as he was a reluctant candidate to the presidency. It did not matter that his stint as a two-term congressman was uneventful. Should he win, he would be the anti-thesis of entrenched national forces and would root out the corrupt environment of national politics. The mainstream contenders were perceived to be just as corrupt as the ruling elite led by the Liberal Party. Much of the population could not feel the much-touted economic recovery, however data-based, by the previous administration simply associated with the elite.²³

Combine all the above with a political and social culture that fed on “compliance-seeking, undemocratic, patriarchal social institutions (i.e. families, schools, workplaces, churches),” this

¹⁸ Abao, “Engaging Duterte,” 304.

¹⁹ See her description of populism to justify her appropriation of the title to Duterte (Abao, 301-305).

²⁰ David, “Dutertismo.”

²¹ His supporters created the grassroots movement, *Kilusang Pagbabago*, some of whose conveners were from the southern Philippines. This led to the launching of the government program dubbed *Biyayang Pagbabago*. This was a government program initiated by the Office of Participatory Governance (OPG) of the then Cabinet Secretary Jun Evasco, a former Catholic priest (Nestle L. Semilla, “Biyaya ng Pagbabago launched,” April 21, 2018, <https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/171836/biyaya-ng-pagbabago-launched#ixzz7iLiCEXMY>).

²² Jodee Agoncillo, “Groups still push Duterte to run for president in 2016 elections,” *Inquirer.net*. 26 September 2016, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/725621/groups-still-push-duterte-to-run-for-president-in-2016-elections>, cited in Abao, “Engaging Duterte,” 305.

²³ See Abao, “Engaging Duterte,” 306. See Julio C. Teehankee, “Was Duterte’s Rise Inevitable?” in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 37-56.

served as fertile ground for the rise of the populist Duterte. He was “the man/solution/savior,” the embodiment of the people’s aspirations.²⁴ More than a year before he stepped down, he boasted that he was able to dismantle the oligarchy.²⁵ In his pre-recorded Talk to the People statement, he reiterated his stance to destroy the oligarchs.²⁶

HOW DID DUTERTE EMBODY HIS OWN BRAND OF POPULISM?

In terms of language, he was “crass and rough but sincere and not superficially polite, action-oriented and not all talk, practical and not aloof nor too intellectual, macho and not *bayot* (a Visayan term meaning homosexual that Duterte has repeatedly used derogatorily in public) homegrown and not imperialist, proud nationalist and not anyone’s puppet.”²⁷ Moreover, he felt free to use sexist and misogynistic language.²⁸ Prominent female critics like Senator Leila De Lima and Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno were particular targets of PRRD’s indignation due to their vocal opposition to lack of due process in dealing with suspected criminals.²⁹

²⁴ See Abao, “Engaging Duterte,” 306; also, Christopher Ryan Mabuloc, “Fighting the Oligarchs: President Duterte and the Argument against Elite Rule – A Perspective from the Academe,” *MALIM: Jurnal Pengajian Umum Asia Tenggara* 21(2020): 34-46.

²⁵ Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos “Duterte takes pride in dismantling oligarchy,” March 18, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1134133>. Nikkei Asia exposed the myth by asserting that PRRD had its own chosen elite (Aurora Almendral, “Crony capital: how Duterte embraced the oligarchs,” December 4, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Crony-capital-How-Duterte-embraced-the-oligarchs>; see Idem, Gita-Carlos, “No Regrets,” March 30, 2022. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1170970>).

²⁶ Gita-Carlos, “No regrets,” March 30, 2022. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1170970>.

²⁷ Abao, “Engaging Duterte,” 306.

²⁸ Edoardo Liotta, “Ranking the worst sexist comments President Duterte has made about women,” May 29, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/xwn4d3/duterte-sexist-comments-women-philippines>.

²⁹ See Michail Flores, “Philippine Supreme Court unseats chief justice who opposed Duterte,” May 11, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Philippine-Supreme-Court-unseats-chief-justice-who-opposed-Duterte>; see Ver Marcelo,

Neither a Socialist nor a Leftist, Duterte's populism did not appear to be anchored on an ideology, although he thought in terms of class struggle.³⁰ Instead he moored his governance on his chosen "war on drugs." In "we-versus-they" terms which he effectively leveraged when he had been mayor, the "they" or "other" were the criminals, the drug dealers, users, and addicts.³¹ He regarded drug use and addiction more as a crime rather than a health problem. He had only contempt for the drug users and addicts labelling them as "junkies" who are "not humans," and the shabu addicts beyond redemption. Drug war casualties are just carcasses to him, worthless pieces of dead animals.³² During the

"Duterte to Sereno: I Am Now Your Enemy," April 13, 2018, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/04/09/president-rodrigo-duterte-chief-justice-sereno.html>. Atty. Alexander B. Cabrera, chairman emeritus of PwC, in his analysis of the ouster decision has this to say: "In my opinion it started with the political, but what wrote *finis* to the Chief Justice's tenure dwelled on the personal" (Alexander B. Cabrera, "Lessons from the Ouster of the Chief Justice," July 8, 2018, <https://www.pwc.com/ph/en/as-easy-as-abc/column/lessons-from-the-ouster-of-the-chief-justice.html>). The "personal" were a set of grievances by the justices against Sereno; also, Nash Jenkins, "The fighter: How Leila de Lima ended up leading the opposition to Rodrigo Duterte's drug war," December 15, 2016, <https://time.com/4603123/leila-de-lima-philippines-opposition-duterte-drug-war/>.

³⁰ See Lisandro E. Claudio and Patricio N. Abenales, "Dutertismo, Maoismo, Nasyonalismo," in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 93-110. The authors argue that PRRD's politics "is the fusion of two seemingly opposing streams of the unfinished nationalist project. On the one hand, he is the heir to elite attempts to centralize a system of a multi-polar oligarchic democracy, the best know example of which is Ferdinand Marcos's vision for a "New Society." On the other hand, his populism is rooted in a form of socialist nationalism that flourished in the 1960s through the leadership of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)" (94-95).

³¹ "Duterte's populism has been so effective that his supporters have focused not on outcomes but on the radicalness of his ways. It seems that to many, that radicalness already approximates the change that they had envisioned. . . . To them those killings are a necessary and straightforward effect of the anti-drug campaign Duterte-style and is central to Duterte's promise to return peace and order throughout the country" (Abao, 308).

³² Marlon Ramos, "Junkies are not humans," August 28, 2016, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/810395/junkies-are-not-humans>; Idem, "Shabu addicts beyond redemption," July 21, 2016, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/797735/shabu-addicts-beyond-redemption> (retrieved May 25, 2017); CNN Philippine Staff, "Duterte: drug war casualties are just 'carcasses' to me," October 29, 2018, '<http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/10/29/Duterte-drug-war-suspects-dead.html>.

2016 campaign he dangled cash awards for policemen in big amounts. Once elected he allocated the entire presidential intelligence fund amounting to billions to fight the drug menace.³³ The John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues in its periodic assessment on the Duterte administration has claimed that the area of human rights and justice “is where the Duterte administration does worst vis-à-vis Catholic social principles.” Since July 2016 as per the institute’s assessment “(t)he human rights situation has deteriorated rapidly. . .”³⁴ It was marked by “excessive violence and by flagrant disregard for the rights of suspects—the writ of habeas corpus, the right to stand trial and be presumed innocent until proven guilty, the right to life, to name only the most routinely violated rights.”³⁵

The domestic and international human rights defenders were his enemies, stumbling blocks to his war on drugs. The unabated occurrence of daily killings targeting the poor had so alarmed concerned groups and Catholic authorities that they came up with statements critical of the use of violence as an ordinary means of eliminating the drug menace. The president, however, did not care. Empirical data showing failed campaigns against drugs employing the military solution in drug-infested countries were not convincing as far as the president was concerned.³⁶ His cavalier

³³ See Sheila S. Coronel, “Murder as Enterprise: Police Profiteering in Duterte’s War on Drugs,” in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 173 in 173-178. Coronel shows in tabular form the types of police activity and the corresponding typical amounts as rewards (174). See also Bea Cupin, “Cops are paid to kill in PH war on drugs - Amnesty International,” February 1, 2017, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/160130-amnesty-international-report-philippine-war-on-drugs>; also, Manuel Mogato and Clare Baldwin, “Special report: police describe kill rewards, staged crime scenes in Duterte’s drug war,” April 18, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-duterte-police-specialrep-idUSKBN17K1F4>. The Philippine National Police has issued a denial to the accusation (Julliane Love de Jesus, “PNP belies reports on cops being paid to kill in drug war,” February 1, 2017, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/867254/pnp-belies-amnesty-report-on-cops-being-paid-to-kill-in-drug-war>).

³⁴ ICSI, “Human Rights,” July 31, 2018. <http://www.jjicsi.org.ph/lights-and-shadows/human-rights/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ KD Suarez, “Colombian ex-president to Duterte: force won’t solve drug war,” February 8, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/160791-colombia-gaviria-op>.

response to charges of human rights violations and insensitive trivializing of killings of suspects was public knowledge. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility in its September 17, 2022, analysis updated on October 1, 2022, of the crime rates in the country as claimed by the Philippine National Police (PNP) cited the government's #RealNumbersPH data, from July 1, 2016, to February 8, 2022, which showed the police recording 6,235 persons killed during anti-drug operations. For human rights advocates the number has risen to 13,000 including extrajudicial killings which are under investigation. So far, only 12 police officers were indicted for only one case – the August 17 murder of 17-year-old Kian delos Santos which was recorded by a close-circuit TV camera.³⁷

Freedom of conscience and expression are stifled by conspiracy theories which labelled dissenters as terrorists or collaborators with the illegal drugs trade.³⁸ To exacerbate the evil, the “(f)reedom of the press and the right to information are diminished by seemingly concerted attacks of different government agencies on those media enterprises which demonstrate the greatest independence.”³⁹

To pursue his agenda with iron will, he needed the full support and the loyalty of the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. To gain this he doubled the salary of the police and the military with the help of a compliant Congress. He appointed a good number of former PNP and military officials to the government bureaucracies. AFP was the beneficiary of the largest

ed-duterte-war-drugs/; Manuel Perez Rocha, “The failed war on drugs in Mexico,” <https://www.tni.org/my/node/11993> (accessed May 19, 2017); Jose Luis Pardo Veiras, “A decade of failure on the war on drugs,” https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/10/opinion/a-decade-of-failure-in-the-war-on-drugs.html?_r=0 (accessed May 19, 2017).

³⁷ CMFR Staff, “On the supposed gains of Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’: did bloody policy bring down crime rate?” October 1, 2022, <https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/for-the-record-in-context/on-the-supposed-gains-of-dutertes-war-on-drugs-did-bloody-policy-bring-down-crime-rate-2/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

budget in recent times.⁴⁰ He really made the cops, and the soldiers feel that they had a special place in his heart.

The legislative hall packed with traditional politicians and family dynasties was immediately configured into a formidable supermajority of the president. Indeed, the war on drugs and, later, the anti-terrorism law would be given safe passage either by their silence or defence of the law. The creation of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) was a major legacy of Duterte not to pursue the path of dialogue but to eliminate the decades-long insurgency by resorting to the dreaded red-tagging.

Elsewhere in the digital world social media was turned into a convenient political tool which he weaponized through his army of trolls, vloggers, and black propagandists.⁴¹

In terms of dealing with rebels, PRRD initially obtained the support of the Left associated with the national democratic ideology which has an armed wing. To entice them to support his regime, he offered government positions to some of them. The honeymoon period did not last long for Duterte, himself, unilaterally ended the peace talks without any reasonable hope of reviving the dialogue. To his credit he was able to continue the peace talks with Muslim rebels in the south and successfully brought it to fruition. This led to the passage of the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (in short, Bangsamoro Organic Law). The John Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues, in its periodic assessment of the Duterte administration through the lens of the Catholic Social Teachings under the principle of peace and active non-violence, has averred that there is much ambivalence in the government's commitment to non-violence as a guiding principle in its efforts to end long-running insurgencies in the country. It has not exercised political

⁴⁰ Babe Romualdez, "AFP budget: the biggest ever, October 21, 20, <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2018/10/21/1861787/afp-budget-biggest-ever>

⁴¹ See Jason Vincent A. Cabañes and Jayeel S. Cornelio, "The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (And What We Can Do about It)," in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato, 301-318 (Quezon City: Bughaw Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017), 231-250.

will as much as it had shown with the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front when dealing with the National Democratic Front and the Islamic extremist groups had relied mostly on a purely militaristic approach.⁴²

To further cement his hold on populist power, PRRD welcomed the support of various religious groups notably the *Iglesia ni Cristo* and a few evangelical sects. The most visible support came from his good friend in Davao City, the self-anointed Son of God, Pastor Quiboloy of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ the Name Above Every Name. In the Catholic Church where Duterte had supporters, there were bishops, priests, and religious who were vocally critical especially of Duterte's violent war on drugs. A high-ranking Church leader even received death threats for his unrelenting criticism of the president's violent approach.

The Filipina Sociologist, Nicole Curato, best known for her academic work on deliberative democracy, has seen it all.

(T)he policy and rhetoric of the Duterte administration's war on drugs have created fragile democratic institutions that are prone to abuse of power. (There are) three key areas of concern: the increasing role of coercive institutions like the police and the military in all levels of governance undermines long efforts at institutionalizing democratic control over security forces; the regime's systematic and aggressive attacks against the political opposition, the judiciary, and the media weaken the capacity of monitory institutions to scrutinize and hold the regime accountable; and disinformation campaigns further corrode the capacity of the public to engage in critical discourse and informed political decision-making.⁴³

⁴² ICSI, Peace with Belligerent Groups," <http://www.jjcisci.org.ph/lights-and-shadows/peace/> (accessed Sept 8, 2018).

⁴³ Nicole Curato, "Democratic Expressions amidst Fragile Institutions: Possibilities for Reform in Duterte's Philippines," January 22, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/democratic-expressions-amidst-fragile-institutions-possibilities-for-reform-in-dutertes-philippines/>.

Duterte ended his six-year term in July 2022. Recently the populist leader attended the national assembly of a PDP-Laban wing where he was elected as chairman.⁴⁴ He continues to be actively involved in the NTF-ELCAC and, recently, he joined its officials in a joint meeting.⁴⁵ Populists have a longer survival rate than the non-populist leaders.⁴⁶ Duterte's was only six years. He may have formally left the corridors of power but there are no indications his influence will wane.

At this juncture the paper now turns to the atonement model of salvation to zero in on the penal substitution-satisfaction theory particularized by the redemptive violent approach. The approach will be shown to resonate with the populist approach of Duterte, which can be considered as a political expression of the latter.

ATONEMENT MODEL

The word "atonement" was introduced into the theological lexicon of Christian salvation (or redemption) perhaps very early in the 16th century. The term's emergence came 400 years after the influential medieval theologian and church leader Anselm of Canterbury wrote his classic work *Cur Deus Homo* or *Why the God-Man* (1098) that "defined Christian salvation theology - the most influential work for both Catholic and Protestants," in Western Christianity.⁴⁷ It has no etymological origin in Hebrew or Greek or Latin. It is something new, a compound of the phrase "at-one-ment," meant as a way of explaining how human beings are to be reconciled with God. No other theological term perhaps has similar English origin.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Kristina Maralit, "Duterte Named Chairman of PDP-Laban," September 30, 2022, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/09/30/news/national/duterte-named-chairman-of-pdp-laban/1860301>.

⁴⁵ https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=307710867584429 (accessed October 20, 2022).

⁴⁶ Mounk and Kyle, "What Populists Do to Democracies..."

⁴⁷ Ted Grimsrud, "Christian Salvation Part I Problems with Atonement Theology," September 14, 2015, <https://thinkingpacifism.net/2015/09/14/christian-salvation-part-one-problems-with-atonement-theology/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The standard atonement theology basically deals with the question, “why did Jesus have to die?” The fundamental response of this soteriological model is that his violent execution was somehow necessary and pleasing to God as the basis of human salvation thus benefitting humankind. Atonement theology has branched out into three streams of tradition, namely: the *Christus Victor* tradition, the Satisfaction theory, and the Moral Influence theory.⁴⁹

In the early Church *Christus Victor* was the predominant atonement image which involves the agency of God, of the devil, and of sinful humankind. It has two versions: the Ransom theory and the Cosmic Battle theory. The Ransom theory propounds that the devil held the souls of humankind captive. To secure their release, God handed Jesus over to Satan as a ransom payment in a contractual agreement. The devil killed Jesus, in an apparent victory for the forces of evil. But God raised Jesus from the dead signaling God’s victory over the devil resulting in the souls of humanity being freed from the devil’s clutches. This victory through resurrection provides the name *Christus Victor* or Christ the Victor. A second version of *Christus Victor* pictured the conflict between Satan and God as a cosmic battle. In this struggle, the devil killed God’s son, but the resurrection then constituted the victory of God over the forces of evil, and definitively identified God as the ruler of the universe.⁵⁰

The second stream of the Atonement model is the Satisfaction Atonement theory which has predominated soteriology for much of the past millennium. Satisfaction connotes reparation for something broken or destroyed, implying voluntary compensation for an injury inflicted. It is a Christian adaptation of a secular concept which in Roman Law means “the compensation for a debt to be paid or for an offense to be expiated.”⁵¹ It likewise consists of two versions. One version reflects the view of Anselm of

⁴⁹ J. Denny Weaver, “The Violence of Satisfaction and the Satisfaction of Violence,” <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-59-no-2/article/the-violence-of-satisfaction-and-the-satisfaction/>. (accessed August 11, 2018).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ K. Rahner, ed., *Dictionary of Dogmatic Theology* as cited in Bratilio Pena, *Soteriology* (Manila: UST Printing Office, 1985), 501.

Canterbury who thought that human sin had offended God's honor and, thus, upset divine order in the universe. The death of Jesus as the God-man was necessary to satisfy God's honor and restore the order of the universe. Denis Edwards has remarked that the medieval theory's biggest problem "is that in popular preaching and teaching (it) has been misunderstood and distorted. Instead of Anselm's careful thought we are presented with a vision of God who demands satisfaction for offenses committed, like some powerful lord who is placated only by suffering and blood. In this distorted form the satisfaction theory has done immense harm."⁵²

A change in the image of satisfaction occurred with Protestant Reformers. For them, Jesus' death satisfied the divine law's requirement that sin be punished. Jesus submitted to and bore the punishment that was really due to us—humankind—as sinners. Jesus substituted himself for us, and died a *penal, substitutionary* death—thus substitutionary atonement.⁵³ J. Denny Weaver cites the very popular movie *Passion of Christ* as an illustration of the penal substitutionary atonement model. He insists that "(the intent of the film's opening quotation of *Isaiah 53:5* was to establish penal substitution as its motif: ". . . he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us." What most offended Weaver about the movie "was its portrayal of the theme of redemptive violence, the belief that good things—in this case salvation—happen through violence. *The Passion of Christ* dramatized Jesus' voluntary suffering so that the rest of us could have good lives and escape punishment.

Abelard (1079-1142) developed the *moral influence* atonement image. In this image, the death of Jesus is a loving act of God aimed toward us. God the Father shows love to us sinners by giving us his most precious possession, his Son, to die for us,⁵⁴ that "our redemption through the suffering of Christ is that deeper love within us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also

⁵² Dennis Edwards, *What Are They Saying about Salvation?* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 16-17.

⁵³ Weaver, "The Violence of Satisfaction..."

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

secures for us the true liberty of the children of God, in order that we might do all things out of love rather than out of fear – love for him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found. . . .” The core of the issue “was not how to change an offended God’s mind toward the sinner, but how sinful humankind could be brought to see that the God they perceived as harsh and judgmental, was in fact loving.”⁵⁵

Whatever Abelard’s theological differences with Anselm, both of them rejected the idea that Jesus’ death was a ransom paid to the devil (Ransom model). Satan has no contractual rights that would obligate God to make such a payment. And even though humankind deserves punishment, Satan has no right to inflict that punishment. These considerations make it unworthy of God to deal with Satan via human beings as captive to the devil. Anselm made them directly responsible to God. Humans sinned against God, and the death of Jesus served to restore God’s honor and thus restore order in the universe. Abelard followed Anselm in rejecting the idea of Jesus’ death as a ransom payment to the devil. But Abelard also rejected the idea of Jesus’ death as a payment to God. It made God seem vengeful and judgmental. Instead, Abelard saw the death of Jesus aimed not at God but at sinful humankind. It was a loving act of God designed to get the attention of sinners and reveal the love of God for sinners while they were yet sinners.⁵⁶

THE PENAL SUBSTITUTION-SATISFACTION VIEW: IMPLICATIONS

Ted Grimsrud elaborates further the satisfaction theory of redemption. He points out the reason of the humanity-God separation: “human failings” – “that God is *required* by the moral nature of the universe to hold against us.”⁵⁷ This is expressed in the human’s violation of God’s commandments reflecting the

⁵⁵ Martyn John Smith, “Divine Violence and the Christus Victor Model” (a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Middlesex University, May 2015), 127-128.

⁵⁶ Weaver, “The Violence of Satisfaction.”

⁵⁷ Grimsrud, “Christian Salvation Part I.”

disruption of moral balance, or our sinful nature and actions which make us impure in God's eyes, or failure to offer to the Great Sovereign God our complete obedience thereby dishonouring Him, to whom we owe our being. Now before the human-God relationship can be restored, God's justice or honor must be *satisfied*, which means that God cannot simply forgive us or heal us directly since we are responsible for the fracture. For this to happen we must pay the debt we owe to God for disrupting the equilibrium of the moral universe lest God destroy or condemn us. "So, the place where the action must take place, the place where the transaction must happen, the place where the means to create salvation must be effected, is on God's side." However, since we are sinful, weak, and disobedient beings (we are the problem) we cannot possibly pay our debt, in other words incapable of doing what will satisfy God. "But we live in the midst of a seemingly unsolvable dilemma—we mess things up, we can't fix them, and God cannot unilaterally act to bring salvation without overturning the universe's very moral foundations." However, God resolves this dilemma by, in Anselm's terms, becoming human, incarnated in the person Jesus of Nazareth. This Jesus lives without sin and dies as a perfect sacrifice without blemish to God. "With such a death, Jesus does satisfy what God needs—paying the debt, offering the perfect obedience, balancing the scales of justice. Jesus's sinless life and sacrificial death provides the good that overcomes the terrible bad of human rebellion against God."⁵⁸

The atonement tradition *as translated* (italics, mine) into the penal substitution view accentuates the idea that "Jesus takes upon himself God's profound anger as our substitute, accepting the punishment for sin that we deserve—even though he was without sin. As this substitute, he satisfies the needs of God's retributive justice to respond to wrongdoing with punishment" in the form of Jesus' violent sacrificial death. This is called scapegoating as well: the sins of humankind are transferred to Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, and by his being sacrificed God's anger is appeased.

René Girard brings us back to the Old Testament ritual of transference:

⁵⁸ Ibid.

A "scapegoat" is initially the victim in the Israelite ritual that was celebrated during a great ceremony of atonement (Lev. 16:21) . . . The ritual consisted of driving into the wilderness a goat on which all the sins of Israel had been laid. The high priest placed his hands on the head of the goat, and this act was supposed to transfer onto the animal everything likely to poison relations between members of the community. The effectiveness of the ritual was the idea that the sins were expelled with the goat and then the community was rid of them.... the transfer of the community's transgressions onto the goat must have been facilitated by the bad reputation of this animal, by its nauseating odor and its aggressive sexual drive.⁵⁹

In whatever form, in all these ways the key aspect of what would make salvation possible is resolved. Something needs to happen on *God's* side of the divine/human divide. God needs to be satisfied—and is through Jesus's perfection and death. That is, the only act that can satisfy what God needs is a violent, sacrificial death of an innocent victim.⁶⁰

This kind of atonement theology and the way it is understood has given rise to what critical theologians refer to as the redemptive violence model of salvation. Weaver raises the following serious questions "about the character of God and the way that God works in the world," a God who regards Jesus' suffering as a necessary requirement for divine satisfaction: "Would a *loving* God, called Father, really *want* his Son to suffer and die in that way? Would a God whose very being, according to Christian confession, is present in Jesus actually want or need for Jesus to get himself killed to satisfy a need of the Father?"⁶¹ On another level one could ask whether the devil or the mob or the Romans or the Jewish leaders were not responsible for the killing of Jesus. Within

⁵⁹ René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001), 154.

⁶⁰ Grimsrud, "Christian Salvation..."

⁶¹ Weaver, "The Violence of Satisfaction."

the framework of satisfaction atonement if one's answer is yes, this leads, in the mind of Weaver, "to a strange juxtaposition." He elaborates:

Jesus, who is innocent and who does the will of God, becomes sin, and bears violent punishment. And the evil powers who oppose the reign of God by causing Jesus to suffer and die—whether the devil, the mob, the Jewish leadership, or the Romans—are the ones who are actually supporting the will of God, by killing Jesus to provide the payment that God's honor or God's law demands. The strange implication is that both Jesus and those who kill Jesus would be carrying out the will of God. In fact, asserting that both claims are true is nonsense.⁶²

Grimrud offers a list of dangerous and unhealthy implications of the satisfaction atonement model in terms of how we view God, Jesus, and human beings.⁶³

- It portrays God as harsh, violent, inflexible, judgmental, non-compassionate, weak (God can't simply forgive and must be subject to moral rules of the universe), and unfair (God creates the way we are and then judges and condemns us for being the way we are). In this view, God is not loving and merciful all the way down.
- It posits violence as necessary for redemption to happen, an expression of what Walter Wink called "the myth of redemptive violence."
- It provides an influential model for how human beings might respond to wrongdoing—with punitive violence, retributive justice based on an understanding of the moral nature of the universe that has debt and retribution as core elements (a model that finds expression in justifications for war, capital punishment, violent child discipline practices, et al).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Grimsrud, "Christian Salvation..."

- It minimizes the significance of Jesus's life. What matters is his sinlessness (understood mainly in terms of not breaking laws) and perfection, not his modelling how to love our neighbors and challenge unjust authority. It is the way that Jesus is different from other humans that is central for salvation—he dies so that we don't have to.
- It ignores Jesus's own teaching and actions related to salvation. Jesus himself forgave sinners directly without the need for a sacrifice to provide satisfaction. Jesus responded to human impurity by compassionately entering the lives of the "impure" and offering healing—not by destroying them as the penal substitution model would require of a "holy" God.
- It doesn't take seriously the emphases of the prophets in their critique of sacrifice. They opposed the use of sacrifice to buttress centralized power structures such as the temple and priestly elite. They proclaimed that God desires mercy not sacrifice.
- It ignores Jesus' emphasis on overturning a debt-oriented approach to human life. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive the debts of others." The satisfaction approach, in all its variations, presupposes the on-going validity of a debt-oriented moral universe rather than recognizing Jesus's rejection of that approach.
- It lets the forces that killed Jesus off the hook. As we will see in a later post, Jesus was killed because of the Powers rebelling against God and the story means to help free us from giving those Powers (such as the state, religious institutions, and cultural biases) our loyalty. The satisfaction atonement theology minimizes the actual social dynamics by making the story of Jesus's death mainly about the cosmic transaction between God and Jesus.

Grimrud ends his list by concluding that "the satisfaction atonement theology does not empower faithful living after the pattern of Jesus's way of life." It could reduce people to passivity living in oppressive situations or unmerited suffering. Nay, these people envision a God who orchestrates violence as part of a divine

plan thus justifying violence for the sake of justice even on the international level.⁶⁴

The satisfaction atonement theology finds a sharper expression in the redemptive violence model which, in turn, finds political representation in Duterte's populist governance (see Table 3).

THE MYTH OF REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE

The phrase "myth of redemptive violence" was coined by Walter Wink who identifies it with the ancient Mesopotamian tale of *Enuma Elish*.⁶⁵ The myth exposes the religion of the ancient world as a religion of violence.⁶⁶ Its cosmology teaches us the following 'truths': creation as an act of violence; order established by means of the disorder; evil prior to good; evil as an ineradicable constituent of ultimate reality and having an ontological priority over good; male as supreme over women; humanity as the perpetrator of evil already present; human beings to live in a peaceful coexistence only with imposed order from the top; unquestioning obedience as the highest virtue where the king's word is right in a centralized imperialist state.⁶⁷

Here issues a theology of war founded on the identification of the enemy with the powers that the god has vanquished and continues to vanquish in the drama of creation. This is the basic mythological type. "The relation of King versus Enemy becomes the political relation par excellence. According to this theology, the Enemy is evil, and war is her punishment.... The distinctive feature of the myth is the victory of order over chaos by means of violence.... Ours is neither a perfect nor a perfectible world; it is a theatre of perpetual conflict in which the prize goes to the strong. Peace through war, security through strength. . . ." ⁶⁸ The following

⁶⁴ Weaver, "The Violence of Satisfaction."

⁶⁵ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13-31.

⁶⁶ See Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 4.

⁶⁷ Wink relies on Paul Ricoeur's commentary on this point (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 14-17).

⁶⁸ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 16-17.

table shows Duterte’s brand of populism as representative of the redemptive violence model.

Table 1. Redemptive Violence Model Reflected in Duterte's Populism.

PENAL SUBSTITUTION-REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE MODEL	DUTERTE’S POLITICAL VERSION
Penal substitution atonement; scapegoating	Criminals and drug addicts/users/dealers are substitutes to be sacrificed. Duterte’s anger and the community’s anger and sin of apathy are transferred to the “others,” who, like goats in the ancient times, had a bad reputation.
Disruption of moral balance by our sinful actions	Corruption and crimes disrupt peace and order in the country.
God’s honor to be satisfied	Duterte’s love for the Filipino people and the honour of the country is to be satisfied. For this purpose, Duterte criticizes U.S. imperialism while pivoting to China.
God’s honored to be satisfied; God’s destructive force if no payment done	Duterte’s love for the Filipino people and the honour of the country is to be satisfied. He does this on at least two fronts: He criticizes U.S. imperialism while pivoting to China, and the enemies of the state, particularly the drug users/addicts/dealers, and communists who refused to

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	“pay” (read: surrender) or to toe the line are killed.
Jesus’ sacrificial death in which he took upon himself God’s profound anger as our substitute in a violent manner	Criminals and drug addicts/users/dealers must be sacrificed to redeem the country from crimes, corruption, and drug menace. Duterte’s anger is projected to the perpetrators as substitutes to be killed.
God as harsh, violent, inflexible, judgmental, non-compassionate	Duterte’s persona is projected as harsh, violent, inflexible, condemning, non-compassionate to his enemies, the enemies of his people.
Evil prior to good; creation as an act of violence; violence as necessary for redemption to happen.	Violence is prior to peace and order, a re-created Philippines would emerge out of the violence, hence the extra-judicial killings are necessary.
Order established by means of disorder	Peace and order in the country is achievable through all forms of disruptions of the established system and liberal democratic institutions.
Male supreme over women	Duterte’s attitudes and behaviors exhibit sexism, misogyny, and hatred for his women-critics who are influential.
Human beings naturally incapable of a peaceful coexistence; order to be imposed upon us from on high.	The Filipinos are lacking in discipline and incapable of a peaceful coexistence, hence Duterte must exercise an authoritarian (fascist) mode of governance.

<p>The King's word as always right; unquestioning obedience as the highest virtue, and order as the highest religious value</p>	<p>Duterte refused to listen to the voices of human rights groups and experiences of failed attempts of drug-infested countries to stamp out the drug menace by employing violence. His was on drugs approach is beyond criticism and accountability. The military and the police form of obedience is his model. Peace and order in the country and the discipline of the citizens are of the highest value.</p>
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WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

The affinities of the satisfaction atonement model in its redemptive violence expression and Duterte's populist style of ruling are too striking to ignore. For all intents and purposes, *Dutertismo* is a political incarnation of the discredited soteriological model contextualized in the country's elite-dominated liberal democracy. This must alert us, Christian believers, who comprise 90% of the population more than 80% of whom are Catholics, to the dangers of subscribing to both in terms of faith-understanding, faith-witnessing, and faith-growth.

It cannot be denied that Duterte's popularity has consistently received a high satisfactory rating from 2016 until he stepped down in July 2022. Apparently, among his hordes of adoring fans are a considerably big number of Christians. His redemptive violent approach did not matter to them. Social psychologists and social scientists can offer an account of the peoples' support of Duterte's brand of populism. But from the perspective of theological or religious education and catechesis, such unqualified support that sidesteps the moral questions surrounding the populist leader's manner of governance risks the Church's fidelity to the gospel teachings of Jesus Christ with

Plenary Council of the Philippines recommends active non-violence to counter evil in the society.⁷⁰ Jesus' primordial vision of the Kingdom as Christianity's foundational guide to living righteously is the unique Christian flavor in responding to acts of violence.⁷¹ At the heart of the re-evangelizing project is to emphasize the foundational value of mercy and compassion, a favored theme of Pope Francis.

Re-evangelization challenges the Church as well to go into soul-searching, both on the personal and collective level. Church leaders have acknowledged the seeming lack of the institution's credibility when it comes to making a stand on political matters based on its social teachings. Duterte loved to expose Church abuses whenever his punitive violent approach was criticized by some Church leaders. A significant number of Catholic supporters believed him more than they did the Church. Prophets may not be honored in their own country, but the Duterte experience could serve as a *kairos* for the Philippine Catholic Church to go into collective introspection both on the individual and collective level and constructive intra-dialogue to discern where did she go wrong, and how could she respond more creatively and more effectively.

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⁷⁰ *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines 20 January – 17 February 1991* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 1992), nos. 307-311. See also Emmanuel S. de Guzman, "Words that Kill: When Civility Becomes an Act of Defiance to Populist Politics of Profanity," (unpublished paper concurrent session lecture text, Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church, Saravejo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2018).

⁷¹ O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 22.