

## Ambiguous fear in the war on drugs: A reconfiguration of social and moral orders in the Philippines

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*This article explores the social and moral implications of Duterte’s war on drugs in a poor, urban neighbourhood in Manila, the Philippines. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, surveys, and human rights interventions, the article sheds light on policing practices, social relations, and moral discourses by examining central perspectives of the state police implementing the drug war, of local policing actors engaging with informal policing structures, and of residents dealing with everyday insecurities. It argues that the drug war has produced a climate of ambiguous fear on the ground, which has reconfigured and destabilised social relations between residents and the state as well as among residents. Furthermore, this has led to a number of subordinate moral discourses — centred on social justice, family, and religion — with divergent perceptions on the drug war and the extent to which violence is deemed legitimate.*

When Rodrigo Duterte assumed office as president of the Philippines on 30 June 2016, he declared a war on drugs and initiated a violent crackdown on drugs and crime. Thousands of suspected drug addicts and pushers have been killed in poor, urban communities across the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> These killings often occurred at night either in legitimate police operations where the police shoot to kill in self-defence when suspects resisted arrest, in gang wars related to drugs, or in vigilante-style operations with unknown assailants conducting drive-by shootings on motorcycles (known as ‘riding in tandem’) leaving the victims sprawled out in the streets. The vast majority

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1 The number of killings in the drug war is wide-ranging and there is a lack of reliable information. However, according to official statistics from the Philippine National Police, a total of 27,928 killings were recorded between 1 July 2016 and 31 July 2018. Of these, 4,410 deaths occurred in ‘legitimate anti-drug operations’, while the remaining 23,518 deaths are ‘homicide cases under investigation’. Philippine National Police, ‘Towards a drug-cleared Philippines: #RealNumbersPH Year 2 — From July 1, 2016 to August 31, 2018’, Philippine National Police, 2018, [http://www.pnp.gov.ph/images/News/2018/RealNumbers/rn\\_83118.pdf](http://www.pnp.gov.ph/images/News/2018/RealNumbers/rn_83118.pdf); ‘25,000 trees for 25,000 dead in homicides, war on drugs’, *Inquirer*, 15 Aug. 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1021371/25000-trees-for-25000-dead-in-homicides-war-on-drugs>.

of the victims are young, unemployed men from the urban slums, particularly around Metro Manila.<sup>2</sup> Besides the thousands of killings, the drug war has been characterised by overcrowded detention facilities, a collapsing justice system, and many opportunities for corruption within the police.<sup>3</sup>

Duterte's war on drugs is based on the conviction that the Philippines is being destroyed by drugs. During his election campaign, he convinced the public about the existence of a drug crisis and called for immediate action. Duterte called the Philippines a 'narco state',<sup>4</sup> where drugs had become a threat to national security, and claimed that the number of drug personalities had reached a high of four million.<sup>5</sup> He built his presidential campaign on the back of his reputation from the southern city of Davao, where he and his family had been running local politics for decades.<sup>6</sup> Known for his crackdown on crime in Davao, which earned him a nickname as 'the Punisher', Duterte gained momentum and ultimately won the election in a landslide victory in May 2016 as his strong message of law and order resonated with voters.

There are great uncertainties about the actual or objective extent of the drug problem, not least if the Philippine figures are compared to global drug prevalence and usage rates.<sup>7</sup> Despite these objective numbers, placing the Philippines low on the list of drug-troubled societies, Duterte activated a sense of fear and anxiety among the population and inscribed a narrative about drugs as a serious threat to society. Nicole Curato usefully refers to this as a 'latent anxiety'<sup>8</sup> as the issue of illegal

2 Clarissa David, Ronald Mendoza, Jenna Atun, Radxanel Cossid and Cheryll Soriano, 'The Philippines' anti-drug campaign: Building a dataset of publicly-available information on killings associated with the anti-drug campaign', ASOG Working Paper 18-001, Ateneo School of Government, Quezon City, 2018.

3 Amnesty International, 'If you are poor, you are killed: Extrajudicial executions in the Philippines' "war on drugs", Amnesty International, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 'License to kill: Philippine police killings in Duterte's "war on drugs"', Human Rights Watch, 2017.

4 'PH becoming a "narco state", Duterte, Cayetano warn', *Inquirer*, 28 Jan. 2016, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/759503/ph-becoming-a-narco-state-duterte-cayetano-warn>.

5 'Duterte hikes drug use figure anew despite little evidence', *Philippine Star*, 23 Sept. 2016, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/09/23/1626648/duterte-hikes-philippines-drug-use-figure-anew-despite-little-evidence>.

6 Jesse Angelo L. Altez and Kloyde A. Caday, 'The Mindanaoan president', in *A Duterte reader: Critical essays on Rodrigo Duterte's early presidency*, ed. Nicole Curato (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), pp. 111–26.

7 According to the Dangerous Drugs Board, a policy-making and strategy-formulating body on drug prevention and control under the President, the number of drug personalities in the Philippines is estimated to be around 1.8 million (Dangerous Drugs Board, '2015 Nationwide survey on the nature and extent of drug abuse in the Philippines', Republic of the Philippines, 2015). Not only does this contrast with Duterte's claim of 4 million drug users in the Philippines, but these numbers do not distinguish between actual drug dependency and occasional drug use. While some users may exhibit signs of addiction, often weight loss and hollowed-out faces, most are not drug dependents, per se, and remain functional in their daily lives. In fact, the drug prevalence rate in the Philippines is estimated at around 2.3% of the population (*ibid.*), which is lower than half the global average. The latter is estimated at 5.3% for adults between the ages 15–64 who used drugs at least once in the past year (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2017*, <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/index.html>).

8 Nicole Curato, 'Politics of anxiety, politics of hope: Penal populism and Duterte's rise to power', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs (JCSAA)*, special issue, *The early Duterte presidency in the Philippines*, 35, 3 (2016): 91–109.

drugs had been public knowledge for years but was not something that had entered political language before Duterte's presidency. Confirming this analysis, Waturu Kusaka asserts that while support for the drug war was strongest in the middle classes, it was also persistent among the poor.<sup>9</sup> Kusaka locates the support in persistent fears — the latent anxiety — of drugs in a local economy and the belief that the discipline promised by Duterte would be more effective than other politicians' hypocritical pro-poor discourses. In this way, the war on drugs became a productive political discourse that has led to a challenge to the rule of law in the Philippines.

This article explores the social and moral implications of the war on drugs by shedding light on how policing practices, social relations, and morality have been challenged, negotiated, and reconfigured. In doing so, we zoom in on Bagong Silang, an urban, poor resettlement site established in the mid-1980s on the northern outskirts of Metro Manila. With a population of around 250,000 and a population density about twice the average of Metro Manila,<sup>10</sup> Bagong Silang is characteristic of the most exposed urban slum areas in the drug war.<sup>11</sup> The analysis is based on our collective research experiences consisting of ethnographic fieldwork both prior to and during the war on drugs. Both authors conducted fieldwork during the drug war in 2017; Author 1 in January and February and Author 2 in May and June. This included participant observation on police activities and among residents in the community, as well as extensive interviews with a wide range of implicated actors on both sides of the drug war — in particular with the police, local policing actors, and residents. In addition to the data exploring the temporal dimension of the drug war, this article benefits from our longer-term engagement with Bagong Silang through fieldwork, human rights interventions, and quantitative research since 2010. This extended involvement allows us to discuss the war on drugs in relation to earlier forms of policing as well as the effects of this on community and state relations. Against this backdrop, the article asks, 'How and to what extent has the war on drugs affected policing, sociality, and the production of moral discourses?'

Our argument is that while the war on drugs reconfigures social and moral orders and, consequently, affects who might be killed, this has resulted in an intensification and a re-articulation rather than a radical break from past violent policing. As we show, the Philippine police have killed people in the past. When we talk about this as an intensification and re-articulation, we do not suggest that the drug war has not had profound implications for the way in which residents live their lives in Bagong Silang. We find it useful to draw on Lars Højer et al. in their working through the concept of escalation.<sup>12</sup> Escalation signifies a quantitative shift in, for instance, violence, which has profound qualitative impacts. As an escalation, the drug war has created a climate of fear, but at the same time public support for the drug war

9 Waturu Kusaka, 'Bandit grabbed the state: Duterte's moral politics', *Philippine Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 49–75.

10 Steffen Jensen and Karl Hapal, 'Policing Bagong Silang: Intimacy and politics in the Philippines', in *Policing and the politics of order-making*, ed. Peter Albrecht and Helene Maria Kyed (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 24–39.

11 Balay Rehabilitation Center, a local NGO working in Bagong Silang, registered 107 killings in the first six months of the drug war.

12 Lars Højer, Anja Kublitz, Stine Simonsen Puri and Andreas Bandak, 'Escalations: Theorizing sudden accelerating change', *Anthropological Theory* 18, 1 (2018): 36–58.

remains curiously high — even among some people involved in drugs. While fear is particularly prevalent among those who suspect that the state is out to get them, it is not without ambiguities. This fear is manifested in a sense of unpredictability as no one knows who will be targeted, a feeling which is pervasive even among those who are not involved or do not think they should be implicated. In many ways, however, it is an ambiguous fear. While the fear is real enough, it is mixed up with a sense that the war and the violence is just. Yet while most people are sure of their innocence, they are not sure that they will be left unharmed. We argue that this ambiguous fear has destabilised an otherwise predictable relationship between local government and residents and challenged notions and practices of community as people — for and against Duterte — are pitted against each other and locked into new forms of conflict.

Much attention has been paid to the national repercussions of the war on drugs, focusing primarily on the use of extra-legal force, corruption, and human rights violations,<sup>13</sup> as well as on Duterte-centric analysis.<sup>14</sup> While significant insights can be drawn on macro-level dynamics from these studies on governance, political legitimacy, and sovereignty, they lack empirically grounded analysis of the everyday implications of a national policy at the local level. Indeed, we argue that the drug war is primarily experienced locally, and on the ground. These perspectives ‘from below’ — elucidated through rich empirical descriptions in the article — are necessary to explore in order to understand the micro-dynamics of the drug war, such as derived social consequences, ambiguities, and dilemmas among the implicated actors. Building on a small body of ethnographic literature examining different aspects of Duterte’s drug war such as Curato’s analysis on the logics of public support,<sup>15</sup> Kusaka’s analysis on moral politics,<sup>16</sup> and our own work on the relationship between money and violence<sup>17</sup> as well as on policing in urban spaces,<sup>18</sup> this article contributes with in-depth perspectives on the ambiguous and informal policing structure, the reconfiguration of sociality through fear, and the existence of subordinate moralities with divergent agendas. The article, furthermore, contributes with an analysis that is capable of both highlighting changes over time and emphasising a unique temporal dimension of the drug war in one of the most intensely affected areas of Manila.

We need to make one additional remark on methodology related to the heightened unpredictability on the ground since the introduction of the drug war. When Author 1 came to Bagong Silang in January 2017, the drug war seemed to be at its most intense.<sup>19</sup> People reported that being outside after certain hours was dangerous,

13 See for example, Danilo Andres Reyes, ‘The spectacle of violence in Duterte’s “war on drugs”’, *JCSAA* 35, 3 (2016): 111–37; Sheila Coronel, ‘Murder as enterprise: Police profiteering in Duterte’s war on drugs’, in Curato, *A Duterte reader*, pp. 167–98; Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, ‘Duterte’s “war on drugs”: The securitization of illegal drugs and the return of national boss rule’, in *ibid.*, pp. 111–26.

14 See for instance, Mark Thompson, ‘Bloodied democracy: Duterte and the death of liberal reformism in the Philippines’, *JCSAA* special issue, ‘Introduction’, 35, 3 (2016): 39–68; Curato, *A Duterte reader*; Vicente Rafael, ‘The sovereign trickster’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 78, 1 (2019): 141–66.

15 Curato, ‘Politics of anxiety, politics of hope’.

16 Kusaka, ‘Bandit grabbed the state’.

17 Steffen Jensen and Karl Hapal, ‘Police violence and corruption in the Philippines: Violent exchange and the war on drugs’, *JCSAA* 37, 2 (2018): 39–62.

18 Anna Bræmer Warburg and Steffen Jensen, ‘Policing the war on drugs and the transformation of urban space in Manila’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, 3 (2020): 399–416.

19 For a detailed exploration of policing in the war on drugs with an empirical point of departure in a

and at the same time, local support for Duterte's drug war remained high. Dozens of killings later, when Author 2 arrived in May 2017, the killings seemed to have declined somewhat. The area also seemed to have settled a bit more, and nocturnal life had resumed to an extent where it resembled life before the drug war was initiated. However, according to reports from interlocutors in early 2018, the killings seemed not to be abating but intensifying.<sup>20</sup> Not least in the area around Bagong Silang, where the police were lauded as being the country's most successful implementers of the war on drugs in August 2017, only to be demoted in a shameful corruption scam involving theft and extortion days later.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the drug war establishes an ever-shifting terrain in which predictability is as rare for researchers as it is for residents.

We organise our argument in four analytical sections. First, we present policing in Bagong Silang before and during the war on drugs to illustrate how past practices and logics of violent legitimacy have been intensified during the drug war. In the second section, we explore how local and informal policing structures have been involved in policing the war on drugs and, consequently, the killings, arguing that the state police oscillate between what we refer to as ever-shifting representational fronts and practical backgrounds. In the third section, we shed light on social relations between the state and residents as well as among residents, focusing on how ambiguous fear has become central in the reconfiguration of these relations. In the fourth section, we unfold the production of a dominant moral discourse in which those connected to drugs are killable in the eyes of the state, and sometimes, the community at large; we also identify a number of subordinate moral discourses challenging this stance. We conclude the article with a discussion on the insidious consequences of the war on drugs.

### Policing before and during the war on drugs

Duterte's declaration of his war on drugs has had profound consequences for policing in the Philippines. Policing has been formed through a long history of counter-insurgency; local politics; decentralisation, and a rather strong, national human rights profile.<sup>22</sup> This has produced complex and often contradictory forms

setting of extraordinary violence, see Anna Bræmer Warburg, 'Policing in the Philippine "war on drugs": (In)security, morality and order in Bagong Silang' (Master's thesis, Aarhus University, 2017).

20 According to the documentary film *On the President's orders* (2019) by James Jones and Olivier Sarbil, who spent six months filming in Caloocan, the local Police Commissioner tried to introduce less violent forms of policing from April 2017. He was, according to the film's narrative, forced to employ violent practices again, which coincides with our interlocutors' reports. In May 2018, the Caloocan Police Commissioner was released from his post amidst accusations of police officers engaging in vigilante activities.

21 GMA News, 'Caloocan Police awarded Best City Police Station two days after Kian slay', 6 Sept. 20, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/624760/calooacan-police-awarded-best-city-police-station-two-days-after-kian-slay/story/>; 'Best to bashed: Caloocan police sacked en masse', *Inquirer*, 16 Sept. 2017, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/931010/best-to-bashed-calooacan-police-sacked-en-masse>.

22 In general, the Philippine Police has been under-studied. There are some notable exceptions, for instance, W. Timothy Austin, *Banana justice: Field notes on Philippine crime and custom* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the rise of the surveillance state* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Glenn Varona, 'Politics and policing in the Philippines: Challenges to police reform', *Flinders Journal of History and*

of policing in which trust and confidence in policing structures co-exist with a deep sense of fear of potential police violence and corruption.<sup>23</sup> Two different formal policing structures are found in Bagong Silang: the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Barangay Justice system (BJS). The PNP is part of a national structure under the Department of the Interior and Local Government. This was a product of the post-Martial Law era demilitarisation of the police. While this was rightly seen as steps toward decentralising and democratising the police, it had the de facto effect of putting the police back in control of local politics and strong political families.<sup>24</sup> This frustrated the police significantly and may also partly explain why they enthusiastically embraced the drug war. We will return to this below.

The second policing structure, and by far the most numerous one in Bagong Silang, is the BJS. The Bagong Silang Justice System has more than 1,000 members, whereas the police only have around 100 (up from 70 in 2010). The BJS is part of the local government structure. The chairman or the captain of the *barangay*<sup>25</sup> (the lowest tier of government in the Philippines), elected every three years, appoints local representatives to be in charge of maintaining peace and order in their own areas, referred to as the *purok*. These purok leaders again appoint a certain number of guards, called *tanods*. In Bagong Silang, each of the 115 purok leaders have appointed up to ten tanods<sup>26</sup> to assist them in patrols and in mediating. Purok leaders and tanods represent the first tier of the BJS. They handle local conflicts, neighbourhood disputes, and criminal offences carrying penalties of no more than one year in prison or P5,000. If penalties are higher, the police must take over. According to previous research,<sup>27</sup> in about three-quarters of all cases, the purok leaders resolve the issues at hand, whereas in a quarter of the complaints, cases are referred to the next level in the BJS, the *Lupon*. The Lupon continues mediation and frequently manages to settle the complaints. This illustrates the social significance of the BJS. The BJS enjoys a high degree of local support and has attracted international acclaim for its

*Politics* 26 (2010): 102–25. See also John Sidel, ‘The usual suspects: Nardong Putik, Don Pepe Oyson, and Robin Hood’, in *Figures of criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and colonial Vietnam*, ed. Vicente L. Rafael (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 70–94; John Sidel, *Capital, coercion, and crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), on the relationship between policing and local politics.

23 Karl Hapal and Steffen Jensen, ‘The morality of corruption: A view from the police in the Philippines’, in *Corruption and torture: Violent exchange and the policing of the urban poor*, ed. Steffen Jensen and Morten Koch Andersen (Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 2017), pp. 41–70.

24 Sidel, *Capital, coercion, and crime*; Alfred W. McCoy, *An anarchy of families: State and family in the Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

25 A *barangay* refers to boats in pre-colonial times, where the leader of the boat was the captain; see William H. Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-century Philippine culture and society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994).

26 This number varies according to the funding from the barangay captain. In 2010, the number was ten tanods in all areas. In 2017, the funding only allowed five tanods per area. However, a number of tanods worked voluntarily, and some hoped that funding would be available later. Others wanted to take part in the drug war.

27 Steffen Jensen, Karl Hapal and Jens Modvig, ‘Violence in Bagong Silang: A research report prepared in collaboration between DIGNITY and Balay’, DIGNITY Publication Series on Torture and Organised Violence, no. 2, 2013, Copenhagen.

culturally and locally sensitive approach to mediation.<sup>28</sup> As we argue elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> purok leaders and tanods are deeply embedded in communal affairs, sharing the same area and being compelled to take part in communal activities. They must be able to navigate very intimate spaces, not least because their position relies on the ever-changing political fortunes of local strongmen from among whom the captain is elected. Purok leaders and tanods are also the primary cogs in local, political machines and are called upon to support any campaign organised by the captain and his political superior, the city mayor. Hence, when the war on drugs broke out they were caught between a rock and a hard place, having to negotiate a delicate balance between the state and the community. We will also return to this later.

In the infant years of Bagong Silang, policing was quite violent as it engaged with counter-insurgency practices to stave off the Maoist insurrection, which was threatening to overtake Manila in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The area was also perceived to be a hotbed for criminal activities. However, according to accounts, they became progressively more peaceful, and in a survey from 2010,<sup>30</sup> two-thirds of respondents reported that they found that the police acted in a normal way or as could be expected. In follow-up interviews, respondents suggested that the police could be managed in most situations through what is called *diskarte*, the ability to wriggle oneself out of precarious situations, including police transgression, by using cunning, connections, and money. This did not mean that they trusted the police implicitly. Rather, persistent stories emerged in fieldwork of corrupt practices, including detention and violence used as threats to extort money; we refer to this as ‘violent exchange’.<sup>31</sup> The police are referred to as *crocodiles* and their practices as *hulidap* or hold-up through arrest. They are also known for their capacity for violence, and in surveys and interviews, the practice of *salvaging* was mentioned repeatedly as an ultimate threat. *Salvaging* as a concept dates back to the Martial Law period, when it referred to ‘saving the nation through killings’.<sup>32</sup>

The police confirmed this practice. In an interview in 2011, one officer stated, ‘I won’t lie about it. We do kill people. I myself have killed a lot of people in Bagong Silang.’ He continued to explain how ‘code 00’ signals an imminent summary execution to other officers, for example ‘Let’s code 00 this guy!’ While his statements reflected a certain level of bragging, they were based on facts. In 2010, we documented at least five killings allegedly carried out by law and order personnel of young men in conflict with the law and the police.<sup>33</sup> Hence, with the advent of the war on drugs, public fear and the logics of violent legitimacy were not invented. Rather, they escalated and were intensified, rearticulated in new ways around drugs and partly made legitimate, not least in speeches by the President, promising to protect police who engaged in violent practices.<sup>34</sup>

28 Asian Development Bank (ADB), ‘Background note on the justice sector of the Philippines’ (Manila: ADB, 2009).

29 Jensen and Hapal, ‘Policing Bagong Silang’; Warburg and Jensen, ‘Policing the war on drugs’.

30 Jensen, Hapal and Modvig, ‘Violence in Bagong Silang’.

31 Hapal and Jensen, ‘The morality of corruption’.

32 McCoy, *Policing America’s empire*.

33 Jensen, Hapal and Modvig, ‘Violence in Bagong Silang’.

34 Philstar, ‘Duterte to PNP: Kill 1,000, I’ll protect you’, *Philippine Star*, 2 July 2016, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/07/02/1598740/duterte-wnp-kill-1000-ill-protect-you>.

With the initiation of the drug war in June 2016, a campaign plan focusing on the eradication of illegal drugs was drafted for the PNP, which placed the police in the central role. The main component, Project Tokhang, is the practice of reaching out to alleged drug personalities in exposed communities urging them to change. Based on a watch list of suspected drug personalities drawn up by residents and local authorities, the police go from door to door advising suspects to surrender. They knock on doors and plead with the individuals to turn themselves in.<sup>35</sup> In the case of voluntary surrender, suspects must sign a waiver registering their drug offences with the authorities. From this point on, their abstinence from drugs is monitored and a course of questionable rehabilitation begins.<sup>36</sup> In the implementation of Tokhang, the practices of the state police are informed by a lower level of policing conducted both by puroks and tanods, and by residents who have been recruited to monitor activities regarding illegal drugs in their neighbourhoods. Based on local knowledge, they compose a watch list for the police with the names and addresses of suspected drug personalities; this forms the basis for Tokhang. The outsourcing of policing practices constitutes a government-funded programme known as the Masa Masid. This programme, meaning the ‘people observe’, is essentially a surveillance system that has been integrated locally as part of a state agenda. Consequently, this constitutes an entanglement of state and local authorities, causing policing in the war on drugs to transcend formal and informal divides, thus, rendering formal and informal processes interdependent.

Another structure of communication and partnerships that exists between policing bodies outside of the official, visible structures is the Community Investigative Services (CIS). A member of the CIS, Marwyn, explained in May 2017 that CIS is run by a former general of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. It aims to collect information about drug incidents in local areas. The CIS is shrouded in secrecy, and according to Marwyn, members were chosen in a training exercise in which the ability to shoot was apparently the final criteria for inclusion. They do their rounds and then report to a coordinator at barangay level. The coordinator then proceeds to report to a meeting with city representatives in a big hotel in a neighbouring district to Bagong Silang. The CIS runs parallel to and recruits from the barangay puroks and tanods. According to Marwyn, they do not receive extra payment for their work in CIS. In fact, Marwyn had to pay for his own badge and ID card, but they do receive a bonus for every piece of good information they send up the system. While this system in many ways replicates the Masa Masid, it extends it, making it more secretive and reveals a deep-seated mistrust within the police structures of the formal BJS and its willingness to be involved in the drug war.

These systems exemplify that at the local level, Duterte’s war on drugs is part of an informal policing structure characterised by a disjuncture between formal rules and policing practices that echoes the past. The fact that there is more than one structure adds to the general sense of uncertainty that has become a hallmark of the drug war.

35 *Tokhang* means to knock (*toktok*) and plead (*hangyo*).

36 Local rehabilitation programmes available to people unable to pay for private rehabilitation treatment typically include zumba lessons or reflection sessions such as Bible study. A few programmes involve building wooden coffins for families that are unable to afford funeral services.



**Policing: Representational fronts, practical backgrounds, and back again**

Policing in the war on drugs is filled with ambiguities in that a desire for peace and order co-exists with violence. On the one hand, policing is a method of crime control and prevention aiming to create safer and more secure communities by fighting drugs. This reflects the formal processes and the vision of the drug war. On the other hand, informal and violent practices are embedded in policing practices, which reflect a significant correlation between the names on the list and those killed in the streets, essentially turning the watch lists into kill lists. Drawing on Erving Goffman,<sup>37</sup> this works as a representational front and a practical background.<sup>38</sup> In an attempt to explore the implications on the ground, we argue that numerous front and back stages exist between which implicated actors negotiate and oscillate.

To illustrate the dominant representational front, we briefly zoom in on the police in Bagong Silang and the way in which they position themselves in the drug war. Police officers perceived their role and duty as maintaining peace and order. This was especially evident in their statements about contributing to a peaceful community in which they had to serve and protect the people, even if this meant personal sacrifices and taking on an overload of work — at times of a dangerous nature. From this perspective, the police act inside the law and represent a vision of the state that aims to change a nation in the midst of a drug crisis, steering the next generation towards a better future. This representational front was expressed both among police officers in Bagong Silang and in interviews with high-ranking representatives from Camp Crame, the PNP’s national headquarters in Manila.

Against this construction, a practical background emerges which is projected onto a dominating human rights framework where blame is placed at the door of the police as the main perpetrators of what then amounts to state-sanctioned extra-judicial killings.<sup>39</sup> According to human rights organisations, the police have systematically targeted and killed the urban poor, planted evidence at crime scenes, fabricated police reports, outsourced and recruited killings to ‘guns for hire’, stolen property from victims, and made a business out of the killings with remunerations per head.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Tokhang is being used as a cover to go to the houses of suspects and kill them, making this appear as an act of self-defence in the police report.<sup>41</sup> The police dismiss these accusations as they argue that the majority of the killings are the results of internal gang wars and vigilante operations with no link to the police. They argue that the media is ruining the reputation of the police institution by

37 Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959).

38 Goffman argued the need to distinguish between frontstage performances and backstage practices. His suggestion to critically assess ideological narratives, look for how the narratives are practised, and understand this relationship is well made. As we show, however, the relationship is less binary than Goffman argues. At times, the backstage may constitute the frontstage. For instance, police killings may be a backstage for human rights organisations while it is a frontstage for a crime-weary Philippine population.

39 Amnesty International, ‘If you are poor, you are killed’; Human Rights Watch, ‘License to kill’.

40 While much evidence does support these allegations, both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are looking for smoking guns to tie the killings directly to executive orders. As this article shows, the war on drugs has more insidious consequences than those emphasised by a human rights framework.

41 See also corroborating evidence in Jayson Lamchek, ‘A mandate for mass killings? Public support for Duterte’s war on drugs’, in Curato, *A Duterte reader*, pp. 199–218; Coronel, ‘Murder as enterprise’.

sensationalising the number of killings and their connection to Tokhang, whereas the local officers are steadfast in their statements that they follow formal procedures and uphold the law.

Contrary to these statements, one purok leader, Barretto, a former military man working directly with the police on Tokhang stated in February 2017 that the police would ‘take care’ of the names on the watch list: ‘The really bad people here, the most bad ones [*sic*], they hurt people. I give the name to the police, then after a while, maybe two days ... [they are] gone.’ By moving his fingers horizontally across his throat, Barretto signals that ‘gone’ in this case means dead, before adding that the police are connected to the vigilantes. According to interlocutors in the community, many of the individuals killed had surrendered at the beginning of the drug war. They refer to the watch list as the ‘passport of death’. By implication, Barretto’s statement indicates the informal policing practices under the drug war and their connection to the killings.

This link became clearer during a conversation with Castillo, a tanod who also collaborates with the police. She is one of the older tanods in Bagong Silang, and through her routine morning walks, she gains intimate knowledge of just about everything that takes place in her neighbourhood. As we engaged with her in a conversation about the drug war, she told us the story of several episodes of killings at the local police station. ‘Someone is arrested. What they do is, they bring the person inside. Inside the detention cell. It has happened there several times... Then they will frame it. Put it [the body] in the river. They will put it in a sack, throw somewhere far’, she whispers, almost inaudibly, keeping her eyes on the open door. A simple brick wall marks the boundary with her neighbour. Quite abruptly, she stops the conversation and indicates that it is enough. We later learned that her neighbour is a police officer and our conversation might suggest that she knew too much about the practical backgrounds of the police — or at least draw unwanted attention — if overheard.

Not only does this episode unmask the illegal practices of the police as presented by a human rights framework; it speaks to the way relations among representatives of the state are formed and negotiated in the drug war; exemplifying order-making as inherently relational.<sup>42</sup> Although Castillo endorses the drug war, admitting to actively contributing to the lists and, indeed, approving of some killings, she speaks of the police as ‘they’ as if she is not taking part in Tokhang, thus representing another dimension of the practical background among those ordered to take part in the drug war. In this case, she oscillates between different performances in a very different way than the police.

As we turn our attention to statements from residents in Bagong Silang, other forms and dimensions of this practical background emerge where the police are noted as having a personal agenda. Many people perceive the police as utterly corrupt ‘crocodiles’,<sup>43</sup> involved in unlawful practices for personal gain: ‘The police themselves are supplying, they are also the ones making people sell, they are also the ones

42 Helene Maria Kyed and Peter Albrecht, ‘Introduction: Policing and the politics of order-making on the urban margins’, in Albrecht and Kyed, *Policing and the politics of order-making*, pp. 1–23.

43 Hapal and Jensen, ‘The morality of corruption’.

commanding', explains Flores, a middle-aged woman with certainty in her voice, as her own brother used to buy drugs from the police. He is now dead. Another young man, Alvin, explains how his cousin's remains were placed in a funeral home that ended up charging noticeably more than the standard for its services, and incidentally was owned by a police officer. Rafael, who has experienced questionable use of authority by the police, adds:

What do they claim their vision and mission to be? To protect and serve. Nah, that's not true. The only ones they protect are their families and themselves. Then all they really do is serve themselves. As for the community, nothing.

While corruption has always been a concern within the police force in the Philippines,<sup>44</sup> the war on drugs has helped create an environment that facilitates further opportunities for this.<sup>45</sup> Police officers involved in corruption are referred to as *scalawags*, and a case dubbed 'Tokhang for ransom' has become a particular point of reference in the drug war. In October 2016, police officers kidnapped the South Korean businessman Jee Ick-Joo, demanded and received a significant ransom, only to kill their hostage inside the national police headquarters in Manila, cremate the body and flush the ashes down the toilet. In this case, it is significant that individual police officers deviated from a state agenda and manoeuvred themselves into a position for personal gain. As the case unravelled in the media months after it had occurred, Duterte was furious and ordered a temporary halt to Tokhang and an internal cleansing of the police force. As this exemplifies, the police may position themselves in a representational front and act in a violent practical background. Consequently, these practical backgrounds are not only related to the killings, but to corruption and self-enrichment. As we mention elsewhere,<sup>46</sup> the war on drugs and its production of violent legitimacy has paved the way for an escalation of corrupt practices, which then constitute the backstage of the backstage, in which policing actors negotiate between many different versions of the formal and the informal in their performances and embodiment of the state in a local context.

### **A climate of fear: Unpredictability and impunity**

The violence in the war on drugs is set in a highly politicised context, which goes beyond that of law enforcement and involves the highest authorities of the state. Duterte's zero-tolerance policy, his numerous encouragements to kill drug personalities, and the leeway given to the police, according to which the use of violence is essentially left to the discretion of the officers, have constituted the foundation for the rampant killings.<sup>47</sup> We argue that this has created a climate of ambiguous fear, where the fear of violence has merged with mixed levels of support for the violence and the fight against drugs in ways that complicate the fear. This ambiguous and illegible climate of fear has at least two dimensions. On the one hand, fear emanates from the unpredictability and illegibility of a violent terrain.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the

44 McCoy, *Policing America's empire*.

45 Coronel, 'Murder as enterprise'.

46 Warburg and Jensen, 'Policing the war on drugs'; Hapal and Jensen, 'The morality of corruption'.

47 Reyes, 'The spectacle of violence'.

48 Steffen Jensen, 'Discourses of violence: Coping with violence on the Cape Flats', *Social Dynamics* 25,

employment of violence and fear is productive of sets of relationships that discipline and control everyday practices<sup>49</sup> on the streets of Bagong Silang. We begin by exploring unpredictability.

After the killings began, a general sense of nervousness of being involved in anything related to drugs emerged. Flores, a long-time resident in Bagong Silang, explained in January 2017: ‘When you see something, just see it. Never mind, do not talk about it. And when you see, do not stare at it. Walk straight. Just do what you are doing to avoid trouble’. Social relations among residents have been especially exposed in the drug war, causing relations with even their closest neighbours to change. She continued: ‘Before, we used to go outside our house and talk, listen and tell stories even late at night, but we can’t do that now, because we are afraid. We don’t know who can be trusted anymore.’ The eroded trust between residents makes people increasingly cautious about who they mingle with, both in terms of those who operate as neighbourhood watchdogs as part of the *Masa Masid* and those who are named as suspected drug personalities on the watch list, potentially drawing violence closer. Moreover, considering the high risk of vigilante attacks, being associated with drug suspects can have fatal consequences. Rafael, a tricycle driver in his 30s with two children, stated in January of 2017: ‘You might get shot here, and we might get dragged into it. Of course, you have to keep your distance.’

However, keeping a distance from your neighbours inside Bagong Silang is particularly difficult. The area is extremely densely populated even for Manila, and the small houses are only separated by narrow pathways. The pathways make up the most central part of public life in Bagong Silang, and it is within these confines that people live their lives: people selling food, children playing, and neighbours chatting. It is a kind of neighbourliness that involves almost claustrophobic knowledge of each other’s lives, requiring of people the ability to get along. Locally, this is known as *pakikisama*, and being able to perform it well is imperative to survival.<sup>50</sup> The war on drugs has challenged this ability and potentially compromised the social cohesion within these confines, as there is no longer the same sense of community as Flores, Rafael and other interlocutors shared with us.

The watch lists in particular play a central part in this as their existence is public knowledge, and their circulation acts as a catalyst for people to keep their distance. Mendoza, an elderly woman, summed it up: ‘Whatever it is I see, only my eyes are seeing it [...] But, it is okay with us, because I don’t mind their business.’ While people are acutely aware of the lists, few if any are privy to them. Much like a public secret,<sup>51</sup> the most important social knowledge is *knowing what not to know*. The unsaid radiates through society, producing a way of manoeuvring oneself in the public space that has been adapted to the strict drug policy. It is not a feeling of safety and

2 (1999): 75–97; Henrik Vigh, ‘Motion squared: A second look at the concept of social navigation’, *Anthropological Theory* 9, 4 (2009): 419–38.

49 Linda Green, *Fear as a way of life: Mayan widows in rural Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

50 Jensen and Hapal, ‘Policing Bagong Silang’, pp. 30–32.

51 Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public secrecy and the labor of the negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

security, but rather one of vigilance and fear that controls people's actions. As most people have not seen these lists, it is the knowledge that they exist, rather than their actual content, which affects daily life in the community.

The lists do not only instil a sense of fear. Residents are often uncertain about the identity of perpetrators. However, while unpredictability is a major factor sparking the climate of fear, this is not always the case. In one incident, recorded in May 2017, a man named Jeremy was shot by the police in a drug bust operation. After the incident, the family told us, 'No, we know who it was and why. We are no longer afraid. We consider it a closed deal.' In this way, the family told us that the violence had been predictable. While they obviously did not agree with the methods, however, as his mother explains, 'it was no surprise that Jeremy died'.

This level of certainty is far from always present. In a deadly shooting in December 2016, seven people were killed in an incident in Bagong Silang. Two motor-bikes with one woman and three men, riding in tandem, had blocked off the pathway and descended on a house in which a group of youngsters were celebrating a birthday as the shooting occurred. According to the police who came investigating, the shooting was the result of inter-gang rivalry over drug turfs, because the shooting took place at one of the gang member's residence. The purok leader assigned to the area stated that the victims were involved in drugs themselves. Other residents and neighbours said that the victims were not involved in drugs, and suggested that the perpetrators were the police — or maybe gangs that were out looking for the guy living in the house, because he had previously been involved in a drug den and needed to be silenced by his former drug lord or police officers involved in the drug business. According to the neighbours, the target survived the shooting while the seven others died as collateral damage. Finally, when we returned in May, one resident, who was a member of one of the gangs that were accused of involvement, suggested that the assailants were in fact members of a specific church, Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC).<sup>52</sup> He had noted a number of signs — how the assailants were dressed and had green marks on their number plates — suggesting to him conclusive indications of INC involvement.

The war on drugs and gangs in Cape Town, South Africa, in the late 1990s produced similar attempts to 'read' the social terrain.<sup>53</sup> Based on this we might say that the gang member was looking for clues as to the perpetrators' identities to try to predict the next round of violence. The search for clues resembles other contexts of

52 Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC) has been called a state within the state. They have their own schools and housing areas. The church is known to command millions of votes. Hence, INC endorsement may constitute the difference between victory and defeat (Jayeel Serrano Cornelio, 'Religion and civic engagement: The case of Iglesia Ni Cristo in the Philippines', *Religion, State & Society* 45, 1 (2017): 23–38. Furthermore, they also have their own security organisation, the Scan. The Scan has a reputation for violence beyond their mandate of maintaining order around INC functions. Allegedly, they can be called to intervene violently in INC members' conflicts with neighbours. They are said to have hired out guns and goons to those willing to pay. By several interlocutors in Bagong Silang, they were rumoured to be involved in vigilante killings as part of the war on drugs. Consequently, their very name struck fear in people's hearts to an extent where conversation about the practices of the Scan was always in a hushed voice. While these are rumours, they indicate the INC's near-mythic status in local narratives.

53 Jensen, 'Discourses of violence', pp. 75–97; Steffen Jensen, 'The security and development nexus in Cape Town: War on gangs, counterinsurgency and citizenship', *Security Dialogue* 41, 1 (2010): 77–97.

conflict. Helene Risør shows how people in Bolivia are constantly looking for clues to be able to protect themselves from the next criminal activity.<sup>54</sup> White cars on the road or stones in particular patterns might be indications of criminal intent that people try to identify to stay safe. While these clues often attain an aura of magic, they are signs of a very real and unpredictable context in which the problem of violence constitutes the unpredictability. This does not in any way imply that violence only disrupts. On the contrary, the war on drugs in the Philippines, not least supported by the unpredictability and illegibility of its violence, produces a particular sociality that works in favour of policing actors.

We now turn to the second dimension of the climate of fear. The impunity with which perpetrators get away with the killings is arguably a necessary component in making drug personalities change or surrender. Santos, a police officer in Bagong Silang, explained:

If there are addicts killed from that place, the other addicts will now surrender. They will fear now. They fear already to use drugs.

In many cases, fear is used actively as a driver of change. Rivera, a purok leader, told us:

I included my brother in Oplan Tokhang so that he will stop using drugs [...] He just needs to be threatened [...] I am a purok leader in our area. How can I make them stop if I can't even stop my one and only brother?

By listing her brother's name, a fear was instilled in him, which, according to the purok leader, made him change and no longer be a burden to the family. This same fear has also caused some drug suspects to disappear entirely from Bagong Silang, as one tanod observed,

Before there are many who take drugs. Now, it seems, few. The others seem to be in hiding. They are afraid [...] Many already went to the province.<sup>55</sup>

In this way, the climate of fear ambiguously functions as a form of order-making. Following this logic, instilling fear — almost enforcing order<sup>56</sup> — to make people change their habits and obtain a safer and more secure community are perceived as legitimate methods of crime control.

However, instilling fear in people also produces dilemmas. As part of the drug war, local policing bodies are being ordered by the central government to participate and while they officially endorse and support it, they are at the same time making themselves vulnerable and exposed: 'Sometimes it is also frightening to report and report. I am being accused because I am the purok leader. Someone might go after me later on [...] They might take revenge on me,' Barretto, a purok leader, explained,

54 Helene Risør, 'Twenty hanging dolls and a lynching: Defacing dangerousness and enacting citizenship in El Alto, Bolivia', *Public Culture* 22, 3 (2010): 465–85.

55 We do not have any numbers indicating how many people left Bagong Silang, but there were many stories about drug dealers and addicts — or those accused of drug-involvement — leaving and fleeing for the provinces. In other cases, people simply left their immediate local environment.

56 Didier Fassin, *Enforcing order: An ethnography of urban policing* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

while stating that the drug war was still good for the community. 'I feel that, because the ones who cause headaches, the ones who are feared are gone, I feel quite peaceful.'

The above remarks were expressed in February 2017. In late March, Barretto was killed in a drive-by shooting. He was a prominent member of the *Masa Masid*, and immediately following his death, rumours as to why he was killed began to circulate. Some speculated that his death was related to him being the chairperson of the local tricycle association (not unheard of). Others suggested in interviews that he was killed because he had failed to share the proceeds from the war on drugs, in which each useful piece of information was said to be remunerated by the state.<sup>57</sup> The majority of our interlocutors, however, suggested that his killing was related to his active involvement in the drug war and the number of people he had included in the watch lists. We cannot know which, if any, of these explanations are true. More importantly, however, his death produced high levels of fear among his many colleagues. Ate Minna, an older *purok* leader, confessed that she hardly ever went out: 'I must make sure that my family is safe. How can I participate in this? Just look at Barretto.' She also complained that her health was suffering: 'I asked the Captain if I could be released.'

Ate Gemma, another *purok* leader, adamantly refuted the accusation that she was making lists. We asked Michael, an acquaintance of ten years, about Ate Gemma. 'She is making lists,' Michael said with confidence. During one full day, we walked around with Michael in his area for him to tell us who were on the list. When we asked him to be discreet, Michael went, 'Psst, house with red gate; on the list.' Asked if he had seen the list, he said no. In this way, the list became the materialisation of people's imagination of each other and the state. 'If I were the state, *kuya* Ambeth would be on the list!' Michael pointed another 20 houses out in the immediate vicinity of his home.

Emil, another *purok* leader, had refused to contribute to the lists and was subsequently accused by the local government leaders of being an 'asset' to the drug dealers. This accusation might well become dangerous as police targeted these alleged assets.

I told them to come and see for themselves. If they find anything, I will withdraw from my post. The people here — I know them. Some use drugs but not so much. I also think about their families. I am pro-life. Will I be responsible for killings?

Being a close associate of the *barangay* captain, Emil might have felt slightly less exposed, but his deliberations as well as those expressed by the others enable us to see the real dilemmas of those charged with carrying out the drug war. The conundrums of Barretto, Emil and Gemma illustrate a larger issue as to how the drug war affects and reconfigures issues of communal trust in ways that might turn out to be lasting consequences. In other words, the war on drugs does not only concern state sovereignty and deaths. Rather, it affects and reconfigures intimate social relationships among residents and between residents and the state, not least through fear.

### **The production of dominant morality and the legitimacy of violence**

Returning to the introductory comments about the uncertainty of the existence of a drug crisis in the Philippines, the securitisation discourse within the war on drugs is

57 Coronel, 'Murder as enterprise'.

a defining factor in its existence and in the permissibility of violence.<sup>58</sup> Throughout his election campaign and early presidency,<sup>59</sup> Duterte established clear boundaries for those who had the right to protection, where those involved in activities of illegal drugs were criminalised and excluded. While this discourse is reminiscent of the past, it foregrounded a moral discourse in the drug war based on a perception of drugs as the cancer of society that destroys individuals, families, and communities. As documented by Curato and Kusaka,<sup>60</sup> this perception resonated in conversations with local police officers and purok leaders such as Officer Santos: ‘Most of the time, if a person is under the influence of drugs, they will lose their mind. They will shoot a person. They will rape a person. They will rob a person.’ This narrative of drugs as the main reason behind crime and violence was very evident with the police and, according to them, the drug war has provided a much-needed change. As Rigonan, another officer from Bagong Silang, said in February 2017, ‘Unlike before, it is safe right now. There were a lot of drugs happening before [...] Now, you can walk freely without that happening [...] The community members are happy, and they feel safe now compared to before.’

Central to this depiction of Bagong Silang as peaceful is the construction of drug personalities as threats to ‘regular citizens’ and, not least, to the notion of order in the dominant moral discourse set by the state. In this aspect, a seamless connection almost seems to exist between the police and the purok leaders, as reflected in their outspoken and vocal hatred of drugs and those associated with it. Drug personalities become the embodiment of threat — informing modes of othering — and positioned demands for extraordinary measures to be taken in the pursuit of order. With a clear distinction between right and wrong, a form of kill-ability emerges which defines who are to live and who are to be killed. The repetitive bodily acts of expulsion with ruthless killings in the streets reaffirm this conviction of inclusion and exclusion, according to which illegal practices are not perceived as illicit,<sup>61</sup> but are deemed legitimate and necessary: ‘If they are using drugs and they have been warned ... it’s okay for me,’ purok leader Rivera states, and purok leader Castro adds to this, ‘They must stop it! Right. They already know that it’s prohibited, yet you still take it? Right?! That’s prohibited. They will die because of it. They should stop it.’

In this production of morality, criticism is not directed at the outlaws but at those transgressing the boundaries set within the drug war. This understanding sees law as subsidiary to order and discipline, and new methods of crime control are gradually perceived as legitimate and even normalised.<sup>62</sup> Here, justice is not mediated through the authority of the law but through violent means of order-making. Again, this underlines the ambiguities within the war on drugs in which order exists concurrently with disorder, security with insecurity, and the licit with the illicit.

While this is the dominant moral discourse set by the state, it is in many ways contested and replete with moral ambiguities. In our fieldwork, however, we identified

58 Quimpo, ‘Duterte’s “war on drugs”’.

59 See also JCSAA, special issue, ‘The early Duterte presidency in the Philippines’, 35, 3 (2016).

60 Curato, ‘Politics of anxiety, politics of hope’; Kusaka, ‘Bandit grabbed the state’.

61 Janet Roitman, ‘The ethics of illegality in the Chad Basin’, in *Law and disorder in the postcolony*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 247–72.

62 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965).



a plurality of orders that challenged the strict notion of kill-ability from a range of different vantage points. These contestations, however, did not employ a language of human rights, which have been tainted in the eyes of the supporters of the drug war as defending the rights of non-humans (drug personalities). As we have showed, the war on drugs has had more insidious consequences than the number of killings. In conversations with interlocutors, we heard other — subordinate — voices with moral deliberations extending beyond the dominant moral discourse. While these subordinate voices may to some extent be in line with the moral compass of the dominant discourse, they express divergent agendas, approaches, and perceptions of how to implement this. In the remainder of this section, we provide three brief examples of how these subordinate voices challenge the dominant moral discourse. These are not (yet) open challenges or resistance to the drug war. Rather, the voices express ambiguity and uneasy conviviality.

First, let us explore this moral discourse as it is experienced by the older tanod, Castillo, whom we met earlier as she unmasked the practice of killings at the local police station. In our conversation with her, she claimed to be supporting the war on drugs and encouraging killings of big-time drug personalities as a way to cleanse the community. In this case, kill-ability certainly pervades. However, throughout our talk, she kept stealing nervous glances out of the door towards the neighbouring house, where a police officer resided, and she kept her voice at a whisper. This indicates that the drug war is not solely about the legitimacy to kill, but also a matter of how this is carried out. Her alertness in the situation stems from the climate of fear, which has become almost routinised,<sup>63</sup> as signs of violence are constantly being observed and analysed. This accentuates the point that the impact of violence is primarily social and that fear almost taints actors under direct orders to take part in the drug war. Although she endorsed the drug war, Castillo's whispering gestures and nervous glances indicated that she disagrees with some of the ways in which it is carried out by the police. Her moral compass is, at the same time, subordinate to and challenges the hegemonic legitimacy of kill-ability in the dominant discourse set by the state.

However, our interviews and conversations with Castillo (over almost a decade) illustrate a further complication. When asked about the drug war (our present topic), she was clearly more interested in other issues around social justice. As a founding member of an Urban Poor organisation in Bagong Silang and an active member of the left-wing opposition, her priorities are not only the war on drugs. Rather, they are focused on social justice issues and left-wing politics. Thus, she echoed many left-wing voices in Bagong Silang and beyond, reflecting their ambivalent stance towards Duterte. During the presidential election campaign, Duterte positioned himself as a left-wing candidate, promising land reform, labour market reform, and a serious effort at the peace process with the Maoist insurgency in the New People's Army. These issues have been craved by the Philippine left for generations and now for the first time, a president seemed to mean it. Hence, as one friend on the Philippine left and a human rights activist said, 'I was surprised when all my comrades voted for

63 Linda Green, 'Living in a state of fear', in *Violence in war and peace: An anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Malden: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 186–95.

Duterte, but they all mentioned the end to contractualisation [labour market reform].’ While the failure to speak out against the killings stupefied our friend, it arguably represents an alternative position in which the important issue is not the war on drugs, but perceived larger issues of social justice as the ultimate moral standpoint.

Secondly, we may identify a moral discourse around the safety of kin and neighbours as potentially destabilising the dominant moral discourse. While many people condemn the killings, a majority agree with the objective of eradicating drugs and crime. There are different aspects to this. Flores, introduced earlier, voted for Duterte in the election because she thought it would be what was best for her family, but upon reflection she has since come to regret this decision:

Nothing has changed, because there is still a lot of pushers and users in the area. But unlike before, they are now very careful. They don’t do it now in public, but still they are using and selling like before, it didn’t stop.

In this way, she critiqued the implementation rather than the drug war itself. For Flores, the most important thing is the safety of her family and while she agreed to talk, she feared for her life and kept below the radar. She was against the killings. Like Ate Minna, the older purok leader, she stayed mostly inside. Other residents approve of the killings of drugs personalities because they feel this will protect their families. Mendoza, an elderly woman explained, ‘They [drug personalities] are doing things that are out of place. It’s like what is in their minds. They steal. They do those kinds of things [...] It’s okay, really.’ In her case, there is a demand for violence against those threatening the safety of families and less so for dissociating from violent practices. In fact, Mendoza contributed with information to her purok leader about people involved in drugs in her neighbourhood. While this form of kill-ability stems from the dominant moral discourse employed by the state, it illustrates how killings are measured against other social parameters and moral deliberations than strictly those of the dominant moral discourse of inclusion and exclusion. While Flores and Mendoza are employing divergent strategies that illustrate the plurality of existing moralities among those navigating on the ground, what seems central is the prioritisation of the safety of their families. This is understandable, of course, but we would argue that it also implies a parallel, subordinate moral discourse that challenges, hesitantly, the morality of the war on drugs. Unsurprisingly, in a Philippine context, this relates to the importance of family as the centre of moral discourses above all other concerns.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, Emil, the purok leader, is another example of a subordinate voice that challenges the dominant moral discourse. His work in the drug war includes monitoring his neighbourhood for people involved in illegal activities. However, he refused to contribute to the lists based on moral deliberations of a Catholic nature. These considerations of kill-ability extend far beyond popular forms of justice and dominant conceptions of right and wrong, but emerge from a pro-life perspective, according to which the value of the individual life and of the targeted family is weighing on his conscience and decision not to contribute to the lists. This moral order contrasts other considerations as it focuses on the given individual and less on the ‘greater good’

64 McCoy, *An anarchy of families*.

as projected in the dominant state discourse. Or rather, for Emil as well as for many other Filipinos, the greater good of the community is indissociable from faith and the Catholic Church. It is therefore not surprising that the Catholic Church has emerged as one of the strongest voices against the war on drugs.<sup>65</sup> Hence, the ‘pro-life’ stance should be taken very literally as a religious affirmation of the importance and power of God.

### **Conclusion: Policing, sociality, and the production of moral discourses**

This article has explored the implications of the Philippine war on drugs in Bagong Silang, a poor, urban neighbourhood heavily exposed to the conflict. Based on in-depth research over time, we hope to have been able to contribute to an understanding of how sociality has been reconfigured in profound and often insidious ways during the escalating police violence of the drug war. While we agree with much of the literature focusing on the actions and policies of Duterte, we suggest that perhaps a less well-understood consequence of the war on drugs has been the extent to which violence has reconfigured the sense of security among people.

While the police have a share in the killings, there are lingering doubts about the potential sources and perpetrators of the violence. The intention is not to exonerate the police; rather it is to point out that this unpredictability is equally affecting social relations. As stipulated by other analyses of conflicts, unpredictability and uncertainty produce a sociality that is deeply problematic and long-lasting. Hence, while the number of deaths is important to have in mind, it only tells part of the story of the long-term consequences of the war on drugs.

Further, it is argued that social relations between residents and the state as well as among residents have been reconfigured through a climate of ambiguous fear, where fear is entangled with unpredictability, alongside a sense that the drug war is legitimate and uncertainty whether perceived innocence will be enough to stay alive. Despite high levels of intimacy and obligations to each other, residents in Bagong Silang may potentially carry these reconfigured relations — characterised by mistrust — with them into the future. Questions of who to trust abound, and threats and grudges proliferate. As one interlocutor said, ‘Maybe purok Tan will not survive long after he stops his tenure ...’. The death of Barretto is a similar example, as is the fear expressed by most of our interlocutors.

Finally, the existence of subordinate moral discourses is explored. While there are vocal voices speaking out in the political world, in the human rights community, and from within the Catholic Church, Duterte’s popularity remains high. The moral discourse set by the state is strong and dominant, but it is not hegemonic. Aside from a human rights framework that stands in direct opposition to the state’s discourse on morality and seeks to prove the direct links between the president and the killings, there are a number of subordinate moralities with divergent perceptions on what constitutes the legitimacy of violence — and the extent to which violence is legitimate. In this article, three subordinate moral discourses are identified — centred on social

65 Nicola Smith, ‘Catholic leaders call for an end to Duterte’s bloody drug war in the Philippines’, *Telegraph*, 21 Aug. 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/21/catholic-leaders-call-end-dutertes-bloody-drug-war-philippines/>.

justice, family, and religion — which both have the ability to challenge and ambiguously support the violence. Thus, the production of morality in the drug war extends beyond a binary construction of right and wrong. Rather, a plurality of moral orders exists on the ground in which meaning is extracted from matters of multiple and fluctuating logics.<sup>66</sup> While they might not constitute much of a resistance, these subordinate voices constitute a possible avenue out of the war on drugs and towards a future that is not only defined by the impact of fear, mistrust, and killings.

66 See also Helene Maria Kyed, 'Predicament: Interpreting police violence (Mozambique)', in *Writing the world of policing: The difference ethnography makes*, ed. Didier Fassin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 113–38.