

# Theorizing Democracy in the Philippines: Some Notes from Peter Sloterdijk

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**Abstract:** This paper theorizes democracy through its various forms raised by Peter Sloterdijk against the backdrop of the 2022 Philippine elections. Peter Sloterdijk’s 2017 Cardiff Lecture—translated and published in English as “On Pseudonymous Politics: Regarding Implicit and Explicit Misconceptions of Democracy”—outlines forms of democracy’s misrepresentation. I seek to highlight these forms with the 2022 Philippine election as the backdrop to this theorization, with the ultimate hope of providing a renewed understanding of democracy in toto. This paper first sets the distinction between democracy and monarchy, followed by a review of Sloterdijk’s lecture to differentiate possible (mis)understandings of democracy. This leads me to my conclusion of some implications these might have on Philippine politics.

**Keywords:** Sloterdijk, democracy, monarchy, Philippine elections

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## INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the 2022 Philippine elections and in anticipation of this year's elections, it seems fitting to revisit the insights of the German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk, concerning democracy and its close affiliation to immunology. In the preliminary note Peter Sloterdijk wrote for his book, originally entitled *Weltfremdheit* he says, "How easy it was to love the world when one knew little about it."<sup>1</sup> Indeed it is quite easy to love or be enamored by an idea, concept, or reality that we know so little of. The same may be said of democracy or politics. It is with great interest that I write this in relation to the recently concluded Philippine elections and the emotional display prior and after the elections.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the build up to the previous election was intense to the point that there was a seeming need to process an unthinkable defeat. Democracy may be romanticized to simply being the best, most virtuous candidate winning,<sup>3</sup> or that it is simply the election of a seeming messiah, a noble leader who can swiftly and magically remedy a troubled nation.<sup>4</sup> These views may condition even the most trivial of our activities. And this was greatly seen with how people started to treat one another, especially behind the veil of security and even anonymity

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, Preliminary Note to *Out of The World*, trans. Corey A. Dansereau and Gill Zimmerman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024), xi.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Magcamit, "We're Feeling It: Philippines Voters' Emotional Beliefs in Presidential Candidates," (12 April 2022), <<https://fulcrum.sg/were-feeling-it-philippines-voters-emotional-beliefs-in-presidential-candidates/>>.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See Leila de Lima, "On messiahs and mistakes: Choosing our next leader," in *Rappler* (8 June 2021), <<https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/opinion-choosing-next-leader/>> and Randy David, "The messianic motif in Philippine politics" (19 December 2021), <<https://www.randydavid.com/2021/12/the-messianic-motif-in-philippine-politics/>>.

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offered by the virtual sphere.<sup>5</sup> Though we are participants in the vital process of suffrage, the danger I opine lies in the very activity.

Sloterdijk's book was originally written in 1993 and just translated last year. The title that the translators Corey A. Dansereau and Gill Zimmerman gave was *Out of This World*. However, the original title, *Weltfremdheit* (literally world alienation or strangeness) points to a deeper existential dimension to one's positionality to this world or even better one's relation to it. This seems to hint at a form of strangeness, an alienation in our relation to the world that may be figured in our political relationships: how we may and perhaps already are falling prey to the very dangers of politics, becoming victims of our narratives of political arrangement, and ultimately are estranged from the world we live in. It is on this note that I write this paper to theorize democracy with the 2022 Philippine election as the backdrop in order to hopefully provide a renewed understanding of democracy in light of the upcoming elections. This paper is divided into two parts, I first gloss over the difference between democracy and monarchy, followed by a review of Sloterdijk's lecture translated and published in English as "On Pseudonymous Politics: Regarding Implicit and Explicit Misconceptions of Democracy"<sup>6</sup> to differentiate possible (mis)understandings of democracy. I end with some musings on potential implications these might have on Philippine politics.

## DEMOCRACY AND MONARCHY

Once more, Sloterdijk's *Weltfremdheit*, literally meaning world-alienation or -strangeness, seems to hint at a deeper existential dimension in our

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<sup>5</sup> See Aries A. Arugay and Justin Keith A. Baquisal, "Mobilized and Polarized: Social Media and Disinformation Narratives in the 2022 Philippine Elections," in *Pacific Affairs*, 95:3 (2022), 549–573, <<https://doi.org/10.5509/2022953549>>.

<sup>6</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, "On Pseudonymous Politics: Regarding Implicit and Explicit Misconceptions of Democracy," trans. Victoria Stiles, in *New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations*, 25:2 (2017), 49–68.

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relation to the world. This seems like an apt depiction too of the peculiar character that politics, or to be specific democracy. A good starting point in theorizing democracy and our misrepresentation of it is to firstly demarcate it from monarchy. This seems pressing due to the proliferation of political dynasties that appear to have assumed a quasi-monarchical figure on Philippine politics.<sup>7</sup> Even greater is the need to do this in order to address a dangerous notion evoked by the claim that the Philippines needs to be a monarchy.<sup>8</sup> The strangeness or alienation that Sloterdijk evokes perhaps may likewise be levied to such a claim. While I assert in this piece that we may seem to be alienated from the very notion of democracy, the same all the more serious in relation to monarchy as the opinion piece cited claims. My first task therefore is to present the limits of a democracy and by doing so to show an obvious difference between democracy and monarchy. While my explanations here would seem to uphold the advantages of a monarchy, such should not be wholly accepted due to the very social and historical conditions of the country, in contrast to nations that already have a monarchy.

One of the crucial foundations of a democracy, I argue, is the fact that it is limiting and is limited.<sup>9</sup> Democracy is fundamentally marked by its limited jurisdiction. The very term limit of government officials is demarcated by our laws.<sup>10</sup> The power the chief executive, for example, is not an absolute or ultimate rule, but that it is within the legally demarcated

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<sup>7</sup> See Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem and Eduardo C. Tadem, “Political dynasties in the Philippines: Persistent patterns, perennial problems,” in *South East Asia Research*, 24:3 (2016), 328–340, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X16659730>> and Ronald U. Mendoza et al., “Inequality in democracy: Insights from an empirical analysis of political dynasties in the 15th Philippine Congress,” in *Philippine Political Science Journal*, 33:2 (December 2012), 132–145, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01154451.2012.734094>>.

<sup>8</sup> See La Liga Manoban, “The Philippines needs a monarchy,” in *Medium* (28 July 2020), <<https://medium.com/the-science-scholar/opinion-the-philippines-needs-a-monarchy-9c32fe15a21c>>.

<sup>9</sup> See D. Eric Schansberg, “The Limits of Democracy,” in *Cato Journal* (Fall 2021), <<https://www.cato.org/cato-journal/fall-2021/limits-democracy>>.

<sup>10</sup> See Article X, Sec. 8 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and also Republic Act No. 7160 Local Government Code, § 43.

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powers vested by the Philippine Constitution as one of three branches of government. However, this limited and limiting context is better understood in both space and time. To understand this better, it may be beneficial to consider the opposite, as in the case of monarchy. Throughout history we have seen how seemingly the imperial motto is encapsulated by “*plus ultra*,” the motto of the conquest of the New World.<sup>11</sup> Were there specific spatial limitations to the monarch’s powers? No. In fact a monarch that is spatially limited is considered a weak one even in today’s standards. A monarch’s might is not recognized through the population’s fecundity but rather the constant efforts to expand the kingdom and protect the current borders. The easiest demonstration of this, perhaps known to almost all, is the Roman Republic turned Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup> That constant lust for more power, land, and resources is deeply ingrained in our own understanding of ancient or medieval kingdoms that, though there still exist monarchical governments today, we do not see of the current monarchs. This possibility of expansion is not found within a democracy without impinging upon another government’s domain.

Another illustration of democracy’s other is the non-existence of a limit to a monarch’s reign. The legacy of a royal family is its capacity to bear the royal standard.<sup>13</sup> From one generation to the next this lineage is continued, the monarchy persists. This is clear evidence of the monarch’s capacity to go beyond the limitations of time, especially when one considers the contributions of particular monarch toward the improvements of a

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<sup>11</sup> For a better discussion of this in relation to the monarchy, see Earl Rosenthal, “*Plus Ultra, Non plus Ultra*, and the Columnar Device of Emperor Charles V,” in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34 (1971), 204–228, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/751021>>.

<sup>12</sup> A specific discussion of this may be found in Neville Morley, *The Roman Empire: Roots of Imperialism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 38ff.

<sup>13</sup> See Jeroen Duindam, “Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires,” in Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan, and Metin Kunt, *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 1–23. An ill effect of this is found in inbreeding within royal lines. See Pierre L. Van Den Berghe and Gene M. Mesher, “Royal Incest and Inclusive Fitness,” in *American Ethnologist*, 7:2 (May 1980), 300–317.

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particular kingdom under the same imperial household over a span of generations. This is in stark contrast to the temporal limitations in a democracy as outlined by constitutions and laws around the world. An untoward effect of this, as such is the case at times in the Philippines, is when elected officials would try to outdo their predecessors, removing marks or overturning projects initiated by their predecessors in order to build the community around the current politician's persona and charisma. The temporal limitations therefore seem to not simply be the limits set forth in the constitution, but the conscious efforts enacted by the successor for the previous official to be forgotten.

In such a limiting experience, what unfortunately might come to the fore is the realization of democracy as simply an engagement of masks.<sup>14</sup> A superficial engagement with one another may seem reasonable, due to the limited nature of one's time in office and likewise the limiting capacity free speech might have in one's potential rise in politics. The result of this might be a shift from society's ethical imperative to an aesthetic one. This would mean, on the one hand, our desire to sense reality or to make reality sensible to us albeit in terms that we only understand, while on the other hand it refers to our condition of wanting things to be beautiful—all being a product of disenchantment of modernity's promises.<sup>15</sup> Beauty in the sense does not hint at the sublime as how Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and other philosophers would talk about, but rather this is a bastardized and truncated form of beauty, of that which is appealing to us. I would even go to the extent to say that beauty in the sense is reduced to something superficial, just accepted at face value, and trivialized. There is a great danger lurking behind this, especially with the strong impact that an aesthetic imperative contains. A very specific example of this is the

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<sup>14</sup> See Jacopo Galimberti, "Democracy and Masks. Towards an Iconology of the Faceless Crowd," in *European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes* 4:1 (2021), 211–235, <<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2612-0496/12690>>.

<sup>15</sup> See Peter Weibel, "Sloterdijk and the Question of an Aesthetic," in *In Medias Res: Peter Sloterdijk's Spherological Poetics of Being*, ed. by Willem Schinkel and Liesbeth Noordegraaf-Eelens (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 85ff.

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commodification of K-pop and of Korean culture. Its domination is due to the peculiar reality of the role of desiring and the enormous impact aesthetics has in the process, with specific K-pop groups acting “not only a cultural commodity but also an intangible object beyond the pleasure principle.”<sup>16</sup> What we are witnessing here is a novel form of soft power not in any military sense as previously associated with the term but in relation to our very psyche.<sup>17</sup>

Returning to politics, a great danger is that we might have grown accustomed to these masks, that when faced with the possibility to remove them or even to change (ideally for the better), we would opt to keep the mask. And the conflict that eventually arises in relation to the aesthetic rather than ethical imperative is a desire for beauty rather than goodness. In the realm of politics, this perhaps explains why we are so easily drawn to beautiful sights and figures, failing to pay more attention to matters that are more essential for the political sphere.<sup>18</sup> This explains why perhaps there is more fuss about beauty pageants in the country rather than political engagement; the Philippines prides itself on being the home of several beauty queens rather than the oldest democracy in Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Alex Taek-Gwang Lee, “BTS and Global Capitalism,” in *Unitas*, 95:2 (July 2022), 391, <<https://doi.org/10.31944/2022950213>>.

<sup>17</sup> See Brandon Valeriano and Aleydis Nissen, “This is South Korea’s K-pop Soft Power Moment,” in *The Diplomat* (16 February 2022), <<https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/this-is-south-koreas-k-pop-soft-power-moment/>>. The influence of this type of soft power goes beyond the social and even cultural. Initial studies already show how this impinges even upon relational and sexual standards, influencing selections of potential partners. See Tony Tran, “15 ‘Model Tries Crazy IU KPop Diet’: Embodied K-Pop Fandoms and Fashionable Diets on YouTube,” in *Sartorial Fandom: Fashion, Beauty Culture, and Identity* (2023), 235–247 and Youjeong Oh, “Image Producers: The (Re)Production of K-Pop Idols,” in *Pop City: Korean Popular Culture and the Selling of Place* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 105–135.

<sup>18</sup> Conversely, a certain politics of aesthetics emerges in our attraction to certain candidates and political figures. See Gideon Lasco, “The politics of physical appearance,” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (14 June 2015), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/85843/the-politics-of-physical-appearance>>.

<sup>19</sup> See May Farrales, “Repurposing beauty pageants: The colonial geographies of Filipina pageants in Canada,” in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37:1 (October 2018), 46–64, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/026377581879650>>; Deby Babis,

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It is therefore disheartening that time could be easily wasted on social media, without giving the same effort for political engagement. What this uncovers is a crisis not in democracy per se but our understanding of democracy and its vitality to politics. This is a crisis of failing to see that a necessary consequence of a democracy is the fact that more people could have a “wrong” opinion, that people can be insincere and pragmatic in their political selection.

The question that remains for us in a democracy is the very ontological basis of a leader’s selection. Mindful of the elected leader’s very nature, the shift from mere individual to elected official is in the leader’s inauguration. It is clear however that this inauguration is the recognition of the vote of the many and not that of the royal prerogative.<sup>20</sup> A clear difference of this is found in the coronation of a monarch in which the political and the religious spheres overlap: the monarch—crowned by the bishop if not the pope himself, anointed to signify that he or she is God’s chosen—administers the kingdom. Coronations are initiations, initiating the individual into the life of the Crown. It signifies the movement away from the private life of the monarch-apparent to the state of the embodiment of the public. Coronations are replete with symbols that are saturated, pointing to religion and politics intertwined—how the divine and cosmic orbs overlap. The recent coronation of King Charles III provides an excellent illustration as the United Kingdom is the last monarchy to maintain this tradition.<sup>21</sup>

What I wish to draw particular attention to is the third (of five (recognition, oath, anointing, investiture, and enthronement and homage)

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“Inclusion and beauty pageants? The Filipino migrant worker community in Israel.” in *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 29:5 (February 2021), 625–648, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2021.1887090>>. For a more historical take, see Genevieve Alva Clutario, *Beauty Regimes: A History of Power and Modern Empire in the Philippines, 1898–1941* (Durnham: Duke University Press, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> See Julian Davis Mortenson, “Article II Vests the Executive Power, Not the Removal Prerogative,” in *Columbia Law Review*, 119:5 (June 2019), 1169–1272.

<sup>21</sup> See BBC News, “Your complete guide to the King’s coronation,” in *BBC News* (6 May 2023), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65342840>>.

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part of the rite. During the anointing, the monarch is divested of his majestic robes and in his *colobium sindonis* (“shroud tunic”), a plain white gown, is led to the throne where he is covered from the public gaze. At this point, he is anointed with Holy Oil by the archbishop to symbolize God’s choosing; the canopy and partitions later taper, allowing the public to catch sight of the monarch, bare in prayer.<sup>22</sup> This passage from private to public space, from the enclosure provided by the screens to the utter bareness in front of a higher authority, from incognizance to vulnerability, marks a total change of the individual-turned-monarch’s interiority. To amplify this, the coronation piece *Zadok the Priest* (HWV 258) by George Handel (Georg Friedrich Händel) attests to the jubilation of the anointment. The words of the hymn are partly taken from 1 Kings 1:34 yet interjected with a very political reality, the beginning blaring with the harmonious tensions at the limit: “Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king. And all the people rejoiced and said: God save the King! Long live the King! God save the King! May the King live for ever. Amen. Hallelujah.”<sup>23</sup> After the anointing, the monarch is eventually vested to signify the dignity of his royal status. He does not dawn anymore the crimson Robe of State, but he is vested in the majestic state with the golden Supertunica (and later the Imperial Mantle) and items rich in symbolism: chivalry (spurs); justice (the Sword of Offering and the sword belt); both sincerity and wisdom (armills); religious authority (orb); fidelity to the state (ring), purity and faithfulness (glove); political power (scepter with cross); and equity and mercy (scepter with Dove).<sup>24</sup> The monarch is then sworn allegiance to by the top ministers, affirming the close link between the religious and the political, the theistic and cosmological spheres, and at the end of the

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<sup>22</sup> See Alicja Zelazko, “Coronation of British Monarchs,” in *Britannica* (9 May 2023), <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/coronation-of-British-monarchs>>.

<sup>23</sup> See Graydon Beeks, “Handel’s Sacred Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. by Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177.

<sup>24</sup> See Zelazko, “Coronation of British Monarchs” and Amy Tikkanen, “5 Fascinating British Coronation Objects,” in *Britannica* (9 May 2023), <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/coronation-of-British-monarchs>>.

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ceremony, the monarch then processes outward, donned with the Robe of Estate, holding both the orb and scepter. This further emphasizes the passage from the monarch's own most sphere—his interiority—to this greater sphere of the kingdom he now represents. In terms of the rite, this becomes fully manifest when the monarch stands on the balcony of Buckingham Palace and displays himself as the identity of the kingdom.

From this passage from the private to the public marked by the holy anointing, the monarch's spiritual character is altered and thus could not simply be just washed away. This is something absent in a democracy since the highest affirmation of assuming a role is made through an oath. At least for Immanuel Kant, it was clear that lying is a grave error because it vitiates the source of law itself by going against the very source of reason.<sup>25</sup> Although monarchs can and have definitely committed heinous crimes, taking the life of a monarch is not just a crime committed against a single person but a desacralization.<sup>26</sup> Should a monarch truly understand this sacred significance of one's changed ontological character, only a mere rectification of one's title would suffice for one to act accordingly.<sup>27</sup>

However, in pointing out these obvious differences between a democracy and a monarchy, what I aim to underscore here is not a support for the creation of a monarchy in the country but a vital recognition of how a democracy differs from it—in order for us to better make sense of our form of government and our ability to hold our leaders accountable. The author of the opinion piece arguing for the Philippines' embrace of a

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<sup>25</sup> See Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> See Robert Zaller, "Breaking the Vessels: The Desacralization of Monarchy in Early Modern England," in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 29:3 (Autumn 1998), 757–778, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2543687>>.

<sup>27</sup> The idea of the *rectification of names* is from the Confucian tradition; however, I invoke it here because it is even more fittingly discussed in the context of the monarch's changed ontological character. See Geoffrey MacCormack, "Rectification of Names in Early Chinese Legal and Political Thought," in *ARSP: Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie / Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy*, 72:3 (1986), 378–390.

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monarchy banks on assuming “success stories” of the monarchy and ultimately (and weakly) claims that,

Filipino democracy is being threatened more than ever. Nowadays, the action we are taking is not enough. Not even ousting the president is enough to change the state of the Philippines. For we must not only remove “democratic” governments from power; we must overturn this modern excuse of a political system and turn back to the medieval times, to a feudal government that has truly worked for the people.<sup>28</sup>

In recognizing the threats posed to our democracy, this piece argues not a shakedown of our political structure but with a total change. However, how is a reversal to an imagined past—the creation of a feudal government, one that we did not seriously have when compared to those of Medieval Europe—a viable step forward? It seems that the author is misled by a political fantasy, one that has swept numerous figures in history, far away from the world of *Realpolitik*. Rather than an embrace of an imagined community, a more sensible approach to political discordance would be to realize how our current democratic institutions support our very drives toward immunizing ourselves, protecting our borders, and fending off those we consider to be the Other.<sup>29</sup> This is a point I will return to later.

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<sup>28</sup> La Liga Manoban, “The Philippines needs a monarchy.”

<sup>29</sup> A very interesting point to make actually is the eventual split off the monarch’s army into two distinct yet closely related regulating branches, the military and the police force. The former designed to maintain the degree of the nation’s immunization, in other words fighting what is considered to be those outside, and the latter as a distinct force of the government to patrol, supervise, and regulate the exact population said it is supposed to serve. Although we know that ultimately the mandate of both the military and the police is to serve the population, it would be rather naive to say that there is no correlation between the capacity of those in power and this perception of regulation on the part of the populace. See John Styles, “The Emergence of the Police—Explaining Police Reform in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England,” in *The British Journal of Criminology*, 27:1 (1987), 15–22

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## MISREPRESENTATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Having differentiated democracy from monarchy, I now turn to the misrepresentations of democracy. Peter Sloterdijk was invited to deliver the Cardiff Lecture, the keynote address for the European International Studies Association (EISA) European Workshops in International Studies (EWIS) in Cardiff University, Wales, on 7 June 2017. Originally given in German, the English translation, published as a journal article, is entitled “On Pseudonymous Politics: Regarding Implicit and Explicit Misconceptions of Democracy.” As the title implies, he provides us the misconceptions that we might have of democracy.

I have named these four forms of intensive pseudonism: oligocracy, fiscocracy, mobocracy and phobocracy. Together these embody the darkened partial operation of nominal democracies. Just as the solo-rule of Octavianus Augustus needed to obscure its monarchic motifs, so it is with those motifs of today’s democratic systems which, under the cover of the noble yet unreal concept of ‘rule of the people over them selves’, bring into public service very different configurations of political power which are in no way populist, let alone popular.<sup>30</sup>

I would want to consider these four forms as masks of democracy. The danger here is that since this is a form of government we have grown to love and are naturally disposed to, we might not notice anymore the difference between what a real democracy is and these masks that cover a democracy. However, an even greater concern stems from the fact that we might, in fact, like the mask more and what is behind it.

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and Mike Brogden, “The Emergence of the Police—the Colonial Dimension,” in *The British Journal of Criminology*, 27:1 (1987), 4–14.

<sup>30</sup> Sloterdijk, “On Pseudonymous Politics,” 53.

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## Oliocracy

Democracy's first mask is oliocracy. Following the French Revolution, society has been re-understood not simply under the rule of the monarch supported by the clergy and the members of the aristocracy but rather a rule grounded on local networks, the rule of the Many as opposed to the rule of the Few.<sup>31</sup> The way we understand a democracy through representation is in fact the ideal choosing of the Best (aristoi) in order for the Few (oligoi) to represent the Many (poloi). But it is different in this case in that there is a willful election of who the Few comprises, unlike in a monarchy in which the selection of the Few is by birthright.

Ideal democracy is the total rule of the many, however we are mindful that this may have some repercussions. With the rise of populist governments, we could look at the Philippines as an example, we are left with the question: should the aristoi or the oligoi be excluded from the demoi (ordinary)? A line from the famous song, Tatsulok, used at times for political misrepresentation in the Philippines underscores my very points: Habang may tatsulok at sila ay nasa tuktok, hindi matatapos itong gulo. This is quite a radical statement that finds its roots in the events that erupted in 1789. Yet in the earnest desire to completely alter the social hierarchy in French society, a quasi-monarchic structure emerged in the First French Republic, and the rest is history. But what I want to emphasize here is what a democracy is and how the Many is supposed to rule and to what extent should the Best or the Few be excluded. Sloterdijk tells us that,

As a consequence, the current 'democracy' increasingly reveals itself to be a system in which the develop their

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<sup>31</sup> See Bernard Rulof, "Post-revolutionary France: The Ultimate Test Case?," in Judith Pollmann and Henk te Velde eds., *Civic Continuities in an Age of Revolutionary Change, c.1750–1850* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 49–68, <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09504-7\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09504-7_3)>.

advantage over the— albeit in ways completely different to those alleged by the theory of exploitation. Seen as a whole it is the Many who draw advantage, in an historically unprecedented manner, from the innovative impulse of the Few.<sup>32</sup>

What is dangerous in this semblance of democracy is that there is the assumption that the vote of the Many is representative of their desire to elect a certain individual. Yet, a staple feature of a democracy ought to have been safeguarding the interests of the many not simply through suffrage but protecting them from highly specialized attacks upon their psyche. Social conditioning happens in that companies are able to manipulate human desires in order to purchase certain products. In that these happen within a capitalist, neoliberal landscape, the same is happening on terms of political interests.<sup>33</sup> And it is in fact already reported to us how such forms of manipulation have taken place all around the world especially in the United States. A report from here our country in fact states how individuals are hired just to manage social media pages in support of leading figures.<sup>34</sup> The problem with democracy's pseudonymous force of an oligocracy is this inability to truly discern if it is indeed the will of the Many exhibited through the actions of the Few or the Few controlling the Many and making it seem that it is the latter's desire.

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<sup>32</sup> Sloterdijk, "On Pseudonymous Politics," 55.

<sup>33</sup> See Signe Bock Seggaard, "The Institutional Anchoring of Social Media Venues as Arenas for Local Political Communication.: Perceptions by Voters and Politicians," in *Institutional Change in the Public Sphere: Views on the Nordic Model*, ed. by Fredrik Engelstad, Håkon Larsen, Jon Rogstad, Kari Steen-Johnsen, Dominika Polkowska, Andrea S. Dauber-Griffin, and Adam Leverton, 1st ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 118–138.

<sup>34</sup> See Kayleen Devlin, "Philippines election: 'Politicians hire me to spread fake stories'," in *BBC News* (8 May 2022), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-61339293>>.

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## Fiscocracy

Now we turn to the second mask. About 15 years ago it was reported that 3% of the total population of the United States had substantial fiscal influence over both the primary elections and the winning candidates.<sup>35</sup> This means that 3% of the total population has provided enough money to either the political parties or directly to the candidates themselves for the donors' aspirations to be of concern in the platforms of the political party or the candidate. In the Philippines, the figures are not too disparate. In the list of donors of elected senators in the 2022 campaign, it is staggering to see the millions of pesos donated in support of senators from either companies or private entities.<sup>36</sup> These figures are alarming considering that a democracy may be influenced by these interests, leaving the Many to simply choose between two alternatives that the Few already have decided for them.

This fiscal concern was definitely not the case in yesteryear's monarchy in which their neighboring lands or far distant shores, in other words the colonized lands, seemed to be the reservoir of fiscal authority. Yes, although there was already a taxation system in place, such interplay of capital and taxes did not play a crucial role then as it does today.<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of the 19th century a taxation system quite similar to ours was formulated, and we today maintain the same practice of taxing both

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<sup>35</sup> See Michael J. Malbin and Brendan Glavin, "CFI's Guide to Money in Federal Elections," *Campaign Finance Institute* (January 2020), <[http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/2018Report/CFIGuide\\_MoneyinFederalElections\\_2018upd.pdf](http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/2018Report/CFIGuide_MoneyinFederalElections_2018upd.pdf)>.

<sup>36</sup> See Cherry Salazar, "DATA: Who financed the campaigns of 2022 winning senators?" in *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism* (9 May 2023), <<https://pcij.org/2023/05/09/data-who-financed-2022-senators-campaign/>>.

<sup>37</sup> See Terence Dwyer, "Taxation: The Lost History," in *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 73:4 (2014), 664–988. On this point, an interesting interlude concerning the importance of the VOC could be discussed, however this would derail the narrative. An interesting read would be Alexander Anievas, and Kerem Nişancioğlu, "Combined Encounters: Dutch Colonisation in Southeast Asia and the Contradictions of 'Free Labour'," in *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 215–244.

our income (income tax) and the products we purchase (value added tax).<sup>38</sup> One of the immanent powers of a state is its capacity to tax its citizens without question, and a democracy with its chief concern of having more in the coffers is a social organization that is muddled with financial matters. A definite prerequisite therefore in running for office is a clear fiscal vision, with our equation of the social, political, and financial.

The logical step therefore in any crisis is to respond with a financial decision, translating to raising the price of commodities, loaning more money, and increasing the tax percentage. My point in raising this, coming from Sloterdijk, is to show how limited our grammar of expression is in terms of political outlook and how this would translate to our daily living. This is something that we could observe in our government's decision and that any response to a crisis could be reduced to just generating more money. What is then very unfortunate is that we repeat this mantra whenever a conflict is encountered. This might explain why people sell their votes, why beggars would refuse food if they could ask for cash instead, when calls for donations would specifically mention cash only, or when we line up in front of our *ninongs* and *ninangs* during Christmas and would feel a tinge of sadness if we do not receive a thick envelope. The danger of this pseudonym is its reductive quality to fiscal matters, conjuring a society divided not between the Few and the Many but rather the wealth-generating part of the population, i.e., those paying taxes, and the wealth-consuming part, those who primarily benefit from the taxes of others.

## **Mobocracy**

The third pseudonym for our consideration is the rule of the masses.

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<sup>38</sup> See Sloterdijk, "On Pseudonymous Politics," 58.

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The concept of the people, from which democracy drew its legitimacy, has always carried with it a murky element, which anyone who wishes to wield power in their name had better avoid referring to.

In fact, by wanting to draw legitimacy from the people, the younger democracies always also functioned as an empowering process with regards to groups whose qualifications for wielding power amounted to nothing more than their emotional ability to be mobilised.<sup>39</sup>

Sloterdijk tells us that a mask of democracy is this mob-rule feature that is quite parodic in that the rule of the many desires to remove this central authority, yeah what is left is this gang-like hierarchy. If this is quite confusing it might be easier for us to just look at our form of democracy. What types of platforms do our political parties really have? At least, generally we have an idea of the differences between the republican and democratic parties in the United States, along with their corresponding policies and platforms that translate to the specific laws they enact. Yet the Philippines' political parties at times seem to be a gathering of allies to the point that, when an individual becomes sour with the group, this person founds his or her own political party. When election time comes, we are confronted with a multitude of political parties without clear foundations, without clear directions, without clear differences. At the end every party would say the same thing, promise the same change, and endorse the same candidate. What we are left with is a highly emotional confrontation with memories evoked.<sup>40</sup> The previous presidential campaign was a battle of memories and emotions between those who felt sided by the rule of the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>40</sup> See Julio C. Teehankee, "Beyond Nostalgia: The Marcos Political Comeback in the Philippines," in *Southeast Asia Working Paper Series Paper no.7* (July 2023), <[https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/119819/3/Southeast\\_Asia\\_Working\\_Paper\\_7\\_Beyond\\_Nostalgia\\_The\\_Marcos\\_Political\\_Comeback\\_in\\_the\\_Philippines.pdf](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/119819/3/Southeast_Asia_Working_Paper_7_Beyond_Nostalgia_The_Marcos_Political_Comeback_in_the_Philippines.pdf)>.

yellow party and those who could not stomach the fact that the son of a dictator would rise to power.

We have to remember, Sloterdijk reminds us, “that the majority of the dictators of the twentieth century were elected dictators[.]”<sup>41</sup> this is what most certain secured at least their initial mandate to rule. And this is the danger that we have to confront today. Even the United Nations is not spared from this precariousness, evidenced by how easy it is for certain countries to group themselves according to where they lie on the political spectrum, evidenced by how predictable the outcome of their votes whether in favor of a resolution or against based on where their allies stand on the issue.<sup>42</sup> The buzz around the concept of radical democracy at times is a demonstration of the possibilities of a democracy: a person winning who is not from the so-called elites, not from the accustomed ruling family, not from the center of the country. How is it radical if the legitimacy of such a rule follows the same principles of the desires of the mob? Similar to this is Niklas Luhman’s principle of the divided line seems questionable since for him politics was the shift from the government to the opposition in a very peaceful way following the elections.<sup>43</sup> However this is easier said than done because a mob rule would not simply give up control. The rhetoric always surfaces us the elections were rigged very good

## Phobocracy

Finally, we arrive at the fourth pseudonym, the reign of fear. To cite Sloterdijk,

For now, the current situation of the phobocratic element in modern democracies remains dominated by the events of

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<sup>41</sup> Sloterdijk, “On Pseudonymous Politics,” 61.

<sup>42</sup> A good overview of this may be found in the actual list of negative votes casted by permanent members of the UN security council. See United Nation, “UN Security Council Meetings & Outcomes Tables,” <<https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>>.

<sup>43</sup> See Sloterdijk, “On Pseudonymous Politics,” 62.

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11th September 2001. Since this day, nearly all politics has operated according to a principle of overreaction. This vulnerability of the seemingly invulnerable that was exposed that day catapulted the coordinates of safety-awareness across practically the whole of the globe into an era of an uncontrollable compulsion for control. Thanks to this American disorder, the phobocratic imperative has spread through the capillaries of the 'global community'.<sup>44</sup>

Sloterdijk uses 9/11 as his basis to discuss a highly volatile society, yet I wish to highlight this in junction with cancel culture. The society we live in seemingly is drawn to action because of a fear of being cancelled or considered siding with the opposition.<sup>45</sup> This is where *cancel culture* enters the picture. Especially with the Internet, there is much talk about the fear of being cancelled because of doing or saying something that does not sit well with others. One of the hallmarks of contemporary society is how we have learned to become tolerant of others. This is a hallmark of modernity in that to be a member of a community we abide by the imperative of being tolerant. Yet cancel culture goes against this hallmark of modernity and that we collectively become intolerant of those perceived to be intolerant. Cancelling is in fact the withdrawing of political engagement because an individual totally cancels or excludes that particular person from the public sphere.<sup>46</sup> Lurking in us is this paranoia of the other person watching, judging, and cancelling.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>45</sup> See Emily A. Vogels et al., "Americans and 'Cancel Culture': Where Some See Calls for Accountability, Others See Censorship, Punishment," in *Pew Research Center* (19 May 2021), <<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/05/19/americans-and-cancel-culture-where-some-see-calls-for-accountability-others-see-censorship-punishment/>>.

<sup>46</sup> See Douglas R. Campbell, "Cancel Culture, Then and Now: A Platonic Approach to the Shaming of People and the Exclusion of Ideas," in *Journal of Cyberspace Studies*, 7:2 (July 2023), 147–166, <<https://doi.org/10.22059/JCSS.2023.363974.1092>>.

In our global community then we witness these acts of acting out of fear be it in this collective withdrawal of support of certain fast-food chains because of their link to the war in the Middle East or a refusal of support for Russian athletes because of the country they represent.<sup>47</sup> It is quite amusing how we could think about cancelling on the global stage yet not in the political sphere in our country. Although, the experience of cancelling individuals in the Philippines has already taken place such as professors or scientists who have spoken their mind or actors or artists who have not aligned themselves with public support, but unfortunately, this has never translated yet to the situation of politicians who have been convicted for plundering—especially those who have already won elections once more and have returned to office. It is quite amusing that we could be united for a common cause millions of miles away such as what is happening in Gaza or in Ukraine, yet we are able to turn a blind eye what is happening in our very country. If fear could prompt us to collective action, why is it when we talk about matters close to us, we feel apathetic?

## **FINAL MUSING FOR PHILIPPINE POLITICS**

To end this paper, I wish to highlight how democracy and even monarchy are ultimately forms of immunological practices in a political assemblage. Any form of government is a way for a people to safeguard their interests, either emphasizing the interests of the individual over the collective or vice versa. For Philippine politics, however, what must be clear is a move away from illusions of political assembly, i.e., a total abandonment of democracy and an embrace of something totally foreign. What is crucial to understand in reviewing these democratic forms is the constant need to reorient oneself

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<sup>47</sup> See Erin Hale, “McDonald’s franchises in Middle East at odds over Israel-Hamas war,” in *Aljazeera* (20 October 2023), <<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/10/20/mcdonalds-franchises-in-middle-east-at-odds-over-israel-hamas-war>> and Reuters, “Explainer: Why are Russians not competing under their flag in Beijing?,” in *Reuters* (1 February 2022), <<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/olympics-why-are-russians-not-competing-under-their-flag-beijing-2022-02-01/>>.

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to the ultimate sphere that binds us all: the state. In this paper, I have provided, following Sloterdijk, the pseudonyms of democracy in the hope of re-understanding our political associations within the state. Perhaps learning how to govern a democracy well, the very responsibility of our elected officials, would be possible only if we are mindful of the spheres we occupy. Conversely, the sovereign people who cast their ballots should likewise be mindful of the very life-giving spheres that bound them and the politicians they elect. Something unthinkable in a monarchy. A democracy allows us all to recognize that we are all on the same boat. We all, electors and elected officials alike, all journey along the same aspirations for a good life in a better state. Yet, this recognition should come sooner rather than later lest we find ourselves outside of the boat when the floods start to rise. We would then be compelled to wade the floods by ourselves, while those in power and those who enabled them are found safe in their own boat—something that the pandemic experience already exposed to us.<sup>48</sup> To better ready ourselves for democracy we have to sort out these different masks and return to the fundamental principles of what a democracy is: encounter, about bridging the different spheres that we occupy.

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<sup>48</sup> See Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, “Sloterdijk, Peter, Der Staat streifte seine Samthandschuhe ab. Ausgewählte Gespräche und Beiträge 2020–2021,” in *Kritike*, 17:2 (December 2023), 114–119, <<https://doi.org/10.25138/17.2.br>>. See also Peter Sloterdijk, *Im selben Boot. Versuch über die Hyperpolitik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995).

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