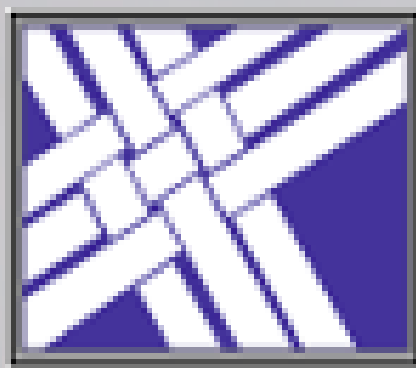




PHILIPPINE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AMIDST POLITICAL UNREST: A Textual Analysis of Storybooks Set in the Marcos and Duterte Regimes



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BACKGROUND: A PHILIPPINE SITUATIONER

THE REGIMES BY THE NUMBERS

Marcos' Martial Law

- 107,240 victims of human rights violations
- 70,000 people arrested
- 34,000 people tortured
- 3,240 people killed by uniformed personnel
- \$5-10 billion worth of ill-gotten wealth

Duterte's War on Drugs

- 20,000 estimated people killed from 2016 to 2018
- 55,481 anti-drug operations (2016-2017)
- 54 children killed by uniformed personnel in questionable drug-related operations
- 26,415 children and 39,518 women who supposedly surrendered but remain without sufficient government service

A TALE OF TWO LEADERS: FERDINAND MARCOS, SR., AND RODRIGO DUTERTE

With the elections coming in 2022, the political landscape in the Philippines have been more devastating than ever. The Philippines will be freed from the unfortunate happenstances of the Duterte Regime: six years of war on drugs; a warring divide among people due to the advent of fanaticism, fake news peddling, and echo chambers made pervasive through online spaces; foul-mouthedness as political rhetoric; the influx of Chinese businesses and partnership that compromised the national finances; a mishandling of a global pandemic; and many political decisions that was questionable for many. However, such freedom comes at a cost, given that Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., is running for presidency. This sends not only nostalgia but also fury to many who have many personal experiences or stories from forefathers during the Martial Law years of the presidential candidate's father, the infamous dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr.

President Marcos, the dictator, started with a vision to strengthen the economic development of the Philippines. However, as detailed in the digital repository "Martial Law Museum" (<https://martiallawmuseum.ph/>), there has been a great dissatisfaction by Marcos' second term in terms of political, economic, and democratic dimensions of the country, leading to the declaration of Martial Law. The dark years were the colors of black and red, and the lives of the people were never the same again.

Fast forward to many years later, President Duterte would rise to power after packaging himself as a common man who was different from the politically driven leaders before him. He was a mayor of Davao City in the south of the country, and he was shown as someone who was not interested to hold the highest form of power in the Philippines. His rule, similar to that of President Marcos, was full of promise. He was even vocal that, in six months, he would have eradicated the problems on drugs and would have made the country better. If he failed, he would step down, and this would be the repeating narrative at that time. However, like many promises, these are meant to be broken.

President Duterte was the subject of strong criticism by many journalists, academics, opposition politicians, and even the international community not only for his foul mouth but also for his many decisions that compromised issues of democracy, human rights, and the welfare of the people. Contrary to promise, he was seen as someone who was heavy on politicking, assigning trusted friends in government offices without qualifications, letting corruption pass right under his nose, and being in absentia during calamities and unfortunate situations when his people needed him the most.

In many ways, Presidents Marcos and Duterte are similar, and their leaderships have made children, who are a vulnerable sector, face dangers that threaten their welfare, life, and well-being.

POLITICS, CHILDREN, AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The trauma experienced by children who had close encounters with President Duterte's war on drugs, which he calls "Oplan Tokhang" (oplan is a play on "plano," the Filipino word for plan, while "tokhang" is a play on the words "toktok" or knock and "hangyo" or plead, cuts deep. These experiences made children sick, angry, and find no will to live (Martinez et al., 2019). Many children have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder as victims of the Martial Law. The lived experiences of victims of torture, sexual abuse, and psychological torment had repercussions to the lives of this people (Martin, 2018).

Children, families of victims, and witnesses have to find ways to continue to live and better their lives. Children, even more so, have the capacity to find small glints of hope despite the darkness of the world before them. Children's literature attempts to provide the guidance and help to address these trauma, pain, and grief. This study presents storybooks set in the Marcos regime or published in the Duterte regime to characterize how these stories attempt to portray child characters who can serve as inspiration to children who had or are experiencing the same struggle brought about by the political inequalities from the adult-centric world.

OBJECTIVES, FRAMEWORK, AND METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

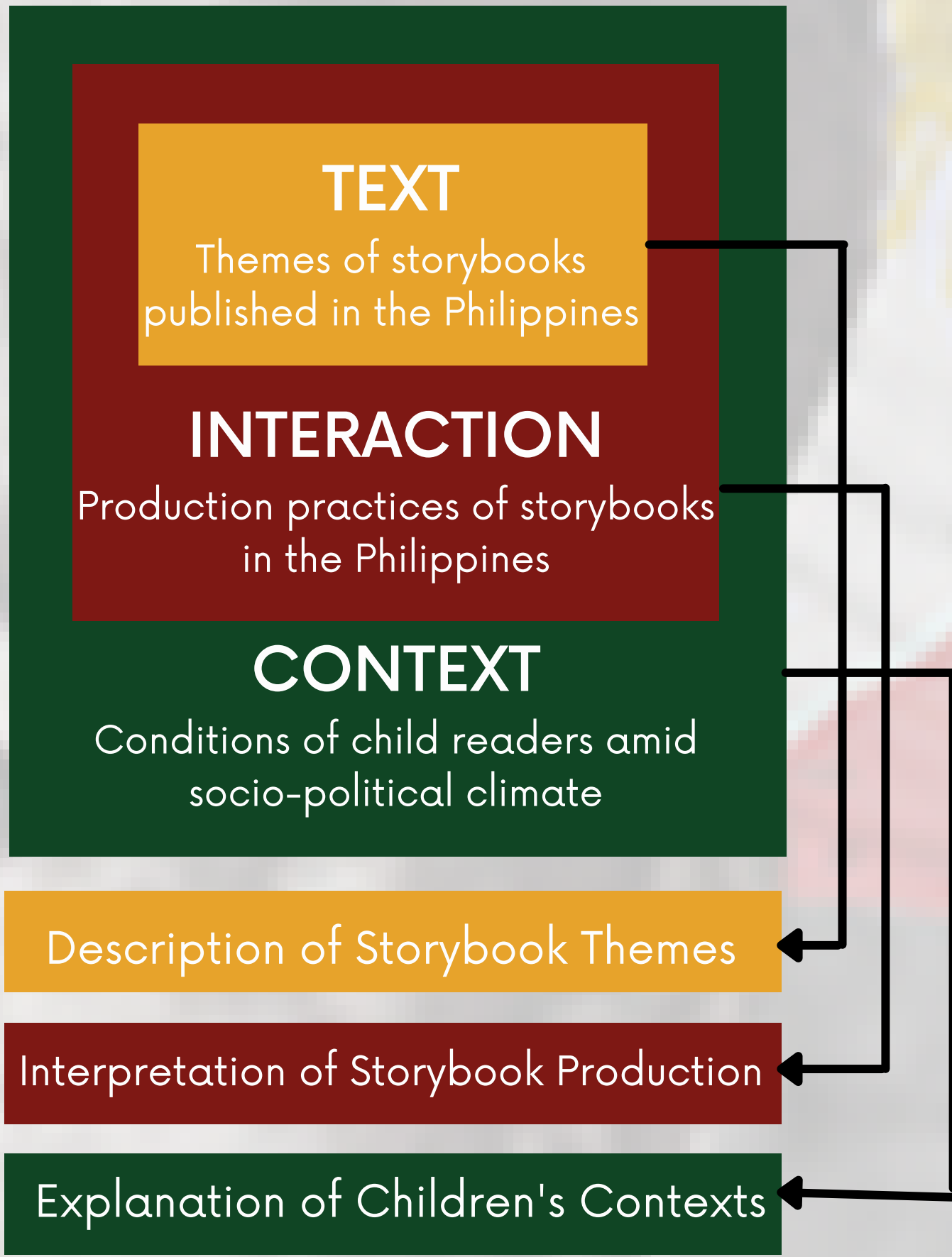
This study aims to answer the question: "How do select Filipino storybooks portray the socio-political landscape of the Marcos and Duterte regimes?"

Specifically, this study aims to:

- identify themes of published storybooks about Martial Law and during the Duterte regimes;
- analyze the media production situation where such publication occurs; and
- link the texts into the socio-political contexts of the country.

CORPUS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Select storybooks published from 2016 to 2019, the height of President Duterte's War on Drugs
- Storybooks on Martial Law that are available on print
- A total of 40 storybooks
- Some media content related to socio-political climate and children's literature production
- Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis as framework and methodology
- Textual analysis as primary data analysis method



CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
Framework and Methodology

CONCLUSIONS: THE CHILD IN THE PHILIPPINE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

In sum, the socio-political climate shapes the themes of storybooks and the regard for child readers. The storybooks analyzed show that the socio-political landscape is no longer sanitized for children; instead, children are portrayed as empowered individuals who also matter in ensuring that the future is brighter for our country. Children are portrayed as carers, friends, teachers and bearers of information, vessels of culture, savior, agents, and champions of hope for the nation. They face various challenges amid political unrest: difficulty in understanding oneself and their immediate communities, validating emotions, loss of loved ones, struggles within politics and society, attempting to escape from harsh realities, and finding the courage to face these realities head on.

Specifically, the following were found:

- The Philippine children's literature scene continues to find new ways of challenging existing forms and norms to better represent, inspire, and empower children, despite and because of the difficult times.
- Children are a mainstay in various media content; how they are perceived shapes the society's regard for them.
- The Filipino child continues to remain hopeful and agentic in finding meaning to his/her experiences in the society.

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PRESENTATION OF DATA: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF STORYBOOKS

THEMES IN PHILIPPINE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

• THE CHILD AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUGGLE

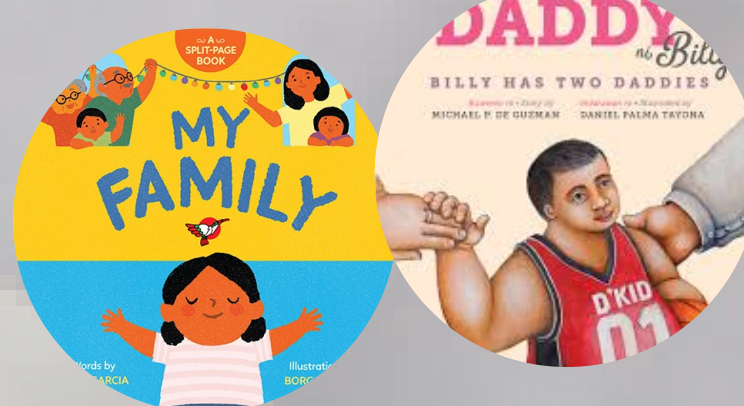


Stories like "Si Kian" and "Dearest Papa" portray children in the midst of the political struggle, such as war on drugs and war in Mindanao. There are also informative storybooks like "Mga Uring Panlipunan (Social Classes)" and "Itong Diktadura (This is the Dictatorship)," which are informative storybooks for children.



Socio-political struggles are also portrayed by joining children as they experience the challenges of the Martial Law. "At the School Gate," "Si Jhun-jhun Noong Bago Ideklara ang Batas Militar (Jhun-jhun Before Martial Law was Declared)," and "Isang Harding Paper (A Paper Garden)" put children at the center of the political narrative, witnessing family members suffer. "EDSA" attempts to identify specific symbols associated with Martial Law and freedom.

• THE CHILD AND RESHAPING CONTEMPORARY HOUSEHOLDS



Storybooks that reshape and reintroduce the concepts of family and the household are also published. "My Family" explores various family structures. "Billy has Two Daddies," as well as the two-stories-in-one book "Erwin's Mother/Klara's Father," portray unconventional but nonetheless accepted parents.



• THE CHILD AND NARRATIVES OF GRIEF



"The Missing Blanket," "How Lakan Cried for His Father," and "May Alaga Akong Bakulaw (I Have a Pet Ape)" tackle various narratives of grief, a common child experience during the two regimes.

• THE CHILD AND RADICAL EXPERIENCES



The stories that were made for children also went beyond storybooks. There are anthologies made for children across all ages. The trilogy "Baklas," "Piglas," and "Hulagpos," which all relate to the idea of breaking free, showcased a multitude of stories portraying radical experiences of children today. The Lumad children are the focus of the other two anthologies: "Ang Bayabas sa Tagaytay at Iba pang Kwento mula sa Kabataan ng Paaralang Lumad (The Guavas in Tagaytay and other stories from the children of Lumad schools)" and "Pangiyak: Mga Kwento at Panawagan ng mga Bayani ng Mindanao (Stories and Woes of the Heroes of Mindanao)."

OTHER THEMES INCLUDE:

- Disability and Social Inclusion
- Acceptance Despite Clashing Opinions
- Unconventional Friendships
- Continuing Traditions
- Storybooks in Regional Languages
- Stories about Hope and the Future



STORYBOOK PRODUCTION AMID POLITICAL UNREST

PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION, DISSEMINATION

- Experimentation in form
 - Split-page board book
 - Flip-page storybooks
 - Half-covered storybook
 - Informative books
- Boom of voices from the regions
 - Aklat Alamid
 - Lumad stories
 - Regional languages
- New modes of dissemination
 - "Buri Books" app
 - Online storytelling videos
- Continuing tradition of courageous themes
 - Contemporary themes addressing timely issues that matter to the child

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN (TRANS)MEDIA PRODUCTION

- Participants in kid test
 - Some publishers, such as Adarna House, perform kid test of their storybooks.
- Online content creators
 - Some children become subject of viral videos, which they or adults upload and share.
- Story creators
 - NGOs would sometimes elicit stories from the children themselves, such as previous projects from Save the Children Philippines and Lumad anthologies.
- Subjects of news content
 - During the heydays of Oplan Tokhang, many children have become victims and their stories are featured in news programs and articles.

REGARD FOR CHILDREN IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Collateral damage

- "When you bomb a village you intend to kill the militants but you kill the children there ... Why do you say it is collateral damage to the west and to us it is murder?" -Pres. Duterte, in an interview with al-Jazeera, comparing war on drugs with wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan. This shows that children are regarded as nothing more than collateral damage, an uncontrollable loss in waging a selfish war.

Traumatized children

- Children are either victims or witnesses to the drug war and the war in Mindanao. They stood witness during the Martial Law days, with no agency and only left to watch their families get taken away.

Hopeful children

- The child is regarded to have the capacity to hope for a brighter future and find meanings in their experiences. Children are empowered in the storybooks because they carry with them a hopeful future.

Belittled experiences

- The effects of social injustices to children are disregarded. The government, expected to take care of their welfare, are the cause of harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS: THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S CONTENT CREATORS

As creators and researchers of content for children, we are thus expected to continue the efforts of writing, illustrating, and publishing stories that promote social inclusion in various communities, differences, and geographies. At the same time, we should continually strive to portray socio-political realities that affect children. Children are vulnerable but powerful; on one hand, we should provide guidance whenever needed and possible, and on the other hand, we should learn to trust that children have the agency to make sense of the world and find special meanings to their experiences.

Other recommendations are as follows:

- understanding the nature of digital-native children today and creating content that appeals to their characteristics;
- writing contemporary stories and being unafraid to challenge existing norms and political problems that would affect children's well-being, safety, and comfort; and
- providing space for children's literature in academic, socio-cultural, and socio-political setting through acknowledgment, support, and patronage so that the industry would bloom.

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