Deconstructing Myths Via Humor: A Semiotic Analysis of Philippine Political Internet Memes

Alma Cita Calimbo[1]

Abstract

The study is a qualitative-descriptive analysis of 12 randomly selected Philippine political internet memes. Utilizing Berger's (2004) Semiotic Theory of Humor and Barthes's (1991) concept of myth, the study examined how the humorous signifiers in the political internet memes deconstruct dominant political ideologies of modern (Philippine) society which appear natural and normal. Findings revealed that contrasts and binary oppositions in both images and captions portraying code violations are the humorous signifiers in the memes. Humor in the memes is basically aggressive, as it ridicules and satirizes representatives of power, the political elite, for their undesirable qualities and practices which are in stark contrast with (or violations of) the righteous and moralistic slogan of the present administration, that is, 'Daang Matuwid.' Through the internet memes, the belief that a new administration can be a 'messiah' who can save the masses from their present sorry condition is deconstructed. As the analysis shows, humor in the internet memes exposes some political ideological constructs which are naturalized or normalized in the Philippine society. Through humor, such ideologies are unmasked and the public is brought to awareness of what is really behind seemingly normal or natural events in the Philippine political arena. This means that Filipino humor, apart from being a mere expression of fun and entertainment, has the potential to express dissent especially against some ills in the society. Recommendations for future research are included.

Key Words: *internet memes, political humor, qualitative research, semiotic analysis*

---

[1] The author is a faculty of Central Mindanao University, Bukidnon and is currently taking up her PhD in Language Studies in MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology.

INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, modes and mediums of communication change; new "languages" emerge. Among the recent mediums used by people in expressing thoughts and ideas are internet memes. In his essay, *The Language of Internet Memes,* Davison (2012) defines an internet meme as "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (p.122)**.//** Due to their "nonserious" nature, memes, despite their viral spread, were not given serious attention specifically in the academic setting. Recently however, some scholars have acknowledged the value of memes in political expression. Dr. Rintel, who has written on memes observes, "Memes represent a new kind of 'comment culture' on the internet." Dr. Frances Shaw who is conducting research on internet memes also acknowledges the role of internet memes in contemporary political expression (Korff, 2014). Internet memes may highlight a societal issue and their viral presence contributes a lot in developing social consciousness on the internet users. Making memes enable the creators to express their receptions and reactions to pressing social issues.

According to Knobel and Lankshire (2007 as cited in Varona, n.d.) successful internet memes are characterized by the presence of the element of humor which can be 'quirky,' satiric, and sarcastic. Another element is intertextuality, which refers to 'cross-references to everyday and popular culture events, icons or phenomena.' Anomalous or peculiar combinations of images and other elements are likewise observable. 'Incongruous elements' incorporating reality and fantasy are also common in digital humor (Kuipers, 2002 as cited in Varona, n.d; Shifman, 2007 as cited in Varona, n.d).

As internet memes are produced by the masses, they represent popular culture products. Popular culture is related to Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Hegemonic power works to "convince individuals and social classes to subscribe to the social values and norms of an inherently exploitative system" (Stoddart, 2007). For example, in his study *Meme World Syndrome: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the First World Problems and Third World Success Internet Memes,* Chandler (2013) identified several binary oppositions between the meme series that indicated ideological beliefs about the nature of wealth disparity and inequality. He then

suggested how the internet memes can be used "to challenge existing power relations and better represent disenfranchised and dominated groups." Similarly, in her study, *The Role of Internet Memes in Public Discourse on the 2013 Pork Barrel Case in the Philippines,* Varona (n.d.) stresses that through the memes, the people ("whether producers, re-mixers, 'likers,' 'forwarders,' or 'commenters'") could freely criticize the rich and powerful" allowing crowded or muted voices of the masses to be heard enabling them to participate in 'public conversation.'

Although these studies focus on the role of internet memes in challenging ideological concepts, analysis does not focus on humor which is an important component of internet memes which make them different from the present study. Stressing the social function of Superiority Theory, Hobbes postulates that humor is a force for resistance by subordinate elements in society (Berger, 1993). Such humor then can be subversive used as "weapons of the weak" in showing hostility against those in power. Goldstein's provocative study, for instance, was conducted on the subject of laughter of poor women in a Brazilian shanty town. Findings revealed that 'while the humor of the poor may not necessarily lead directly to rebellions and political revolutions, it does open up a discursive space within which it becomes possible to speak about matters that are otherwise naturalized, unquestioned, or silenced' (in Kuipers, 2008). Pearce's (n.d.) study, *No Laughing Matter Humor as a Means of Dissent in the Digital Era: The Case of Authoritarian Azerbaijan,* resembles the present study as it deals with the role of humor in internet memes in expressing political aggression. The researcher stresses the capacity of digital humor to threaten the authoritarian Azerbaijan because of its viral nature. She cited Bernal claiming, "'The power of humor under dictatorship… lies in the fact that humor is one of the few spheres of expression that officials do not dominate' in Azerbaijan."

In his book, *The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines*, Raul Pertierra (2012) provides a distressing portrait of contemporary politics in the country. He quotes Archbishop Oscar Cruz, "...if most of the Filipino politicians do not really command the respect, much less the trust of most of the people ... the reason is not a deep secret. Philippine politics is usually understood ... as a means to gain power and to accumulate wealth... (p. 7). Pertierra (2012) stresses that exasperated and dismayed of unfulfilled promises and hypocrisy of elected public officials and "in the absence of rational explanations for the paradoxes of politics,"

netizens resort to humor as a tool in coping political adversities and in facilitating the culture of dissent (Lynch, 2002). Conducting this study will also give insights on Filipino humor and its potential in challenging ideological practices in the Philippine political setting.

This paper sought to analyze Philippine political internet memes and argued that humor in the political memes serve to challenge dominant ideologies. Specifically, the study aims to: a) identify the humorous signifiers in the political memes; b) infer the connotative meanings of the humorous signifiers; and c) discuss the ideological functions of humor in the political memes.

A sign can be a word, a sound, or a visual image, which stands for something else. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, a European linguist, a sign has two components: the *signifier* (the word, the sound, or image) and the *signified* (the meaning or the concept the signifier represents). Whereas any text can represent something as what semioticians claim, internet memes are among the texts that are packed with signs (both visual and linguistic) making them excellent objects for semiotic analysis. According to Davison (2012) an internet meme has three components: the manifestation which is the physical observable object (image, skill, audio, etc.) that is created; behavior which is the act of creating or performing the meme, and the ideal which is the "concept or ideas conveyed." Two of these components resemble the two basic parts of de Saussure's sign system, the signifier and the signified (a detailed discussion is given in the next section). Manifestation resembles Saussure's signifier and ideal resembles the signified. The process of performing the meme taking a picture of a person or thing and adding a caption to it (Korff, 2014).

In his article, *Signs of Humor: On the Structure of Laughter*, Berger (n.d.) states that humor involves a code violation making it the semiotic variation of the concept of incongruity. Incongruity theory, which is probably the most widely accepted theory of humor holds that "all humor involves some kind of a difference between what one expects and what one gets" (Berger, 1993). Something can be found funny if it is irrational, paradoxical, illogical, incoherent, fallacious, or inappropriate. As the American comedian Groucho Marx says, "Humor is reasoning

gone mad" (cited in Lynch, 2002).) "A humorous event has to deviate from the norm, i.e. to contradict what is expected or normal in given circumstances.

Berger (2004) stresses that semioticians consider both syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis of texts. While syntagmatic analysis focuses on the narrative structure of the text or how it proceeds from one event to another, paradigmatic analysis involves examining texts in terms of the pattern of oppositions in the text that reveals its true (and hidden) meaning. Paradigmatic analysis then is based on Saussure's notion that concepts are defined differentially, e.g. the concept of a cat is determined because it is different from a dog (Chandler, 2005). In Hilaire Belloc's joke *On a Politician* (Here, richly, with ridiculous display, the politician's corpse was laid away. While all of his acquaintance sneered and slanged, I wept: for I had longed to see him hanged.), for instance, the ending which is the punch line is incongruous and brings surprise and shock because it is unexpected: the speaker is not weeping because of the politician's death but because he does not deserve a natural death; he deserves hanging (Berger, 2004).

Barthes (1991), in his *Mythologies,* expands Saussure's semiological system by proposing two orders of signification, making Saussure's sign system as the first order, and the mythological system as the second order. Barthes used the term *denotation* for the first order of signification which refers to the literal or obvious meaning and *connotation* for the second order of connotation which refers to the additional cultural meanings (in Berger, 2004).

Myth, according to Barthes, is a representation of the dominant ideologies of our time. Barthes attempts to unravel the layers of meaning that lie behind seemingly innocuous everyday texts. His definition of "text" was one of the early formulations that expanded this notion to include any aspect of daily life with the potential to signify meaning (in the same way as a conventional linguistic sign). In his classic example, Barthes shows a picture of a young Black soldier giving the French salute. This image is at once a complete sign (*Black soldier gives French salute)* and the form or signifier of the second-order system: the myth (*France is a great empire supported by all, regardless of color or creed).* Barthes, in this example, posits that bourgeois ideology perpetuates forms without meanings (e.g., the meaning of

imperialism that might be conveyed by the saluting black man is removed) making them innocent, natural, and a statement of fact (in Chandler, 2005).

As myths transmit hidden ideological functions, this implies that contrary to Saussure's concept of the sign, myths are never arbitrary; instead, they are motivated. As what Robinson (2011) stresses, "Barthes's main objection to myth is that it removes history from language. It makes particular signs appear *natural, eternal, absolute, or frozen*" [emphasis by the researcher]. To the consumer of myths (the readers), the signified of connotative myths is 'hidden' making the myth a command or a statement of fact which demands no explanation at all. Making a myth appear as 'the way it is' is the aim of the producer of myths. It is then the role of semioticians to unveil such hidden meanings. For this, semiotic analysis can be considered as a political act "establishing the freedom of language from the present system and unveiling the constructedness of social realities. The contingent, historical, socially constructed capitalist system comes to seem as 'life', 'the world', 'the way it is'" (Robinson, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

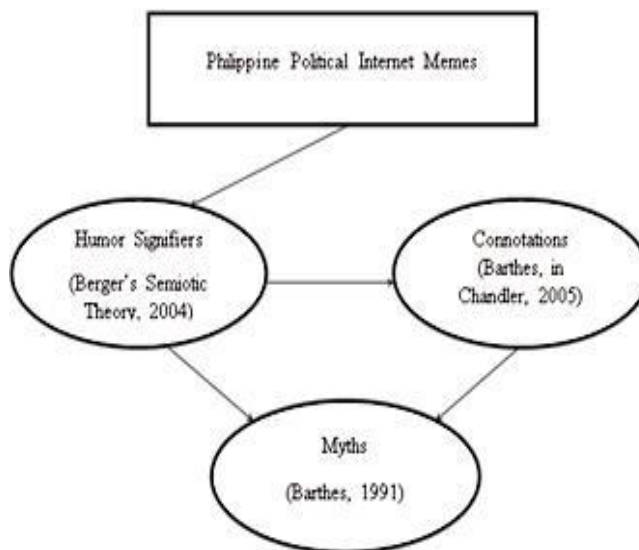**Figure 1**: Schematic Diagram of the Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 shows the flow of the analysis of the selected internet memes. Using Berger's (2004) Semiotic Theory of humor and Barthes's (1991) connotative and mythological meanings of the sign, the role of the humor in deconstructing dominant ideologies was discussed.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative research employing humor analysis. The corpus of the study was 12 Philippine political memes randomly selected from Google and Yahoo search engines. Majority of the internet memes were taken from Facebook. The memes were selected according to their appropriateness to the study. Utilizing Berger's (2004) notion of hu mor as code violations, the semiotic variation of the Incongruity Theory of Humor and Barthes's (1991) connotative (in Chandler, 2005) and mythological meaning of the sign, the study examined the meanings of the humorous signifiers in the political memes and analyzed how they deconstructed dominant ideologies of modern (Philippine) society which appear natural and normal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Much humor in the political memes is elicited by recognition of paradigmatic relations of the key signifiers in the political memes. According to Chandler (2005) 'paradigmatic relations' are the oppositions and contrasts between signifiers that belong to the same set from (which) those used in the text that were drawn. Interpretation of such contrasts which are incongruous elicits humor. In figure 1, for instance, contrasting signifiers are apparent that contribute to the humorous effect of the meme, such as *rich/ poor or money/ nonmoney* and *proper/improper or ethical/nonethical* which are highlighted by both the image and the caption text. The image shows politicians and celebrities wearing their expensive gowns ramp(ing) on a red carpet, (with) as the(ir) smile(ing) (faces) facing the audience and the photographers. This signifies an event (basically a joyous one like that of a celebration) hosted by a rich person whose guests is also well-off. However, the background which is a slum area heightens the contradiction in the image. The stark contrast between the subject and the background of the image becomes the key humor signifier in this political meme. Incongruity theory holds that "all humor involves some kind of a difference between what one expects and what one gets" (Berger, 1993).

Fig. 1: SONA Fashion Meme
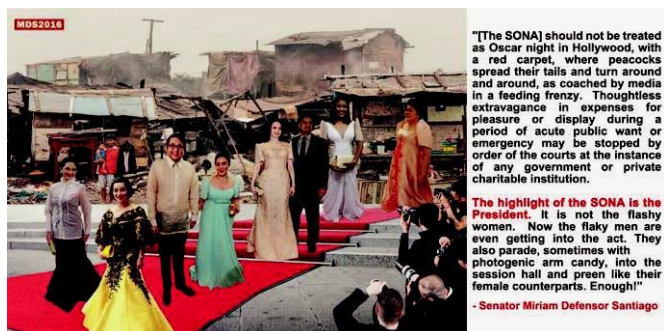
Source: www.facebook.com

The incongruous signifiers (in Figure 1) have serious connotations. From the semiotic perspective, humor is considered as a violation of a code. Although delegates of a formal gathering like that of the SONA are expected to observe proper decorum, the caption text describes it as a "thoughtless extravagance" treating the SONA as an "OSCAR night in Hollywood, with a red carpet." Violation of decorum of these people is much more put to the surface by the background, which shows a slum area which is a (portrait) scene of poverty the country is facing. It is then, so incongruous, illogical, and inappropriate for these people to show off during a serious event (the SONA), which affects the whole country and amidst the tremendous problems the country is facing like that of poverty. Connotatively, whereas the slum area in the background symbolizes poverty, the subject of the image (the politicians and the celebrities) symbolizes the government's selfishness and apathy for allowing such luxurious display despite the suffering of the masses.

According to Barthes (1991), myth is a representation of the dominant ideologies of our time, which becomes 'natural' with history. One may rationalize that there is nothing wrong with dressing appropriately in a formal occasion or with being photographed during a memorable event, it is just 'natural' and there is no question about it. But the meme deconstructs such myth. Whereas a rich person may rationalize that there is nothing wrong with his/her expensive lifestyle because he/she works for it, it is different for those people in the government service. The meme suggests that it is shameful, thus unnatural, for those authorities who must be after of

the welfare of the majority to act or live luxuriously amidst the sad and pitiful condition of their subjects. To quote Confucius, "In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of" (Yohannan, n.d.).

Fig. 2: Noynoy gago meme   **Fig. 3:** Noynoy bugok meme

Source: www.facebook.com   Source: pulpolitika.wordpress.com

In figures 2, there is nothing incongruous or deviant in the images as they depict facial expressions which are congruent also to the emotions implied in the caption texts, thus making these iconic signs (Pierce, in Chandler, 2005). The caption text with the President's statement, "I challenge the Supreme Court" and the senator's retort, "Ang galing mo naman. Lawyer ka?" which spells out the binary opposition between *wise/stupid* is the key humorous signifier in the figure. However, understanding the humor element in both memes is maximized by considering the external features of the texts. Although Saussure's sign system stresses the relationship of signs to each other, such structuralist semiotics is focused exclusively on internal structures of the text; hence, it is limited and cannot make a comprehensive analysis of texts, which as in this meme, refer to other texts (Chandler, 2005). The humor in this meme is basically attributed to parody and intertextuality as it makes reference to another text. According to Norrick (in Berger, n.d.), "intertextuality occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written." In addition, Chandler (2005) emphasizes that "each text exists in relation to others."

The caption texts in Figure 2 have an intertextual reference to the argument on the constitutionality of Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP). The decision of the Supreme Court (SC) on the unconstitutionality of DAP "provoked President Benigno Aquino III to address the public and the Supreme Court to insist on its constitutional basis" (Diola, 2015). With this background, the President's statement, "I challenge the Supreme Court," makes sense. Such statement of the President is basically incongruous, thus funny. For one, as Santiago stressed, he is not a lawyer to question the Supreme Court as it is the high court comprising those people who are experts of the law. Assuming that he knows better than the Supreme Court is a violation of a code, the semiotic variation of the concept of incongruity in humor.

Figures 2 and 3 have two connotations. First, the President's statement connotes abuse of his authority as he seeks to challenge the Supreme Court which is in the right position to settle the case. Doing so signifies that he has the power to manipulate decision in certain agencies in matters which threatens his administration. Second, the meme signifies the ignorance of those holding government positions regarding their responsibilities and functions. This is specifically true to those elected officials who were celebrities or relatives of other prominent government officials who had no training and experience in the government service but just capitalized on their popularity and wealth. The ignorance of these officials is signified by the quote in the text enclosed in the parentheses, "Gago ka" and "BUGOK." The term "gago" is a Filipino slang for stupid or being an asshole (Urban Dictionary, 2004), while "gago" is a vernacular (Bisaya) term for a stupid person. These terms contribute to the unexpected or surprising element in the meme. To call the highest official in a country "gago" or "bugo" (stupid) is beyond expectation. Incongruity theory works in the form of a shock. Friedman (in Mwetulundila, 2014)) says that shocking the audience is a way of getting attention. Shock can take many forms; it can be violent, funny, or unexpected. Calling the President "gago" and "bugok" is indeed violent, funny, and unexpected.

Manipulation entails ignorance on the part of the victims. However, through humor such 'natural' phenomenon is ridiculed in the meme revealing its anomalous nature, thus implying that the masses are not ignorant at all. Whereas those in power make it appear that what they are doing are part of their functions or "discretion," thus natural, the memes show that the netizens are aware enough of what is going on.

Through the memes, the masses are able to show that it is not they who are stupid, but they are those who are up there occupying lofty seats in the government.

Fig. 4: Daang Matuwid Meme   **Fig.5:** Kultong Dilaw Meme

Source: www.facebook.com

The oppositions between *straight/crooked* and *righteous/corrupt* are highlighted in the memes. The caption text, "*Matuwid*?" (righteous) in Figure 4 is in stark contrast with *corrupt* implied in the caption text, "Noynoy had pork of P700 B in 2012 DAP." Incongruity is heightened by the caption text "Noynoy's P100M 'pork' went to bogus NGOs, too" which is unexpected. Similarly, "ideretso na din sa garbage" is in contrast to "daang matuwid." The memes have an intertextual reference to President Aquino's commitment to his fight against corruption and to institute good governance which is the essence of his motto of treading "daang matuwid" or straight path (Magno, 2015). Humor is then elicited by these binary contrasts which are reinforced by the image of Sen.Santiago which is iconic sign of sarcasm and cynicism and her statement, "Where is 'daang matuwid'? Even the GPS can't locate it" and the images and captions highlighting the unsolved problems during Aquino's administration which promotes "daang matuwid' or good governance and the gigantic allocations lawmakers receive from government funds.

The humorous signifiers in the memes have serious connotations. With the incongruity between the program's self-righteous and moralistic worldview and what is really happening, the humor in the memes signifies "Daang Matuwid" as a hypocritical slogan (Tiglao, 2015). During Aquino's administration, the PDAF releases from 2010-2013 totaled P6.5 billion. With the addition of DAP which totaled P157 billion, Aquino's pork barrel totaled P220 billion during his first three years. Yet such "suspicious siphoning off of public funds" was not given attention by the Commission on Audit (Tiglao, 2014) which taints Aquino's projected image as a fighter of corruption.

The myth that "Daang Matuwid" or Aquino's administration can save the country from the pangs of the social cancer, corruption, which the Filipino public believed and resulted to the undisputed election of Noynoy Aquino to presidency is deconstructed. Or the notion that a new governance (with its new "messianic" slogan) is better than the previous one (Tiglao, 2015) is negated in the political memes. As what Tiglao (2015) boldly states, "President Aquino's Daang Matuwid will go down in our history as the most wacko and hypocritical slogan—and non-program of government—of any administration." Whereas the supporters of Aquino believe that the President is really serious in his "Daang Matuwid" Program, the memes help the general public to see that it is not 'the way it is.'

Fig.6: "Noynoying" Meme	**Fig. 7**: Noynoy Buwiset Meme	**Fig. 8**: Noynoy Present/Absent Meme

Source: www.google.com

Binary contrasts such as *serious/nonserious* and *present/absent* can be easily gleaned in both caption texts and images in the figures above. The smile of the President, his relaxed position while texting during the dangerous operation done by the Special Action Force (SAF) commandos in contrast to Obama's vigilance during a high-value target operation, his presence in the interview with Vice Ganda and in the Dongyan wedding which can be nonserious gatherings and his absence in the Arrival Honors for SAF heroes which is really a serious event are illogical and incongruous making these as the humor signifiers in these memes.

The humorous signifiers connote the President's disinterest and lack of enthusiasm in considering more important things that need his urgent attention. The President's response and reaction to the queries why it took so long for the soldiers to be given reinforcement which resulted to heinous massacre of 44 Special Action Force (SAF) commandos angered the netizens. The *Tribune* reported, " In his obsession to obtain the peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as a political trophy, President Aquino deliberately ignored the pleas from the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) for additional reinforcement to rescue trapped operatives from their dire position" (Manalo, 2015). Adding insult to the injury, the President was not around in the arrival honor ceremony for the fallen SAF men for he preferred instead to attend an opening program of a car factory in Sta. Rosa. Such cold-hearted and disrespectful gesture makes him a despicable (signified by the word "buwiset") leader. His presence in the ceremony could have assuaged the grief of the bereaved families (Manalo, 2015).

The myth that a new administration can augment the condition of the masses is again debunked in these memes. In addition, the myth that tragic events are beyond control and that "accidents" are natural and inevitable is negated here. For one, as the figure in the left shows, the President is in contact with someone (this is referring to Presidential Adviser on Peace Process, Teresita Deles) during the operation which means he could have asked for reinforcement for the policemen. As the *Tribune* reported, "'If the President could make a call so early in the morning to Deles so she could in turn call on the monitoring teams to call for a ceasefire, why can't he make a call to ask the Armed Forces to send reinforcement for the beleaguered SAF personnel?' the source asked.'Because he was advised by Deles not to do so. They were so obsessed with the peace agreement, they want to save the Bangsamoro Basic

Law as they believe it was the last piece for Aquino to earn the Nobel Peace Prize,' said the source" (Manalo, 2015). Hence, whereas the government says that what happened are accidental cases of "misencounter" and "misinformation," the truth is bared that the government is just "washing hands" on the matter which is a manifestation of his weak leadership.

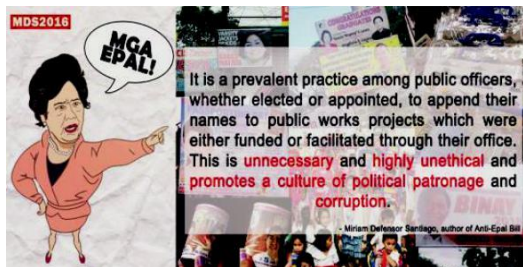**Fig. 9**: Epal Meme   **Fig. 10:** No Epal Meme

Source: www.google.com

The words "unnecessary" and "unethical" highlighted in red in the caption text spell out the incongruity and code violation in Figures 9 and 10. *Unnecessary* contradicts *necessary* as *unethical* contradicts *ethical*. These contradictions expose the illogical, thus incongruous behavior of – as the caption reads – "public officers, whether elected or appointed, to append their names to public works projects which were either funded or facilitated through their office."

The image of Senator Santiago (Figure 9) who seemed to be photographed downwards and pointing to her target upwards is connotative of the gap between her and her targets. Studying the direction of her fingers pointing upwards, one can infer that she is addressing somebody who occupies an elevated position. The images which are the posters of projects named after public officials superimposed by the caption text illuminate the identity of her targets; these are the public officials who append their names on the projects. Their elevated position symbolizes their power and authority and the image of the senator in an abased position symbolizes the powerless masses or petitioners.

Despite the abased position of Senator Santiago in the image, the caption text "MGA EPAL" serves ideological function. "Epal" has an intertextual reference to House Bill 4929 which seeks to ban naming government projects after government officials. Such bill is also similar to "Anti-epal Bill which Sen. Santiago filed before. The caption text then deconstructs the myth that it is just natural for government officials to publicize their names for projects they facilitated. According to the Senator, it is unnecessary and highly unethical (hence unnatural) as it "promotes the culture of political patronage and corruption.

In congruence with the caption text "EPAL" in both memes, Kabataan Party-list Rep. Terry Ridon observes, "In truth, this system of political advertising is a manifestation of our nation's deeply troubling patronage politics and the proliferation of political dynasties in the country. Playing with the concepts of mass communications, these traditional politicians take advantage of the power and funds under their discretion to boost name recall and face recognition, two key factors important during elections" (Viray, 2014). As the caption text on the left shows, such practice of naming government projects after government officials is "prevalent" which makes it appear as normal or natural. But as the memes show, such is not natural; instead, it is "epal" as Santiago calls it and unethical as suggested by the caption text on the right, "NO NIGGA. NO EPAL." After all, as these projects are funded by the government, it follows that the people (through their taxes) fund such projects. Hence, naming these projects after public officials is indeed unethical and a violation of a code.

Fig. 11: Hell Meme   **Fig. 12:** Anyare Meme

Source:

www. facebook.com

One is shocked to read the words "*Congratulations*" and "*HELL*" (Figure 11) making these incongruous, thus funny. Such humor is a form of sarcasm as represented also by the sarcastic smile of Sen. Santiago in the image. Similarly, "ANYARE?!?" signals that something illogical is happening. Whereas Risa Hontiveros is more qualified to hold a government position than Nancy Binay, Hontiveros lagged behind in the SWS survey.

Such humorous and incongruous signifiers connote the distorted portrait of Philippine politics. As what Pertierra (2012) observes, "The political elite rules uninterruptedly, winning elections repeatedly." President Benigno Aquino III is a former President's son as President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is also a former President's daughter. And here comes Nancy Binay, the daughter of Vice-President Jejomar Binay, who was elected Senator despite her lack of training and experience in the government service.

Throughout the history of Philippine politics, this is the trend. It would appear then that if one has relatives in the government service, it would seem normal too that he or she can also hold a position in the government. Or if a candidate is rich, he or she can be a good leader. But as the word "ANYARE?!?" suggests, such belief is wrong. The double question marks and the exclamation point are loaded with emotions. It would seem that the creator of the meme tells the readers, "You are not in the right track of thinking!" This is the reason why voters can also be blamed for the problems in the country.

In her speech at the Far Eastern University Central Student Organization lecture series on 22 November 2012, Sen. Miriam Santiago stresses that vote-buying among rich candidates is the worst problem in Philippine elections. Uneducated masses sell their votes and rich candidates gain popularity as they can afford expensive campaigns at an earlier time. She stressed that "our Constitution provides as a state policy that: 'The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunity for public service.'" However, the Senator continues, "Is there equal access to public service for the rich and the poor? Don't make me laugh." It follows then that as long as the country remains stricken with poverty, the myth that the rich and the political elite are the most qualified to hold government positions will always be a myth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contrasts and binary oppositions in both images and captions in the political internet memes portraying code violations are the humorous signifiers in the memes which are in accordance to the Incongruity Theory of Humor. This is also in accordance to what Saussure (in Chandler, 2005) postulates on the differential relationships between signs. He claims that meanings of signs can be decoded as they are differentiated from other signs. Binary oppositions signify undesirable qualities of politicians such as being selfish, apathetic, disrespectful, dishonest, hypocritical, and corrupt which are in stark contrast with (or a violation of) the righteous and moralistic slogan of the present administration, that is, Daang Matuwid. Humor in the memes is basically aggressive or subversive as it ridicules and satirizes representatives of power, the political elite. As seen, humor is basically elicited by the creators' attack of the target's (politicians) actions or behaviors which the people consider as illogical, abnormal, or incongruous. Thus, through the internet memes, the belief that a new administration can be a "messiah" who can save the masses from their present sorry condition is deconstructed. This is in accordance with what Barthes (1991) believes that popular culture (such as the new media) is a potent tool to "naturalize" or 'normalize" bourgeoisie ideology.

The findings also corroborate with the results of the previous studies (Chandler, 2013; Varona, n.d.; Pearce, n.d.) regarding the role of internet memes in transmitting ideological constructs and in challenging such dominant ideologies through humor. Due to their viral nature, internet memes indeed can be threatening to the political elite as they reveal the embarrassing and humiliating political realities which are masked by naturalized beliefs brought about by hypocritical political slogans of the government and deceiving politics of patronage that is prevalent in the Philippine setting. As what Luis Teodoro, a prominent commentator writes: "This is the Philippines, a stage where idiots pretending to be geniuses, murderers posing as beneficiaries of humanity, victimizers acting like victims, and villains being held up as heroes are daily spectacles that make finding out who's really what behind the masks the effort of a lifetime" (in Pertierra, 2012, p. 12).

As the analysis shows, humor in the internet memes exposes some political ideological constructs which are naturalized or normalized in the Philippine society. Through humor, such ideologies are unmasked and the public are brought to awareness of what is really behind seemingly normal or natural events in the Philippine political arena. This means that Filipino humor, apart from being a mere expression of fun and entertainment, has the potential to express dissent especially against some ills in the society. Filipino humor, then, serves serious functions, thus deserving of serious attention.

As the study focused only on the analysis of images and captions in the political memes, another study can be conducted on the effect of the political memes on the perception of the public of the government to confirm the ideological functions of the internet memes. Another study can also be conducted on the motivations of the meme creators in creating the memes. Such study can further illumine the relationship between popular culture and ideology. In connection, a similar study can be conducted on internet memes using different analytical approaches, e.g., functionalist approach to unravel "serious" motivations behind the humorous internet memes. Furthermore, as the present study explored Philippine political issues which are intertextually referred to in the selected memes, a more detailed study on the role of internet memes on specific political issues can be conducted. Such study can shed light on how the public responds to such political issues. Finally, as Filipinos are known for their sense of humor, a more comprehensive study on other Philippine humorous texts can be helpful in analyzing the role of humor in identity construction. As Berger (1993) puts it, "Rarely do social researchers analyze humor or try to determine what makes it such a dominating force in our lives. The types of jokes a person enjoys contribute significantly to the definition of that person as well as to the character of a given society."

REFERENCES

_____ (n.d.). *Semiotics: The theory behind media literacy*. Retrieved from http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/mjodonnell/cojo232/pdf/semiotics.pdf

_____   (2004).   *Urban   Dictionary*.   Retrieved   from http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=gago

Barthes, R. (1991). *Mythologies.* New York: Noonday Press.

Berger, A.A. (n.d.). Signs of humor: On the structure of laughter. Retrieved from culturestudies.pbworks.com/f/Semiotics+of+Humor+AAB.doc

Berger,   A.   A.   (1993).   *An   anatomy   of   Humor*.   Retrieved   from http://www.google.com.ph/books?hl=en&lr=&id=aZkRJJnc6BUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR 9&dq=Berger%27s+humor+categories&ots=i9p3gHGX6&sig=EmUo6XgcKBiSsX NYpC60KfJsMBk&redir esc=y#v=onepage&q=Berger's%20humor%20categories&f=false

Berger,   A.   A.   (2004).   *Semiotic   Analysis*.   Retrieved   from http://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upmbinaries/5171_Berger_Final_Pages_Ch apter_1.pdf

Chandler, R. C. (2013). Meme world syndrome: A critical discourse analysis of the first world problems   and   third   world   success   internet   memes.   Retrieved   from http://etd.fcla.edu/CF/CFE0004828/Chandler_Robert_C_3127154_MA.pdf

Chandler, D. (2005). Signs. In *Semiotics for Beginners* . Aberyswyth University, Retrieved from http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem01.html

Davison, P. (2012). The Language of Internet Memes. In *The Social Media Reader.* Mandiberg, M. ed. New York University. Retrieved from https://ia902603.us.archive.org/35/items/TheSocialMediaReader/Mandiberg-theSocialMediaReader-cc-by-sa-nc.pdf

Diola, C.(2015, Feb.3). Supreme Court affirms DAP unconstitutionality. Retrieved from http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/02/03/1419749/supreme-court-affirms- dap-unconstitutionality

Korff,   E.   (2014).   In   the   land   of   memes   and   emoticons.   Retrieved   from https://medium.com/@ericakorff/in-the-land-of-memes-and-emoticons-3113d17d8329

Kuipers, G. (2008) The sociology of humor. In *The Primer of Humor Research*, Raskin & Ruch (eds.). New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/6196205/The_Primer_of_Humor_Research_Edited_by_Victor_Raskin

Lynch, O. H. (2002) . Humorous communication: Finding a place for humor in communication research. Retrieved from cc.shu.edu.tw/~tyu/CTA.pdf

Magno, A. T. (2015, July 28). SONA 2015: Aquino recaps economic gains of 'Daang Matuwid.' Retrieved from http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2015/07/27/SONA-2015-Aquino-recaps-economic-gains-of-Daang-Matuwid.html

Mwetulundila, R. (2014). An analysis of rhetoric and humour in Dudley's political cartoons published in 2012. Retrieved from https://repository.unam.na/bitstream/handle/11070/779/mwetulundila2014.pdf?sequence=1

Pearce, K (n.d.) No Laughing matter humor as a means of dissent in the digital era: The case of authoritarian Azerbaijan. Retrieved from https://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/GWASHU_DEMO_22_1/B158221228502786/B158221228502786.pdf

Pertierra, R. (2012). *The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines*. Retrieved from http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/asia-media/09241.pdf

Robinson, A. (2011). An A to Z of Theory Roland Barthes's Mythologies: A Critical Theory of Myths. Retrieved from https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-barthes-2/

Stoddart, M.C.J. (2007*). Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power*. Retrieved from http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/bitstream/1808/5226/1/STARV28A9.pdf

Tiglao, R.D. (2015).'Daang Matuwid': PH's most wacko slogan ever — plagiarized from Islam? Retrieved from http://www.manilatimes.net/daang-matuwid-phs-most-wacko-slogan-ever-plagiarized-from-islam/205037/

Varona, K.Y. (n.d.) The role of internet memes in public discourse on the 2013 pork barrel case in the Philippines. Retrieved from http://asianmediacongress.org/varona.pdf

Yohannan, J. D. (n.d.). *A Treasury of Asian Literature*. New York: The New American Library.