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The logo for the International Institute of Social Studies, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

**Youth Council as *Saling-Pusa***  
*Part of the political arena, but not as legitimate players*

A Research Paper presented by:

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## List of Acronyms

KB	: <i>Kabataang Barangay</i>
LGU	: Local Government Unit
NYC	: National Youth Commission
PCYA	: Presidential Council for Youth Affairs
ROTC	: Reserve Officers Training Corps
SK	: <i>Sangguniang Kabataan</i>
YC	: Youth Council

## Glossary

<i>Barangay</i>	: District. Smallest administrative unit in the Philippines.
<i>Barangay</i> captain	: District chief. Highest elected official in the <i>barangay</i> /district.
<i>Katipunan ng Kabataan</i>	: Youth Federation. Registered youth residents in a district. They can be elected for the youth council and vote as well.
<i>Kabataang Barangay (KB)</i>	: District Youth. Youth council instituted by Ferdinand Marcos in 1975.
<i>Saling-pusa</i>	: Younger kids who tag along in a game with older kids. They are included in the game, but not as full-fledged players because they do not know the rules of the game.
<i>Sangguniang barangay</i>	: District. Smallest administrative unit in the Philippines.
<i>Sangguniang Kabataan (SK)</i>	: Youth Council instituted by Cory Aquino in 1991.

## Abstract

Children and youth participation have been institutionalized in Philippine policies, predating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's (UN CRC's) call of valuing children and youth participation in civic affairs. This research argues that even though children and youth have been highly regarded in Philippine policy and in practice – the inclusion is tokenistic and manipulated, as observed in my research on youth councils. I use a Filipino term, *saling-pusa*, to describe the youth council's position in the government. *Saling-pusa* is a title given to younger kids who tag along in a game with older kids. It is a symbolic position granted by the older ones to the young ones to give an impression of inclusion – so that the young ones will not be upset and cry. I support my argument by critically examining the various framing of youth and youth councils through policy-makers discourse in a historical perspective – from previous administration up to the present. Contradictions between policy and practice are illustrated by comparing policies with experiences of youth council members. In the end, a conjecture of the future of the youth council is made – and it seems that treating the youth council as a political *saling-pusa* will persist with the current administration.

## Keywords

Youth, Youth Councils, Policy, Philippines, *Sangguniang Kabataan*.

## Part One: Setting the context

### Chapter 1: Contextual background

*In this chapter, I introduce my main premise that the youth council is a political 'saling-pusa'. I give a brief background on the youth council and an overview of my paper. I also provide information about the relevance of my research, the approach that I used and my methodology.*

Oliver Tayo (2002) described his experience on youth participation in the Philippines as *saling-pusa* – younger kids who tag along in a game with older kids. They are included in the game, but not as full-fledged players because they do not know the rules of the game. This is done so as not to upset the young ones and to prevent them from crying. It is like being a player but not really part of the game (Tayo 2002). His description captured what I also observed in my research on youth councils: it seems that the youth councils are treated as a *saling-pusa* – part of the political arena, but not as legitimate players. They are included in the government in policy and practice but this inclusion is superficial, tokenistic, and has tendency to be manipulated by adult leaders.

#### **Youth councils: from past to present**

Since its establishment in 1975 by dictator President Marcos, the youth council has been mired in controversy, as he appointed his daughter Imee Marcos as the chairperson of the national youth council. From then on, the youth council faced various changes made by different administrations– from abolishment to re-establishment, from delays and resets in elections to term extensions. There has been a constant debate in Congress and Senate on whether it should be reformed or abolished. The main argument of those who are for abolishment is that it has been a school of corruption, breeding ground for political dynasties and a waste of government funds. Those who are pushing for reform see the value and potential of the youth council. They prefer to change the age qualification and make it higher to make them liable in entering contracts and in managing funds.

After a three-year suspension of youth councils and extensive debate in the Congress and Senate, President Noynoy Aquino signed the Youth Council Reform Act on January 2016, reinstating the councils through elections that were supposed to happen in October 2016. However, when Rodrigo Duterte was elected President on June 30, 2016, he postponed elections yet again until October 2017. A few people from the Congress already filed bills pushing again for the abolishment of the youth councils.

I argue that the youth and the youth council have been highly regarded in policy but are always subject to the current government's priorities and agenda. I observed that the youth are framed in a paternalist and homogenous way for nation-building purposes. Youth are seen by politicians as bearers of the future; it is necessary to safeguard them in order to keep them in check. Adult policy makers define what the youth should be in policies through a dominant discourse of youth as "becomings" (Qvortrup 2005), with patriotic and conservative undertones. I thus argue that Youth Councils are being treated as a political



*saling-pusa* – included in the government structure, but this inclusion is only symbolic and subject to older politicians’ agendas.

My research shows a historical perspective of the framing of youth and youth councils by different administrations and policy-makers, which is the dominant discourse. A historical perspective is important as Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 24) said that “... youth are not born, They are made by historical circumstances”. My research locates the youth council in the bigger political picture and its role in different administrations. Other studies on the youth council have evaluated the youth council based on indicators (such as number of legislations produced and projects that were implemented) that were handed down by policy makers based on how they wanted the youth council to operate. These works have evaluated the youth council as weak in performing functions (UNICEF 2007) corrupted (Ponce et al. 2013, BA Legal Management 4A 2015) and involved in nepotism (Velasco 2005), whereas I investigated the reasons why it was deemed as such by analyzing the framing of the youth council in policies historically and comparing it with the experiences of youth council members.

## **Structure of the paper**

The first part of the paper details how the youth were seen as a threat to the administration of Ferdinand Marcos. This perception of youth-as-threat led to the establishment of a national youth organization that has a youth council, for purposes of controlling the youth. I explain the beginnings of the youth organization and the youth council; and the reason why it was established – to develop the youth as ‘good’ citizens, away from activism and guerillas.

I develop my argument of youth council being a political *saling-pusa* by showing how different administrations framed the youth and the youth council – not as a legitimate player in the political arena and always subject to the current administration’s agenda. I detail how different administrations in the Philippines have used the youth and the youth council and manipulated them according to their priorities. I explain how different governments have treated the youth council as becomings and this puts the youth in an inferior position where the older generation can claim knowledge and make decisions for them.

To help build my argument, I rely on secondary data to show the framing of youth-as-becomings through the discourse of policy-makers and through government resource materials. I will then show the contradictions between policy and practice by incorporating the data I got from interviewing previous youth council members based on their experiences as youth council representatives.

I show that the youth council is subject to other policy-makers’ own agendas with quotes and anecdotes from previous youth council members, who shared their experiences of manipulation by adult officials. I illustrate the political space for the youth is not conducive for meaningful engagement. The discourse of youth-as-becomings (adult expectations of youth – what they should be and how they should serve that country) is the dominant discourse that is perpetuated by older politicians and policy-makers with little to no input from youth themselves.

By critically examining the framing of youth and youth councils in different Filipino administrations' policies and policy-makers' discourse as well as previous youth council members experiences of this framing and expectations from the government/policy-makers—I aim to highlight the tensions and contradictions between policy and practice regarding youth and the youth council to reveal the unfair framing and treatment of the youth. Mainly, I wanted to understand how these problematic framings of youth translate into policy and practice that—rather than creating avenues for the meaningful political participation of youth—effectively relegates youth councils to the position of political *salings-pusa*, particularly as experienced by previous youth council members.

### **Why does my paper matter**

This is especially significant now to contribute to youth studies literature in the Philippines, which is dominated by a structural functionalist tradition. This was pointed out by Gerry Lanuza (2004), a sociology professor in the Philippines. Structural functionalism, as articulated by Eisenstadt implies that age differences ‘serves as a category according to which various roles are allocated to various people; for the individual, the awareness of his own age becomes an important integrative element through its influence in his self-identification’ (Eisenstadt 1956: 28). I wish to contribute to Philippine youth studies with a research that moves away from a structural functionalism view because this approach is related to assumptions on supposed roles and capacities based on age. I veer away from assumptions on age and maturity – that social and mental maturity can be only reached in adulthood and that it is a natural and inevitable process (James et al. 1998). My approach is different because instead of accepting a view that children and youth are in a process of “development” and “maturity” that can be fully achieved once they reach adulthood, I show that children and youth are a social phenomena – it is socially constructed and relational.

Lanuza (2004) said that most large-scale studies on Filipino youth use a structural functionalist lens, which is evident in surveys done by the government. He said that this kind of analysis “provide empirical bases for state policing and surveillance and the reproduction of values of tradition-bound institutions, like the family, sectarian schools and religion, towards youth” (Lanuza 2004: 363). Structural functionalism is the dominant discourse in treating children and youth and it is evident in policies. It is impartial to children and youth because this approach would naturally see them as immature and in need of guidance – thus it puts the youth in an inferior position that is subject to adult control. My research moves away from this tradition as I explain that youth and the youth council are subjected to problematic framings and adult manipulations.

### **Using a youth studies lens in research**

In my research, I used a youth studies lens to show that youth is socially constructed (James, Jenks and Prout 1998, Ansell 2005, Qvortrup 2005, Hart 2008, Jones 2009). I exposed the concept of youth as a social construction that shows how historically, the older generations are in control of defining childhood and youth – how they should be and what is expected of them. The socially constructed definition of youth has a tendency to be passed

on from one generation to the other. It is important to explain that youth is a social construction to reveal that viewing children and youth as “naturally” immature and in need of adult guidance – as what is commonly assumed – is not a truth that should be blindly accepted.

I exposed how youth is relational (Durham 2000, Bourdieu 1977, Hart 2008, Jones 2009), which means that it involves interaction with other groups. In this research, I showed the youth’s relationship with older generations – and this relationship is unequal where youth is placed in an inferior position, subject to older people’s agenda. A relational view exposes the uneven power relations between adults and children/youth. It shows that the exercise of power by the older generations could result in forms of manipulations and a production of dominant discourse. As Mills (2003: 69) explained that the imbalance of power relations between groups of people – in this case, the young and the old – contributes to the production of knowledge.

I located the youth in historical contexts as inspired by Mannheim’s theory of generations (1952). He suggested that historical events have an impact on age generations and their worldview. I used a historical perspective, to show how the framing of youth and youth councils by policy-makers developed, remained and changed through time in relation to important events in Philippine history.

The concepts mentioned above helped me provide a relevant critique on the role of youth and youth councils in the Philippines because it is unfair to judge the youth council as it is and not relate it to historical circumstances as to why it was established. To analyze the youth and youth council as socially constructed and subject to older peoples’ (especially the government and policy-makers) agenda also helped me show the inferior position youth in the Philippines.

### **Positionality and reflexivity**

Initially, I had a hard time deciding on my positionality when I started my research on Philippine youth councils. There were ongoing debates on whether it should be abolished or reformed when I begun this project. I did not know where to place myself in the debates. Back home, I did not pay much attention to the Youth Council and I shared what some thought – that it was underperforming and a breeding ground for nepotism. I took up Children and Youth Studies at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) and I became familiar with literature on youth; it helped me take a stand.

I did my critical literature review on the Youth Council and showed how policies in the Philippines framed children as “becomings” and not “beings” (Qvortrup 2005) and that it hindered genuine youth participation.

Qvortup (2005) discussed in his book *Studies in Modern Childhood* the way children and childhood has been represented in the past decades. He discussed the way children are seen as a “private goods” and as “public goods”. Seeing children as “private goods” means children concerns are a private matter – such as those who advocate for child-free zones because they see children as disrupter in society and should be disciplined/kept away by

parents from society. On the other hand, children seen as “public goods” stem from the Ariesian vision where children are not seen as different from adults. There was no conceptual category separating children from adults. Children did the same tasks like the adults. Thus, “the Ariesian vision was one in which the children were a part of the public life, that is, they were not confined to the privacy of a family (Qvortup 2005 : 2). These categories helped shape current childhood studies – seeing children as “human beings” or “human becomings” (Qvortup 2005: 5) Treating children as “becomings” entail grooming them to be the future citizens of the world – thus doing every measure to protect them and to make sure they grow up as good citizens. On the other hand, seeing them as “beings” means letting them exist as they are with no expectations for what they can do or become in the future.<sup>1</sup>

In the Philippines, children and youth are seen as becomings. Older politicians and policy-makers contribute to the dominant discourse of treating youth as becomings. They frame the youth be ‘good’, educated, patriotic citizens to serve the country.

I became interested in showing a different side of the story. I pondered on why I had negative notions on the youth council. Most of studies on Philippine youth councils portrayed them as a problem – corrupted (Ponce et al. 2013, BA Legal Management 4A 2015), a breeding ground for nepotism (Velasco 2005) and weak in performing their tasks (UNICEF 2007). As mentioned earlier, these studies used a structural functionalist approach. With this research, I wanted to show how the negative view of the youth councils came about by historically analyzing the framing of youth and youth councils in the Philippines. I decided to compare these framings in policies with the experiences of previous youth council members whom I interviewed.

## **Gathering primary and secondary data on youth councils**

### *Methodology*

My research relied on content analysis of secondary data – bills and laws from the Senate and Congress and official statements of policy-makers in meetings/sessions. This is to provide the framing of youth and youth council using policy-makers’ discourse. It is important to analyze policies to understand how policy-makers frame and problematize issues and their proposed government solutions because these policies shape worldviews (Goodwin 2013: 168). I also used news from reliable online websites and written works on Philippine history to provide contextual background.

I complemented the analysis of secondary data with quotes and anecdotes from my interviews with previous youth council officers (chairpersons and council members). I interviewed 11 of them and they are from different youth council batches. There have been five *Sangguniang Kabataan* youth council batches (this excludes the *Kabataang Barangay* youth council established in 1975 from Marcos administration which was eventually abolished) and I was able to interview at least one member per batch. Please see table below:

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<sup>1</sup> from my previous paper (Critical Literature Review: Child Participation in Politics – Youth Council in the Philippines) for Children and Youth Studies Term 2 – 2016 at ISS, The Hague, Netherlands.

**Table 1. List of Youth Council interviewees**

Name	Position in the YC	Sex	Current Age	Age when he/she was in the YC	Member of YC for how long	YC Batch	Part of which government
1. Fernando Alejo	Chairperson	Male	43	18	5 years	1992-1996	Ramos
2. Michael Aquino	Chairperson	Male	41	17	5 years	1992-1996	Ramos
3. Antonio Bihasa	Council member	Male	35	15	5 years	1996-2001	Ramos/ Estrada
4. Ma. Nina Magpayo	Chairperson	Female	31	17	5 years	2002-2007	Arroyo
5. Jay Mark Chico	Chairperson	Male	31	17	5 years	2002-2007	Arroyo
6. Kevin Sanchez	Chairperson	Male	24	17	3 years	2007-2010	Arroyo/ Aquino
7. Judy Lee Garcia	Chairperson	Female	25	16	3 years	2007-2010	Arroyo/ Aquino
8. Erick Sua	Chairperson	Male	25	18	3 years	2007-2010	Arroyo/ Aquino
9. Rialyn Carrasco	Council member	Female	26	17	3 years	2007-2010	Arroyo/ Aquino
10. Richard Rufo	Council member	Male	24	16	3 years	2007-2010	Arroyo/ Aquino
11. Naz Eliseo Carcosia	Chairperson	Male	26	15	3 years	2010-2013	Aquino

The interviews with the previous youth council members coming from different batches helped me compare their experience with the policies and government framing of the youth / youth council. These helped me flesh out the tensions and contradictions in policy and practice to show the continued youth-as-becomings framing and the inferior position of the youth council in government, which is subject to adult manipulation.

## Part Two: Framing of the youth and the youth councils

### Chapter 2: Youth as a threat to be contained

*In this chapter, I discuss how the youth was seen as a threat by the Marcos' administration – thus, Marcos formed a national youth organization with a youth council to contain the threat and to control the youth to become “good” citizens.*

#### Seeing youth as a threat

*Pre-Marcos and Marcos Era*

Filipino youth have played an active role in shaping the country's history – leading social movements and campaigning for social change against injustice (Lanuza 2004, Tuano 1994, de Vera 1971, Acuna 1960). Starting from the 1890s when a group of young, middle-class men called the *Ilustrados* led the fight for nationalist independence from the 377 years of Spanish colonization in the country (Dano-Santiago 1972, Gomez et al. 1986). Fast forward to 1965 to 1972, when university students held massive rallies and strikes in Metro Manila demanding those who are in authority to give in to their requests. These requests were about national and international concerns, school administration affairs and reforms with the Catholic Church in the country (Agoncillo 1990: 571). We can infer that the Filipino youth can be catalysts of change and historically, they play an important part in shaping the situation of the country.

Youth was seen as a threat to those in power – a disturbance to the status quo. As Agoncillo and Guerrero described in their book (1977:555), during the late 1960s – 1970s, the country faced increasing socio-economic difficulties. This led to immense dissatisfaction among Filipinos, which led university students to do regular demonstrations and strikes as protest to the government. “The ‘parliament of the streets’, as the student demonstrations were called, was basically anti-government and generally speaking, negative in attitude” (Agoncillo and Guerrero 1977: 555). President Ferdinand Marcos used the student demonstrations, rallies from the laboring class and the threat of rebellion from the Communist Party as reasons to justify Martial law in September 1972 (ibid).

Martial law was declared to restore order in the country due to the frequency of demonstrations and strikes in the city. The legislative branch was abolished and was replaced by President Marcos' decrees. The military exercised great power with the president's directive. Curfews were strictly implemented and streets at night were nearly empty. Anyone accused of insurgency can be arrested without any warrant and be jailed.

#### Marcos' 'New Society'

*Propaganda and indoctrination*

During martial law, Ferdinand Marcos envisioned a new kind of Philippines with a focus on changing the values and behavior of Filipinos. According to Abueva, it was a transformation from an individualistic orientation to an inclusive one where valuing the

good of others and the whole nation is prioritized. Marcos had this vision not just for his administration but he wishes it to remain for the indefinite future (1979: 35). The government used *disiplina* (discipline) as a slogan to change the behavior of Filipinos. It has since been used in the New Society to “change Filipino political culture and behavior through a variety of ways: presidential decrees... flag, the national anthem, indoctrination, New Society songs, slogans... citizen campaigns, varied applications of force and coercive sanctions customary in democracies...” (Abueva 1979: 35).

### **Beginnings of the *Kabataang Barangay* Youth Council**

*Co-opting the youth to be “good” citizens*

I have explained how the youth was seen as a threat, capable of shaping history and changing the status quo. I briefly showed a general picture of how the youth was influential in the past and the political atmosphere during the Marcos administration. Now, I would focus more on the establishment of the youth council for purposes of controlling the youth, still in relation to Marcos’ vision of a ‘New Society’.

In 1975, Marcos made a presidential decree establishing the *Kabataang Barangay* or District Youth as loosely translated. This is the first time to have a space for the youth to be represented in the government. Every *barangay*/district (smallest administrative unit), had the *Kabataang Barangay* as the main youth organization composed of all residents who are less than 18 years old. They would choose a youth chairperson and six youth leaders to lead the District Youth. Every *Kabataang Barangay* youth council chairperson was tasked to head the Committee on Sports and Recreation. It is also mention in the decree that “the *barangay* captain (district chief) shall have general supervision over the affairs of the *barangay* youth organization (*Kabataang Barangay*)” (Marcos 1975). We can infer that the space given to the youth in governance is subject to adult agenda as it is said in the law that the district chief shall supervise the activities of the youth council. By also assigning the youth chairperson to head the Sports and Recreation Committee means implicitly making them focus on sports only and not on any other influential matters in governance.

Ferdinand Marcos’ daughter, Imee Marcos, became the national chairperson of the youth council by appointment – which garnered some controversy. But during that time, it was difficult to express such contestations, as it would be dealt with harshly. One college student, Archimedes Trajano who was 21 years old that time, questioned the appointment of Imee Marcos and her capacity to lead the youth. He did this in public when Imee Marcos addressed thousand of students in a public college. A few days after, his tortured and dead body was found on the streets of Manila, which was said to be done by Imee Marcos’ security (GMANews.TV 2006).

I was not able to interview anyone who was a part of the youth council during Marcos’ time, so I will rely on statements of Imee Marcos herself on the goals of the *Kabataang Barangay* youth council then. These statements are from the Technical Working Group session when the Youth Council Reform Act was being discussed on October 1, 2013. According to Imee Marcos, the aim of *Kabataang Barangay* (District Youth) was “citizen training, training to be good citizen of the republic” because the 1970’s was “age of

belligerent activism and student guerillas in every urban center” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 7-8).

The youth council members of the *Kabataang Barangay*, were subjected to indoctrination as we can deduce from Imee Marcos’ statements. According to her, “The bigger part of our budget entered training. *Ang training namin pinakamaikli na isang linggo— walang tulugan, walang kainan at talagang pabirapan hanggang matamnan ang buong bundok at palawakin ang kaalaman.* (The shortest duration of our training is one week – no sleeping, no eating and we faced hardships until we reached the top of the mountain to broaden our horizon” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 8). She said their training was nothing like academic trainings done in schools, it was a boot camp; “it’s really training by doing. It was experiential, you had to plant trees, you had to suffer, you have to go through dreadful food and hunger strikes, you had to go through all kinds of rituals that went deep into the nights...” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 21-22).

It becomes clear that the youth council was not built to give meaningful space for the youth to participate in governance. It was established to control the youth and to develop them to be “good” citizens, away from activism and guerillas. Durham (2000: 113) pointed out that the youth could be seen as political saboteurs by older people in power and that their “potential for political sabotage comes from incomplete subjugation to contexts and co-opters, and to their own power for action, response, and subversion in contexts of political definition”. The youth was seen as a threat to those in power and Marcos established a way to contain this threat. *Kabataang Barangay* was also made to distract the youth from other issues facing the country. As Leal (2010: 94) quoted Sarah White “incorporation, rather than exclusion is the best form of control”. The youth council was made to co-opt the youth to focus on sports and recreation instead of joining the leftist groups who were against the Marcos administration. The *Kabataang Barangay* was all part of Marcos’ agenda of instilling discipline to Filipinos in the New Society. The national youth organization and its youth council was established for ideological purposes, for nation-building purposes – as part of Marcos’ vision of a “New Society”.

### ***Kabataang Barangay – involved in nepotism***

*Start of the negative perception on youth councils*

I have showed above how the youth council has been mired in controversy from the start. In this part, I elaborate more on how the youth council has had a negative perception in the beginning as it has been involved in nepotism and corruption.

The *Kabataang Barangay*, with Imee Marcos as the national chairperson had autonomy in managing a yearly budget of 11 million pesos (209,000 euros in time of writing) as enabled by Ferdinand Marcos by virtue of Presidential Decree 1191 (Marcos 1977). They had the power of a corporation where they can enter contracts and free to acquire, purchase and dispose property. As Bueno (1998) said, this move gave Marcos’ critics more reason to condemn him as his daughter was the chairperson enjoying this great power.

We can see the continued role of the youth council to be used in Marcos’ political agenda. He manipulated it to build an empire with family and friends in position for him to



enjoy staying in power. As Abueva (1979: 48-49) have pointed out, “President Marcos has carefully nurtured his civilian political base by his control of the bureaucracy and local governments... By this direct control of their tenure, by restructuring local government boards and councils down to the *barangay*/district... the president has effectively strengthened his nationwide power base, which also serves to legitimize his rule...”.

## Chapter 3: Youth Council as a part of decentralization

*In this chapter, I explain how the youth council was part of the Cory Aquino administration's agenda of decentralizing government power. I discuss the government's attempt to provide youth a meaningful space in the local government.*

Ferdinand Marcos, after 21 years of being president, was eventually overthrown into power and was replaced by Cory Aquino in 1986. It was a result of EDSA I People Power Revolution, a series of mass demonstration against violence of the Marcos regime and electoral fraud.

Cory Aquino was the spouse of Ninoy Aquino. Ninoy, one of Ferdinand Marcos' political enemies, was assassinated in 1983. Cory received political limelight after Ninoy's death and ran for presidency against Marcos. After the said People Power revolution, which forced Marcos to flee the country, Cory Aquino then became president.

Cory Aquino's administration focused on bringing back democracy to the country after years of authoritarian rule. She re-established the Congress to make laws again, decentralizing the power of the president. (Montinola 1999) She focused on bringing justice to human rights violations in Marcos' regime, as well as reclaiming the government money that was used by the Marcos family. This was the political climate in Cory Aquino's administration.

### How were the youth and youth council treated?

*Kabataang Barangay* (KB) was abolished in Cory Aquino's time. In June 1986, the government commissioned a study on the *Kabataang Barangay*. The study came up with the following recommendations: abolish the KB, create a National Youth Commission, establish a National Youth Assembly and set up genuine representation in government (Bernardo et al. 1997).

A national youth consultation was held in February 1987 as a response to the recommendations of the KB study. It was a huge conference attended by 400 youth leaders from all over the Philippines. The conference resulted in coming up with 42 resolutions concerning access to quality education, human rights and land reform. It was proposed in the conference to have a National Youth Commission (NYC) and National Youth Assembly (Valte et al. 2002). These resolutions were submitted for President Aquino's consideration (Bernardo et al. 1997). The Aquino government formed the Presidential Council for Youth Affairs (PCYA) instead of the proposed NYC. The PCYA was far from what the Filipino youth envisioned for the NYC as it had limited powers and only concerned with coordination with youth groups (Bernardo et al. 1997).

During Cory Aquino's administration, the *Kabataang Barangay* – which was one of Marcos' ways of controlling the youth – was abolished and it took some time to replace it with a system for meaningful youth representation in the government. A new youth council

was conceptualized, as enacted in the 1991 Local Government Code, which I will discuss below.

### **Institutionalization of a new youth council**

*An attempt to give the youth a meaningful space in government*

I have mentioned that Cory Aquino focused on democracy and decentralizing power in the government during her time as president. She enacted the 1991 Local Government Code, which dispersed national government powers to local government units or LGUs (Philippine Republic 1991). In this law, a new youth council was born, called the *Sangguniang Kabataan (SK)* loosely translated as Youth Council.

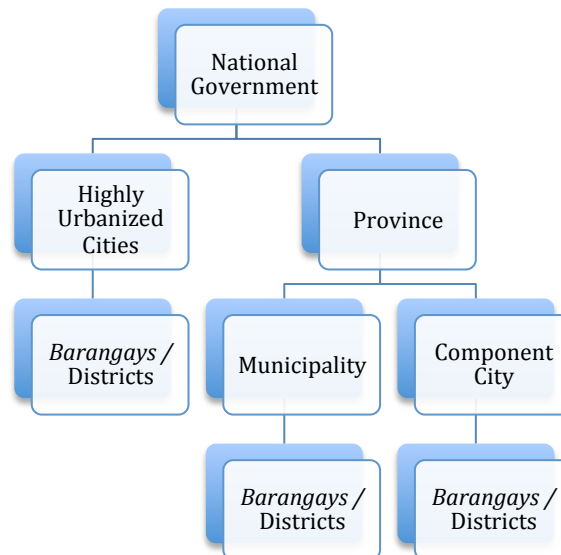
### **How does the SK Youth Council work?**

*Structure and Tasks*

It is important to situate the Youth Council in the Philippines – from a general picture of the structure and how it spans from local to the national level.

General picture – the Youth Council is part of local government units (LGUs) through the *barangays*/districts. LGUs were established to decentralize the function of the national government in the community. Local governments have autonomy to carry out their functions of delivering basic services such as health, social welfare, agriculture, public works and natural resources. LGUs have three levels: provincial, municipal/city and *barangay*/district (National Youth Commission n.d:130). As of June 30, 2016, there are 81 provinces, 144 cities, 1,490 municipalities and 42,036 *barangays*/districts in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). Please refer to Figure 1 below for the structure.

**Figure 1. Structure of Philippine Government from National to Local Level (National Youth Commission n.d.). Italics by the author.**



Local level - the Youth Council can be situated in the *barangay*/district, the smallest administrative unit of the Philippines. Per district, there is a youth council, which has one chairperson and seven youth council members. They don't function separately and is a part of the bigger district structure. Please see Figure 2 below. It is important to note that the youth council is put into position by the *Katipunan ng Kabataan* (Youth Federation). They are composed of residents of the district aged 15-17 years old who register themselves to be part of the Youth Federation. These members have the right to vote and to be voted in the Youth Council.

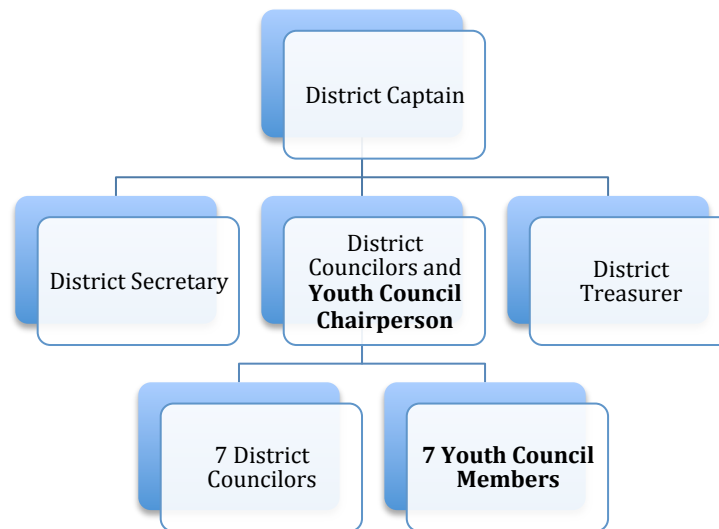


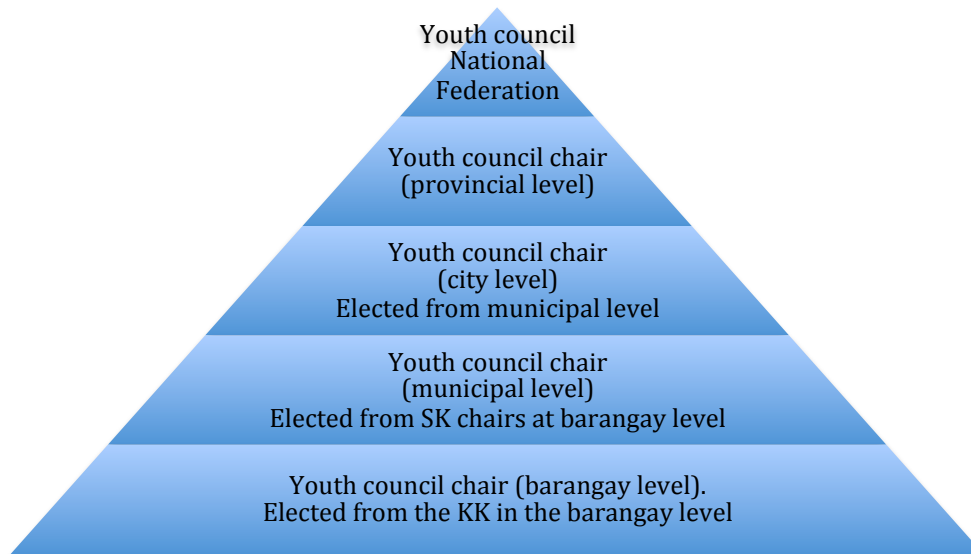
Figure 2. Structure of District Government (National Youth Commission n.d.). Highlights by the author.

Prior to the reform, the Youth Council are composed of 15-17 year old members of the Youth Federation who were voted to implement projects and create legislations for the youth. It is composed of one chairperson (who serves as the official representative of the youth in the district with voting powers in the bigger district structure).

Aside from making legislations and implementing program “to enhance the social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical development” of the youth (Philippine Republic 1991), they are tasked to hold fund-raising activities and create committees to carry out projects. They need to consult and coordinate with youth organizations and national agencies for policy formulation and program implementation. James (1993), James and Prout (1997) and Jenks (1982) (as cited in Cheney, 2007: 14) articulate that the way childhood has been conceptualized is directed by the ideas of adult’s expectations of the child’s role in the future. Thus, policies show older people’s projection of what they want for the youth – to be “enhanced” comprehensively in social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical aspects of life. Ennew and Milne (1989: 3) also mentioned that policies were devised to secure a nation’s future and survival through its children, due to the rise of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – thus, making sure that children and youth are physically and mentally well-rounded so can serve the country for the sake of its stability.

The youth council chairperson shall “serve as an ex officio member of the *sangguniang barangay* (district government) upon his assumption to office. As such, he shall exercise the same powers, discharge the same duties and functions, and enjoy the same privileges as the regular *sangguniang barangay* (district government) members, and shall be the chairman of the committee on youth and sports development in the said sanggunian.” (Philippine Republic 1991)

National level - as already mentioned, youth councils can be found per district as headed by the youth council chairperson. Then it also goes up on a municipal, city, provincial and national level as represented by a youth council representative to be voted upon. Please see Figure 3 below for the structure:



**Figure 3. Youth Council Structure from National to Local Level (UNICEF 2007).**

In Cory Aquino’s administration, *Kabataang Barangay* youth council was abolished and was replaced by the *Sangguniang Kabataan* youth council. The new youth council was envisioned to provide genuine youth representation in the government. A new one was institutionalized because the old youth council one had a bad reputation such as involvement in nepotism and corruption.

## Chapter 4: Youth framed as homogenous becomings for the nation

*In this chapter, I discuss the framing of youth as homogenous becomings for nation-building through the establishment of the National Youth Commission during Fidel Ramos' presidency.*

In general, the Fidel Ramos administration focused on political stability, peace with insurgents and economic growth for the whole country. Youth fits in the administration's agenda on economic growth by framing them as human capital. This is in line with James (1993: 90) when she said that "a child's greatest significance is her future: that adult whom the child will become. In this configuration, "the child" becomes a homogenous social category unqualified by other markers of identity such as class, gender, and ethnicity". From what I gathered, the treatment of youth-as-becomings remains the dominant discourse in the Philippines. Youth is characterized as a homogenous sector – regardless of class, gender and sex – that should be developed into well-rounded citizens for the country.

### **Establishment of the National Youth Commission**

*Framing the youth as homogenous "becomings" for nation-building*

The National Youth Commission (NYC) was established on June 1995 when Republic Act 8044 – Youth in Nation-Building was enacted. NYC is the arm of the government in charge of policies concerning the youth. Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 24) mentioned how youth can be used to achieve national aspirations of the state.

In the Philippines, youth are treated as "becomings" and what they can do for the Philippines for the future. The Youth in Nation-Building Act treats the youth as a homogenous category – defining them only on the basis of age, which is age 15-30. The law states that youth is a "critical period in a person's growth and development from the onset of adolescence towards the peak of mature, self-reliant and responsible adulthood..." (National Youth Commission 1995). Christiansen, Utas and Vigh (2006) discussed different discourses on children and youth. I will focus on one discourse – seeing children and youth as products of social construction. They discussed the origins of the dichotomy between children and adults, which was based on age-based hierarchy and supported by scientific data (Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development and Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development). This continued to be the dominant discourse in treating children and youth – as a process of "development" and "maturity" that can be fully achieved once they reach adulthood. This discourse constructed by older generations especially politicians and policy-makers is the dominant way of thinking in the Philippines.

I agree with Velasco (2005: 93) when she mentioned that the state discourse in the Philippines is "heavily imbued with conservative, sectarian values". One of NYC's values includes "God-centeredness" (National Youth Commission n.d.). The Youth in Nation-Building Act disregards differences in faith and religion as one of the law's principles involves "inculcation in the youth of patriotism, nationalism and other basic desirable values to infuse them faith in the Creator..." (National Youth Commission 1995). The Philippines is 90% Christian and 10% Muslim and other religious groups – the law homogenizes that all

of the youth believe in “the Creator”, showing exclusion of those who have different religious beliefs.

Youth are framed to be productive citizens of the country in an economic sense as it is stated in the Act: (I highlighted some parts for emphasis)

“Encouragement of youth involvement in character-building and development activities for **civic efficiency**, stewardship of natural resources, **agricultural and industrial productivity**, and **an understanding of world economic commitments on tariffs and trade** and participation in structures for policy making and program implementation to reduce the incidence of poverty and **accelerate socioeconomic development**” (National Youth Commission 1995).

Youth are treated as becomings that needed to be developed as human capital to ensure the continued economic productivity of the Philippines. I pointed out earlier that Ennew and Milne (1989: 3) recognized that policies were devised for ensuring a nation’s survival through its children. The next generation should be healthy, in mind and body: physically fit, useful for the economy and for maintaining the continuity of national culture...” Cheney (2007: 14) also stressed this point when she said that policies reflect adult’s projection of their expectations for the youth. This is echoed in Philippine policies where the state attempts to comprehensively develop children and youth in different aspects of life such as social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical – all for the benefit of the country.

## Chapter 5: Youth Council as Political *Saling-Pusa*

### *Experiences of previous youth council members*

*In this chapter, I put an emphasis on the relational aspect of youth with the older generation to show how the youth council is manipulated and placed in an inferior position.*

#### **Youth as relational**

*Adults to be respected, youth to be respectful*

I interviewed a previous youth council chairperson (he was 17 at that time) who shared that he was called *aktibista* or an activist. He was named as such because he clashed with older members of the district government and fought over what he knew was right. He brought around with him the by-laws of the Local Government Code in meetings so that he had proof when the older ones disagreed with him. He said he received comments like he was a know-it-all. He said the adults did not want him around meetings.<sup>2</sup> (Chico 2016, personal interview)

In the Philippines, the young ones are expected to be respectful and follow what the adults say. This is typical in our culture where respect for elders is highly regarded because they have greater life experiences. As Agoncillo stated in his book, “respect for the elders is one Filipino trait that has remained in the book of unwritten laws. The elders believe, and demand, that they be obeyed – right or wrong.” (1990: 7-8). Bessell (2009: 305, 313) shared the same opinion and said that in the Philippines, adults expect children to be respectful, which puts children in a submissive position – and these are embedded in institutions. When young ones are assertive, this is seen as disrespectful. This kind of culture hinders meaningful youth participation because adults do not see the youth as equals. Golombek (2002: 8-9) said that cultural norms that support hierarchical relationships between the old and the young hinder youth participation. The older generation demands submissiveness from the youth. This reflects the relational aspect of youth that it is subject to power relations – putting the youth in an inferior position.

#### **Inferior position of the youth council in the government**

I explained earlier how the youth council is situated in the local government structure, which is a part of the barangay/district – the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines. My interviewees shared that the structure of the youth council is hierarchical and always at the mercy of the district chief. One interviewee said that the district chief meddled in the affairs of the youth council because he is “the father of the community”<sup>3</sup> (Alejo 2016, personal interview). This shows how the political space is gendered (Celis et al. 2013) – also the language used in policies is gendered/ not gender sensitive (chairman instead of chairperson). Men dominate politics and the way it works is paternalistic – as a “father of the community”, it is his duty to care for the youth council for their own good. He shared that

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<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with J. Chico on his youth council experience, at Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines, 28 July 2016

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with F. Alejo on his youth council experience, at Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines 27 July 2016



there are no equal rights in the local government among the older leaders and the youth council. The older leaders dominated decisions on youth council matters because after the youth council discussed and planned activities among themselves, the youth council chairperson then forwarded the proposal to the *Sangguniang Barangay* (district government) where they voted upon it in a formal session. This formal session was adult-dominated where nine votes would be cast and only one of the nine votes came from the youth (as represented by the youth council chairperson); the rest are adults. This set-up hindered effective youth participation because youth were placed in an inferior position in the government hierarchy – there was no equity in the decision-making process. Rajani (2001: 3) pointed out that it is necessary to ensure that “there is a level playing field for participation, through attention to the values and rules for interaction, including language(s) used, seating arrangements and facilitation” to enhance youth participation. The location of the youth council in the Philippine local government is not conducive for meaningful youth participation because of its top-down structure.

The hierarchy is reinforced not only in the position of youth council in the district government but also within structure of the youth council itself. First, only the chairperson represented the whole youth council in formal sessions of the district government. Second, all of them got benefits such as scholarships and health insurance but only the chairperson received a monthly salary and the other seven youth council members did not. Among the 7 youth council members, only two had specified tasks as treasurer and secretary. Other members had no specific responsibilities. The difference in responsibilities might be a factor for some members to not actively participate as there was no equality in decision-making and benefits received. This might have implied to the other youth council members that only the highest position is valuable.

One interviewee questioned the task of the youth council as legislators at such a young age. He said “you can make ordinances but you can’t even watch rated-18 movies”<sup>4</sup> (Aquino 2016, personal interview). This came up after I asked if he agreed with raising the age of the youth council. It seemed that he implied that reaching the legal age is a determining factor in handling certain tasks. He found it amusing that young ones are allowed to write legislations but cannot even watch rated-18 films. For me, he indirectly said that only adults of legal age should be writing legislations and that some tasks are “meant” for adults. This kind of worldview makes the dichotomy between the young ones and the adults greater – reinforcing the inferior position of the youth.

All of my interviewees (youth council members and policy-makers) agreed that it was necessary to raise the age of the elected officials in the youth council. The youth council reform law raised the age of those who can be elected from 15-17 to 18-24 years old. All of them said that 18-24 years old are more mature and they can make reasonable decisions. They believed that 15-17 years old can be easily manipulated by adults as compared to older ones. This highlights how the structural functionalist view is deeply ingrained in the Philippines – most assume that it is “natural” for older ones to be mature, responsible and rational while the young ones are “still in the process” of this “development”.

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<sup>4</sup> Personal interview with M. Aquino on his youth council experience, at Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines 29 July 2016

My interviewees agreed that it is necessary to raise the age range at least to 18 years old because it is the legal age. In that way, future youth council members can sign contracts and would no longer rely on the district chief. Based on their experience, they had a hard time implementing their projects because they were highly dependent on the decision of the *barangay* chairman (district chief) because he is the main approver of projects and the one who would be signatory of checks (because they are not legally allowed yet). If the district chief doesn't agree on their projects, their projects would not materialize. This shows that the youth council did not have power over decision-making and was highly dependent on adults (district chief) because they are not of legal age. This implies that one needs to reach the legal age (which is 18 in the Philippines) to be able to exercise political power in decision-making. The young age of previous youth council members was considered a hindrance in doing their tasks. This kind of thinking does not create an encouraging atmosphere for youth, especially those who are below 18, to get involved in politics simply because their age becomes a hindrance to perform.

### **Adult manipulation in the youth council**

#### *Politicizing the youth council*

One youth council chairperson ran for a higher position because he wanted to be the president for the youth in the municipal level. He lost because according to him, it was highly politicized. Some elected community leaders got involved and bribed the youth council in other communities to vote for whom the elected leaders wanted to win. One of the bribing techniques was called “kidnapping” – where the adult leaders gathered the voters and took them away for a tour and they gave them gifts. They toured them around all day so they can secure their votes and the other competing candidates would not be able to campaign anymore. The person who eventually won was an ally of the current mayor. According to him, adults usually meddle with youth council concerns especially during elections because these older politicians want an ally to be in the position. <sup>5</sup> (Sanchez 2016, personal interview).

It is stated in the law that ten percent (10%) of the district government's general fund shall be set aside for the youth council. According to previous youth council members, they often experienced problems with project implementation because they had a hard time getting fund approval from the adults.

All of my interviewees said they did not have control of the funds and that the 10% fund came with the district chief's discretion. One experienced problems in project implementation because the district government did not have funds ready for spending. Some received their funds only at the end of the year, usually in December. They often hit a dead end because it was impossible to do a project without assurance of funding. Supposedly, the district government should assist the youth council but in reality they controlled them. One said that the 10% fund came from the district government funds, which differed per month, depending on the revenue from taxes. There were no clear

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<sup>5</sup> Personal interview with K. Sanchez on his youth council experience, at Quezon City, Philippines 25 July 2016

guidelines in the release of the funds so some youth councils got their money only at the end of the year.

One said that because he was not an ally of the district chief, he did not get along well with him and the treasurer. They did not help him with the bureaucratic processes so he had a hard time with project implementation, as he did not know the procedure.

It is important to have an environment where the youth council are provided proper guidance and at the same time autonomy to do their tasks. I agree with Besell (2009: 312) when she articulated the problematic conceptualizations of children when they are treated as both passive and active actors – they are treated as beings that lack competence but at the same time they are romanticized as beings readily equipped to assume responsibility without proper guidance. Hart (as cited in Matthews et al., 1999: 137) also said that it is “unrealistic to expect them (children) to become responsible, participating adults at the age of 16, 18 or 21 without prior exposure to skills and responsibilities involved.” Active and effective youth participation does not happen overnight (Rajani 2001: 19), there should be venues for youth engagement early on in life.

## Chapter 6: Youth council in the limelight – to abolish or to reform?

*In this chapter, I briefly explain the sudden limelight given to the youth council – because there was ‘evidence’ that the youth council was underperforming. The youth council fitted well in the Aquino administration’s anti-corruption campaign thus, explaining the momentum of debates in the Congress on whether to reform or abolish the youth council.*

*I put emphasis on policy makers’ discourse on youth in this chapter to support my argument that youth council is given attention to but the framing is problematic – it reinforces age-based discrimination. The discourse is not about meaningful youth participation but instead incorporating the youth council according to their agenda.*

Noynoy Aquino won the 2010 presidential elections under the slogan *Daang Matuwid* (Straight Path) which basically assured a corruption-free government. He is the son of ex-president Cory Aquino. Sisante (2010) said that his popularity is due to the martyrdom of his father during the Marcos dictatorship and his mother’s commitment to democracy. His anti-corruption agenda seemed to be attractive to most Filipinos, especially after having two consecutive presidents (Estrada and Arroyo) who were involved in corruption and faced impeachment charges from the Congress.

Alleged corruption in the Youth Council was exposed during Noynoy Aquino’s time. In April 2010, the Youth Council National Federation President, Jane Cajes, was accused by the Office of the Ombudsman-Visayas of misusing funds, entering into no-bid contracts and failing to present financial statements for an environmental project amounting to 10 million pesos or 186,000 euros (Punongbayan 2010). This put the Youth Council in the spotlight which prompted policy-makers to fix the Youth Council.

A lot of bills on the Youth Council were filed in the House of Representatives and the Senate during Noynoy’s administration, as compared to the previous administration. See table below:

**Table 2. House bills and resolutions on the Youth Councils**

Administration	Congress Period	Number of bills and resolutions filed
Aquino	16 <sup>th</sup> – 2013-2016	31
Aquino	15 <sup>th</sup> – 2010-2013	48
Arroyo	14 <sup>th</sup> – 2007-2010	1
Arroyo	13 <sup>th</sup> – 2004-2007	2

Policy-makers often cited UNICEF’s (2007) study on the Youth Council to support their bills and resolutions – whether it was for abolishment or for reform. UNICEF-Manila was asked by the Philippine government to conduct a systematic and nationwide assessment of the Youth Council’s effectiveness because there was no comprehensive and empirical study on the Youth Council during that time (UNICEF 2007: 16-17). Key finding is that the

Youth Council's "performance for the past ten years has been generally weak... in terms of coming up with legislations, promoting the development of young people..." (UNICEF 2007: 14). The study also mentioned positive qualities of the Youth Council such as it has "tremendous potential to develop the next generation of leaders" (UNICEF 2007: 15).

Indeed, it can be stated the UNICEF study was crucial because it provided an empirical data on the youth council. It was the basis of policy-makers to push for abolish or reform. They used the study according to their need – those who were for abolishment focused on the key finding that the Youth Council's performance was weak for the past ten years. Those who were for reform chose to focus on the notable strengths of the Youth Council.

### **Reform won... but where is youth participation?**

*A look into policy-makers' discourse in crafting the Youth Council Reform Act*

In this part, I expose policy makers' discourse on youth to show how they place the youth in an inferior position in the government. The arguments of policy-makers discriminate the youth based on their age – implying that politics are for adults. This reinforces the dichotomy between the young ones and the older generation.

Policy-makers opted to reform the youth council because in their opinion, Philippines does well in providing youth a space in governance, as compared to other countries. Below are actual quotes with my highlight for emphasis:

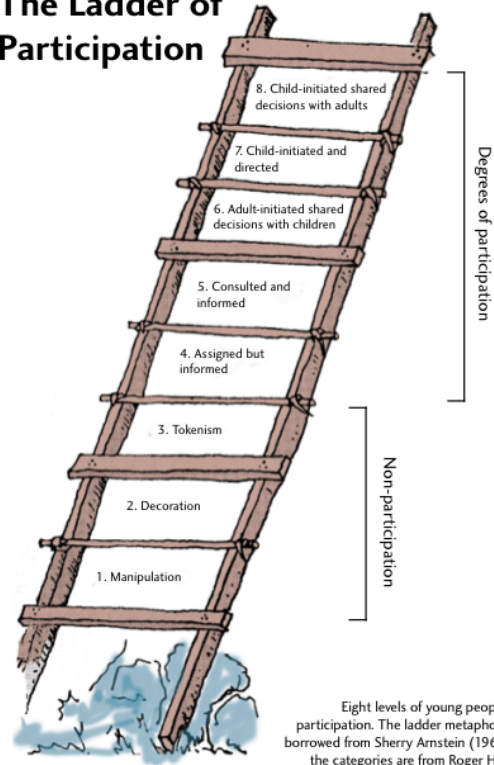
Mayor Herbert Bautista: "*Bihira sa kabit na anong bansa na mayroong youth participation in nation-building. Japan, may NYC; Singapore, may NYC pero doon lang sa national level 'yan. Dito, barangay (district) level and policymaking ito...* (It is unusual for other countries to have youth-participation in nation-building. Japan has National Youth Commission; Singapore also has but only in the national level. **Here, we have until the district level and it includes policy making.**" (Senate of the Philippines 2013a: 58).

Mr. Flores: "And here we are so fortunate, a lot of other countries would go to the National Youth Commission, would really inquire and **they see the SK as a best practice. Surprisingly, even though we see it as hell, some other countries when they visit us, they see it as heaven for youth participation...**" (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 79).

Mr Bombon: **“It’s really a model of youth representation.** It’s not—because there are levels of youth participation depending on the model of youth development. **We’re really at Level 5 already wherein the decision-makers are young people. Even if it is just one vote, it’s young people who have that decision. They have that one vote.”** (Senate of the Philippines 2013c: 96).

Policy-makers used Roger Hart’s (1992) Ladder of Participation to measure the level of youth participation in the Philippines. The ladder includes eight level of young people’s participation. The first three are considered as non-participation: 1. Manipulation, 2. Decoration and 3. Tokenism. The five higher levels are varying degrees of participation namely: 4. Assigned but informed, 5. Consulted and informed, 6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children, 7. Child-initiated and directed and 8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults.

## The Ladder of Participation



**Figure 4. Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation (WhyDev.org 2013).**

For policy-makers, Philippines ranks high in youth participation because policies allowed the youth to make decisions – but as I have shown earlier, the experiences of previous youth council members say otherwise. The adults, especially the district chiefs, are the ones who make final decisions when it comes to Youth Council matters. It is clear that the space for the youth is more in line with the first three rungs, which implies that the youth council is a manipulated and tokenistic space.

I agree with some authors that critique the use of Hart’s Ladder of Participation. As mentioned in Kellet and Montgomery’s (2009:45) work on children’s participation – “Reddy and Ratna (2002) criticize the implicitly sequential nature of the model. John (1996) asserts that Hart’s ladder is a bestowing of rights to the powerless and passive child by the powerful adult, an outdated model of rights”. Franks (2011: 17) also critiqued the hierarchical nature of the ladder which naturally pushes children to reach the top level with a lack of knowledge on the needs of children. Policy-makers’ usage of Hart’s Ladder of Participation contribute in perpetuating the relational aspect of youth – that adults determine what is known about the youth. Older politicians claimed that the youth are able to engage meaningfully in the government – and their claim contained little to no input from youth themselves.

## Making the age range higher:

It is important to mention that age was a big discussion in crafting the Youth Council Reform Act. Previously, the age bracket to be a Youth Council member was 15-21 years old then it was changed to 15-17 years old in 2002. Policy-makers saw this change of making the youth council younger as a major problem that caused the ‘weak’ performance of the youth councils. Below I show the three main arguments of policy-makers to rationalize the necessity of changing the age from 15-17 to 18 and above.

### *Youth should be in school, not politics*

Policy-makers believe that youth – aged 15-17 should not be involved in politics and they should focus on studying instead. They implied that politics is not a place for young ones, and their young age caused problems in the local government because they missed meetings/sessions as they were in school. Below are actual quotes with my highlight for emphasis:

Senator Bongbong Marcos: “But I think this highlights the problems that the whole organization of SK has and then in what it’s trying to do. The low figure actually makes sense simply because **kids of that age—15 to 17—are in school, they’re doing other things. They simply are not involved in politics.** In fact, one of the problems is that even after they are elected, they still have to attend to things like school... These are exactly the problems that we need to address when it comes to the business of reforming and reorganizing the *sangguniang kabataan*.” (Senate of the Philippines 2013a: 23).

Senator Bongbong Marcos: “Because my view is that, of course, there are those systemic problems that the **kids are either studying or doing the SK; they cannot do both.** As young people, as students, their **first priority really is going to be to go to school.**” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 56).

Mr. Flores: “...College students at 18 and have more leeway with their time compared to high school. And even Department of Education really says, “No, they should really be in school.” And we agree, **they should focus on their academics at the age of 15 to 17** but if we **increase it to 18 to 24, 25**, whichever is the case, we feel **it’s going to minimize or limit the number of absences.** And which is why we’re also really proposing for a youth rep because if we have our youth rep that can have a fulltime job as a youth rep, then you’ll know that that person will have focus.” (Senate of the Philippines 2013d: 62-63).

Mr. Dolor: “I think the reason why we are trying to increase the age of officers is one, because of the legal responsibility. And another the **perennial problem of absences of SK officers.**” (Senate of the Philippines 2013d: 62).

Senator Bongbong Marcos: “*Kaya nangyayari iyon ay dahil sa age range, hindi naman dahil sa structure kaya hindi sila maka-attend dahil pumapasok nga, nag-aaral* (**Absences of the youth officers happen because of the age range, not because of the structure – they go to school that’s why they miss government meetings**)” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 75).

Jones (2009: 88) said that policy-makers use measurements of life stages because it is convenient for them but this can form an ideology of life course – thus, in the Philippines, it can perpetuate constricting the youth to category that they should be in school, and not be involved in politics. It is in support with Ennew and Milne (1989: 8) when they said that “cultures determine the different ways they [children] and the things they are supposed to do... in our world, children are separated from adults: they go to school rather than work; they are not expected to take on responsibility...”.

Ansell (2005:5) and Boyden (as cited in Hart 2008: x) mentioned the tendency worldwide to assume that children and youth need to have formal education. This perspective is apparent in the way policy-makers think. They perpetuate the dichotomy between adults and youth because they implied that politics is not a space for youth – youth should focus in school instead. Youth are discriminated based on age and policy-makers blame them for being absent in government meetings (for the reason that they are in school). Policy-makers did not question that structure of the government where the youth council is located – instead, they focused on targeting the age of youth as a problem. It can be deduced that the reason for this is that changing the age range of the youth is easier as compared to changing the government structure where the youth council is located.

“You don't have to be young to represent the youth”

Policy-makers rationalized increasing the age range because for them, one doesn't have to be young to represent the youth. Below are actual quotes with my highlight for emphasis:

Senator Bongbong Marcos: “Again, the idea being that **you do not have to be young to fight and to represent the youth**, you don't have to be very young to represent the youth sector and to be able to represent them in government.” (Senate of the Philippines 2013c: 7).

Senator Ejercito: “But I do think also that... youth, **they still need guidance and wisdom of the older members** of the *sangguniang pambarangay* (district government).” (Senate of the Philippines 2013e: 16).

Mr. Nalupta: “Although we argued... *na hindi naman ibig sabihin na kailangan talagang batang-bata para maging SK kasi kabiti anong age to espouse the youth agenda, wala naman talagang age bracket in the same way na 'yung women's issues ay hindi naman kailangang maging babae talaga iyong advocate ng women's issues.* (Although we argued that **you don't have to be very young to be a youth council chairperson. You can espouse the youth agenda at any age.** There is no age bracket. **In the same manner that you don't have to be a woman to advocate women's issues.**” (Senate of the Philippines 2013c: 14).



The statements above reinforce the inferior position of the youth and the domination of adults in deciding for the youth. The adults, being in a superior position because of their higher age and supposed wisdom, can easily proclaim such statements because they are in a privileged position to do so. It is difficult for youth to contest these declarations given that it is based on higher biological age that the youth have not reached yet.

For technical and practical reasons

Lastly, the motive of policy-makers for increasing the age-range is for practical and technical purposes, which is related to the conduct of elections. Below are actual quotes with my highlight for emphasis:

Senator Joseph Ejercito: “**I think the problem started when the age was lowered to 15 to 17.** *Kasi maayos naman ‘yung unang batches ng SK.* But because *dalawang balota*—I mean, *dalawa yung pagbobotohan nung 18 to 24.* (Because the first batches of the SK were okay. **But now, because there are two ballots, the 18-24 would have to vote twice because there are two separate ballots.**” (Senate of the Philippines 2013a: 26-28).

Ms. Ladra: “In 2002, I was new in Comelec (Commission on Elections) but the only idea that I can get now, the reason why maybe Comelec had that as a proposal was because **at the age of 18, we already register voter as a voter for all of kinds of elective positions, whether local or national.** But insofar as SK, as we say, it is a youth organization, it should not— maybe they were thinking, on the part of the Comelec, that it **should not start at 18 but earlier.**” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 58). Senator Marcos: “*Siguro ito (I think this) is a practical matter.*” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 58). Ms Ladra: “Yes *po.*” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 59).

Ms. Ladra: “Yes, and maybe, Your Honor, you also have to consider that **if we will start our SK from 15 years old to include also less than 18, then we will also have a separate registration** for these people. Meaning, an **impact on cost implication.**” (Senate of the Philippines 2013b: 72)

Increasing the age range for the youth council is more convenient and more cost efficient. Policy-makers said that when the age was 15-17, there were two separate ballots because legally, only 18 and above can vote. The Commission on Elections had to have separate registration and ballots for the youth council to separate those 18 above and 18 below.

Harris (2009: 302) mentioned that “political institutions are created by adults to serve an adult agenda and are not structured around young people’s interests or designed to engage them”. This holds true in Philippines where decisions on the youth council are made based on convenience and practicality for the government. Policy-makers did not delve deeper on ways to engage the youth to participate meaningfully in the government but they instead focused on other things like raising the age range.

## Chapter 7: Future of the youth council – still a political *saling-pusa*

*I conclude my research paper with a discussion on the Youth Council's future with the Duterte administration. I briefly describe Duterte's leadership style and his framing of the youth. I hypothesize that the treatment of the youth council as a political "saling-pusa" will persist.*

The future of the youth council does not look positive, assessing Duterte's agenda and statements. I observe hints of Duterte controlling the youth for nation-building purposes. The current framing of youth is that they need monitoring or else they will be delinquent. He also emphasized the need to instill patriotism among the youth and his approach has a tendency to be regulating.

Duterte's main agenda for the Philippines revolve around fighting drugs, crime and corruption (Viray 2016). His administration's treatment of the youth is more of controlling, rather than empowering. When he was still a mayor, he ordered the police to do a cleanup of youth who skipped classes and hung out outside schools and said that he would beat them up with a hammer (Lacorte 2015). During his first few days as president, the Philippine National Police implemented OPLAN R.O.D.Y. (which is coincidentally the president's nickname). It is short for Operation Plan Rid the streets Of Drunkards and Youth. It was a crackdown on people drinking and minors who are still outside the streets at 10 pm (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2016). One youth group expressed its contentions saying the police operations are like similar to martial law days and that it is unavoidable for some youth to stay out late because some are working students and some might go beyond the curfew due to rains, flooding and traffic (Sauler 2016). It can be deduced that Duterte puts a great importance on discipline and his way of enforcing it is harsh and controlling.

Duterte wants to revive the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), which was made non-compulsory in 2002 after a law was passed. ROTC was declared optional following the death of a student who was killed after exposing the anomalies of his school's ROTC program (Lacuata 2016). Duterte said that ROTC can help "build up a credible self-defence force" and instill "discipline, nationalism and patriotic duty" (Go 2016). Duterte frames the youth as a sector that can be used for nation building.

### **Part of the political arena, but not as legitimate players**

I have briefly discussed how the Duterte administration frames the youth as a sector that needs regulation and a group to be developed for nation-building purposes. Now I lay out the continued treatment of the youth council as a political *saling-pusa* that is manipulated according to the priorities of the government. I show that the youth council is placed in an inferior position in government and is subjected to older people's control.

Youth council elections were supposed to happen on October 2016, as part of the new Youth Council Reform Law – which was passed on January 2016 during Noynoy Aquino's presidency. My interviewees were looking forward to it when I talked to them in July 2016, especially after a 3-year hiatus. The National Youth Commission (NYC) had

prepared the implementing rules and regulations of the law. NYC and the Office of Senator Bam Aquino already had published materials hyping the comeback of the Youth Council. The Commission on Elections already opened up the voting registration process in July 2016.

After all the hype and preparation, Duterte postponed the Youth Council elections and the *barangay* (district) elections yet again until October 2017. It was the first bill that the president signed into a law (Dioquino 2016). He wanted to postpone the elections because “there is a possibility of drug money influencing the polls. (Rappler.com 2016)

The Youth Council elections are part of the local district elections. We can infer from statements of politicians that the purpose of postponing the elections is for political reasons. The Senate President said that Duterte has yet to appoint new officials and it would be banned if there were local elections (Senate of the Philippines 2016). Duterte mentioned that this move would save the government millions of money instead of having a costly election (Elemia 2016). It can be deduced that providing a space for the youth in the government is not a top priority.

Some politicians already filed bills pushing again for the abolishment of the youth councils. Below are some snippets from the bills (highlighted texts are my emphasis):

HB 3489 – “can’t be fully attentive to functions and responsibilities... **sessions are missed because they conflict with class schedules, yet the young officials almost always receive their allowances...** become training and **breeding ground for corruption, to which evil our youth should be spared exposure at such an early and immature age...** by abolishing SK, the state not only safeguards that the youth can give actual **priority to their education, their moral fiber is likewise secured and governmental funds saved.**” (Philippine Congress 2016a).

HB03454 – “while it failed to provide the youth meaningful participation in governance, it only **distracts youth leaders from their studies...** As a matter of fact, many SK officers who are studying away from home, **have not been rendering adequate services while receiving full benefits as members of their local legislative council...** Instead the **youth should be inoculated from dirty politics** and unproductive political wrangling while it is not yet too late. Like typical Filipino parents, we should rather have our children **focus on their studies than in politics** where they are vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.” (Philippine Congress 2016b).

From the text above, we can deduce that the main reason for scrapping the youth councils is that they see it as a waste of government funds. They are not concerned at all with youth participation in the government. We can infer that politicians convey their agenda in a paternalist way – pushing for abolishment for the sake of protecting the youth from corruption. They imply that politics is not an area for youth and youth should focus on education instead.

## Conclusion

*Saling-pusa*: a Filipino term to describe younger kids who tag along in a game with older kids. A token position granted by the older ones to the young ones to give an impression of inclusion – so that the young ones will not be upset and cry. They are part of the game, but not as full-fledged players.

I established the position of Youth Council as a political *saling-pusa* with a critical analysis of how the youth and Youth Councils are framed in various Filipino administrations through policies and policy-makers discourse. I supported my claim of Youth Council as a political *saling-pusa* through incorporation of previous youth council members' experiences of adult manipulation and domination in the Youth Council. I used anecdotes and quotes to tease out the tensions and contradictions between policy and practice. I used a historical perspective – from when the Youth Council was established up to the present – to show the problematic framing of youth throughout different administrations.

I used a youth studies lens to show the inferior position of youth in the government when I established that youth is a socially constructed concept, which is relational – subject to unequal power relations – where adults are in the privileged position to claim knowledge and decide for the youth. The dominant discourse in the Philippines remains to be the older generation knowledge on youth, which follows a structural functionalist perspective – that young ones are “still in the process” of developing into “naturally” mature, responsible and rational adults. This discourse is deeply ingrained and continues to perpetuate the dichotomy between youth and adults – where the young ones are placed in a subordinate position. My research veers away from the structural functionalist tradition and I show that youth is a social construction that is relational and highly susceptible to adult manipulation. I offer a different approach to Philippines youth studies that are mostly dominated with a structural functionalist view.

The relational lens helped me illuminate that the youth are subject to older people's agenda and priorities. The common theme all throughout the paper is that youth are seen as becomings – that they are individuals that need to be groomed to be future citizens to make sure they become “good” citizens. This youth-as-becomings perspective has been applied by various administrations but in different approaches – from seeing youth as a threat to be contained, to incorporating them in decentralizing power, to seeing them as homogenous and productive citizens for the nation, to letting them stay as a political *saling-pusa*.

Oliver Tayo's usage of *saling-pusa* as a reflection when he was a practitioner working with youth captured what I also observed in my research. I am curious to know if this term can also be described in other areas of youth engagement in the Philippines. Further research in analyzing other spaces youth participates in – like family, friends and school – can enhance this study because it would be interesting to know if the *saling-pusa* treatment can be observed in other circles that youth is involved in.

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