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**A Historicised (Re)Assessment of  
EDSA ‘People Power’ (1986)**

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## A HISTORICISED (RE)ASSESSMENT OF EDSA ‘PEOPLE POWER’ (1986)

The EDSA ‘People Power’ of 1986 stands out in political iconography and ideography of democratisation, both within and beyond the Philippines. Hailed as a paragon of peaceful political change, it is touted as having inspired through ‘demonstration effect’ the struggles for democracy elsewhere in the region and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Given the pulsating worldwide discourse on what Huntington calls “waves of democratization,” this event seems assured of a secured position in the global history of the democratisation movement. In any evaluative analysis of this event as a conjuncture, this factor should not be set aside for it reminds us of, and prompts us to do something about, the pervasive but seldom recognised bias for democracy as an analytic default in much of the ‘western’ and ‘westernised’ scholarship on politics.

The recent turn of events in the Philippines with the outpouring of sympathy for the death of Cory Aquino, the effusive paean harped on her juxtaposed against the mounting contempt for Gloria Arroyo, and the much ballyhooed startling entry of her son, Noynoy Aquino, into the race for presidency in 2010, all seem to indicate the still pre-eminent status of EDSA as a galvanizing political metaphor in public imagination.<sup>2</sup> While efforts by segments of the elites to enflame the ‘spirit’ of the ‘yellow revolution’<sup>3</sup> appear contrived to some observers, the possibility cannot be discounted that for not an insignificant section of the Philippine society, and of course for various and possibly competing reasons, EDSA is held as a pivotal historical event to which they look back with a mixture of pride, triumph, ambivalence and both wistful and wishful thoughts.

That EDSA People Power of 1986 was a defining moment in recent Philippine political history cannot be doubted. Its watershed character, however, cannot be assumed to be straightforward or unproblematic, for an event does not happen, and the meanings of such event may not be grasped, in a social vacuum. The equal emphasis given by this paper on the discursive context is necessary owing to three considerations: (1) the persistent and highly contentious character of the political arena within which EDSA took place and from which an analyst can only pretend to be above or apart; (2) the nation-state, which is often collapsed to what is happening in the capital, or to what the elites in Congress and Malacanang (the district where the presidential palace is located) are doing, is simply too convenient and simplified a level of analysis to capture a complex, multi-dimensional reality that was EDSA; and, more importantly, (3) the political behaviour of contemporary Filipinos tend to be shaped more by the “discursive EDSA” than the ‘real’ one, assuming such a clear-cut

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Thompson, *The anti-Marcos struggle : personalistic rule and democratic transition in the Philippines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Recent headlines include the following: Frinston Lim, “Cheering crowds greet Noynoy, Mar in Tagum,” *INQUIRER.net, Philippine News for Filipinos*, September 26, 2009, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20090926-226946/Cheering-crowds-greet-Noynoy-Mar-in-Tagum>; Michael Lim Ubac, “Sentiment for Noynoy also up in Senate, says Kiko - INQUIRER.net, Philippine News for Filipinos,” *INQUIRER.net, Philippine News for Filipinos*, September 26, 2009, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20090926-226955/Sentiment-for-Noynoy-also-up-in-Senate-says-Kiko>.

<sup>3</sup> Documentary and film projects on Ninoy’s life proliferate recently. These include “The Last Journey of Ninoy” and *Ninoy Aquino & The Rise of People Power* by Tom Coffman. There is also a plan for a bio-picture that, according to Kris Aquino, is envisioned to be like the film on Gandhi. It may be co-produced by Star Cinema with a Hollywood company. Angela Casauay, “Kris reveals details on Cory-Ninoy movie |,” *Sun.Star Network Online*, November 8, 2009, <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/kris-reveals-details-cory-ninoy-movie>.

distinction is tenable. It must be emphasised as well that this EDSA might have inimical consequences on efforts to expand the genuine democratic public sphere in the country. Given these considerations, the following set of questions should also be raised, in addition to those that call for ascertaining the ‘true nature’ of EDSA as a conjuncture : in what particular sense, for whom, to whom and for what it is considered a watershed? To what extent it may be so?

As a conjuncture, EDSA may not stand alone as an analytic unit. Given the sizeable literature emphasising the ‘restorationist’ (the return of the ‘good old days’) character<sup>4</sup> of EDSA vis-à-vis the ‘tradition’ in Philippine politics, EDSA would make sense only primarily in reference to Marcos’s declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972, which marked the shift to dictatorial martial rule. They constitute the two sides of the same historical coin when considering critical conjunctures in the post war political history of the Philippines. The two-peas-in-a-pod character of these events emanated from at least two mutually reinforcing sources. First, the historic condition that saw EDSA People Power largely as a logical response to authoritarianism that accompanied martial law. Second, the historically contingent relationships that gave rise to the still contestable but nevertheless hardening political iconography that pits one as a moral (not just political) antinomy of the other. In other words, without the declaration of martial law that ushered in Marcos’ dictatorial rule, and without the continuing demonization of this era as a nightmarish detour from the otherwise unmolested march to a purer form of democracy, not only was it unlikely that EDSA revolt would have taken place; it would have also assumed, if it did take place, metaphorical significance different from what EDSA holds today. The extent to which the EDSA revolt may be considered as a critical juncture, thus, depends significantly on the assessment of, and meanings attached to, the Marcos years. Conversely, the ways in which images of Marcos era evolve will be greatly influenced by the changes in how the public views EDSA. This paper finally seeks to explore the possibility that by itself, without reference to the Marcos years, EDSA may have opened genuinely new pathways in the development of Philippine politics.

In the following sections, we will provide a bird’s eye view of the historical context leading up to EDSA People Power. This will entail a review not just of the martial law years but also of features of Philippine politics from 1946-1972. This is necessary to appreciate the changes that Marcos instituted upon the imposition of martial law on 21 September 1972, as well as to assess the extent to which EDSA People Power ushered in a “new era”, if that was indeed the case.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Review: Oligarchs and Cronies in the Philippine State: The Politics of Patrimonial Plunder,” *World Politics* 43, no. 3 (April 1991): 414-450; Benjamin N Muego, *Spectator Society: The Philippines Under Martial Rule*, Monographs in international studies no. 77 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1988); Francisco Nemenzo, “From Autocracy to Elite Democracy,” in *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People's Power* (Metro Manila: Conspectus, 1987), 221-268; Alfred W McCoy, *The Yellow Revolution* ([Bedford Park, S.A: Flinders University], 1986); Francisco Nemenzo and Ron May, eds., *Philippines after Marcos* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1985); David Timberman, *A changeless land : continuity and change in Philippine politics* (Armonk N.Y. USA ;Singapore: M.E. Sharpe ;Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991); Benedict Anderson, “Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams,” *New Left Review*, no. 1969 (1988): 3-31.

## POLITICAL LANDSCAPE BEFORE 1972

A number of outstanding features characterised the formal political structures in the Philippines prior to 1972. The three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judiciary—worked well enough for most parts, through the system of check and balances. The executive was elected by popular vote and had a term of four years; the legislature consisted of two houses whose members were also popularly elected; and the judiciary enjoyed a fairly high level of autonomy.

Local and national elections were regularly held since 1946. These were contested mainly by the Liberal and Nacionalista parties. What may be regarded as two-party system thus existed, despite the oft-cited observation that personalism and factionalism rather than substantive ideological differences characterised the two parties.<sup>5</sup> Voter turn-out during elections was high, and smooth succession from one regime or set of leaders was the norm. Electoral politics, in other words, seemed to function fairly well, making the epithet “showcase of democracy in Asia” not totally undeserved notwithstanding the cynicism that surrounded it.

The patron-client model of politics also characterised pre-martial law politics. A scholar notes that it was probably the most dominant model of political behaviour during the pre-martial law period.<sup>6</sup> This model refers to paternalistic, personalistic, mutually beneficial ties between rich patrons (usually landlords) and poorer clients (usually peasants) which form as a building block of a pyramidal structure that sometimes operates expansively all the way from officials in Malacanang, provincial capitols or town halls down to peasants in the villages.

Another feature of the 1946-1972 era was the weakness of the state, in particular vis-à-vis the oligarchy. Before the war, Quezon was known for his efforts to strengthen the state and the presidency, facilitated by his “one party democracy.” The Japanese occupation derailed this state-building project as it destroyed the nascent centre of power that Quezon’s Commonwealth was trying to build. In the post war era, the locus of power reverted back to the local, provincial and/or municipal level, as captured by the “all politics is local” dictum. Manifest in the victory of the Liberal Party in 1946, a splinter group from Nacionalista, was the easing out of the ‘old guards’ such as Osmena and Laurel who like Quezon embodied the need for a strong executive. The state had been held captive to the interests of the ruling class to the point that, as Hutchcroft claims, the “power of the oligarchy” clearly overwhelmed “the power of the state.”<sup>7</sup>

Closely related to this is the intertwining of the relationship between the state and big businesses many of which are owned by the deeply entrenched oligarchs. As one scholar has observed, in the Philippines “business is born, and flourishes or fail, not so much in the market place as in the halls of the legislature or in the administrative offices of the

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Herman Lande, *Leaders, Factions, and Parties ; the Structure of Philippine Politics*, Monograph series (Yale University. Southeast Asia Studies) no. 6 (New Haven: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University; distributor: Cellar Book Shop, Detroit, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Amando Doronila, “The transformation of patron-client relations and its political consequences in postwar Philippines,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 16, no. 1 (1985): 99-116.

<sup>7</sup> Paul D Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 23.

government.”<sup>8</sup> Called by one scholar as ‘patrimonial oligarchic state,’ it has deep historical roots in the failure of both Spanish and American regimes in state building, leaving the state an easy prey to the rent-seeking behaviour of oligarchs.<sup>9</sup>

The composition of the dominant oligarchy became more fluid during the 1950s and 60s as commercial and industrial diversification offered a new and wider range of opportunities that facilitated the entry of new oligarchs as others fell on the wayside.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding this, however, the Philippine oligarchy is remarkable for continuity with at least its core having deep roots that can be traced to the country’s early history in pre-Spanish, Spanish and American periods.<sup>11</sup> The absence of ‘true revolution’, the resilience of key ideological institutions such as the Church, and the indecisive character of upheavals in Philippine history worked together to prevent radical transformation of the socio-economic structure, thus enabling such a continuity.

Concomitant to the predominance of the oligarchy was the widening gap between the rich and the poor, with the middle class remaining relatively small in number and stuck with the poorer rather than richer segments of the society.

The continuing and even strengthening neo-colonial bond between the US and the Philippines was also a major feature of this period. The geostrategic needs of the US, as well as economic and political interests of the Philippine elite synergised to nurture this relationship. While Filipino critics tend to exaggerate the capacity of the US to intervene in the internal affairs of the Philippines, the significant extent of such intervention cannot be denied.

As the 1960s drew to a close, not only were a growing number of people recognising the serious problems of the political system, they were also becoming increasingly willing to do something about it. Rallies, demonstrations, and strikes became common, almost daily occurrences in Manila, leading to what is known as the First Quarter Storm. The revolutionary activities of the communists also resumed with the establishment of the CPP/NPA. The call for reform saturated the atmosphere inflamed further by anti-Vietnam War sentiment, youth counter-culture and student protests worldwide. Marcos was quick to ‘seize the day.’

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas McHale, “An Econecological Approach to Economic Development” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1958), 217 as cited in Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> Amando Doronila, *The State, Economic Transformation, and Political Change in the Philippines, 1946-1972* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992); Temario C Rivera, *Landlords and Capitalists: Class, Family, and State in Philippine Manufacturing* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, University of the Philippines, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Dante C Simbulan, *The Modern Principalia: The Historical Evolution of the Philippine Ruling Oligarchy* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2005).

## MARTIAL LAW: THE END OF AN ILLUSION?

On the morning of 23 September 1972, Filipinos throughout the archipelago woke up wondering at the country's state of affairs. The night before, Marcos disclosed the content of Presidential Degree No. 1081, signed two days ago, which put the nation under martial law. Except for a few who were privy to the plan,<sup>12</sup> Marcos's foes and friends alike were surprised by the turn of events. Although rumours were rife for several months that martial law was in the offing, nobody thought it would come that soon. Marcos's bitterest critics were rounded up and incarcerated, the Congress was abrogated, the press muzzled, 'loose' firearms confiscated, private armies disbanded, schools closed for weeks, a curfew imposed, and public disciplinary measures enforced. In the following years, changes swept the country. Many of these were cosmetic, yet many Filipinos believed that a new era, a New Society as Marcos put it, was born.

Within the sphere of formal politics, it was no doubt a new era. With the full backing of the military and without a legislature to oppose him, Marcos became the most powerful human being in the land. As Abinales and Amoroso contend, his regime constituted "the greatest dominance of state over society the Philippines has seen".<sup>13</sup> Through presidential decrees, letters of instructions, and executive orders he exercised both executive and legislative privileges. The judiciary was maintained but its autonomy was considerably curtailed through various means to ensure that all Marcos's wishes were accorded a veneer of legality. Marcos's centralised and personalistic rule is described by Thompson as "sultanistic".<sup>14</sup> With one-man rule, and the opposition severely emasculated, the highly contentious politics that was reflective of intra-elite rivalries of the 1946-1972 period suddenly died down.

Until 1978 no elections were held. In lieu of elections with secret balloting, a series of referendums were carried out via direct acclamation in local citizen assemblies in the *barangay* level.<sup>15</sup> According to Marcos it was a better and more direct way to allow the "voice of the people" to be heard.<sup>16</sup>

Marcos quickly moved to neutralize the traditional oligarchy, as exemplified by what he did to the Lopezes, Osmenas and part of the Cojuangcos. Owing to their enormous wealth and vast properties, the Lopezes for instance could influence the course of Philippine politics, to the point that they were called the "presidential kingmakers." Such extensive power wielded in the interest of the oligarchs, so Marcos often claimed, got in the way of efforts to reform the society. Through various means, Marcos forced them to relinquish ownership or control of vast multi-sectoral business empires.

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<sup>12</sup> Marcos is said to have "twelve disciples" who knew about the plan. Except for two civilians—the Defence Minister Enrile and businessman Conjuangco—all the rest were high ranking military official

<sup>13</sup> Patricio N Abinales and Donna J Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Pasig City: Anvil, 2005), 205.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, *The anti-Marcos struggle : personalistic rule and democratic transition in the Philippines*, 49-63.

<sup>15</sup> The Barangay is the smallest and most basic political grouping in the Philippines.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on referendum, see Albert Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines : the political economy of authoritarianism* (Westport Conn: Praeger, 1997), 57-62.

Rather than destroying the oligarchy altogether, however, crony-capitalism under Marcos ushered in a new set of oligarchs. One study claims that several families including the Marcos, Romualdez, Benedicto, Enrile, Cuenca, Silverio, Oreta, Tantoco, Floreindo, Disini, and Martel families were not on the pre-Martial law's who's who list of the very rich but, owing to the favour endowed by Marcos during martial law years, became integrated into elite circles.<sup>17</sup> Other traditional oligarchies who either cooperated with Marcos or whom the Marcoses regarded as non-threats to their interests did not suffer the fate of the Lopezes and Osmenas and some even profited from the business opportunities offered by the dictatorship. These include the Aboitiz, Elizalde, Conception, Palanca, Siguion\_Reyna, Sycip-Yuchengco, Yulo, Alacantara, Fernandez, Tan, Tanjuatco families.<sup>18</sup>

The military was expanded and its public profile enhanced. Between 1972 and 1976, its budget increased by about five-fold, from 880 million to 4 billion pesos. For the first time the military received the largest share in budget allocation.<sup>19</sup> The number of armed forces regulars also dramatically rose in the same period from 55,000 to 150,000, and to the projected 250,000 by 1980s. As a clear sign of its widely expanded role, the military penetrated areas that hitherto were largely exclusive domains of civilians such as infrastructure building, bureaucracy, media, public utilities and US aid.<sup>20</sup>

The expansion of the military was accompanied by its politicisation, which Thompson views as its deprofessionalisation.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps as part of a grand plan, years before he was elected president in 1965, Marcos began cultivating good ties with the military. Marcos promoted officers perceived to be loyal to him. These officers would, at times, stay in military service past their stipulated retirement dates. This favouritism was usually directed towards Marcos's old classmates from the UP corps of cadets as well as relatives.<sup>22</sup> These moves appeared calculated to strengthen Marcos's control. Ironically, his wanton practise of favouritism also planted the seeds of his regime's destruction, as will be discussed below.

With export-promotion, capital-intensive industrialisation and the modernisation of agriculture being placed at the centre of Marcos's economic blue-print, the roles of technocrats were visibly enhanced, an extension of what started during the previous regime. For sometime they wielded substantial influence on policy making and implementation. Agencies such as the Department of Finance and Presidential Management Staff positioned to solidify their clout within the government. While it is true that in the end they succumbed to the pressures from Imelda and other cronies, and that Marcos may have just intended to use them to enhance the image of the government both in the eyes of international funders as well

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<sup>17</sup> John Doherty, *Who Controls the Philippine Economy: Some Need Not Try as Hard as Others* (Manoa: University of Hawaii Press).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jose Abueva, "Ideology and Practice in the 'New Society'," in *Marcos and martial law in the Philippines* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 39.

<sup>20</sup> See Walden F Bello and Severina Rivera, *The Logistics of Repression and Other Essays: The Role of U.S. Assistance in Consolidating the Martial Law Regime in the Philippines* (Friends of the Filipino People, 1977) for an account of the role of U.S. aid in maintaining the Marcos regime.

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *The anti-Marcos struggle : personalistic rule and democratic transition in the Philippines*.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred W McCoy, *Closer than Brothers: Manhood at Philippine Military Academy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 28.



as the Filipino people,<sup>23</sup> it is still significant for the purpose of this paper to note their erstwhile prominence not just for their technocratic role but also for being embodiments of power in their own right.

The martial law regime also launched several projects that had huge mass appeal. Infrastructure projects—the building of roads, bridges, irrigation, etc—that began during his first term continued. Despite being limited to lands planted with corn and rice, Marcos's land reform appeared in the eyes of many to be a serious attempt to address the centuries-old problem of poverty and social inequality. IRRI that promoted Green Revolution and Masagana 99 were other projects that many of the Filipino farmers still alive today fondly remember.

Despite Marcos' nationalist rhetoric, the martial law years intensified the neo-colonial bond as Marcos used the support of the US to prop up the regime until its collapse in February 1986. The term US-Marcos dictatorship that activists popularised was not unwarranted, and the logic of patronage that had been long-standing characteristic of Philippine politics, was extended all the way to Washington with Uncle Sam acting as the ultimate patron.<sup>24</sup>

While martial law effectively neutralised the opposition among the elites - at least until the assassination of Ninoy Aquino in 1983 - the regime had to confront a formidable challenges in the guise of rebellion in Mindanao and mounting resistance from the CPP/NPA. Combating the Muslim secessionist movement, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), proved costly while the challenged posed by the CPP/NPA became more serious and menacing in mid-1980s. Marcos's regime also had to contend with oil shocks and the collapse of prices in the world of key products such as coconut and sugar. More importantly, the onerous impact of crony capitalism and the debt-driven industrialisation began to put an increasingly heavy strain on the economy. It appeared for sometime that people could bear the loss of their freedom provided their economic needs were met. But when the economic malaise exploded in an economic crisis in 1982/1983, making the economic tailspin and forcing the regime to default in its loan payment to international lenders, it became clear that the beginning of the end of Marcos's regime had arrived.

Given the depth of technocratic competence and the support of the US-IMF-WB, however, the regime's decline appeared not to be irreversible. What ensured the regime's rapid plummet to near-death was the assassination of Ninoy Aquino upon his return to the Philippines on 21 August 1983. This event shocked the nation and it awakened even the hitherto apathetic segments of urban classes, and galvanized them into a formidable opposition to the Marcos regime. To a people reared in Catholic and nationalist imageries, Aquino's martyrdom resonated as Rizal- and Christ-like and this ensured that Aquino would be immortalised.

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<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel de Dios, "The Erosion of Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People's Power*, ed. Javate-de Dios, Petronilo Daroy, and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol (Manila: Conspectus, 1988), 106-108.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, James Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy: A Century of Colonialism in the Philippines* (Henry Holt, 1998). Despite the perception of Marcos as America's boy, however, Marcos was not always an obedient client of America. In many ways, Marcos was also able to manipulate the U.S. government to acquiesce to his demands. See Raymond Bonner, *Waltzing with a Dictator: The Marcoses and the Making of American Policy* (Times Books, 1987).

From August 1983 to 1985, the economic and political situation became more and more unstable as capital fled out of the country and anti-government demonstrations involving more and more people across social divide became more common occurrences. This alarmed the United States, which feared that the communists were poised to take advantage of the situation. While divided as to what to do with Marcos, the American operatives pressured Marcos to undertake reforms. In response, and to the astonishment of his friends and enemies alike, Marcos declared in November 1985 that a snap presidential election would be held three months later in February 1986. As was feared by his family, cronies and close associates, it proved to be a mistake fatal to the regime.

Ailing since few years back, Marcos had become isolated and increasingly dependent on small group of trusted kin and associates. Seemingly detached from reality, he misread the signs of the times and underestimated the popularity of Cory Aquino, the widow of the slain Ninoy Aquino, and her ability to unify the nation against the regime. When Marcos declared victory in the election amidst mounting evidence of irregularity, and in the face of a NAMFREL (National Movement for Free Elections) parallel tally which pointed to an Aquino victory, the nation stood in tense anticipation. In a few days, the historic and the now iconic event called People Power Revolution unfolded culminating in the demise of the Marcos regime.

### **EDSA PEOPLE POWER**

The events leading to the EDSA People Power are well documented. The key actors in this narrative include Defence minister Juan Ponce Enrile, military Vice Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos, and members of the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM), who attempted to stage a military coup against the Marcos government. When this plan fizzled, the rebels retreated to two military camps along EDSA to defend against Marcos's counterattack. In a desperate move, the rebels called on the people to surround the two camps in order to protect them. Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, who called on the people to support the rebels, heeded this call. The people – many of whom were supporters of Corazon Aquino's campaign for the presidency – arrived in droves, decidedly altering the power equation in favour of the rebels. The US withdrawal of its support for Marcos reinforced the chain of events that culminated in the overthrow of the regime.<sup>25</sup>

The EDSA revolution, however, cannot simply be read as a spontaneous outburst of emotion over the course of four days. It is common in Philippine media and popular discourse to trace the beginnings of EDSA to the assassination of Marcos's political archrival former Senator Ninoy Aquino in 1983. The senator's assassination mobilised the once dormant "middle forces" (the moderate and religious middle class of the Philippines) and set off a string of protests that lead to an organised challenge against the regime in the form of the Aquino campaign. On September 16, 1983, barely a month after the slaying, the "well-heeled" office workers of Makati - Manila's main financial district - held a rally for the late Senator. *Mr. and Ms.*, a weekly news magazine critical of the Marcos administration described the event as such:

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<sup>25</sup> For a chronology of the events that led to EDSA, see Alfred W McCoy, *Closer Than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 237-238.

Makati never had a protest rally and when it did Sept. 16 Friday afternoon, it was the biggest ever complete with ticker tape raining down on Ayala and Paseo de Roxas avenues, [sic] Yellow confetti was ingeniously (sic)<sup>26</sup> made out of telephone directory books and cast down by the hundreds by employees from any one of the high rise buildings along the rally route. Such style.<sup>27</sup>

On September 30, the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Aquino's death, at least two thousand mourners attended a mass at Forbes Park – the most prominent of Manila's elite gated communities.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while Aquino's death resonated with the masses, it is largely remembered for politicising the elites and the middle class. This same section of society would constitute the supporters of the Aquino campaign, who eventually joined the Church, and the rebel soldiers in overthrowing Marcos. The way Aquino dealt with these groups largely informed the policies of her administration.

The Aquino regime sought to de-'Macosify' the political infrastructures and "restore democracy." The first to go was the 1973 Constitution and the Batasang Pambansa, the parliament. A constitutional commission was formed to draft a new constitution, which took effect in 1987. In the interim, she operated on the so-called Freedom Constitution which granted her enormous power—power which she could have used but did not, to the consternation of many, to institute truly substantive and lasting reforms. The judiciary was also reorganised and the courts were made more amenable to the present dispensation. Soon, a plebiscite to ratify the newly framed constitution was held so were elections for the new legislature. On the local level, a purge of local officials ensued and they were replaced by those not identified with the previous regime. In due time, local elections were held with all the usual fanfare characteristic of previous eras. The vibrant and colourful pre-Martial law electoral politics—often equated to democracy—was restored.

It was also a restoration in a different sense of the word. The Marcoses had barely left Malacanang when the old oligarchs sidelined by Marcos returned in droves and in style. Symbolic of this revival was the regaining of control of electricity hegemon Meralco and media empire ABS-CBN by the Lopez family. In the 1987 elections, three-fourths of those who won seats in Congress were either members or related to families who prominent during the pre-Martial law years. The good-old-days in Philippine politics was palpable.<sup>29</sup> The atmosphere was captured well by Benjamin Muego, a known student leader-activist in the Philippines in the late 1960s, who left for US in 1970. He was astounded upon returning to Manila in 1987 after 17 years of absence. Expecting to see changes that the "EDSA Revolution" and martial law years were supposed to have brought forth, he was astonished at what he found:

<sup>26</sup> One may say that there is nothing ingenious about cutting yellow confetti from phone directories)

<sup>27</sup> "The Well-Heeled Go to an Aquino Rally..." *Mr. and Ms.*, 23 September 1983, 19. For an analysis of the meanings associated to particular places of protest like Makati, see Eva-Lotta Hedman, "The Dialectics of 'EDSA Dos': Urban Space, Collective Memory, and the Spectacle of Compromise," in *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson*, ed. James Siegel and Audrey Kahin (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2003), 283 -301.

<sup>28</sup> "Peaceful Manila Rallies," *Mr. and Ms.*, October 7, 1983.

<sup>29</sup> Resil Mojares, "The Dream Goes On and On: Three Generations of the Osmeñas, 1906-1990." in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, ed. Alfred W McCoy (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1994). Benedict Kerkvliet and Resil Mojares, "Themes in the Transition from Marcos to Aquino," in *From Marcos to Aquino: Local Perspectives on Political Transition in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press).

"...it was an uncanny feeling returning to an old familiar place seventeen years later, only to see the same things, listen to the same platitudes and shibboleths, see the same old political personalities in the evening news saying the same thing they were saying seventeen years earlier. The only difference was that while many of them use to unabashedly praise Marcos, now they are damning him to the heavens."<sup>30</sup>

## POST-AUTHORITARIAN PHILIPPINES: A RESTORED OLD ORDER?

In order to assess EDSA's conjunctural role, it is necessary to examine not only the visible changes in political infrastructures, policies and practices but also whether or not these changes altered the dynamics of political interaction and negotiation between the state and the civil society at large. In what follows, we discuss two areas that commentators often use as bases for assessing the Aquino administration: the economy and human rights. The economy is an important issue because one must determine whether regime change brought by EDSA altered the elite-driven economy of the country and created lasting change. As for human rights, the martial law period, as mentioned earlier, significantly increased the role and the power of the Philippine military, which used these new powers to commit various atrocities. If EDSA allowed for greater protection of human rights and if it paved the way for people to better access economic resources, then one is justified in claiming it constitutes a break from the recent past of martial law.

Those critical of Aquino's economic policy posit that the Aquino regime merely restored an elite order that deepened inequality in the country. Coronel, for instance, argues that neoliberal economic policies during the Aquino presidency served to cater to the demands of the elite and middle class:

During the first three years of the Aquino presidency, a brisk economic growth rate, averaging 5.8 per cent, only reinforced the disparities. Shiny condominiums and shopping centres reshaped the Manila skyline during those early years. Even as rural incomes declined in real terms and the cities swelled with migrants from the countryside, the Philippines experienced a boom in imported luxury cars for the rich and appliances for the middle class. By 1990, the economic slide had begun. For 1991, the growth rate is officially estimated at only 2.5-3 per cent.<sup>31</sup>

Similar to the pre-martial law setup, this economic order was sustained by oligarchs who used their power through the control of the Congress and other state apparatuses to achieve their economic goals. This is best illustrated by the recurring issue of land reform. According to Coronel, land reform legislation during the Aquino presidency was ineffective. It left important decisions like the "timetable for land redistribution and the limits of land retention" to be determined by the landlord dominated congress. It also exempted corporations that gave stocks to its farmers. The legislative eventually passed a bill that effectively exempted 70% of the country's agricultural land from redistribution. Many oligarchs were able to hang on to their land. For example, Hacienda Luisita, the 7,000-hectare sugar cane plantation owned by

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<sup>30</sup> Muego, *Spectator Society*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Sheila S. Coronel, "Dateline Philippines: The Lost Revolution," *Foreign Policy*, no. 84 (Autumn 1991), 168.

President Aquino's family, remained largely intact after Aquino's land reform efforts.<sup>32</sup> It was not surprising for the Congress to act this given its elite composition alluded to earlier.

On the level of human rights, it initially seemed like Aquino would push for a genuine change to the system. In her first week in office, she freed all Marcos-era political prisoners, including top cadres of the CPP. She also appointed Jose W. Diokno, a former senator and a prominent human rights crusader, to a commission to investigate military abuses.<sup>33</sup> However, increasing threats from the military, which culminated in coup attempts against the regime, forced the Aquino to pander to the military as well, making her more lenient towards human rights abuses. Members of the RAM, mostly from the notorious batch 1971 of the Philippine Military Academy, launched nine abortive coups against the administration. As resistance from the military grew, Aquino became more willing to cooperate with it.<sup>34</sup> After coup attempts in November 1986 August 1987, for instance, Aquino dismissed several cabinet members whom the military deemed "leftist."<sup>35</sup>

Aquino's conciliatory approach to the military reinforced the sense of impunity that was fostered during martial law, which allowed for human rights abuses to continue unabated. Amidst coup plots against her regime, it became increasingly difficult for Aquino to discipline the military. For example, according to a *Manila Times* report in May 1986, the Kilusan ng Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (Movement of Farmers in the Philippines) claimed that military operations in the area of one of their regional chapters resulted in 19 massacres and 500 executions.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, on January 1987 government soldiers fired on farmers demanding for land reform in front of the presidential palace. Eighteen died.<sup>37</sup>

Aquino also continued the Marcos policy of using vigilantes in counterinsurgency efforts. She formed "Civilian Volunteer Self-Defense Organizations" or "vigilantes" as a form of "people power" to defeat the communist rebels." These efforts were encouraged by the U.S. government, which, under Reagan, promoted a "low intensity" strategy to counterinsurgency.

Towards the end of 1987, there were over 200 vigilante groups, with an average group size of 150 members. Amnesty International reported in 1988 that there was strong evidence of these groups committing human rights violations with acquiescence from the military. The report added that the vigilantes were the most serious human rights problem in the country. After the Philippine Committee on Human Rights (PCHR) recommended that the government abolish the vigilante groups, Aquino abolished the body. Its members believed that the decision to abolish the committee was triggered by its recommendation.<sup>38</sup> Because the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>33</sup> Coronel, "Dateline Philippines," 170.

<sup>34</sup> Se McCoy, "Closer than Brothers."

<sup>35</sup> Mark R. Thompson, "Off the endangered list: Philippine democratization in comparative perspective," *Comparative Politics* 28, no. 2 (1996), 189.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Renato Constantino, *Renato Constantino and the Aquino Watch* (Quezon City: Karrel, 1987), 56.

<sup>37</sup> Coronel, "Dateline Philippines," 168. For a first-hand account of this event, known as the "Mendiola Massacre" (the protestors were shot in Mendiola street), see Jo-Ann Q. Maglipon, *A Smouldering Land* (Quezon City: National Council of Churches in the Philippines and the Forum for Rural Concerns, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> David Kowalewski, "Vigilante Counterinsurgency and Human Rights in the Philippines: A Statistical Analysis," *Human Rights Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1990), 248.

military considered the vigilantes an integral part of their counterinsurgency programme, it was difficult for Aquino to shut down these groups.

These cases indicate fairly clearly the continuities, rather than breaks, of the Aquino regime from previous eras, both martial law and pre-martial law years. As an analytic trope, continuity in fact has a long tradition in the examination of Philippine politics.<sup>39</sup> Observers have noted that the Philippines is remarkable for historical continuity such that the title of a book, *Philippines: A Changeless Land*, may not be entirely hyperbolic.<sup>40</sup> Timberman, the author of this book, wonders: “How could a nation that had gone through so many changes actually (has) changed so little?” As he notes:

There is sad constancy to the poverty, inequity, and injustice that characterize Philippine society, particularly in the countryside. There is a long history of society and politics and economic affairs being dominated by relatively small and surprisingly durable groups of conservative families. Consequently, there is also a history of successive governments—both democratic and authoritarian—being unwilling or unable to enact much needed socio-economic reform such as land reform. There is timelessness to the highly personalistic nature of politics as well as to the rituals and rhetoric of political discourse. There is a predictable repetitiveness to the charges of election fraud, corruption, nepotism and incompetence.<sup>41</sup>

This seems to have been partly broken during the martial law years as books published during this period tended to bewail the unfortunate break that martial law brought to the otherwise unmolested evolution of Philippine democracy to its ‘purer’ form. Beth Day’s book *The Philippines: Shattered Showcase of Democracy in Asia*,<sup>42</sup> which was published in 1974, eloquently represents this pervasive sentiment from the time.<sup>43</sup>

The immediate post-EDSA period has seen a return to prominence of the theme of continuity, apparently in much forceful or vigorous form.<sup>44</sup> Owing perhaps to the frustrations over the failure of Aquino administration to carry out adequate reforms, and sharpened by high

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<sup>39</sup> See David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay*, Politics and international relations of Southeast Asia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); David Steinberg, “Tradition and Response,” in *Crisis in the Philippines* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Simbulan, *The Modern Principalia*; Lewis Gleeck, *President Marcos and the Philippine political culture* (Manila Philippines: L.E. Gleeck, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> Timberman, *A changeless land : continuity and change in Philippine politics*.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>42</sup> Beth Day, *The Philippines: Shattered Showcase of Democracy in Asia* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1974).

<sup>43</sup> See also William Butler and International Commission of Jurists (1952- ), *The decline of democracy in the Philippines : a report of missions* (Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1977); David Rosenberg, ed., *Marcos and martial law in the Philippines* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979).

<sup>44</sup> Muego, *Spectator Society*; Nemenzo and May, *Philippines after Marcos*. New York; Rivera, *Landlords and Capitalists*; Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism*; Eva-Lotta Hedman, *Philippine politics and society in the twentieth century : colonial legacies, post-colonial trajectories* (London ;New York: Routledge, 2000); John Bresnan, *Crisis in the Philippines : the Marcos era and beyond* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986). *Oligarchic Politics: Elections and the Party-List System in the Philippines* (CenPEG Books, 2007).

expectations tied to the euphoria over EDSA, scholars poured out their disappointments by underscoring the theme of the return to good old days in Philippine politics. Anderson's article "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines" which appeared in 1988 is exemplary in this regard. Seeing that old oligarchs and familiar political practices that characterised pre-Marcos and Marcos years were back with a vengeance right after EDSA, he opines that what Marcos did from 1972-1986 was merely to push the logic of elite democracy that pervades the Philippine political landscape before and after EDSA.<sup>45</sup>

Francisco Nemenzo's article "From Autocracy to Elite Democracy" is also notable. Writing in 1987, he introduces the article by describing a scene in Cory Aquino's oath taking on Feb. 25, 1986. He notes that rather than doing it in a huge, open public place where millions of common people could share the joy of the moment, the oath took place at the exclusive Club Filipino and the guests were a select group of politicians, business tycoons, landlords and their 'perfumed ladies'. It clearly bespoke, as Nemenzo evocatively puts with a tinge of bitterness, of the "social complexion of the new government."<sup>46</sup>

Given the preponderance of views held by keen observers on the restorationist and/or continuous character of the post-EDSA politics, one might wonder why EDSA People Power persists to hold such a strong grip on many other observers' imagination as a critical turning point. The reasons for this are certainly complex and this subject thus entails a separate, thorough treatment. To note briefly, however, part of the reason lies in the vibrant democratisation discourse on the global scale, nurtured by the post-Cold War and post-9/11 atmosphere. This atmosphere has bestowed on EDSA the iconic status it holds as an exemplar of peaceful change ushered in through the power of the people. The imagery conjured up by more than a million people rising peacefully to challenge a dictator is very powerful a driving metaphor in the age of global democratisation.

Another reason stems from existing power structure in the Philippines. Notwithstanding the sharper or more virulent rivalries among the oligarchs, as noted above, they are held together by the dogged determination not to be sidelined or dominated again by one man or one group. Martial law was simply a traumatic event for the elites. Their experience of it has made them assert a stance "Never again!" to authoritarian rule. To maintain vigilance, and to rally the common people behind them, a large part of the dominant elites appropriate EDSA and its memories as a foil to counter any attempt to strengthen the state or the presidency, which for reasons right or wrong easily brings the vision of the nightmare that the Marcos years was supposed to be. The recurrent showing of documentaries about the Martial law years; the building of monuments such as the EDSA shrine and Bantayog ng mga Bayani (Monument of Heroes);<sup>47</sup> the constant deployment of anti Marcos rhetoric, signs and symbols in the media and other ideological apparatuses; the erasure of nuances in the writing of the history of Marcos years, reducing it to one long night of terror and plunder, and erasing whatever policies and projects that worked well and that benefitted the people during that period; the often exaggerated reaction to efforts by the president to strengthen institutions; all these

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams."

<sup>46</sup> Nemenzo, "From Autocracy to Elite Democracy," 221. Despite this criticism, Nemenzo continued to support Aquino amidst the coup attempts against her administration. See Francisco Nemenzo, "A Season of Coups," *Kasarinlan* 2, no. 4 (1987): 17-35.

<sup>47</sup> The Bantayog ng mga Bayani is a memorial centre dedicated to remembering the heroes of the Marcos period. See Lisandro E. Claudio, "Memories of the Anti-Marcos Movement: The Left and the Mnemonic Dynamics of Post-Authoritarian Philippines," *Southeast Asia Research*, Forthcoming.

should be understood as part of the “Never again” template. Despite hardly making a dent on the life of the common people, thus, it may be said that EDSA easily appears a turning point because it was in fact the case for the life and well being of the elite (and those who wish to join them), who also happen to have access to the mechanisms that shape political and historical discourses.

In addition, highlighting the watershed character of EDSA serves as a smokescreen that hides the fact that the Filipino oligarchy which includes the Marcoses and their cronies, has, as far as one can remember, regardless of the regime and periods in history, consistently exploited the weaknesses of political institutions to serve its interests at the expense of the majority of the people. By underscoring EDSA, on the one hand, and Marcos’ ‘evilness’, on the other, the rest of the oligarchy wish to elide accountability for the continued impoverishment of the nation.<sup>48</sup> By accentuating the evilness of Marcos, they effectively distance themselves from one of their own (Marcos and their cronies) and thus save the Philippine oligarchy as a collective from the responsibility for the sorry state of the nation. The impression prevails, thus that the fault lies in Marcos and his gang alone, and not in the deeply entrenched system that he represented.

The meaning of EDSA, however, cannot be reduced to the expectations of the dominant ideology thesis. Like any other modern societies, the Philippines is so complex that among 80 million who may be categorised as “common people” one can easily expect that different meanings of EDSA are held for various and perhaps competing reasons. It cannot be safely assumed, as some observers do,<sup>49</sup> that the lack of improvement in their life precludes a meaningful appropriation of EDSA by at least segments of the ‘common people.’ Perhaps it makes sense to hypothesise that it is precisely this lack of improvement in their lives that allows for them to read EDSA as symbolic of their unfulfilled hopes. While the dominant elite finds it convenient to utilise EDSA for their purposes, its subversive meanings and potentialities simmer at the ‘undersides’, as Iletto puts it, of Philippine politics. Importantly, because such potentialities are suppressed by dominant discourses, they can be triggered at certain critical moments. Evidence of this is the EDSA 3 revolution that almost toppled the Arroyo administration in 2001.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, the effects of EDSA cannot simply be determined by looking at highly visible changes immediately after EDSA—both constituting breaks and continuities from the previous periods as noted above. Thompson argues that the compromises Aquino made to the elite and the military were necessary because the weak post-authoritarian state needed support from influential and powerful forces. He argues that while Aquino’s policies “adversely affected the quality of the democracy being restored in the Philippines” in the short-run, “it gave her the breathing space needed to seek democratic consolidation” in the

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<sup>48</sup> For example, in the biography of Salvador “Doy” Laurel, Vice President to Aquino and a member of the oligarchic political elite, written by his wife, martial rule is represented as a period of “darkness.” Celia Diaz-Laurel, *Doy Laurel*, The Author, 2005, 102-123.

<sup>49</sup> See for example Hedman, *Philippine politics and society in the twentieth century: colonial legacies, post-colonial trajectories*.

<sup>50</sup> Interpretations of EDSA 3 in popular media are varied and reflect the contested nature of People Power. Some refer to it as a genuine outpouring of mass support for populist leader Joseph Estrada. Others view it more cynically – a case of a corrupt deposed president exploiting the desperation of the urban poor in order to insight urban violence.



future – one that would manifest in the freer elections that began in the Aquino period.<sup>51</sup> The new state Aquino was trying to build would have collapsed had she not compromised with elements of the military at a time when her government was being threatened by various coup attempts.<sup>52</sup>

As such, the effects of the restoration of democracy in EDSA must be examined based on its more long-term impacts. Although we do not necessarily agree that all these impacts of EDSA point to a deepening of democracy, we suggest that EDSA nonetheless fostered a number of lasting changes that allow us to consider it a historical juncture.

### **TOWARDS NUANCING BREAKS AND CONTINUITIES: FOR WHOM, BY WHOM, AND FOR WHAT?**

Notwithstanding the preponderance of views pointing to continuity as shown above, a different picture might emerge if one adjusts analytic lenses. For observers like Coronel, Muego, Nemenzo and Anderson who may have nurtured high hopes for visible and substantive, if not truly fundamental, changes on the national level, the failure of the Aquino regime to deliver on these areas highlights its lack of difference from the previous regimes. If seen from the local viewpoint, as what Kerkvliet's and Mojares's edited volume does,<sup>53</sup> however, alternative imaginaries become possible.

Michael Pinches, who happened to be undertaking a fieldwork in the urban poor community of Tatalon in Manila in early 1986, argues that while EDSA "was mainly bourgeois in practice and conception," "many of the working class and poor in places like Tatalon were significant participants and were attracted by the movement's populist character."<sup>54</sup> Prior to 1986, he notes, there was a marked silence instilled through intimidation in areas like Tatalon, with residents claiming, "We are just silent, there is nothing we can do."<sup>55</sup> During the snap elections, however, the new opposition provided leadership and safe cover for the residents of Tatalon who had grievances against the government.<sup>56</sup> They were also attracted to the figure of Cory Aquino who represented "both suffering and collective strength."<sup>57</sup>

What we may glimpse from this was the shift in the perception of the people<sup>58</sup> about themselves away from being politically inconsequential or powerless towards the rediscovery of their ability to make a difference, something that is encapsulated in and reinforced by the very notion of People Power. During martial law and pre-martial law years, people's action or people empowerment was often the preserve of leftist/left-leaning organisations and state-sponsored associations. One thing, among many others, that EDSA did was to trigger among

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<sup>51</sup> Thompson, "Off the Endangered List,"

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Benedict Kerkvliet and Resil Mojares, eds., *From Marcos to Aquino: Local Perspectives on Political Transition in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991).

<sup>54</sup> Pinches, "People Power and the Urban Poor," 87.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>58</sup> This refers to people who are outside the ambit of the organised Left.

at least segments of the ‘common people’ the awareness of their power as political agents, of what they can do and achieve as a collective. According to Kerkvliet and Mojares, because it “demonstrated that the social and moral resources” need for reform are present and because it “enlarged the moral and symbolic capital for the struggle to create a better society,” EDSA has inspired Filipino “people for generations to come.” The positive change after EDSA “no matter what turn history takes now, is not inconsequential.”<sup>59</sup>

In other words, a larger segment than initially assumed of the Filipinos may have been politicised, directly or indirectly, by the experience that accompanied the increasingly broad-based struggle to depose Marcos. The highly populist politics that characterises the post-EDSA period as evident for instance in EDSA 3, as well as in the election of popular media and showbiz personalities (of which Erap Estrada was an exemplar), may be an extension of this process of politicisation of the masses (lower and middle classes), accompanied by the ‘massification’ of politics, in the course of anti-Marcos struggle that concluded in EDSA.

For feminist cultural critic Nefeti Tadiar, People Power was an eruption of revolutionary desires – desires that can be uncovered through “an interpretation of the subjective dynamics of the revolt of the people [...]”<sup>60</sup> While acknowledging that the history of the revolt was eventually written by the economic/political elite, she contends that “the wayward movements of desiring-action coursing through this event continue to insist and might again exert such force (beyond People Power 2) so as to bring about more lasting fruitful socio-political changes.”<sup>61</sup> It is in this light that she interprets the role and impact of Corazon Aquino as the most resonant oppositional figure to the repressive Law represented by Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos, “the dictator-ally of the US, embodied the blockage of Philippine development and democracy, preventing the Philippines from being all that it could be.”<sup>62</sup> In the 1980s, Tadiar further notes, the hypermasculine militarist president suffered from a severe kidney ailment. His declining health, therefore, represented the declining stability of the Philippine socius. Aquino’s femininity, manifested in “her political inexperience and girlish demeanor,” was the “embodiment of transgression”<sup>63</sup> in light of Marcos using his vast political experience to plunder the state and silence dissent. Similar to Iletto, thus, Tadiar argues that these impulses emanated from the “underside” of Philippine politics.

The reference to the “underside” of Philippine politics foregrounds the fictional oneness of the notion of democracy. This point is analytically significant in that the conjunctural character of EDSA cannot be assessed apart from the yardstick of democratisation. Contested democratic frames necessarily suggest a range of possibilities including the opposite, that EDSA may not be a conjuncture after all.

To note, more radical scholars have argued that given the sharply iniquitous social structure that characterised the Philippines since the Spanish period, and maintained and even exacerbated during the American period, there never was in fact a real democracy in the Philippines. According to this view, what martial law amounted to was, as the sub-title title of

<sup>59</sup> Kerkvliet and Mojares, “Themes in the Transition from Marcos to Aquino,” 5, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Neferti Xina M Tadiar, *Fantasy Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 187.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>62</sup> p. 193

<sup>63</sup> p. 194

a book clearly states, *The End of an Illusion*—a long-standing illusion that the Philippines was ever a democracy.<sup>64</sup> While it is undeniable that it is ideologically-driven perspective and one held by a minority, it nonetheless cannot be dismissed as analytically inconsequential. The reason is two-fold: the persistent and gross social inequality in the Philippines is a historical fact; and, (2) it challenges us to rethink the fundamental bases of the widely held notion of EDSA as a historical conjuncture by driving home the question what really constitutes a democracy.

Quimpo's clear-cut differentiation between the meaning of elite democracy and democracy from below is instructive. For the elites, so he claims, democracy mainly refers to the maintenance of formal political structures that ensures freedom to exercise electoral politics, something that they can easily influence or manipulate. For the common people, however, this refers to genuine and "greater participation in decision making", which they hope could translate into "social and economic equality".<sup>65</sup>

The notion of 'democracy from below' puts in sharp relief the fact that a key event or set of events that happen may carry variable meanings to different sectors in a society. For the majority of Filipinos who live in varying levels of poverty from the Spanish period to the present, the failure of different colonial and postcolonial regimes to provide them better lives sets the platform for rejecting both the Marcos years and EDSA People Power as historical conjunctures. As far as they are concerned these events may be non-events, as their life hardly changed one generation after another.

Conversely, for the political and economic elites and other groups such as the leftists and Muslim separatists who were sidelined, emasculated, oppressed or terrorised by the Marcos regime, the highly negative impact of this period on them ensured that it would be regarded as a sharp break from the past, as one, long, dark night of terror that should "never happen again."

The 'massification' of politics mentioned earlier has been paralleled by the fragmentation of the oligarchy as more and more new entrants vie for better position in the scramble for the booty. The result appears to be the intensification of intra-elite rivalries as multiple centres of power, representing tenuous coalitions of families, have emerged. Intra-elite rivalries are certainly not new. It is an outstanding feature of the Philippine political history since as early as the Revolution of 1896 and Malolos Republic. What seems to be different in the post-EDSA period is the multiplicity of centres of power of more or less equal strength. Whereas Marcos and his cronies constituted an exemplary centre of power, practically unchallenged until the 1980s, the post-EDSA period saw no one particularly dominant group. It may have been a result of twin-processes that saw Marcos systematically emasculating the traditional oligarchy, from which group could emanate someone could have filled in the vacuum left by him, on the one hand, and cultivating new oligarchs, one the other. As Doherty claims, several families who used to not be members of the elite circle in the pre-Martial law years made it to the list primarily due to favours from the Marcos regime.<sup>66</sup> Included in these new elites are Chinese businessmen, like Philippine Airlines owner Lucio, who were cultivated by

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<sup>64</sup> *The Philippines: The End of an Illusion* (Association for Radical East Asian Studies and Journal of Contemporary Asia, 1973).

<sup>65</sup> Nathan Quimpo, *Contested democracy and the left in the Philippines after Marcos* (New Haven CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2008), 23.

<sup>66</sup> Doherty, *Who Controls the Philippine Economy: Some Need Not Try as Hard as Others*.

Marcos as political allies and who now hold significant influence in post-authoritarian Philippines.<sup>67</sup> The multi-cornered rivalry among the oligarchs is clearly seen in the several presidential candidates (five or more) since the 1992 election. The one coming up in 2010 is shaping up to be no different.

The fragmentation of the ruling oligarchy is also reflected in the much increased fluidity or weakness of the party system in the post-EDSA period. Whereas party-switching, defections and personalistic leadership have always been a prominent feature of electoral politics in the Philippines, broken only in the martial law years when party politics was sharply polarised between the ruling KBL and a motley of opposition parties, this became even more so in the post-EDSA when political parties come and go and are revived or become operative only on the lead up to elections. According to Kasuya, the single-term presidency imposed by the 1987 constitution may have a role to play in such weakness or instability.<sup>68</sup>

The Philippine state persists to be described as weak,<sup>69</sup> still unable to make its effective presence felt in all corners of its territory and to protect itself adequately from the predatory interests of the oligarch and other interest groups. In the case of Arroyo administration, however, we see a regime that Nathan Quimpo characterises as strong, and he echoes the alarms fairly common in Philippine political discourse against the allegedly creeping forms of authoritarianism. The “never again!” subtext is palpable<sup>70</sup> and while it echoes the concerns of the vocal segment of the Philippine society, it is possible that among the silent majority there are not insignificant number of people who really wish that the presidency, the regime or the state be made really strong to enable it to carry out programs that will get the Philippines out of economic doldrums.

Another possibly conjunctural legacy of the martial law-EDSA tandem was the intensification of the moralisation of politics at the expense of more secular, critical and analytical explanations. This is not to say that before Marcos period, morality did not play an important role in defining political fault lines. It has always been there. What is quite new is the synergy between the gravity of Marcos’ sins, on the one hand, and the dramatic manner by which events including the assassination of Ninoy Aquino unfolded leading to its downfall on EDSA, on the other, which may have made it so much easier to project Manichaeic images of politics as a fight between good and evil. The important role played by the Catholic Church and other religious organizations in the struggle against Marcos, accompanied by frequent mobilisation and deployment of religious images and metaphors, ensured that politics unfurl as a morality play.

The moralisation of politics that occurred after EDSA emboldened two groups that have since increasingly seen themselves as moral forces in Philippine politics: the Church and the military.

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<sup>67</sup> Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 253-255.

<sup>68</sup> Yuko Kasuya, *Presidential Bandwagon: Parties and Party Systems in the Philippines* (Pasig City, Philippines: Exclusively distributed by Anvil Pub, 2009).

<sup>69</sup> Patricio N. Abinales, “The Philippines: Weak State, Resilient President,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2008 (2008): 293-312.

<sup>70</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, “The Philippines: predatory regime, growing authoritarian features,” *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 3 (7, 2009): 335-353.

The Catholic Church, largely apolitical before the revolt, found itself in the middle of a large political upheaval during EDSA. Shortly after, it would argue that the revolution was divinely ordained. This perspective is aptly summarized by Bishop Soc Villegas, aid to Cardinal Sin in 1986:

There was no way that social scientists, political scientists, could explain what really happened at EDSA. The only fitting conclusion was that it was an intervention by God. To think that military tanks manned by soldiers trained to kill stopped when people waved their rosaries and gave them flowers and gave them food... The only way to explain it is the grace of God at work in human hearts.<sup>71</sup>

The Philippine Church's notion that God's will is discernable in certain political events, which was strengthened and for them validated by EDSA, encouraged its greater involvement in national politics. EDSA II, for example, witnessed a return of the Church to the centre of national politics, with Cardinal Sin directly opposing a Vatican order not to intervene in the protests against Estrada.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, elements of the military also became more politicised after EDSA. After the revolt, many of RAM's own members, for instance, felt that the focus of the organisation was shifting from reforms within the military to more political issues.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the military realised that they could use populist rhetoric to justify their political interventions. The coup attempts against Aquino were largely justified on nationalist grounds, with RAM styling itself as protectors of the people.<sup>74</sup> Even more recent military attempts at destabilizing the Arroyo administration largely mirror the rhetoric developed by RAM post-EDSA. The discourse of the nationalist soldier, notwithstanding the differences in their orientations, has also been used as a platform for coup plotters to launch successful political careers. RAM leader Gregorio Honasan and Antonio Trillanes – head of the Magdalo military faction that launched mutinies against Arroyo – are both senators of the republic.

Beyond the Church and the military, however, other groups, particularly, citizens groups began to see themselves as moral forces after EDSA. This moralisation is manifested in the discourse of popular empowerment that various grassroots NGOs forward.<sup>75</sup> The end of authoritarianism through EDSA also spelled the end of the political poles of martial law, which, we argue, allowed for the surfacing of these new political actors.

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<sup>71</sup> Bishop Socrates Villegas of Balanga, Bataan, interview by Lisandro Claudio, 24 August 2009, Bataan, digital recording, Balanga Cathedral, Bataan. Indeed, the resonance of People Power within religious communities has allowed for theological essays to be written about the revolution. See Douglas J. Elwood, ed., *Toward a Theology of People Power: Reflections on the Philippine February Phenomenon* (Quezon City: New Day Pub, 1988).

<sup>72</sup> Juliet Labog-Villanueva, "Sin opposed Vatican order, pushed EDSA: Cardinal threatened to quit as archbishop," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 21, 2008, [http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20080121-113651/Sin\\_opposed\\_Vatican\\_order\\_pushed\\_Edsa\\_II](http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20080121-113651/Sin_opposed_Vatican_order_pushed_Edsa_II).

<sup>73</sup> Salvador Guerrero, "The Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM): A Creation of Historical Experience," *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 3, no. 3 (1988), 57.

<sup>74</sup> This nationalist rhetoric would peak in 1990 when RAM changed its name from Reform the Armed Forces Movement to Rebolusynaryong Alyansang Makabayan (Revolutionary Nationalist Alliance).

<sup>75</sup> Quimpo, *Contested Democracy*, 52.

During martial law, two versions of “democracy” from different ends of the political spectrum were being forwarded. On the one hand was Marcos’s democratic revolution from the centre, which saw the state take on increased powers for the building of a “New Society” through martial rule.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand was the “National Democratic” revolution of the CPP and its founding Chairman Jose Maria Sison/Amado Guerrero, which targeted American imperialism and local reactionaries.<sup>77</sup> The rise of the Left as very significant players in national politics owes significantly to the condition brought about by Marcos’ authoritarian rule. Marcos, as the communists themselves claim, proved to be their most effective recruiter. From a few dozens of armed combatants in 1969, the NPA grew to the estimated 24,000-strong combatants with mass-base support of a few millions by the mid-80s.<sup>78</sup> Not only did the Left, along with Muslim separatists in Mindanao, constitute a powerful military resistance point to the dictatorship, its mass organisations also became a venue for large-scale political socialisation. For example, the 1970s saw student activism peak in the Philippines. The grammar of this activism, which targeted the “US-Marcos dictatorship” and various class inequities in Philippine society, was a product of various youth and student organizations being a part of the ND movement.<sup>79</sup> The Left also made a significant impact on Church, peasant, and labour movements. People Power would not have been possible without the political organization and socialisation that occurred in previous years.<sup>80</sup>

Despite its vast contributions to the anti-Marcos struggle, the CPP was excluded from EDSA. In what many critics and Party members consider a major tactical blunder, the CPP and its mass organisations decided to boycott Aquino’s campaign for the presidency, labelling the election as nothing more than a contest between a dictator and bourgeois reformists.<sup>81</sup> The boycott stance prevented Party members engaged in united front efforts from building an alliance with Aquino, even though the latter had attempted to woo the Left during the early phase of the campaign. During EDSA, the CPP attempted to play a role in the revolt, but the Aquino camp, which already enjoyed popular support, excluded it from the events.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Ferdinand E. Marcos, *The Democratic Revolution in the Philippines* (Manila: s.n., 1977).

<sup>77</sup> Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 4th ed. (Oakland, Calif: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1980). For an analysis of these two competing “revolutions,” see Reynaldo Clemena Iletto “The ‘Unfinished Revolution’ in Political Discourse,” in *Filipinos and their Revolution*, 177 -202.

<sup>78</sup> The New People’s army grew at an exponential rate during the Marcos years such that, according to Weekly, it was a significant threat to the government in the 80s. By 1985 its troops numbered around 24,000. Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of Its Theory and Practice* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001), 104.

<sup>79</sup> The resonance of these discourses is discussed by Reynaldo Iletto in “The ‘Unfinished Revolution’ in Political Discourse,” in *Filipinos and their Revolution*, 177 -202.

<sup>80</sup> For an analysis of the implications of the exclusion of the Left on the remembrance of People Power and the Marcos period, see Lisandro E. Claudio, “Memories of the Anti-Marcos Movement.”

<sup>81</sup> “Memorandum on the Snap Elections,” Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines, December 23, 1985, A.R. Magno trans., in “CPP: Rethinking the Revolutionary Process,” *Diliman Review* 34, no. 4 (1986): 17.

<sup>82</sup> Dominique Caouette, “Preserving Revolutionaries: Armed Struggle in the 21st Century, Exploring the Revolution of the Communist Party of the Philippines” (Ph.D Dissertation, Cornell University, 2004), 431-432.

The CPP's exclusion from EDSA meant that it would also be excluded from the post-authoritarian government of Aquino. More broadly, the success of a peaceful urban insurrection cast doubt on the viability of the CPP's underground armed struggle from the countryside. Since EDSA, the CPP and its National Democratic movement's strength and influence have declined sharply.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, because of the strategic and theoretical debates sparked by the Left's exclusion from EDSA, the Party split in 1992, resulting in a mass exodus of cadres, soldiers, and POs from the CPP.<sup>84</sup> Thus, EDSA not only ended the Marcos regime but facilitated the decline of the organised Left.

In place of the old Left, various aboveground people's organisations, NGOs, and reformist political parties have emerged. For Quimpo, these new "Left" formations maintain the mass character of the CPP, but unlike it, have come "to appreciate the positive aspects of the country's democracy" despite its inadequacies.<sup>85</sup> Groups like the progressive party Akbayan have recognised "the intrinsic value of formal democratic institutions and procedures" – an approach that has allowed them to participate in the sphere of electoral politics, which had once been the exclusive territory of the elite.<sup>86</sup>

This reconfiguration of politics from below is largely a legacy of the EDSA revolution. Unlike the period of martial law, which pitted two "democratic revolutions" against each other, Philippine politics is now more plural with various groups from below influencing and contesting the formal political sphere. This would not have been possible if not for the democratic space opened up by the revolution. Moreover, we contend that "people power" was a truly empowering moral discourse that allowed citizens and groups to see the ability of collective action to influence formal political structures.

## CONCLUSION

To assess EDSA as a historical conjuncture, one must not treat it as simple change in the type of political regime or system. Not only is this inadequate, it may, at times, prove untenable since various similarities between the politics of immediate post-war, martial law-era, and post-EDSA Philippines reveal the tenacity of many political practices, ideas, structures and institutions. In this paper, we have attempted to show that broader analytic lenses – ones that consider discursive resonances, that de-centre analysis from central state institutions, and that consider long-term changes in political culture – must be deployed in order to uncover the changes brought about by the revolution. Such an approach may be more speculative than an

<sup>83</sup> According to Weekly, the CPP was a serious threat to the government in 1985, with the government estimating placing NPA membership at around 24,000. According to Rutten, NPA membership dropped to 10,300 in 1993, while the latest government published in the Philippine Daily Inquirer estimate pegs the membership at 5,700. Weekly, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 104; Rosanne Rutten, "Popular Support for the Revolutionary Movement CPP-NPA: Experiences in a Hacienda in Negros Occidental," in P. N Abinales, ed., *The Revolution Falts: The Left in Philippine Politics After 1986* (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1996), p. 116; Joel Guinto, "Teodoro: Troops on guard vs 'desperate' communist rebels," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 31, 2008, Monday, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20080331-127453/Teodoro-Troops-on-guard-vs-desperate-communist-rebels> (Accessed September 29, 2009).

<sup>84</sup> For an account of the split, see Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines* (Anvil Publishing Inc, 1994).

<sup>85</sup> Quimpo, *Contested Democracy*, 90.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 90-91.

analysis of institutions, but we contend that the complexity of the event merits such multi-dimensionality. If, as we've argued, readings of EDSA are based on the way the 'evils' of martial rule are interpreted and also historical representations from the present, it is imperative to delve into the broad social matrices in which these interpretations are occurring.

The EDSA revolution not only ended authoritarian rule, which allowed for the beginning of a democratic transition – however slow and incomplete this transition might have been; it also altered the grammar of politics from below and above. The 'moralisation' of politics which we point to, for instance, cannot be grasped unless first, the locus of analysis is shifted away from the state and focused instead on groups like the military, the Church, and people's organisations, and second, unless the discursive resonance of EDSA as a moral uprising is paid due consideration.

Therefore, while there is a need to recognise the restorationist critiques on the basis of the reality of continuing social inequity in the Philippines, our approach has led us to conclude that EDSA cannot simply be assessed in terms of its immediate effects on formal economic and political structures. To reduce the revolution to this discounts the various resonances of the event to various groups. While it is difficult to argue that EDSA allowed for a fundamental alteration of the nature of Philippine politics, it is nonetheless important to see the spaces it opened and the political energies it strengthened. It is in this sense that EDSA may be considered a conjunctural event in Philippine history.

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