

Redemocratization Process in Comparative Perspective

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The Philippines is only one of the many countries which transitted from a dictatorship to democracy. But the Philippines is unique in that, the Aquino government is expected to do more than just transit the country back into normalcy. It is also expected to solve fundamentally and permanently the problems of the country.

The Philippines is the sixteenth country that has returned to democracy in the last fourteen years. Only one of these countries reverted back to military rule and that is Thailand. All the others have somehow managed to preserve their democracy by sheer determination and emulation of the countries around them — Greece, Portugal, Spain, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil, Guatemala, and the Philippines. All these countries found that if democracy was to return peacefully, it had to be done by the people themselves. The people found unity to display massive intervention of their own political lives. The first demonstration of people power happened in Thailand. In October 1973, there was a march of about 300,000 to 400,000 students, workers, professors and businessmen who were fired upon by the armed forces of Thailand. But when sixty-five were seen sprawled in the streets, the army stopped firing. Fortunately for Thailand, they had a King who stepped in and said, "If this is what the people want, then we want to have democracy." He then picked out a professor from Thammasat University, Professor Sanya Dharmasakdi and he said to this professor, "From now on, you are going to be our Prime Minister and your duty, will be to return this country to democracy. You'll give us a Constitution, get that Constitution approved by the people, then hold elections after that Constitution. And after the elections are held, you are to turn over the power to the newly-elected officials, then go back to the University and teach." That was exactly what happened.

In other countries, other forms of people power took place. Ours obviously was not the first, but it was the most spectacular for being massively peaceful. But in all these countries, the massing of the people or the combined efforts of popular movements was at the propitious moment joined by the armed

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forces, and the Catholic Church (in countries that were prevalingly Roman Catholic). As a civic institution and because of its universal character, the Church would manage to withstand the blandishments and the repressions of the dictatorship and would join the people. And among the three of them, the people, the armed forces, and the Church, they would bring down the dictatorship peacefully or relatively peaceful. They would then go through that same process of transition Thailand went through. The transition government is expected to do exactly what the King told the professor of Thammasat University to do – transit the government back to normalcy.

What happened in February 1986 in this country was to put things somewhat in reverse in the order of transition. The dictator, perhaps out of over confidence, made the mistake of calling for a snap presidential election. Confident that he would win or that he could successfully cheat to win, he failed to foresee the popular reaction to his cheating. Therefore, the reaction called “people power” catapulted Corazon Aquino to the presidency. When she was inaugurated president in February 1986, how was she perceived by the people? Never having been through this experience of transitting peacefully from dictatorship to democracy and seeing Corazon Aquino sworn in by Claudio Teehankee as President of the Philippines, did the people regard her as a transition person, as a president entrusted only with the functions given to transition governments all over the world in the last fourteen years? Or, was she regarded as a regularly elected or cheated but acclaimed President, in care of the country not only for transition but for the purpose of solving fundamentally the problems of the Republic?

Corazon Aquino was regarded as both. Therefore, she took on a double burden — the burden of transition and the burden of solving the problems of the Republic. And therefore, the transition that the Philippines is undergoing takes on a unique character not experienced anywhere else in the world today.

There was a *coup* attempt on July 1986. Several more followed. And every now and then, one heard alarms of another march into the city, rumors of another *coup*. The Filipino people have learned to take these things in stride. The first attempts of *coup d'etat* here, were more like musical comedies. But the August 28 one had to be taken a little more seriously. It is evident that these things are to be expected in transitions.

In Portugal, for instance, since the dictatorship lasted for so many years, repression produced the condition which enabled the communist party to penetrate not only the population but even the armed forces of Portugal. Therefore, when transition began in 1974, the battles took place within the armed forces themselves — the left battled with the right, the right battled with the left, and the center had to confront both left and right.

In Spain, five years after the beginning of the transition in 1976, the *guardias civil* swarmed all over the *cortes*, the parliament of Spain and tried to bring about a successful *coup*. In a book which contained the transcript of what took place inside the *cortes* between the *guardias civil* and the members of the Spanish parliament, one would read about the president of the *cortes* apparently moving around feeling that he was entitled to do so because he was President of the *cortes*, inspite of the fact that the colonels and other officials were already in charge inside the session hall. One would read about one colonel who said to the President, "*Sientate...*" (Sit down.) And the President said, "*Tu sabes quien soy yo.*" (You know who I am.) "*Yo soy el Presidente de los cortes.*" (I am the President of the Courts.) And then the colonel said, "*Tu no eres Presidente, ni rey tu.*" (You are not the President, nor the King.) And everybody said in Spain, "*Ah hombre, se acabo la democracia.*" (No man, democracy is finished). "What are we going to do when all these soldiers are swarming all over the place?" But King Juan Carlos, whom Francisco Franco created or recreated as the monarch of Spain, thought that he would continue with Francoism but luckily for Spain and the rest of the world, he happened to have developed democratic ideas and said, "*No, no, no, hombre. Es no puede ser.* (No, no, no, man, it cannot be.) I believe in democracy and that is what we are going to have," sounded a little like someone named Corazon Aquino who in that afternoon of August 28 went into television and said to the Filipino people, "No to dictatorship once more. No terms to Honasan." Firm on democracy, now Portugal and Spain are securely on the road to democratic greatness. And the Philippines also, is going to be a great republic.

But is democracy really native to our culture? Democracy is far from being a better Western transplant to Asia or Africa. It was in fact practiced 2500 B.C. in the alluvial plains of Mesopotamia. Indian democracy, for example, preceded the British occupation and the British are to be faulted for having to destroy the indigenous village democracy of India in order to bring about a centralization of colonial power in New Delhi. The French tried to destroy village democracy in Madagascar. The Madagascans have a village head very much like our *datu* in our *barangay* who also rose to office, not by hereditary succession but by consensus of the population. And when they saw him, the French thought to use him as an instrument for colonial policy. Just like how the Spaniards thought when they saw the *datu*. And so, the French changed the name of the village chief to *chef d'village*. Just like the *datu* who became *cabeza de barangay*. And thenceforth, the *chef d'village*, and the *cabeza de barangay*, no longer represented his people but the governor-general of the colonial power at the capital and the Kings of France and Spain living in Paris and Madrid.

Philippine democracy, Robert Fox wrote before he died, is a revision of that old canard that our original *barangay* was three-tiered — nobles, freemen

and slaves. He said that the colonial powers going around the world in the 17th century, tended to view the societies that they chanced upon — in Latin America, Asia, and Africa — through the prism of their own culture. Since there were nobles, freemen and slaves in Spain and France, therefore, when they saw a society among the Aztecs in Mexico or among the Cebuanos in Cebu, or among the Madagascans in Malagasy, they concluded that these societies must have nobles, freemen, and slaves. But Robert Fox says that there was no such division in Philippine society. There was more equality than we suspected, and there was more democratic consensus than westerners were willing to concede.

Thirty years ago, the Philippines was already number two in economic development in the whole of East Asia. Number two only to Japan. Those who were competing with the Philippines for that position were Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong. Now thirty years later, the Philippines is left way behind these countries. To get back on track, the Philippines must do as Japan did in the 1870s. After emerging from an agricultural state to a unified state under the emperor through the Meiji restoration, Japan sought three things: constitutionalism, an army, and industry. To do that, they had to send out their young men abroad and bring people from abroad to teach the people at home. They have no raw materials in Japan. They have to import 85 percent of their raw materials. And yet, in 1870, with little communications and renewed technology, Japan was able to defeat imperial Russia on land and on sea. The Philippines was much further ahead down the road than Japan in 1870. Technology may be in its incipient stage but there are technologists travelling abroad to find employment. There is a Constitution and the armed forces. So in the year 2000, can the Philippines not be an economic power? The Filipino people have to shock themselves, particularly those in the rural areas into a realization that this country need not remain agricultural, that this country is now in the condition to industrialize into the family of economic power nations.