

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: Rethinking Democratization in the Philippines

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Is the Philippines a democracy? The four authors in this volume provide an alternative reading of the Philippine experience by going against the grain on much of what has been written about the Philippines as a supposedly “democratic” or “democratizing” society. At one level, this re-conceptualization of a key concept such as democracy as it applies to our concrete experience is liberating since it opens up a new way of framing a problem by seeking greater conceptual clarity and political relevance. At another level, the re-evaluation that we have engaged in forces us to consider alternative responses to a problem whose roots have remained hidden or misunderstood under the conventional approaches.

Setting the overall tone of this study, Miranda in chapter one provides a rigorous re-examination of the concept of democracy and its measurement and concludes that by no means can the Philippines be considered a democracy. In his review of the vast and contested literature on the concept of democracy, Miranda adopts a well-established definition by Schmitter and Karl (2009:4) but adds two essential components: 1) a system of making authorities publicly accountable through the involvement of citizens not only in electoral processes but also through “politically active civil society groups”; and 2) a criterion for regime performance in which a democratic system must show a capability for achieving a “progressively human quality of life for its citizens within fifty years of a regime's formal democratic initiation”.

Modifying the definition originally drawn from Schmitter and Karl, the working definition of democracy used in this book as articulated by Miranda reads as follows:

Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives [original definition by Schmitter and Karl] and *their involvement in politically active civil society groups. As a system of governance, it demonstrably promotes—however slowly or gradually, even allowing for occasional, temporary reverses—a progressively human quality of life for its citizens within fifty years of a regime's formal democratic initiation* [Miranda's modification in italicized text].

The working definition of democracy used in this project addresses two important weaknesses that have beset traditional definitions of democracy. First, by providing a criterion for regime performance, our definition departs from a mainly procedural understanding of democracy that privileges the existence of free and competitive elections and related processes as the necessary and sufficient conditions of a democratic system. As Miranda stresses: "If sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority derives from them, it would be absurd to classify a regime as democratic where the material and other conditions of human life do not improve or at least do not markedly worsen over time". Thus, if certain outcomes and practices such as the rule of law and the quality of human development are intrinsic to the survival and reproduction of the democratic process, it is conceptually and logically necessary to include these factors in a working definition of democracy.

There exist strong comparative empirical findings that democratic regimes are best sustained by strong economic conditions. One major study shows that "democracies survive in affluent societies whatever may be happening to them," that "they are brittle in poor countries," and that "per capita income is by far the best predictor of the survival of democracies" (Przeworski et al. 2000: 137). Other major studies also support the finding that prospects for sustaining democratization are lower in societies with high levels of inequality (Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). In particular, Boix's study also shows that presidential systems with low per capita incomes and high levels of income inequality (as measured by the Gini index) face higher rates of observed failures and probability of regime breakdown (2003: 150-155). Thus, it is imperative to include a regime performance dimension in defining democratic systems since a process of democratization can hardly be sustained in the absence of significant improvements in the material welfare and socio-

political conditions of the people. In sum, Miranda points out that “a dimension of regime performance is what separates formal or paper democracies from those that demonstrably protect and promote the welfare of the people.”

Second, consistent with this critique of a mainly procedural definition of democracy, our understanding of the public accountability of authorities and rulers in a democratic system is not limited to citizen participation in electoral exercises but must include citizen participation through their active political civil society organizations. By adding this dimension, the concept of public accountability of the officials in a democratic system is thus substantially expanded to include the intervention and participation of civil society groups in the political process. This new dimension of accountability in fact gains saliency in political systems like the Philippines where electoral exercises have been traditionally dominated by powerful political families and routinely subverted by violence, coercion and systematic manipulation of electoral results. However, it needs to be pointed out that citizen participation in civil society groups does not have a uniformly virtuous impact on the public accountability process since such groups themselves have different and oftentimes conflicting agenda and political preferences. Since Philippine political life has been significantly energized by politically active civil society groups, we need to understand better whether such activities have indeed facilitated the democratic transition process or have introduced debilitating cycles of instabilities in society.

Another important conceptual guidepost emphasized by our study lies in the crucial distinction between democracy and democratization. As argued by Miranda, a democracy is best understood as one that has succeeded in showing overall improvement in the following core features of democratic systems over a reasonable period of time (from twenty five to fifty years): “popular sovereignty and representative governance; political participation and popular control; political equality and freedom; rule of law; public accountability; and, most crucially, the human quality of life for its citizens”. Reviewing the country's dismal governance history and its consistently dysfunctional operation and poor outcomes on a wide variety of socio-economic and political indicators, Miranda concludes that the Philippines is better described as a “non-democracy and, probably, a non-democratic oligarchy”. Indeed, a “non-democratic oligarchy” aptly sums up the key features of the Philippine political regime. Its oligarchic social structure has severely limited access to power to a few dominant political families while the means of accessing power has been largely undemocratic in the absence of genuinely free and fair elections, the minimum requirement for any democratic regime.

One may offer a less stringent criterion for judging the Philippine experience and argue that if the Philippines is not (yet) a democracy it is at least democratizing and on the way to being a functional democracy. But the process of democratization does not automatically translate to a democracy and could be reversed or stalled and in the words of Ronas in chapter 3, end up as a grotesque case of a “never-ending democratization” process. As also shown by the Philippine experience, this democratization process is particularly disabling and dangerous when initiated and controlled by powerful oligarchic blocs.

It is therefore crucial to understand why the protracted and contested process of democratization in the country has not reached a stage where we can confidently assert that we now have a democracy in place. At best, we have comforted ourselves with qualifying our supposedly democratic system as “weak, elitist, flawed, formal, unconsolidated,” and a host of other adjectives. But if this has been the case for more than 50 years now since independence, then as Miranda also asserts, “persistently ‘dysfunctional’ democracies are actually prudently better recognized as non-democracies; analytical sharpness is facilitated and political costs are minimized”.

Thus, in no uncertain terms, Miranda's paper stresses the urgent need to re-conceptualize democracy to reflect an imperative of our times: demonstrably significant improvements in human development. As he further explains, this is a “concern that is now demanded of all regime types but most particularly of those alleging to be functionally democratic whatever the extent of ‘democracy deficits’ might be”. He adds that this reconceptualization of democracy must necessarily go beyond the traditional procedural-electoral concerns of democratic governance and include dimensions of actual improvements in the quality of life indicators of the regime's constituencies. Finally, Miranda points out the need for democracy audits that will incorporate an “inclusive syndrome of civil liberties, and socio-economic-political rights and responsibilities”. Such a democracy audit will be able to distinguish between “pseudo-democracies, democratizing polities and democracies”.

The democratization process is necessarily a demanding one because it also involves processes of nation-building and state-building which may require different logics and priorities.¹ For instance, in much of the western experience, the process of state-building and nation-building largely preceded the onset of democratization. Thus, in the experience of the European industrialized states, a relatively politically unified state with working national political institutions were already in place when the process of democratization

got activated. In much of the colonized, developing world, however, the process of democratization (as typified by the foundational system of elections after independence) oftentimes took place under conditions of contested national identities and the absence or weakness of functioning state institutions (Fukuyama 2004). In short, most developing countries including the Philippines had to undergo highly compressed, simultaneous challenges of nation-building, state-building, and democratization with oftentimes disastrous outcomes. But while this knowledge hopefully leads to a better understanding of the formidable challenges of these processes, it cannot also be made an excuse for perpetually dysfunctional systems that continue to be referred to as democracies. After all, the Philippines has the longest experience of elections and formal democratic processes in the region. It also had the most promising record of economic growth in Southeast Asia during the decade after World War II. More than six decades later, we have become the laggard in the region. What went wrong?

The remaining chapters in this book examine various aspects of the democratization process, focusing on developments since 1986. In chapter two, I provide detailed historical and political evidence to argue that even on purely procedural grounds, the Philippines fails to qualify as a democratic regime. In chapter three, Ronas examines the concept of “horizontal accountability” as applied in the Philippine context and explains why the overly strong executive vis-à-vis the legislature and the judiciary has been an obstacle in the democratization process. Finally, in chapter four, Holmes discusses the “innate systemic limits” of civil society and the decentralization process and why these “have not really propelled the democratization process in the country”.

In my chapter, I examine the applicability to the Philippine experience of the most widely used indicator employed by the procedure-oriented approaches to democracy to determine the presence of a democratic regime: “free, fair, and competitive elections”. While it is true that most procedural definitions of democracy include other key factors such as the guarantee of basic civil and political rights, the universality of the franchise, and civilian control over the military, I focus my analysis on the electoral process to dramatize the fact that even on the most minimal aspect of elections alone, the Philippines cannot qualify as a democratic regime.² However, I also analyse the infirmities and dysfunctional operation of the party system in the country. By examining in detail the electoral processes and outcomes at the gubernatorial and congressional level from the 1987 to the 2010 elections,³ I provide concrete historical evidence showing that the Philippines fails to qualify as a democracy even from a mainly procedural definition of the concept.

In the overall system of the public accountability of officials in a democratic regime, elections constitute the process of “vertical accountability” when citizens are enabled to choose their officials in “free, fair, and competitive” contests. O'Donnell reminds us that elections “...occur only periodically, and their effectiveness at securing vertical accountability is unclear” (1998: 113). However, credible electoral contests can provide legitimacy to governments and become practicable way(s) of resolving conflicts without bloodshed and violence (Przeworski 2003). As further argued by Diamond, with good elections, “People are more likely to express support for democracy when they see it working to provide genuine political competition, including alternation of power, and when it has at least some effect in controlling corruption, limiting abuse of power, and ensuring rule of law” (cited in Reynolds 2011: 72).

But what is the electoral record in the Philippines? Notwithstanding our reputation as the country with the longest history of elections in Asia, we also have an electoral history steeped in vicious cycles of violence and systematic fraud and manipulation. As documented in my study, the post-war history of elections in the country show little credibility in the face of unrelenting machinations to win such contests either by the outright use of force or vote and voter manipulation in many areas of the country. For instance, the revelations about the massive vote manipulations that took place in the 2004 and 2007 elections reveal how deep and pervasive is the problem with the direct involvement of the country's top civilian and military elites. As further explained in my study, not even the shift to an automated election system promises an end to these problems. Automation will not automatically solve our electoral problems unless more basic problems of political stability, institutional capabilities and accountabilities are addressed. For instance, our weak system of electoral governance as exemplified by an organizationally incompetent Comelec lacking independence and the overall culture of impunity enjoyed by erring officials need to be decisively resolved.

Contributing to the growing literature on political elites in the country, my study, moreover, provides an updated documentation and analysis of how pervasive and resilient has been the dominance of political clans in the country at two levels of governing: governorships and congressional positions since the restoration of formal elections in 1987. If the continuing cycles of electoral violence and fraud disqualify the country from any claim to having “free and fair elections”, the entrenched dominance of political clans over two key governing positions likewise disables us from claiming a tradition of competitive elections.

One obvious effect of this overwhelming clan dominance over our governance system has been a highly elitist and narrow pool of leadership recruitment, disabling potentially more progressive and transformative leaders from winning elective positions. Furthermore, continuing clan dominance has severely weakened public accountability mechanisms especially in the context of other institutional infirmities such as the weakness of “horizontal accountability” mechanisms (discussed by Ronas), the limitations of civil society organizations and the process of decentralization (explained by Holmes) and the absence of well-institutionalized political parties.

Adding to the anemic process of democratization in the country has been the absence of well-institutionalized parties that could effectively link peoples' interests with leaders who are sensitive and responsive to social concerns in a virtuous cycle of interest aggregation and accountability. In my chapter, I explain that the particular institutional attributes of our presidential system such as the far greater powers of the executive vis-à-vis the legislature and the judiciary, the term limits on the presidency, and the independent resource base of many of the dominant political clans, have not been conducive to the emergence of well-institutionalized parties. I further argue that effective party building can be enhanced by two processes. First, mass-based parties espousing alternative programs of government must be allowed the full freedom to challenge the existing parties in open and institutionalized forms of conflict. In pursuit of common causes, these alternative parties may also explore principled political alliances with established parties. Second, some institutional changes could be explored to strengthen the party list system. Some of these concrete measures include increasing its seat allocation in Congress and shifting to full proportional representation (PR) in its election system by doing away with the three-seat cap on individual parties. However, I also argue that a minimum vote threshold (2-3 percent of total votes cast for the PL) should be retained to preclude the further fragmentation of the Party List (PL) system. Thus, for the PL system, the challenge focuses on the combination of more inclusive forms of representation particularly of the marginalized and under-represented sectors while avoiding the political paralysis of extreme party fragmentation.

In democratic systems, two aspects of public accountability are usually studied: “vertical” and “horizontal” accountability although as stressed in this book, a third aspect, sometimes referred to as social or “oblique” accountability involves the impact of civil society organizations on the same process. In his examination of “horizontal accountability issues” among the key national agencies of government, Ronas builds on Guillermo O'Donnell's concept of “delegative democracy” as a unifying thread to examine why executive

hegemony over the legislature and judiciary constitutes an obstacle to democratic consolidation.⁴ In the context of a “delegative democracy”, the executive clearly exercises superior powers over the legislature and judiciary and the formal checks and balances mandated by the constitution seldom work. Ronas discusses extensively the well-established specific manifestations of executive powers over the legislature and judiciary such as the president's decree-making powers under the executive's military power, veto powers over legislation, appointment powers, control over the budget process, immunity from suits, and the difficulty of impeaching the president, among others.

But why is an overly strong executive vis-à-vis the legislature and the judiciary a problem for democratic consolidation? One simple reasoning goes back to the dangers inherent in the exercise of power which is not restrained by institutional or legal means. If one combines this with an all too human predisposition to deploy power for selfish, private ends, then the risks that the substantial powers of the executive could be abused are certainly magnified. However, a fuller understanding of the problem requires an examination of the institutional context of presidential systems. For instance, Latin America which is dominated by presidential systems also shares with the Philippines this similar political tradition of strong presidents and weak legislatures.

There is strong comparative empirical evidence that presidents who are much more powerful vis-à-vis their legislatures create problems of instability. One study by Shugart and Carey shows that:

Systems that score high on presidential powers, in particular those that are extreme on presidential legislative powers, are often those systems with the greatest trouble sustaining stable democracy.

Systems that give presidents considerable powers over the composition of the cabinet but are also low on separation of survival of executive and assembly [legislature] powers belong to “troubled cases” (1992: 148).

It is logically tempting to argue that we need strong presidents who can ensure the efficiency and coherence of policy outputs in the face of legislatures made up of individuals parochially elected and representing localized district interests. This problem is aggravated by the absence of a strong party system which further empowers the president to act, in effect, as the sole aggregator of the national policy agenda with little input from parties and other organized political groupings. As Ronas points out, an alternative response to an overly strong president is to strengthen the powers of the legislature, otherwise the presidency loses its accountability to the assembly and magnifies the risks of

presidential power being abused. For instance, at the height of its exercise of its presidential powers, the Arroyo administration, not surprisingly, sought to exempt its executive officials from the investigative and monitoring functions of Congress. Another complementary check to a president with too much power is a party system with enough legitimacy and strength to challenge and provide a broader base of consensus to presidential initiatives. Thus, if a well institutionalized and disciplined party system has emerged, it can provide an expanded venue for policy-making and consensus which otherwise would be overwhelmingly dominated by the president.

In exploring further some reform measures to advance the cause of horizontal accountability, Ronas cautions against grand projects designed to amend the constitution for major institutional changes such as the shift to a federal-parliamentary system. He argues that these are inherently divisive measures with potentially more harmful unintended consequences. Instead, he focuses on more pragmatic and doable and yet consequential measures such as restoring to Congress the power over the purse (budgeting process), the strengthening of the rules and powers of LEDAC (Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council) and JELACC (Judicial Executive Legislative Advisory and Consultative Council), and ensuring the fiscal autonomy of the Judiciary. Indeed, these are reform areas where the leadership of a strong president could be tested: not in the exercise of overwhelming power over Congress and the Judiciary but in the exercise of negotiating skills for welfare-enhancing distributive reforms. As Boix asserts:

... changing the constitutional framework of a country has a small impact on the stability of a democratic regime. . . . When a society is sufficiently equal or when capital is sufficiently mobile, democracy prevails regardless of the rules (parliamentarism, plurality rule, and so on) employed. When a society is acutely unequal, no constitutional rule can sustain democracy (2003: 15).

However, specific amendments to the existing constitution may be worth exploring to address unique problems such as the possibility of institutionalizing a system of asymmetric federalism for the Muslim dominated provinces of Mindanao.

Looking forward to a long-term response to horizontal accountability and the overall problem of democratic consolidation, Ronas advocates a broad coalition of reform encompassing concerned government officials and various civil society organizations. To provide a more focused arena of mobilization and organization, these reform coalitions can be organized along specific issues such as the passage of the Freedom for Information Act, working for just,

negotiated political solutions to the armed conflict, ending the culture of impunity on corruption and human rights violations, completing the agrarian reform process, ensuring credible and fair elections, and substantially reducing poverty and income inequality, to name a few of such actions that will no doubt advance the democratization process.

The final chapter by Holmes examines whether two generally acknowledged “democratizers” --- civil society and decentralization--- have indeed facilitated the democratization process in the country. Starting with a cautionary note, he argues that “both arenas have suffered innate systemic limits and therefore have not really propelled the democratization process in the country”. Defining the concept of civil society is a highly contested exercise and in this study, Holmes adopts a framework drawn from Alagappa (2004) and Anheir and Topler (2010) that privileges groups somehow oriented toward a set of “public goods” that include: “accountability of public officials, more inclusive representation, equitable development and an intrinsic goal, autonomy,” particularly from government. These set of orienting goals are generally consistent with the prescriptions of many political theorists on the functions that independent groups and associations of civil society perform for democracies such as: “ 1) a center of collective political resistance against capricious and oppressive government; 2) to organize people for democratic participation; and 3) socialization into the political values necessary for self-government” (Rosenblum and Post 2002: 17-18).

Such a definition of civil society groups and their functions is consistent with this book's expanded understanding of the public accountability mechanism through which citizens make their public officials accountable both through the electoral process and the impact of “politically active civil society groups”. However, we also need to address the collective impact of many non-politically active civil society groups whose political apathy by itself also necessarily affects the dynamics of public accountability. Holmes recognizes this concern as he discusses the problems faced by civil society groups in trying to expand their mass base of support. Thus, a conception of civil society that situates it mainly as a “seedbed of virtue” risks glossing over the reality that there are voluntary organizations in the wider civil society that may in fact “strengthen existing cleavages and exclusion patterns” (Hooghe and Stolle 2003: 235-36).

In assessing the overall impact of civil society initiatives to advance the democratization process, Holmes identifies the key limitations and dilemmas faced by this sector. These include the “project-oriented” and single-issue

nature of many civil society groups; their limited mass base; intra-civil society differences along ideological lines and differing orientations on people empowerment and engaging the state. At the heart of these problems are two interlinked issues: the nature of civil society and how it is demarcated from the state or the public sphere; and the relationship between civil society and the state. It should come as no surprise that in democratic or democratizing societies, the universe of voluntary organizations that make up civil society are by nature plural and particularistic: plural because these are voluntary organizations with diverse interests, identities, and political-ideological orientations and particularistic because these are primarily propelled by the interests and identities of the groups themselves.

In the Philippines, the struggle against the authoritarian rule of Marcos spurred the emergence of a critical mass of politicized civil society organizations committed to an agenda of reforms and radical changes in power relationships. However, given the inherent pluralism and particularism of these groups it is unrealistic to expect a common and stable form of political engagement with the state or to people empowerment. Moreover, even the most politically active of civil society groups cannot replace the government unless they transform themselves into a political movement or party that systematically seeks to win state power. If there is no such open challenge, then the more realistic option is for civil society to clearly delineate “much clearer criteria . . . for entry into and support for state programs” or risk being “absorbed by and constituted on the basis of clientelist and semi-clientelist relations” (Reid 2008 as cited by Holmes).

Notwithstanding its own weaknesses and limitations, Philippine civil society groups, as pointed out by Holmes, do have a significant record of reform advocacy and have played major roles in the initiation and passage of key legislation such as the Urban Development and Housing Act, the Anti-Rape Law, the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act, the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, and others. Given their extraordinary diversity and oftentimes conflicting priorities and contradictory goals, civil society can maximize their collective action through what may be considered as their “overlapping consensus”⁵ on specific issues that enhance developmental and democratization goals. This “overlapping consensus” also makes possible the formation of reform coalitions between civil society and government actors as articulated by Ronas in his chapter.

Decentralization is another process that has been seen by many policy-makers as a “magic ingredient” for democratization. But as a contested political

process, it can ignite either a virtuous process of accessing and using power in a more democratic manner or a vicious cycle of further entrenching the already well-established power holders who lack public accountability. In assessing the country's decentralization experience, Holmes starts by noting three initial positive developments: 1) the provision of additional fiscal support to local government units (LGUs) through the internal revenue allotment (IRA) as mandated by the Local Government Code (LGC) passed in 1991; 2) the provision of technical and capability-building support by both national government agencies and multilateral and bilateral funding agencies; and 3) a generally satisfactory citizen appraisal as seen in public opinion surveys which seem to be supported by the many awards for exemplary governance practices and innovations given to selected LGUs (for instance, the *Galing Pook* Foundation awards started in 1994).

In further analysing the decentralization process, Holmes proceeds by identifying three major problems: statutory, organizational, and systemic. Reflecting the first major flaw, no enabling law has been passed to implement the LGC's mandate to have sectoral representatives in the local legislative councils. The local legislative councils have to be distinguished from the special boards such as the Pre-Qualification, Bids and Awards committee, the local health board and the local school board which already include private representatives in many LGUs. The lack of this enabling law means that private citizens and civil society groups are denied access to the local legislative councils which can serve as an additional mechanism for advancing the public accountability of local officials. A second statutory flaw lies in the "archaic, martial law-vintage" fiscal provisions in the LGC that have constrained the taxation powers of LGUs and in turn made them overly dependent on the IRA from the national government.

The second problem discussed by Holmes concerns the organizational constraints faced by LGU personnel particularly in the area of development planning and tax administration. This has been aggravated by the lack of participation by the private sector and civil society groups in the local legislative and planning councils in the absence of an enabling law to enforce the original mandate of the LGC. Finally, Holmes examines the systemic constraints on the entire process of decentralization with the pervasive networks of patronage and clientelist ties linking national elites and local power holders. These constraints have resulted in what a World Bank-ADB document states as an "excessively politicized system of rewards and allocations, and by uneven institutional strength and resourcefulness among national executive, congressional, provincial, and city or municipal actors" as quoted by Holmes.

More particularly, we see these debilitating practices in the use of huge government resources controlled by the executive to buy LGU officials off during electoral contests, the diversion of the IRA by local executives for their private ends, the sheer wastage of congressional “pork barrel” funds deployed for non-productive projects, and the unbridled corruption at all levels of government.

Some General Evaluations on the Philippine Transition from Authoritarian Rule

More than twenty five years after the transition from authoritarian rule under the Marcos dictatorship, what evaluations can we offer about this process. Consistent with the overall conceptual framework and empirical findings of this book, we clarify why the formal end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986 did not really result in a transition to democratic rule.⁶ As we further explain below, the so-called transition process has failed to satisfy even the procedural requirements much less the substantive conditions for the initial installation of a democratic order.

The dynamics of the actual process of transition from authoritarian rule in the country had strategic outcomes on the process of democratization or the lack of it. Activated by a unique confluence of events, the tumultuous actions that climaxed in the ouster of the dictatorship in 1986 do not fit nicely into any of the established models of democratic transition: structural, modernization, or elite-bargaining. Experienced neither as a reform nor revolutionary process in the country, the end of the dictatorship was not also a consciously designed “pacta” between the dictator and the opposition elites. It occurred as the surprise endgame to a failed coup attempt against the dictator but it was also the product of several events coming together at various conjunctures: the growing popular resistance movement especially after the assassination of Sen. Aquino in 1983; the inter-elite antagonisms fuelled by the deepening economic crisis starting in 1981; the split in the military and its politicization as an institution; the serious ailment of Marcos that provoked elite realignments; the calibrated pressures from the United States; and the emergence of a popularly accepted new leader of the legal opposition, Mrs. Aquino. One particular feature of this transition process includes an element of imposition coming from the combined effects of the rebel military's involvement in the process and the pressures and support of the United States but initially counterbalanced by the massive popular mobilization against the dictatorship.

At least two strategic, critical outcomes resulted from such a process. First, an initially shaky but eventually stabilized *modus vivendi* facilitated the participation of leading elites from the dictatorship to be part of the transition government and eventually win and hold on to crucial elective positions. Such an arrangement also led to the restoration of the economic and political power of the old anti-Marcos elites whose resources were taken over by the ruling family and its cronies. Second, this grand restoration of elite rule foreclosed the possibility of the substantial redistribution of material resources such as landownership that could have significantly empowered the traditionally poor and oppressed sectors.⁷

Unlike many cases of “pacted” transitions where mass participation and mobilization were either absent or weak, the struggle that eventually ousted the dictatorship in the country was firmly anchored in mass organizing and mobilization especially by the left movement in the country. As discussed by the book authors, the robust presence of a vibrant and politically engaged civil society capable of resisting oppressive governments and working for transformative developmental projects is a positive force for democratization. While maximizing its “social capital” and coalitional capabilities, civil society groups must also guard against being routinely co-opted by government officials with little public accountability. They certainly can work out principled alliances with government actors but they must also preserve their independence and integrity. Undoubtedly, one of the more inspiring aspects of the transition process has been the continuing assertive activity of various civil society organizations in protesting repressive government actions, oftentimes at the sacrifice of countless lives.

In his summation of twenty five years of comparative transition processes away from authoritarian rule, Schmitter argues: “Of all the economic and cultural prerequisites or preconditions of democracy, the one that must command the most urgent attention is the need for prior agreement on national identity and borders” (2010: 25). Indeed, the urgency of addressing this problem is tragically demonstrated by the failure of government to come to terms with the historic affirmation of the national identity and geographic community of Muslims in the country. In another but related level of contested national identity rooted on questions of class equality and solidarity, the protracted armed struggle by Communist-led guerrillas in the country likewise attests to the urgency of this problem. The failure of government during the transition process to decisively resolve these legitimate issues does not speak well of its capabilities and priorities.

Another lingering outcome of both the dictatorship and the transition process has been a politicized military. For obvious reasons, no process of democratization can proceed if the military continues to defy legitimate civilian authority. But its politicization as an institution does not take place independently of its relations with civilian authorities. In short, military (and police) tendencies towards politicization are usually driven by perceptions about the illegitimacy and continuing incompetence of civilian leaders. Moreover, civilian machinations for the pursuit of power and wealth also enlist military allies, further politicizing the institution. Not surprisingly, the most dangerous displays of military rebelliousness during the transition process also took place during the administration of civilian leaders seen as illegitimate and corrupt. Thus, the long term response to the dangers of a politicized military lies not so much in reforms within the institution, although these are important, as in reforms in the civilian institutions that direct and legitimize the military's activities.

A major failing of the transition process has been its inability to improve the process of electoral governance in the country. Both procedural and substantive approaches to democracy agree that credible electoral exercises are necessary conditions for the initiation and maintenance of democratic regimes. But as discussed above, elections continue to suffer from endemic violence and fraudulent manipulations. Moreover, free and fair elections cannot be assured as long as many areas of the country remain as arenas of armed conflict and significant numbers of voters are in effect disenfranchised by their poverty and vulnerability to elite manipulation and coercion. One clear focus of reforms in electoral governance must be the Comelec, the constitutional body that enforces and oversees all laws and policies related to the conduct of elections. For much of its disreputable history, no less than Comelec heads and commissioners have been directly implicated in the rigging of elections. To address this problem, a systematic campaign to strengthen both the organizational competence and institutional autonomy of the Comelec is required. Needless to say, the culture of impunity in this institution as in many other government agencies must also come to an end.

As a whole, we believe we have conducted a rigorous critique of the key concept and practice of democracy and offered an alternative reconceptualization that is analytically sharper and more politically relevant for our community. For a number of reasons, we stress that we have not had any successful transition to a democratic regime or that we are now living in a democracy. We have failed to meet even the minimum conditions of a procedural democracy: free and fair elections. We have failed to show any

significant progress in achieving minimum outcomes that make possible the exercise and sustainability of democracy: the rule of law and improved quality of life indices, to mention just two of these critical factors. We have failed to develop effective institutions to ensure the “horizontal accountability” of public officials and agencies. At another level of public accountability, civil society organizations have done an invaluable job of monitoring the exercise of power and initiating reform advocacies but these same groups continue to be repressed and harassed by powerful political clans and oligarchic blocs.⁸ In the same vein, the full potential of the decentralization process to empower and democratize local government constituencies continues to be blocked by the resilience of oligarchic and clan families in many local areas.

And yet all these daunting conditions do not signal despair or defeat. We have come to understand much better the forces that impede democratization processes. When this knowledge is harnessed by democratization movements and struggles in our own country, we are hopeful that we will be brought closer to the birthing of a truly democratic order.

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Notes

- 1 As argued by Stepan, Linz, and Yadav (2011), even within the process of nation and state building, one can have conflicting logics and priorities as shown by those who pursue traditional nation-building models from those who try to craft “state-nations” in societies with a shared political community but with deep cultural diversities.
- 2 For an expanded conceptualization of procedural democracy and its use in classifying political regimes in Latin America, see Mainwaring, Brinks, and Perez-Liñan (2007:123-160).
- 3 The first gubernatorial contests after the end of authoritarian rule in the country took place in 1988.
- 4 In his reconceptualization of democracy in this book, Miranda considers O'Donnell's concept of “delegative democracy” as a case of “conceptual stretching” and therefore not properly a subtype of democracy. Following Diamond (2009), he argues that a better classificatory label for “delegative democracies” would be that of a “hybrid” regime or, considering that most instances of the latter are seriously democracy-challenged polities, a “pseudodemocracy”.
- 5 Rosenblum and Post (2002) use the term “overlapping consensus” to refer to principled reasons for cooperation between civil society and government but it can also be used to identify points of consensus among various civil society groups.
- 6 As Schmitter stresses, his co-authored works with O'Donnell focus on “transitions *away from* authoritarianism rather than *to* democracy”. . . and that both authors “refuse to presume a *telos* that would lead to such a felicitous result. . .” (2010:18).
- 7 Thus, in one of the many tragic ironies of Philippine political history, the key beneficiaries of authoritarian rule – the Marcos-Romualdez political families – have remained unpunished and regained full political power at both national and local levels.
- 8 This “monitoring of power” by civil society groups in the Philippine context cannot be equated with the notion of “monitory democracy” espoused by John Keane (2009) where “power-monitoring and power-controlling devices” are exercised in a fully functional democracy, in fact in what he calls a “post-Westminster” form of democracy. In an undemocratic order such as the Philippines, one has to be prepared to risk life and limb to engage in the “monitoring of power”.