Why Asia's Oldest Democracy is Bound to Fail

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ABSTRACT

Despite having the earliest exposure to electoral democratic practices in the Asia-Pacific region, the Philippines remains to be one of the least stable democracies in the Global South. Notwithstanding the return of electoral democracy in 1986 after two decades of authoritarian rule, the Philippine state has yet to consolidate its democratic regime. In view of the emerging literature on post-1986 Philippine politics, this highlights the defective aspects of its contemporary electoral democracy by examining four key features of state–society relations: (a) the nature of the elite class; (b) electoral and representative politics; (c) civil society; (d) political economy; and (e) internal security. This article focuses on the balance of power across various sectors where interests of the state and non-state spheres interact, and to what extent such dynamics reflect the prospects of a stable electoral democracy. Employing an interpretivist analysis with allusion to some demonstrative empirical examples, this article concentrates on the post-1986 Philippine politics. The main theoretical argument here is that a good starting point for a comprehensive empirical analysis of the quality of democracy requires disaggregating and analyzing empirical observations that demonstrate the nature of the balance of interests found in state–society relations.

Keywords: democracy, state–society relations, Philippines, elections, political economy

> "*No country in Asia has more experience with democratic institutions than the Philippines.*"
>
> —Hutchcroft (2008, p. 142)

For two decades of immense suffering experienced by many Filipinos during the authoritarian and corrupt regime of Ferdinand Marcos, the

year 1986 *is* indeed considered by many as the "turning point."[1] What emerged during that time *was* the return of national and electoral processes, the reinstitutionalization of checks and balances between government agencies, and the constitutional guarantee of human rights and civil liberties. While the year of 1986 paved the way for the return of "procedural–electoral" democracy, the Philippine politics is still far from the kind of democracy that espouses socioeconomic justice, consistent state's regard for human rights, and equitable economic development that many established countries in the West have already achieved. Indeed, this is not a novel argument in the scholarly literature on the Philippine politics (Dressel, 2011; Hedman & Sidel, 2000; McCoy, 1994, 2009; Putzel, 1992; Regilme, 2015; Rogers, 2004), whereby scholars have shown the nature of its "defective" democracy (Croissant, 2004; Merkel & Croissant, 2004).

Nonetheless, the fairly recent and notable cluster of literature on the Philippine politics (Bello & Gershman, 1990; Kramer, 2009; Loo, 2004; McCoy, 2009; Thompson, 2010) seems to be unable to take a more comprehensive account of the overall quality of democracy since the fall of Marcos, and also of being mostly focused on specific policy issues or temporal turning points such as national elections or political crises. Having said that, I provide a critical review of the nature of the post-1986 Philippine democracy and its failures using several focal areas of state–society relations. Indeed, various derogatory descriptive phrases have been used in the literature to describe the post-1986 Philippine democracy: "cacique democracy" (Anderson, 1988), "oligarchic democracy" (Kingsbury, 2001), "low intensity democracy" (Gills & Rocamora, 1993), "elite democracy" (Bello & Gershman, 1990), and the dominance of "local strongmen" or "bossism" in the Philippines (Sidel, 1999, 2004). Supporting such a stream of literature, I provide a general overview of how the defective qualities of democracies can be seen in five focal areas of the Philippine state–society nexus: (a) the nature of the elite class; (b) electoral and representative politics; (c) civil society; (d) political economy; and (e) internal security.

There are two reasons why these five areas of analysis will be explored upon in this article. First, one can reasonably argue that one of the fundamental elements of a democratic state is the extent of its responsiveness to citizen's human rights—a quintessential concern that can be empirically examined by considering state–society relations. Particularly, I refer to non-state groups such as the political elites, commercial elites, and ordinary citizenry and their relationship to the state, that is, how and to what

extent does the state respond to their needs and wants, or how a specific non-state group wields state power for its own sectoral interests. This makes a good starting point for a comprehensive empirical analysis of the quality of democratic governance because they illustrate the balance of interests between and amongst actors in the state and society. Second, it is important to examine how the state manages its own internal security problems, particularly on various violent non-state armed groups that challenge the state's legitimacy and political control over a given territory. An effective democratic state cannot solely function in terms of its ability to manage the political economy of domestic material resources in view of public interest. Instead, it is through the ethical use of the state's instruments of political violence and its strong domestic sovereignty embedded through the widespread perception of public legitimacy that internal security is best achieved. Thus, the ultimate success of the state's quest for democratic consolidation over its claimed territory is contingent on its ability to manage the threat posed by violent non-state armed groups. On that regard, the renowned German sociologist Max Weber conceptualizes the state "as an institutionalized rule structure with the ability to rule authoritatively (*Herrschaftsverband*) and to legitimately control the means of violence (*Gewaltmonopol*)" (Risse, 2011, p. 4). Hence, the democratic legitimacy of the Philippine state requires an array of competent state agencies that can sufficiently and effectively provide the needed public goods delivered to its constituents, yet such state competencies should be willfully tamed by a deliberative view of public interest. Thus, the state's propensity to abuse its extractive and coercive powers has to be justly controlled by a meaningful and active civil society. This makes the pursuit of public interest the quintessential goal not only of the state, but also of the wider society.

Hence, I shall then proceed to empirically analyzing each of these five areas of the post-1986 Philippine polity, and thereafter provide some critical concluding remarks on the prospects for a more stable democracy in the country.

The Nature of the Philippine Elite Class

Like many developing democracies in the Global South, the Philippine political economy is distinctively characterized as having a dominating presence of capitalist owners of the means of production and other powerful economic actors who primarily depend on their labor as urban or rural proletariat (Krinks, 2002). Indeed, the logic of contemporary political

economy in the Philippines is based on a very pronounced binary conflict of wealth and poverty, where individuals markedly identify themselves either as part of the masses (*masa*) or the bourgeoisie (*burgis*, *mayaman,* or *elitista*). More particularly, Krinks (2002, p. 5) suggests that the latter class may be composed of "landowners or rentiers or genuine entrepreneurial capitalists, or people in the upper levels of the bureaucracy or professions."

The historical genesis of the most influential families can be traced from the long history of Spanish and American colonial rules. After the Spanish colonization that lasted for more than three centuries and gave birth to extremely powerful "landed" elites, the American colonial rule was focused on molding the next cadre of Filipino leadership (Doronila, 1992). Thus, the former US President William Howard Taft's[2] policy of recruiting Filipinos as part of the colonial government was preferentially geared toward the bureaucratic employment of famed individuals from the *ilustrado* (middle-class intellectuals during the Spanish colonial period) and *principalia* (economically wealthy class) classes. They eventually occupied key positions in local and national levels of bureaucratic administration as this allowed them to control, or at least gain influence over, strategic centers of the state power in the early years of the formation of the state apparatus during the American occupation. As a case in point, the American historian Alfred McCoy (McCoy, 2009; Regilme, 2011) narrates how the US colonial administrators in the Philippines strategically collaborated with native Filipino elites in order to promote the American interests through extensive police power and surveillance systems, and that some of these "best practices" of coercive techniques that were experimented in the archipelago were then exported back to the USA. Widely considered as nationally influential, powerful families have been able to obtain preferential loans from state banks, special favors for their own banks and financial institutions, logging and mining concessions, and some significant tax exemptions (Balisacan & Hill, 2003; Karadag, 2010; McCoy, 1994). The American occupation's policy of buying some lands from the Roman Catholic Church was also one of the primary reasons that created the rise of new landed elites such as the Filipino-Chinese "mestizos" in the post-Spanish colonial context. These new cadres of middle class also enjoyed a wide access to public resources in the state's coffers that are only used for private gains.

Consequently, the current state's police power apparatus is, to a large extent, a by-product of the long, historical development of elitist power

structures that continue to perpetuate its existence despite the American establishment of national elections in the country as early as 1935. In other words, while the downfall of the authoritarian regime of Marcos also led to the collapse of deposition of the regime's allied wealthy families (Cojuangco, Benedicto, Tan, and Romualdez, among many others), the fall of Marcos just paved the way for a "redefinition of who is in and who is out" within the inner circle of national and local elites who had access to the state's coffers. That is to say, a new group of politicians elected during the succeeding presidential elections inaugurated a new class of economic and political elites who would then exploit the public resources for one's private gains.

Two quintessential strategies of the Philippine elite families have been used in order to retain their primacy as pivotal actors of the national political economy (Hutchcroft, 1998). First, they devote inordinate amount of resources to undermine the state and to have unlimited acquisitive opportunities. Second, using the financial resources from the central bank, these family conglomerates broadly diversify their business interests into many economic sectors. This mode of political behavior highlights the larger patterns at work within the Philippine political economy: a predatory oligarchy extracts undue privileges from a patrimonial and weak state and, consequently, long-term development goals are hindered by these overtly particularistic and short-term demands from the powerful few. Loyalties of the elites are defined by parochial familial interests rather than to the broader public interests. Thus, "the Filipino family is the most enduring political unit and the one into which, failing some wider principle of organization, all other units dissolve" (Conde, 2007).

The expansion of the elite class started and persisted through bilateral kinship where two elite families combined their wealth through marriage. For instance, the case of Zobel de Ayala clan, the most affluent family in the Philippines listed in the Forbes 2007 World's Richest and with a net worth of around US$ 3 billion, is an interesting case of elite expansion through bilateral kinship that can be traced from the colonial period (*Forbes*, 2007). Accordingly, patriarch Antonio de Ayala from northern Spain migrated to Spanish colonial Philippines and forged an industrial partnership with the Mexican immigrant Antonio Fernandez de Roxas, and later with Andreas Zobel, a pharmacist from Hamburg, Germany, who settled in Manila in the 1830s. As the cases of Zobel de Ayala and other influential clans may suggest, colonial rule dramatically advanced the apparently unjust interests of the elite families, political clans, and

dominating domestic and foreign corporations against those of the paltry interests of the rural majority (Putzel, 1992).

On the other hand, focusing on the subnational level of political analysis, political scientist John Sidel (1999) casts some doubts upon the orthodox view that the majority of the cadre of national political elites, which form a part of the patron–client system, have their own power lineages that can be traced from colonial landowners. Undermining the importance of national elites, Sidel (Hedman & Sidel, 2000, pp. 1–223; Sidel, 2004) argues that local and national elections are dominated by "local" politicians and powerful "political clans" based in specific provinces and regions. These local elites enjoy not only political endurance, but also economic ascendancy. This is demonstrated by a monopolistic standing within their own respective bailiwicks through "landownership, commercial networks, logging or mining concessions, transportation companies, and/or control over illegal economic activities" (Sidel, 2004, p. 3). Upon realizing that national politics is clearly contingent at the local level, John Sidel introduces the concepts of "bossism" and "bosses," where he implies the "prevalence of local power brokers who achieved sustained monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or bailiwicks," and distinguishes it with "patrons" who are more dependent on coercion than on affection or social standing (Sidel, 1997, p. 952). In fact, he contended that political violence is an instrument of the local elites to enforce their authority. Illustrative of this authority, the political violence in the end of November 2009 in Maguindanao, a province in the Muslim-dominated southern Philippines, cost the lives of 57 journalists and other media personnel who were brutally massacred. Apparently, the suspect is the incumbent local mayor who is a part of a weapons-armed political clan that has controlled the province for several decades already, while these journalists were just trying to document the filing of candidacy of the political contender of the incumbent mayor.

Juxtaposing the orthodox wisdom of how national elites are profoundly influential (Balisacan & Hill, 2003; Hutchcroft, 1998; Putzel, 1992, p. 2) with the seemingly minority view held by Sidel (Sidel, 1997, 1999, 2004), I contend that both local and national elites in Manila are crucial in the persistence of elite-based electoral politics that systematically marginalizes public interest. The symbiotic relationship between national and local elites remains crucial to the political ascendancy, survival, and eventual failures of the national political elites. In support of such an

argument, Steven Rogers (2004, p. 114) characterizes that "national and local posts remain dominated by an unrepresentative elite that is more adept at advancing personal interests than at crafting coherent policies." Introducing the concept of an "elite above the law," Rogers (2004, pp. 116–119) describes that the national and local elites' privileges are being maintained "through a dense web of family, social and professional connection held together by loyalty, tolerance, and ties of mutual obligation." When applied to national and local politics, these cultural values are arguably a "potent force opposing progress." The logic of an "elite above the law" as well as the values that define elite behavior in politics make it difficult for ideological delineation among political parties to be possible. The post-1986 Philippine democracy is merely dominated by "elites above the law," rather than by grassroots political parties and well-grounded policy platform-based political organizations. Even more disappointing was the recent scandal in May 2012. It was during that time that the Philippine Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona was formally impeached by the legislative branch for being unable to declare around US$ 2 million held in various foreign banks accounts. The conviction of the Chief Justice demonstrates how the post-1986 Philippine democracy had gone wild that even the highest court in the country—the fortress of the law as the guardian of democratic societies—seemed to be in a dismal and rebarbative state.

Meanwhile, succeeding "revolutions" after 1986 are also insightful of how elites' interests rather than more democratically grounded and broad-based interests were the bases for a successful political mobilization brought by social movements. A very telling example of this is the "Second People Power Revolution" in 2001 that successfully deposed then President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, who was an undereducated movie actor and who rose from local politics to the national limelight. With an impeachment trial halted because of the apparently anomalous political machinations at the legislative level, millions of people from the middle class and civil society groups gathered in the same location of the 1986 revolution. The accusation about the massive political corruption of President Estrada as well as his economic mismanagement and cronyism pushed the middle class into the streets in Metro Manila's financial district in an utter disregard for the "rule of law" by disregarding the ongoing impeachment process in the Philippine Senate. Although generally considered as a legitimate act of civil disobedience that attempts to

topple a corrupt regime, the Second People Power Revolution was heavily criticized as an initiative of a dissatisfied constellation of elite factions who were disfavored during Estrada's presidency apart from the critical role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines (GMA, 2008). Ultimately, even during and after the First People Power Revolution in 1986, the role of the national and local elites was pivotal in dictating how the national political arena should be managed and powerful enough to mobilize the acts of civil disobedience that could even topple democratically elected and widely popular presidencies such as that of Estrada. Even the political and social discourses on what qualifies as a "legitimate 'people power' revolution" were also dictated by elite interest. As a classic case in point, there is a dispute about the "failed" Third People Power Revolution in 2001 (four months after the Second People Power Revolution), wherein the working class gathered in the same location of the first and second revolutions and tried to rally on the way to Malacañang Palace, where President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (the successor of Joseph Estrada through the Second People Power Revolution) held the office. What makes this third "revolution" very distinct from the previous ones was that, firstly, the ones involved came from the working class and unemployed, living in extremely poor urban areas within and nearby Metro Manila, and secondly, they attempted to use violence to promote their ends as massive destruction, and vandalism of public utilities and infrastructure were committed.

The power to stage major changes in the political and social infrastructures was definitely controlled by various elite factions, and, in the case of the Philippines, not even "social movements from below" were enough to resist the "soft" and "hard" power of the national elite factions. As described by a well-known observer of the Philippine politics, Amado Doronilla, as a "source of political instability that has undermined the strengthening of political institutions and democratic legal process," the People Power Revolutions (first and second) present a paradox of the post-1986 Philippine politics, that is, "to have the power to elect a president and to have the power to remove a democratically elected president" (Mydans, 2006). Thus, the post-1986 democracy is exhibitive of the fundamental weaknesses of a regime under the veneer of oppressive elitism: a persistent disregard for the "rule of law" tolerated by a rotten political culture with corrupt and venal political elites directing the national political–economic theater.

Electoral Politics

The return of electoral processes and a legal guarantee of political succession were part and parcel of the eschatological promise of the First People Power Revolution in 1986. In principle, electoral processes were supposed to promote a broader sense of political representation, where elected leaders were expected to represent various public interests, as broadly as possible. However, the Philippine electoral politics was plagued by the unchallenged dominance of political clans and dynasties (Boudreau, 2009; Coronel, 2004; Teehankee, 2007). In view of that, the persistence of families—and not principle-based political parties—was one of the most enduring features of the Philippine Congress, even with the fall of Marcos (Teehankee, 2007). As such, in 2007, two-thirds of the legislators in the post-Marcos Congress were members of political families. Of these, 70 percent were second- and third-generation politicians. Nearly all of them also had multiple relatives in public offices. Meanwhile, it is estimated that there were 250 political families nationwide; of the 265 members of Congress in the year 2007, 160 belonged to these clans (Conde, 2007). In fact, the Arroyo political dynasty, of which the former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is a member, had several members in the thirteenth Philippine Congress. Notably, two presidential sons and the brother-in-law of the former president were concurrent members of the Congress. As of the moment, the former president herself is somehow demoted by being a Member of the House of Representatives (Philippine Congress): an effusive way of trying to protect her political interests amidst a seemingly unfavorable political climate, currently dominated by her political enemies. But her return to the Philippine local politics through the legislative branch also paved the way to the political vendetta of the Aquino political dynasty (of which the current President Benigno Aquino is a member), thereby making the former president face various counts of corruption and is now under "hospital arrest."

As a matter of strategy, political clans have mobilized an array of adaptive actions that include: "1) the establishment and maintenance of a kinship network; 2) the organization of political machines; 3) the mobilization of wealth and property; 4) access to state resources; 5) the use of violence and coercion; and 6) the cultivation of issues, image, and popularity" (Teehankee, 2007). The emergence of political clans can be traced from their initial cooperation with the Spanish colonial

administrators, and their rise to power continued even during the post-colonial period. Although the Marcos dictatorship created a new cadre of political and economic cronies, the end of his rule marked the comeback of old powerful clans whom the dictator had previously tried to crush. This ultimately suggests that post-authoritarian electoral competition was apparently another opportunity for other previously repressed powerful elite groups to reemerge—a situation that was undoubtedly detrimental to democratic deepening and broadening of the space for political participation. Indeed, democracy, in this case, became the only "game in town," particularly suited for the big elites to whom such a game was designed to serve for.

Furthermore, the Philippine electoral political landscape is notable also for its run-off-the-mill political parties and an undeveloped political party system. Characterizing how ill-equipped these parties are, Filipino political scientist Nathan Quimpo (2007, p. 277) opines that these political parties, aside from being controlled mostly by the nation's politico-economic elites, "are built around personalities, rather than around political programs or platforms," and, unfortunately, "ideologies and platforms are just adornments for them," with "lavish spending, vote-buying, fraud and violence" being widely practiced every national or local election. In addition, with political violence as a recurring feature of electoral processes, Quimpo (2007, p. 283) argues that

> The Philippines is perhaps the only democracy in the world where violence has become a regular feature of elections—dozens get killed in every election. At least 87 people were killed and 45 injured in 183 violent incidents in connection with the elections for barangay (village) leaders in 2002. In the May 2004 national elections, at least 147 people were killed in election-related violence, making the elections the bloodiest since 1986. Immediately after both the 2002 and 2004 ballots, President Arroyo declared that the elections had generally been peaceful.

Notably, political violence that leads to the death of innocent civilians could be one of the most appalling instances in which electoral politics is at a serious crisis. Arguing how "institutional continuity" describes the crisis of mismanaged electoral politics in the country, Teehankee (2006, p. 215) describes the regular national elections in the country as insightful of "flawed administration of the electoral process, wanton use of government resources for partisan political purposes and allegations of

fraud and massive cheating." The famous German political scientist Aurel Croissant (2003, pp. 81–82) offers two plausible reasons why the political party system in the country fails the standard of a fairly competitive yet meaningful party politics. The first reason refers to the observation that political parties "have lacked a common programmatic or ideological core," while the second pertains to the difficulty "for parties to discipline legislators or enforce coherent policies because of the extremely personalistic nature of local party chapters" (Croissant, 2003, p. 81). These defects of the party system demonstrate why organized and meaningful representation of a diversity of various conceptions of sectoral interests fails to get into the state's comprehensive policy agenda. The Philippine political parties' rallying cry goes with the charisma of its leaders' personalities, rather than strong convictions on a principled policy agenda and a well-grounded ideology.

To illustrate the monstrosities of the Arroyo regime at the macro-aggregate level, Nathan Quimpo (2009, p. 345) explains that

> Under Arroyo, political violence, coercion and repression have reached the highest levels since the Marcos era. After declining in the 1990s, the numbers of election-related violent incidents and killings have risen sharply in the 2000s. In the 2004 presidential elections, which Arroyo allegedly rigged, a total of 189 persons were killed and 279 wounded in 249 election-related violent incidents, making the 2004 polls the deadliest since 1971.

In other words, if, indeed, democracy has returned after 1986, it appears problematic why election-related political violence appears to be arguably more pervasive today than in the past. This only suggests how 1986 was a mere turning point for a qualitative change in procedural politics, rather than a meaningful emancipatory politics that respects its constituents' fundamental human rights.

Civil Society

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups had emerged when the 1987 constitution guaranteed the political and civil rights as well as the freedom to form civic-oriented associations that form a cornerstone of any meaningful democracy. Having the third largest NGO community in the world, the Philippines arguably presents the most stunning achievement of its civil society sphere with its extensive

promotion of a culture of political participation in the macro-political arena, considering the 160 percent increase in the number of NGOs between 1986 and 1996 (Clarke, 1998).

Yet, the number of the Philippine NGOs is in no way suggestive of the presence of a meaningful civil society in an emerging democracy. In this regard, David Wurfel (2004, p. 222) argues that the Philippine NGOs have not significantly helped in strengthening the prospects for democratic consolidation as they are "infected by the pervasive patron–client system, which they are ostensibly dedicated to subvert" as the legislative and executive branches are unrestrainedly dominated by traditional politicians.[3] This observation is also supported by Ferrer (2004, pp. 554–557) when she "de-romanticized" NGOs in the Philippines for three primary reasons. First, the civil society sector's effectiveness is undermined by multifarious competing agendas among themselves. Second, "partisan politics" and ideological, cultural, and gender differences weaken their credibility. Third, a large number of big NGOs based in the urban centers reinforce the dependency of small-scale yet meaningful efforts of rural-based NGOs and interests groups toward effective collective action for socioeconomic justice.

Notably, Western governments strongly rely on the orthodox wisdom that supporting domestic civil society in the Philippines has lesser chance of having that foreign aid being funneled to corruption instead of direct bilateral assistance to the government. Yet, it is a well-known fact among Filipinos that the actors in domestic civil society, or non-state organizations, are in no way immune from political corruption. Hence, one of the most recent and biggest political scandals of foreign aid occurred in 2012, when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated an official investigation against the Visayan Forum Foundation (VF), the country's biggest NGO dedicated to fighting human trafficking. In reference to a USAID-funded project worth US$ 1.65 million (approximately 70 million PHP), the VF was accused of making "falsified private documents which were used and are being used to defraud the donors of the aforesaid foundation, specifically the USAID," according to the presiding court judge who served the warrant of arrest against the organization's leader (Romero, 2012).

Recognizing perhaps these difficulties in the struggling civil society sector in the country, Quimpo (2008) argues that the highly problematic "contested democracy" in the Philippines requires a dramatic paradigm shift, that is, a more participatory and broader sense of

political interests—and this requires the encouragement, not suppression, of leftist and progressive forces.

In the face of the state's reaction to a seemingly rambunctious civil society sector, the Arroyo presidency (2001–2009) has been widely accused of being responsible for the unexplained thousands (or hundreds, depending on the sources) of cases of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines whose victims (unarmed) are suspected to be ardent supporters of the progressive left-wing civil society groups in the country. To a large extent, this "state of emergency" politics that the Arroyo regime launched after 9/11 was done within the pretext of a larger transnational security crisis brought by the terror attacks in the USA in the end of 2001 vis-à-vis the role of the Philippines and Southeast Asia in the War on Terror (Foot, 2005). Having said that, the widespread reinforcement of brutal policing practices that include political harassment, and in some cases through extrajudicial killings, by the Arroyo regime against unarmed political opposition and civil society critics also led to a widespread branding of all those progressive groups as "terrorists" (Focus, 2007; Guevarra, 2007; Parreno, 2011). This happened, unfortunately, despite the fact that some in the political opposition, if not most of them, have been totally disinterested or not at all involved in violently deposing the current democratic regime.

National Political Economy[4]

Two key problems remain as hindrances toward a more equitable economic development amidst the return of electoral democracy in 1986: agrarian reform and sharpening material inequalities.

The rise to power of the democratically elected successor Corazon Aquino[5] in 1986 also presented a lot of perplexing ironies in the democracy. One of these is that, during her presidency, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was passed as a law that attempted to redistribute massive land estates to peasants. Ironically, President Corazon Aquino's family-owned *hacienda* (estate) of around 6,000 hectares was exempted from such directive. Even the current President Benigno Aquino, her son, appears to be very silent in genuinely addressing redistribution of those precious landed estates. Such silence is indicative of how they are indeed afraid of how they will be stripped off from their decades-old land assets.

Notwithstanding the heralded optimism brought by the re-democratization of the country since 1986, political sociologist Walden

Bello (Bello, Docena, de Guzman, & Malig, 2004) warned that the post-1986 Philippines is in a state of "permanent crisis" where electoral democracy in the country failed to deliver economic prosperity and to lessen inequality which became a vital source of mass alienation. For instance, powerful families who were then historically empowered by colonial rule own majority of the shares in the biggest corporations in the country today. For example, The Ayala Corporation, owned by the Ayala de Zobel family, controls the biggest and most capitally rich commercial bank, the most expansive real estate business, utilities services, and many other commercial interests.[6] The Ayala family and several other families are just a part of the structural problems of the post-1986 Philippine political economy that even the downfall of Marcos was unable to strike down.

Material inequality in the Philippines is pervasive, yet it remains to be the most crucial policy issue in order to truly uphold socioeconomic justice. Demonstrating how electoral democracy is unable to live up to the ideals of socioeconomic justice, the Gini coefficient in 1985 in the Philippines was pegged at 0.45, while in the succeeding years until 2003, the interval rate ranged from 0.45 to 0.47 poverty (ADB, 2005). This is particularly insightful: before and after the revolution, income inequality remains unchanged, despite all the glamorized hopes brought by the return of electoral democracy in 1986. It must be noted, however, that the Philippines appears to be a non-anomalous case in the Global South, even in Southeast Asia. In the opinion piece written for the widely read "openDemocracy" (Regilme, 2012), I have used the data from Claessens, Djankov, and Lang (2000, pp. 1–44) and argued that

> the case of three Southeast Asian electoral democracies are provocatively telling: the top ten most affluent families in Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand own 58%, 53%, and 46%, respectively of the entire market capitalization of the country. This constrains the economic odds of the rest of the population to rise from poverty and to meaningfully engage in democratic politics.

In praxis, the society's dissatisfaction with the frailties of the electoral democratic regimes since 1986 has been clearly shown in the following: six coup d'état attempts during the Aquino regime; regular massive protests against undue privileging of foreign capital against small- and medium-scale enterprises during the Ramos regime; the eventual collapse of the democratically instituted regime of Estrada due to his inability to solve

endemic poverty amidst enriching his favored cronies; and the numerous systemic attempts to topple Arroyo during her nine-year presidency due to numerous political scandals. Needless to say, the life of the new democracy in the country is terminally ill or at the very least, always at high risk of eventual demise—it is a deadman trying to run off on the edge of the cliff.

Meanwhile, the return of electoral democracy which began during Corazon Aquino's government in 1987 until 1992 inherited the previous structural-historical dilemmas experienced by the Marcos regime. For instance, the duly elected President Aquino and the ratification of a new liberal democratically oriented constitution in 1987, which was initially expected to uphold vigorously the interests of the broadest sectors of the society, did not bring much salvation in favor of the landless class. In fact, key economic cabinet positions in the Aquino government were virtually all filled in by powerful private business elites, collectively known as the "Makati Mafia" (Bello, Docena, de Guzman, & Malig, 2004, p. 43)—referring to Makati as the affluent and posh financial district in the heart of Metro Manila. Expectedly, this elite group is primarily accountable to an unstated mandate of protecting their class interests, rather than pushing for radical reforms such as land and asset distribution or basically upholding the democratic mandate of robustly defending the majority interests of the society, largely defined by poverty and landlessness. Bello et al. (2004, pp. 43–44) further argue that this "mafia" is strongly committed to neoliberal economic priorities such as favorable economic climate, free market competition, influx of foreign capital, and, of course, debt servicing in order to maintain a satisfactory credit rating for the country. Such a commitment is indeed very difficult to reconcile with Corazon Aquino's post-authoritarian political rhetoric of mass-based pro-poor policy paradigm with the aim of "expanding the base for income, wealth and resources" (Bello et al., 2004). Instead, her regime is widely acknowledged as a big failure: playing as a powerless captive of national elites strongly committed to act as ambassadors of powerful global institutions that unconditionally herald the neoliberal economic ideology, devoid of any sympathy for the grueling poverty in the developing world.

True enough, as many landless poor are unable to survive in the rural areas, they seek further employment opportunities elsewhere in the urban areas—yet their fate remains to be hopeless. In the case of the post-authoritarian Philippines, for instance, "*unemployment* rate is

pegged at around 8 to 12 percent in the period 1995–2011" (Regilme, 2013, p. 97). Insightfully, the rate of "underemployment" is much more striking: it ranges from "17.1 to 26.1 percent in the period of 1995 to 2011" (Regilme, 2013, p. 97). These figures are not so difficult to understand: typical Filipino households, especially in "imperial" Metro Manila, would normally have several family members working for a company on an underemployed status or may be found working in the informal sector. The phenomenon of "credential inflation" in the Philippines is very much pervasive, wherein the access to university-level education has been much easier for many from various levels of the society which triggered the increased demand for the level of qualifications needed for a measly number of job supply (Regilme, 2013). Thus, it is no surprise to see burgeoning figures for underemployment, where there is an apparent mismatch of jobs vis-à-vis academic and skills training. This is exemplified, for instance, by a typical Filipino trained lawyer who is working in the business process outsourcing industry as a customer service officer, answering calls from the USA—a job that does not necessarily require a university degree. The grim financial situation faced by ordinary Filipino workers is described below in terms of aggregate macroeconomic labor situation:

> Based on the July 2010 data provided by the Philippine Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE 2011), the minimum daily wage in Metro Manila (National Capital Region/NCR) prescribed for non-agricultural jobs is pegged at 382 Philippine pesos (6.16 euros) while the rate for agricultural jobs is 345 Philippine pesos (5.56 euros). In all other regions, the rate for agricultural and non-agricultural jobs is set at around 200 to 220 Philippine pesos (approx. 3.70 euros). Meanwhile, the Ibon Foundation's study shows that the 400 Philippine pesos (6.45 euros) minimum daily wage is just two-fifths of the recommended approximated mean family living wage of 988 Philippine pesos (15.93 euros) in the Metro Manila region for the period 2010–2011. (Regilme, 2013, pp. 97–98)

Taking into account such figures, working-class Filipinos are left with no other choice but to migrate to "greener pastures" abroad, whenever they have the opportunity to do so. This is true not only in the cases of skilled workers and professionals, but also when one considers the case of Filipino students and scholars who went abroad for graduate studies, either supported by a scholarship or financed by their own families. Many of them aspire to settle down permanently abroad for better-paying jobs

and a more secure family life. Yet, those who returned initially vowed to reform, if not radically change the corrupt system in the Philippines, only to find out several years after that they will inevitably contribute to the perpetuation of the corrupt system. While approximately 10 million Filipinos comprise the third largest international labor diaspora in the world (next to China and India), there are far-reaching political consequences that such a phenomenon causes. First, capital-rich countries in the West benefit the most from the highly skilled and extremely motivated Filipino workers, while the labor-exporting countries lose the much-needed labor power that is needed to fuel their emerging economies. More importantly, the labor diaspora has tremendous effects on the quality of social welfare opportunities in the Philippines, most especially in the fields of health care, education, and engineering, among many others. While billions of pesos are being poured into the domestic economy each year from the foreign remittances of the Filipino labor diaspora, this is in no way enough to compensate for the huge economic loss of domestic labor as well as the unquantifiable social costs to their many young Filipino families who are left misguided because of their parents who are working abroad. Most importantly, perhaps, the massive Filipino diaspora, which is being excessively promoted by the state as the enduring solution to the deep problems of social justice in the country, also reflects how state agencies have implicitly confessed that domestic problems are difficult to solve and that their constituents are better off by just moving abroad.

Internal Security

In view of the fact that Marcos discursively used the apparent existence of perverse security threats from rebel groups (left-wing and Muslim rebels) in order to justify martial law in the early 1970s, it is not surprising that the return of electoral democracy and constitutional guarantees of freedom after the 1986 revolution seems not to make any substantial difference in finally resolving the grievances of these groups. As it is widely known, the southern islands of Muslim Mindanao are considered to be the foremost battleground for armed rebels who have been fighting for a separate Islamic state within the mainly Catholic country. In fact, sporadic violence has continued despite ceasefire and peace talks that began in 2003 (BBC, 2009). True enough, the Muslim rebels' activities and agenda are much more complex than what international media usually

tells what it is. For instance, Muslim rebels in Mindanao, together with their peers in Indonesia and Malaysia, were trained in Middle Eastern territories as a part of the capacity-building activities of the "Jemaayah Islamiyah" network that aspires to build regional Islamic caliphate network in Southeast Asia (Singh, 2007). In reference to the inability of the post-revolution democratic state based in Manila to effectively uphold internal security, the paramilitary strength of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which has around 12,000 members and 9,000 firearms, was bolstered by the Philippine Navy's feeble monitoring capabilities. This also resulted in the easy transfer of weapons and sleaze within the Armed Forces of the Philippines[7] that found substantial firepower being traded to the insurgents (Rodell, 2004). Despite the remarkable dwindling of public support for the communists since the 1986 revolution, the Philippines still has the reputation of having one of the oldest surviving armed communist insurgencies in the world that not even a dictatorial or an electoral democratic regime was able to eliminate. The communist revolutionary movement in the Philippines goes back to the late 1960s when sociopolitical upheavals were taking place in many parts of the world and, since then, has not been successfully defeated by the liberal democratic government in Manila (Nathan, 1987).

The failure of the electoral democratic government to effectively resolve various armed conflicts presents us two useful analytical insights. First, many of these armed conflicts—spurred by communist, Islamic fundamentalists, and highly organized criminal syndicates—are all reflective of the sharp material inequalities in many areas of the country that were deprived of the state's public goods due to the imperial dominance of Manila and the Catholic-dominated regions of the country. Second, the systemic persistence of these internal security problems is symptomatic of the moral and democratic deficit of the country's elected national and local political leaders and the rotten state apparatus that supports them. It should be no surprise to say that the national elections in imperial Manila are only a matter of race for the extremely powerful and capital-rich political and economic elites in the country whose inner motivation is to secure their financial posterity using the state's public coffers, and not necessarily to resolve many of these endemic internal security problems once and for all.

Moreover, the abusive coercive apparatus of the state has not ceased its operations despite the downfall of the draconian regime of Marcos. Does it necessarily mean that the armed conflicts from many oppressed

constituencies in the country always require brutal and illiberal policing practices from a supposedly liberal democratic state such as the Philippines? McCoy (2009) traces the institutional origins of the oppressive police power of the state starting from the American occupation even until the recently concluded Arroyo presidential regime that purportedly employed extrajudicial killings in the hope of silencing political dissidents and critics. While this may be seen as an attempt to nominally consolidate a personalistic yet democratic-elected Arroyo regime, this is in no way a step forward to democratic consolidation. Undoubtedly, the return of a democratically elected regime and a constitutional guarantee of civil liberties did not prevent the pervasively abusive practices of the state's police power over political opposition in the superficially invoked value of national security.

Yet, promoting national security requires inducing equitable economic development across the country. This economic variable remains crucial in increasing the pace of political development in many struggling democracies (Boix, 2003; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Maeda, 2010; Teorell, 2010)—or more specifically, the consolidation of the new democratic regime. In this regard, multiple national security threats—Muslim insurgency, private armies, and communist rebels—remain to be unresolved due to the institutional problems within the police apparatus of the Philippine state (Schulzke, 2010). The Armed Forces of the Philippines, accordingly, have been beset with the systemic "lack of professionalism" as evidenced by its well-known propensity for "corruption, abuse of civilians, and ineffectiveness against the insurgents" (Schulzke, 2010, p. 320). Consequently, the dismaying incapacity for the police power apparatus of the state to resolve endemic security problems hinders the economic growth and development which remains critical to the stability of any new democratic regime (Beetham, 1994; Schedler, 1998).

Concluding Remarks: A Chaotic Circus of the Philippine Democracy

In this article, I argued that the Philippine "procedural–electoral democracy" is still far from being "consolidated" as in the levels similar to advanced liberal democracies in Northern Europe or North America. Upon examining the five key areas of state–society relations in the post-1986 Philippine democracy, I argue that the key explanatory factor here is the "pervasively extreme social conflicts" (Dahrendorf, 1958; Jones, 2010) that exist between and among the ruling elites and the oppressed,

as seen in the changing constellations of elite groupings in every presidential regime period. Particularly, the agential powers of local and political elites can be dramatically seen in how "electoral politics" and the "commercial sphere" are ruled by the capitalist-oriented logic of continuous accumulation of power—after all, capital is indeed power (Nitzan & Bichler, 2009). Consequently, the long-standing and growing dissatisfaction among ordinary citizens can be seen in the various "internal security" problems. Although they existed way before the return of electoral democracy in 1986, the veneer of procedural and legitimating electoral processes brought by constitutional democracy and elections in 1986 was not enough to finally address the deep social conflict-oriented causes of these pockets of resistance.

While sketching the concrete pathway toward democratic consolidation[8] is way beyond the scope of this article, I have, nonetheless, rearticulated the importance of how elites generate social conflict as in the case of these pockets of resistance generated by long-term systemic disregard for "authentic socioeconomic justice" and the "sharpening material inequalities" in the country (Regilme, 2012, 2013). Moreover, the state leverages on its police power apparatus as it quells these armed resistance movements, albeit resulting "in systemic illiberal policing practices." If, indeed, "sharp material inequalities" and "systemic illiberal policing practices" concurrently persist and intensify over time, we shall not be surprised that the "great tragedy of the Philippine politics" will imminently come—that is, the eventual realization of the illusion that post-1986 electoral democracy, after all, is just another effective way for capital-rich elites as well as their political collaborators to capture the state's coercive and extractive capacities in the name of "private" interest, rather than that of the "public."

While the analysis here only focused on intranational factors and causal dynamics, I believe that the bigger story here has something to do with the systemic injustices perpetrated by the global political economy (Bohman, 2010; Jones, 2014; Regilme, 2014). Future research on the emancipatory politics in the Global South should be geared toward an empirically rigorous causal examination of transnational–domestic linkages. Thus, the solution cannot be solely found and exclusively deliberated in Manila, but can be resolved in the corridors of power in the West.

Conclusively, the return of electoral democracy does not necessarily guarantee a truly emancipatory politics, but may instead be one effective way for the elites to consolidate their rule through the state.

In this way, the outcome is not democratic consolidation (Schedler, 1998), but elite-oriented state capture. The future is grim for Asia's oldest electoral democracy, and so is the case with other countries in the Global South experiencing elite-oriented state capture.

NOTES

1. Notably, Jürgen Habermas (1996, pp. 359–387) refers to acts of civil disobedience as "critical moments of accelerated history." Such a description refers to how such acts, in this case revolution, may actually incite significant structural changes in the political economy such that it also dramatically transformed the political–historical timeline of events.
2. Before being elected as President, he served as the first civil governor of the Philippines as an American colony.
3. In the Philippines, the local NGOs are usually considered double-faced. Some consider NGOs as having legitimate claims with a clear advocacy and organizational mission, while some, if not many of them, are just temporary as they only function as a part of the political machinery of politicians during election season.
4. Some of the arguments and examples in this section pertaining to the labor economy were based in Regilme (2013).
5. Corazon Aquino, wife of the assassinated opposition leader Benigno Aquino, Jr was famous, nationally and internationally, as the symbol of democratic struggle in the Philippine historical discourse. In fact, she was the first democratically elected female president in Asia and *Time Magazine* named her as the "Saint of Democracy," considering her very religious Catholic life and commitment to peace and democratic ideals.
6. See Hutchcroft (1998) on how the financial system in the Philippines was basically controlled by a few families whose claim to financial power can be traced from strategic alliances during the Marcos rule. Many of the cronies created by the Marcos regime benefited from the diversion of large resources from the state's coffers (e.g., Central Bank) to the capital funds of the commercial banks owned by these cronies. Consequently, the powerful elite families used these funds in order to diversify the range of their business endeavors by using them as capital, but, in fact, the capital was largely considered as illegally diverted funds from the Central Bank. Many of these families still control the biggest sectors of the Philippine economy.
7. See also the work of Croissant and Kühn (2009, p. 187) on how the Philippine coercive apparatus "has shown itself more or less resilient in guarding its prerogatives in the post-authoritarian era."

8. See also the work of Croissant (2004) on how Southeast Asian democracies' quest for democratic consolidation has, in fact, "stagnated."

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