

The 'Unfinished Revolution' in Philippine Political Discourse

Reynaldo C. ILETO *

The February 1986 event that led to Marcos's downfall is usually labelled as the "February Revolution" or the "EDSA Revolution." On the other hand, all sorts of analyses have argued to the effect that the "EDSA Revolution" cannot be called a revolution, that it can best be described as a form of regime-change, a coup d'etat, a restoration, and so forth [see Cariño 1986]. Yet to the hundreds of thousands of Filipinos from all social classes who massed on the streets that week there seemed to be no doubt that they were "making revolution" and that they were participating in "people power." For the revolution to be, it sufficed for them to throw caution aside (*bahala na*), to confront the tanks and guns of the state, to experience a couple of hours of solidarity with the anonymous crowd, and to participate in exorcising the forces of darkness (i. e., the Marcos regime).

Should the business of naming the event a "revolution" be understood, then, simply in terms of its political referent? Whatever the reality of the processes enveloping them, the crowds on EDSA seemed to readily interpret or locate their experience within a familiar discourse of revolution and mass action. The present essay explores the discursive frame of radical politics from the 1950s up to 1986.¹⁾ I hope to explain why "revolution" and "people power" were familiar in 1986, as well as why the imagined "1986 EDSA revolution" also constitutes a departure or break from the Marcos/Communist Party discourse of revolution.

The lack of a "Great Tradition" preceding the Spanish intervention in the seventeenth century prevents any identification of contemporary Filipino leaders with god-

* Department of History and Politics, James Cook University, Townsville, Q 4811 Australia (Visiting Research Scholar, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, from November 1991 to November 1992)

1) Craig Reynold's masterly study of Thai radical discourse [1987] provided some basic insights for this essay. See also Vicente Rafael's provocative essay on the circulation of political signs during the early Marcos regime. Benedict Anderson's comments on an early draft of this paper are gratefully acknowledged.

kings and sultans of a glorious past. As Marcos —whose signature denotes a group of nationalist writers under his patronage— noted in 1971, “no Taj Mahal, no Angkor Wat, no Great Wall stands with us to remind the colonial intruder of his insolence in affecting to ‘civilize us’ in exchange for exploitation” [Marcos 1971 : 91]. Marcos’s arch-critic Renato Constantino saw this lack in a slightly different light. In 1975 he wrote : “we did not have here anything like the great ancient cultures of China, Vietnam, Indonesia, or India. If we accept this fact we will readily understand why colonial consciousness was easier to implant on our people” [Constantino 1975a : 263].

Both Marcos and Constantino agreed that Filipino identity would be found, not in an illusory precolonial past, but in the people’s struggle for liberation. The absence of great kings and monuments has, in fact, since the beginning of this century facilitated a construction of textbook history as a series of assertions against Spanish rule culminating in the 1896 Revolution spearheaded by the Katipunan secret society. The series of rebellious figures during Spanish times is continued through the American colonial period in the persons of politicians leading the independence movement while practicing the ropes of constitutional democracy.

Despite the near-universal acceptance of the pantheon of anticolonial rebels and revolutionists that dominate Philippine history, paradoxically the status of the colonial “other” or “enemy” has been the subject of heated debate. Up to the 1960s, the history textbooks which dominated the schools —with the exception of the University of the Philippines and a few other state institutions in Manila— spoke of the Spanish colonial period as a civilizing experience. Revolts occurred because there were abuses, mainly by civil and military officials, but by and large the Spanish period foreshadowed the period of tutelage under the U. S. Why the Philippine Revolution, then ? As the Jesuit historian Horacio de la Costa put it in 1960, Filipinos, through their exposure to Christianity and western civilization, had become a people with a common outlook :

[They] had matured as a people, both spiritually and politically ; and if that movement issued in the tragic violence of the Revolution, this was because the ruling power either failed to read the sign, or refused to recognize it. Spain, or to speak more accurately, Spanish officialdom insisted on treating Filipinos as children when they were no longer children. They were no longer children because they had learned from Spain itself the rights and obligations of maturity.

Yet this was precisely what Spain could not or would not concede—it is thus that we must interpret the Philippine Revolution of '96.

De la Costa went on to explain that, while America's intervention prevented the Revolution from running its course, America itself bequeathed its democratic institutions to the Philippines and delivered on its promise to grant independence when the citizenry was ready for it [de la Costa 1965: 19–20].

De la Costa's emphatic statement, "*it is thus that we must interpret,*" in reference to the 1896 Revolution, points to the struggles over historical interpretation that raged from the late 1950s to the 1970s. What was this other kind of history against which Father de la Costa was reasserting the "proper" view? At that time, Teodoro Agoncillo and Oscar Alfonso of the University of the Philippines had just published a new textbook which asserted that a truly Filipino history ought to begin in 1872, the year that three Filipino nationalist priests were executed at the behest of the friars. The rebels and heroes of the old history were still there, but no longer functioned as interruptions to a basically civilizing Spanish-Catholic era. The Revolution was seen as a repudiation of Spain and the attempted recovery of a lost indigenous heritage. Because so much of the Filipino mentality was still colonial—still tainted with Spanish and American accretions—the Revolution was, in fact, still "unfinished" [Agoncillo and Alfonso 1960].

The controversy over the shape of history actually began around 1957–59 with the confluence of several developments in the academe and politics. The defeat of the Huk rebellion in the early fifties, and the outlawing of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) in 1957, saw a number of talented intellectuals—either former members of the PKP or sympathizers of the Huks—take the struggle for "true independence" into the classrooms and the pages of newspapers and weekly magazines. There was also a significant group of civil libertarians and nationalists who, without necessarily embracing Marxist ideas, were critical of the continued American military and economic presence in the country. In an international environment of assertive nationalisms and the Cold War, it was felt by an increasing number of Filipinos that the independence granted to them by the U. S. in 1946 was quite meaningless. Yet, clearly, this view was not shared by the vast majority. The state and its educational system, both offsprings of the American colonial period, seemed committed to reproducing an

evolutionary view of change with both Spain and America (and their native wards) as key actors. True, the Philippine Revolution was recognized by the establishment, but only insofar as it inspired patriotism and nation-building. A re-education process, critics insisted, had to be undertaken.

At the very core of this struggle to “de-colonize” the Filipino mentality was the dissemination of alternative histories and biographies. Beginning in the late 1950s, “nationalists” (an all-embracing term for anti-establishment intellectuals) at the University of the Philippines, Lyceum of Manila, and a few other institutions of higher learning maneuvered with varying degrees of success to control the teaching of two courses which, according to law, all tertiary students had to take: “Rizal” and “Philippine Institutions.” Jose Rizal, martyred by Spain in 1896, had been constructed by the church and state as a gradualist and non-violent intellectual-patriot. Now was the time to question these official meanings or to posit alternative heroes. Much of the inspiration for the radical movement in the 1960s came from individuals who had positioned themselves to teach the “Philippine Institutions” course [CEPEP 1964].

That the radicalization of historical consciousness began in the late fifties can be explained further by the party politics of the time. In the late 1950s, with popular president Ramon Magsaysay and the sensational Huk rebellion both dead and the economy faltering, top presidential aspirants like Carlos Garcia, Claro Recto, and Jose Laurel were searching for patriotic platforms and catchwords to sway the crowds to vote for them. Beginning with relatively tame slogans like “*Filipino First!*” politicians were soon heard to be urging the people to carry on the “Unfinished Revolution” with a tinge of anti-Americanism. Competition among top politicians required them to hire the best writers, bankroll publications, sponsor meetings and organizations, and so forth. Thus, as long as a “freewheeling democracy” existed—a function of belonging to the “Free World”—political patronage guaranteed a space for radical intellectuals despite the pressures exerted on them by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), the Congressional Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA), and even the Catholic Church hierarchy.

With the triumph of Diosdado Macapagal in the 1961 elections, “Unfinished Revolution” became a catchword shared by the conservative president and radical intellectuals alike. While limited and rather evolutionary meanings were attached to this slogan in Macapagal’s writings and speeches, radical groups found its use by the

president sufficient reason to come out in support of him. For "Unfinished Revolution" was a slogan with a variety of referents. In magazine articles, conferences and colloquia, it came to have anti-imperialist, neutralist and socialist meanings. Among the more daring juxtapositions was that of Macapagal's revolution and Sukarno's revolution. The editors of the journal *Progressive Review* made the link explicit :

The Indonesian Revolution, national democratic in its first stage and socialist at its second stage, serves to inspire a confident and effective way of facing up to the boastful posture of colonialism and imperialism in the whole of Asia. It inspires a national unity that is the integration of all progressive and patriotic forces and which can sweep away . . . the *exploitation de l'homme par l'homme*. It dutifully inspires a daring and resolute struggle for the attainment of a just and prosperous society.

Although he has not yet clearly stated whether he is seeking new directions of national action, President Diosdado Macapagal has, at least, provoked attention to the need for completing what he calls so aptly the "Unfinished Revolution." Although he has not yet stated what are those forces that must cohere in some way, he has already indicated sufficiently the exploitative inconsistencies of foreign domination and influence in our country. With his bold concept of "Unfinished Revolution" he has convinced us that we are at the crossroads (July-Aug. 1963).

Why a traditional Liberal Party politician like Macapagal should choose "Unfinished Revolution" as his slogan has probably more to do with outshining his rivals in the Nacionalista Party than with a genuine desire for revolutionary upheaval. Probing into a politician's intentions, however, only leads us to the familiar clichés about the emptiness of factional and oligarchic politics in the Philippines. What is significant is that Macapagal was latching on to, and bringing into wider circulation, a sign and a discourse that had existed for decades in the peripheries of the political system.

"Unfinished Revolution" flourished in the rhetoric of the labor movement from the first decade of this century, finding its way into various peasant movements in central Luzon in the 1920s and 1930s. The sign carries with it an interpretation of the Philippine Revolution as a mass movement initiated by Andres Bonifacio, a self-

educated warehouseman, often called "the Great Plebeian," who founded the Katipunan and announced the inception of armed struggle. A history of the revolution that gives primacy to Bonifacio invariably includes themes that go beyond mere freedom from Spanish rule ; it points to the confiscation of Church lands and carries a critique of the *ilustrado* (educated middle-class) betrayal of the cause.

Politicians from the beginning of this century were aware of the potency of the Bonifacio/Katipunan sign. It was something to be exploited in political rallies. However, the meanings generated by the sign had to be kept under control. Manuel Quezon, leader of the Nacionalista Party from 1916 up to his death in 1943, dominated the political scene through his remarkable ability to inflame the passions of the crowds regarding the independence issue through reference to Bonifacio's unfinished revolution ; simultaneously, he worked to implement the American gradualist scenario [Ileto 1984]. In a 1929 speech at Balintawak, where Bonifacio first declared his defiance of Spanish rule, Quezon—then Senate President—typically praised Bonifacio's love of liberty, honour, and spirit of sacrifice. "Rizal," he said, "was the creator of Filipino nationality, and Bonifacio the redeemer of our country's liberties." Quezon went as far as to say that "Bonifacio was the embodiment of that Revolution." However, there was some trepidation in referring to Bonifacio's advocacy of armed struggle :

Let it be known . . . that he did not immediately think of revolution. A man with a high sense of responsibility, leading an austere life, modest to the point of humility, exhibiting a great love for God and his fellowmen . . . he was a man of peace and he could not have failed to be horrified at the tragic consequences of a resort to arms.

The fact is that Bonifacio had always signified violence, armed insurrection, the people's anger. Quezon sought to emphasize the tamer side of Bonifacio, the poor man who succeeded through hard work, who composed the Decalogue of the Katipunan which called for the fulfillment of obligations and love among the brethren.

The occasion for Quezon's speech was the laying of the cornerstone for a monument to Bonifacio. The Governor General had signed the bill, unanimously passed by Legislature, appropriating funds for the monument. Quezon thus refers to

“the Honorable Dwight F. Davis, the representative in these Islands of America, the sovereign nation, [who] joins us in paying this tribute of love and admiration to the Great Plebeian.” This was, however, coming 20 years after the erection of a monument to Rizal at the Luneta. Quezon was speaking at a time when the Tanggulan, Sakdal and other peasant movements were rapidly spreading in Central Luzon as a result of heightened agrarian tensions. The Bonifacio of the labour and radical nationalist movements—forced to play a minor role in politics after 1916 owing to a combination of police work and the effects of colonial reeducation—was threatening to become a rallying point for the peasant movement. Certainly, to the intellectuals of the Communist and Socialist parties, Bonifacio was *the* historical figure on which to anchor the present. The colonial state’s sponsorship of a Bonifacio monument, and speeches like Quezon’s, should thus be seen as attempts to coopt, to control, a potentially subversive historical consciousness, one that had always been there since Bonifacio’s death in 1897, but which now threatened to break its boundaries.

The Bonifacio monument at Balintawak soon became a focal point for radical labour, peasant, and student movements. Twice a year, on May 1st (Labour Day) and August 26 (commemorating Bonifacio’s “Cry of Balintawak”), the monument would be inundated by poetry and speeches about Bonifacio and the unfinished revolution, juxtaposed with commentary about the sad state of the present. Memories of the revolution were renewed, while new manifestos in Tagalog attacking the politicians, landlords, and imperialists were read. Typically, veterans of the Katipunan secret society of 1896 would be present, to be honored and to be tapped of their revolutionary potency by the present generation [CEPEP 1964].

However important the Bonifacio monument was to the socialist labor and peasant groups, it paled heavily in comparison with the drawing power of Jose Rizal’s monument at the Luneta. Bonifacio was still a “fringe phenomenon” up to the 1960s. As late as 1963, during the centenary celebration of Bonifacio’s birth which was held at the Luneta, the grandstand was nearly empty. The audience was sparse and many of the onlookers were really Manila policemen. Yet on Independence Day (July 4, later changed to June 12) and Rizal Day (Dec. 30) the place was packed and the politicians were all there decked in their finery [Agoncillo 1970]. The struggle to displace Rizal with Bonifacio was really just beginning to take off in the schools.

Before the attributes of a radicalized Bonifacio, the Katipunan and the Revolution

could be potted in slogans, logos, broadsheets and pamphlets for mass dissemination in the sixties, his biography had first to be rewritten. With a few exceptions like Epifanio de los Santos, scholars during the colonial period had neglected the serious study of Bonifacio and the revolution. "The revolution had become like a collection of proclamations, anecdotes and decrees—the social character of the revolution, incorporating the contradictions among classes and a dominant ideology overarching the whole set of events, was suppressed or hidden" [Veneracion 1971]. A turning point in Bonifacio studies was reached only in 1956 with the publication of Teodoro Agoncillo's book *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan*.

Readers were sharply divided over Agoncillo's book. Even the senior members of Agoncillo's University of the Philippines history department saw fit to publish a scathing review of it in the journal of the rival, Jesuit-run, Ateneo de Manila [Zafra 1956]. Catholic schools swiftly banned the classroom use of this and the 1960 textbook of Agoncillo and Alfonso. Critics condemned these books for reducing the Spanish-period background to the revolution to what Agoncillo called "an age of political chicanery and social hypocrisy." No credit was given to the role of Christianity and the colonial educational system in the development of Filipino identity. The critics bemoaned the fact that Bonifacio was presented as a romantic revolutionary, a poor, honest and talented man who could call the masses to arms through his command of language, but whose leadership of the Katipunan society was subverted by the well-to-do or "middle class." Agoncillo came down hard on the "middle class," elements of which, he acknowledged, did participate in the revolt, but mainly for their material interests. They looked down on the lower classes and in the end betrayed the movement.

There were other things found to be wrong with the book. In sum, it transgressed the "proper meanings" of the revolution at that time. It excluded the Catholic Church from any meaningful role in the nationalist movement. It seemed to be saying to the reader (who invariably was middle class, proficient in English): it was people of *your* class that caused Bonifacio's downfall; now that we see history repeating itself, now that internal corruption and foreign intervention are with us again, will you allow yourself to commit the same mistake?

For the nationalists and other radicals, of course, Agoncillo was a godsend. *Revolt of the Masses*, soon followed by a study of the Republic of 1898 using a similar

paradigm of the “haves” versus the “have-nots,” provided them with more and more material with which to reorient the Rizal and Philippine Institutions courses which they were steadily occupying. Since surveillance by the state made it extremely risky for radical nationalist and socialist ideas to be broadcast outright, such ideas had to be framed in the discourse of the Philippine Revolution of 1896. As students from the 1960s on internalized the new interpretations of the revolution, and as these were circulated further through mass organization work in the 1970s, the discursive foundations were being laid for a broad-based revolutionary response to the excesses of the Marcos years.

Upon his assumption of the presidency in 1965, Marcos did not seem to be aware of the importance of locking on to the historical controversies of the time. In an extemporaneous speech to the Philippine Historical Association in November 1967, there is a remarkable absence of any attempt to connect himself to the past, or specifically to the heroes of the revolution. Instead, he spoke of the need to modernize, to develop; he went on and on about such mundane topics as miracle rice, a citizen army, manpower development, the eradication of smuggling, increased customs collections, and so forth. His call to action to the historians was:

The message of history that you constantly deliver to the rest of us enables us to rediscover our capacity as a people to build a nation. With this capacity, we built the first constitutional democracy in Asia. With this capacity, we shall make Asia's first republic in the years to come a model of freedom and prosperity in this part of the world. [Marcos 1967]

Five years later, just a few days after proclaiming martial law in September 1972, Marcos addressed the Association again. This time he spoke not at a university venue but at the palace, and with an entirely different posture towards history. Somehow, his discourse had, consciously or not, become reconstituted in relation to a revolutionary discourse which threatened his regime. For example, he reminded his audience of the last time he addressed them in 1967, when all the talk was about development programs:

And so, you had the rice program which meant a variety of activities. Then, you

had the road program. If you remember, we could not finish any road that we had started. We still had what our forebears during the Revolution like Rizal and Mabini referred to as the temperament of *ningas kugon* [i.e., the quick but unsustained burning up of dried cogon grass]. We enthusiastically start out on a project and in a few days we forget all about it

Marcos, of course, alludes to one of the aims of his own "Democratic Revolution" which is to discipline the people, to eradicate their inherited "colonial vices." But he uses the words of the *ilustrados* of the Revolution to lend greater force to his own. A quarter of the way through his rambling speech, Marcos makes pointed reference to General Emilio Aguinaldo's military talents, evidenced by his arduous trek through the Sierra Madre during the Philippine-American war. Marcos is struck, he says, by the fact that the very same place and personal names in the historical account of Aguinaldo were the ones he encountered in his own war days. "I was taken aback at the parallelisms between the experience of Aguinaldo and his grandsons of the 1940's." Of Aguinaldo's problems during the revolution, Marcos says :

My grandfather, who had been with General Antonio Luna, had recounted to me the same things, and I was surprised that these memoirs bespoke of the same strategy, the same weaknesses and the same petty quarrels that existed between the leaders. These quarrels also existed among the guerrillas. It is surprising, nay, uncanny how the occurrences seemed to repeat themselves.

Marcos continues on, blurring more and more the gap between the time of the Philippine Revolution and his own alleged experiences as a guerrilla leader. He is the Aguinaldo (i.e., the president of the 1898 revolutionary republic) of 1972. And consistent with this identification is his reference to the bitter conflict between Bonifacio and Aguinaldo as a simple takeover of leadership by a more competent man :

. . . because of the artillery of Vibora [i.e., General Ricarte, a native of Batac, Marcos's hometown] and the rest of those who followed his example, Aguinaldo started winning the battles in Cavite, while Bonifacio lost all the battles he had fought. Because of this, in the succeeding convention in Tejeros and later on even

in the meetings of the leaders, Bonifacio lost the leadership and Aguinaldo took over" [Marcos 1973]

Such drawing of parallels between Marcos's "Democratic Revolution" —not to mention his own life story—and the turn of the century Revolution indicates the crucial role that historical struggles played during this period. Between 1965 and 1972 a challenge to Marcos's regime, and to the very social and political fabric on which it rested, had been mounted. This challenge was predicated on a shifting historical consciousness mainly among the youth. While Marcos still pursued the same developmentalist goals in 1972, these had to be grounded upon historical foundations, "proper" interpretations that assured the primacy of "traditional leaders" and the notion of evolutionary change.

The Vietnam war and opposition to it, the French student revolt, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, corruption in the Marcos government, the rigged election of 1969—these are among the multitude of factors that can be used to explain the rapid growth of radical nationalism and the student movement in the late 1960s. But if we are to ask questions at the level of the conditions of the possibility of the student movement taking off in the late sixties, we have to recognize a break in historical consciousness around that time. Basically it consisted of the displacement of the "reformist Rizal" (a construct of the church/state establishment) by the "revolutionary Bonifacio" (a construct of labor/peasant movements and the radical left). The notion of "Unfinished Revolution" became more widely established, to serve as the rock upon which more elaborate edifices, such as the Mao Zedong-inspired "struggle for national democracy," could be built.

The documentation of this process of displacement and recodification is difficult and problematic. One of the indexes of this is the iconoclasm yet popularity of the writings and speeches of Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino in the late 1960s. Their words, their ideas, were repeated by others and recombined in many different ways. For example, on 30 December 1969, at the Third National Rizal Lecture, Constantino set out to undermine Rizal's supreme position in the pantheon of heroes. Why is it, he asked, that only in the Philippines is the national hero (Rizal) *not* the leader of the Revolution (Bonifacio)? Agoncillo had harped on this before, but Constantino elaborated further. Rizal had "repudiated that Revolution. In no

uncertain terms he placed himself against Bonifacio and those Filipinos who were fighting for the country's liberty." In other words, contrary to common knowledge, Rizal and Bonifacio were opposed rather than complementary. Further, Constantino developed another, older, thesis that Rizal was an American-made hero. He was sponsored because he was a gradualist, believed in education, was like the *ilustrados* who cooperated with the U. S., and was martyred by Spain, not the U. S. And finally, Rizal wrote that "reforms, to be beneficial, must come from above, and those which come from below are irregularly gained and uncertain." Looking back years later, Constantino remarked that his Rizal lecture

. . . was received with howls of protest; I had uttered blasphemies against the holy of holies. Two or three in that audience could almost have died of apoplexy; they felt as if I had insulted them personally. Yet, I was not saying that Rizal should not be regarded as a hero, merely that he should not overshadow other heroes because there are heroes more relevant to our times [Constantino 1975a: 269].

Constantino's words, indeed, were a shock to many. But for others in the audience—mainly the young who had not spent most of their lives "venerating" Rizal—the relevance was immediately recognized. Just a month or so before Constantino's lecture was given, Marcos had won a second term of office in an election characterized by violence and rampant vote buying. The politicized youth, organized in a myriad of groups, could dispense with a hero who, as constructed by the Filipino and American establishment, reflected too much and feared changes from below.

Another historical figure whose stature Constantino punctured in 1969 was Aguinaldo. As the leader who proclaimed independence from Spain on 12 June 1898, and then went on to become president of the first Republic, Aguinaldo is a key legitimizing figure of the present nationalist state. Yet Constantino, mustering historical evidence, showed that Aguinaldo was preoccupied with "order" rather than revolution, was indirectly responsible for the execution of Bonifacio, and was so naive in his relations with America that he "set down a tradition to be followed by gullible Filipino leaders up to this time." As in the case of the Rizal/Bonifacio opposition, serving as the binary opposite of Aguinaldo was Bonifacio. If Aguinaldo is rather

suspect as a hero, Constantino argued, not so Bonifacio, for he “did not let his people down. No act of his can be cited as a sanction to compromise and to the surrender of the ideals of freedom” [Constantino 1969a: 95].

It is no coincidence that the most controversial essays of Constantino were written in 1969 when it was clear that Marcos, with U. S. help, intended to stay in power. In talking about the 1896 Revolution, Agoncillo, Constantino and others were addressing the present, and providing the material with which the youth could organize their experience of the present. There is also no doubt that the new historical consciousness underpinned the January 1970 student demonstrations that nearly climaxed with the students breaking through the gates of the presidential palace at Mendiola. The visual signs were ubiquitous —paintings of clenched-fisted students juxtaposed with the classic representation of Bonifacio with a raised bladed weapon; and the use of the letter “K,” in the ancient tagalog alphabet, against a red background. This was the “K” of the Katipunan and its banners which was found in the “Philippine Revolution” chapters of high school and university history textbooks. The two most radical student groups, *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) and *Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan* (SDK) not coincidentally, perhaps, were able to play around with the “K” in their logos. The “K” had found its way into the banners, letterheads, T-shirts, graffiti and wall inscriptions of 1969–70, serving as a visual sign of the fusion of the 1896 Revolution and the new student radicalism.

KM and SDK activists saw themselves as carrying out “the Second Propaganda Movement,” a repetition of the consciousness-raising activities of Filipino reformists and nationalists in the late 1800s [Pimentel 1991: 85]. At the University of the Philippines, where parts of the campus were occupied and dubbed the “Diliman Commune” until the military and the police regained control, organizers and orators were making direct correspondences between the 1896 “Cry of Balintawak (or Pugad Lawin)” and the students’ defiance of the Marcos regime [Salazar 1970]. According to veteran Petronilo Daroy :

The momentum set by the January 26–30 student demonstrations unleashed a torrent of mass protest actions against everything that was construed as “establishment.” Students, joined by sympathetic workers and peasants in the thousands, swelled the rallies and marches sponsored by the *Movement for a*

Democratic Philippines Student activism while already building up in the late 60s reached its peak in the 1970–71 period. It was not uncommon for the youth during this time to claim the movement as a continuation of the “unfinished revolution of 1896,” a reference to the failed Philippine revolution led by Andres Bonifacio.

At this point, then, the unfinished 1896 Revolution “was not just an event [the students] read about in college history books, but a cause they were championing and continuing” [Pimentel 1991: 85]. This is the revolution implied in the following account of the “Battle of Mendiola” fronting the presidential palace :

It wasn't much of a battle. The student protestors had only stones and some Molotov cocktails, one of which had set fire to a truck. The flames lit the faces of the students, but I couldn't recognize any Suddenly I heard someone shout my name. Startled, I stepped back from the sidewalk, into the shadows. Then I saw the flushed faces of some UP freshmen I had met at a seminar the week before. “*Rebolusyonaryo na rin kami!*” (We are now revolutionaries too!). They took my hand and swept me along their forward rush. [De la Torre 1986 : 51]

“We are now revolutionaries too!” —Perhaps what they meant was that they were like Mao Zedong now. But even if this were so (and it is unlikely), for the category “revolutionary” to be meaningful at all in their discourse there had to have been a shift in historical conscious; there had to have been a Bonifacio and the unfinished revolution. The narrator of the above event actually makes the connection himself. Edicio de la Torre was a Catholic priest who found himself, after the experience of the “First Quarter Storm” of 1970, moving inexorably from Christian reformist movements to the Communist Party :

When the time came for the final slogans... it felt good to shout *Mabuhay ang Bagong Hukbong Bayan* [Long Live the New Peoples Army]! . . . I took a deep breath before the last slogan : *Mabuhay ang Partido* [Long live the Party] . . . (and finally waffled) *ng mga Anak-Pawis* [of the Toiling Masses]! Through the cheering, I told myself Bonifacio would have understood my choice of words. [*ibid.* 113]

Andres Bonifacio, long neglected in national history or at most a “complement” to Rizal, had finally come into his own. Bonifacio signified “the masses,” breaking with the past, challenging the “establishment,” dis-ordering society, acting rather than talking, taking up arms rather than relying on Divine Providence, unfinished revolution. From “Bonifacio,” students could move on to other models. As Epifanio San Juan put it: “they now quote Chairman Mao, Che Guevara or Herbert Marcuse because these figures seem to incarnate radical sentiments consistent with the dreams of the 1896 revolution” [*ibid.* 133].

For Marcos, of course, such proliferating signs spelled danger, a subversion not only of his regime but of the ideological foundations upon which the postcolonial Philippine state rested. The publication in 1971 of his *Today's Revolution: Democracy* (TRD) must be seen in this light.

As others have pointed out, the Marcos regime moved in the early 1970s towards the “constitutional authoritarian” model, dedicated towards establishing and maintaining the conditions for capitalist development and modernization. It is thus easy enough to dismiss TRD and other pronouncements of the regime as empty rhetoric obfuscating its dependent character and oppressive practices. TRD, however, has inscribed within it the revolutionary discourse of the late sixties against which TRD (and the sociopolitical order it represents) seeks to establish itself. Marcos himself says early in TRD that his Democratic Revolution is nothing more than modernization, development, moral regeneration, peaceful change. But he attempts nonetheless to hook onto the discourse of revolution, the only frame of reference for any talk of change at that time to be taken seriously by his audience. As Marcos says in the preface, “‘Revolutionary’, in fact, is now an ‘in’ word” [*ibid.*: xvi].

The strategy of TRD is not to deny the “Unfinished Revolution” but to wrest from the youthful radicals the initiative in continuing this struggle. Like Macapagal before him, Marcos had in his service a group of writers and intellectuals quite familiar with the discourse of “Unfinished Revolution” and thus able to offer a counter-scenario. The Democratic Revolution, Marcos declares, “is faithful to our historical aspirations and experience, rooted, as it were, in the historical demands of the Filipino people which gained full expression in the Revolution of 1896. We are, in many ways, and under changing circumstances, still waging this revolutionary struggle” [*ibid.* 64].

But what about the students, who were claiming the same? At the very outset of

TRD, the phenomenon of the "First Quarter Storm" of 1970 is identified with violence, pure disorder; its origins are alien, its participants gullible, immature youth. "A great many of the student activists could, indeed, have been merely 'playing at revolution', but they were playing according to the wishes of those who knew that revolution was a serious business." The manipulators, says TRD, were the communists, inspired by ideas of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. "It is certainly wise to learn from the experience of others, but it is also unwise, *if not traitorous*, to fashion ourselves after—or submit ourselves to— foreign models" [*ibid.* 64]. By identifying the sources of the students' inspiration as alien and external to Philippine society and history, Marcos seeks to diminish the authenticity and significance of their revolution. He can then position himself to lay claim to the heritage of history.

Not surprisingly, Bonifacio is censored in TRD. Instead, the ideals of Rizal, suitably modified, are upheld. On page 5, in an oblique reference to the Agoncillo/Constantino critique of Rizal, Marcos alludes to the "minority" that hopes for "violent change" and that regards as genuine "only those revolutions which come 'from below,' which means the masses taking direct action against their government." No, Marcos retorts, the demands of the 1896 revolution were in fact articulated by the *ilustrado* propagandists, who desired "a political authority that would be the instrument of national liberation." Rizal himself stressed the need for people and government to be united. Borrowing from the language of the radical Left, Marcos concludes: ". . . the so-called rule of the 'intellectual oligarchy' was an essential element in the revolutionary and political tradition. It was the 'revolutionary vanguard'" [*ibid.* 70].

Since the Democratic Revolution is meant to be a peaceful, liberal rather than Jacobin, type of revolution Marcos, in hooking his project onto the Unfinished Revolution of 1896 necessarily glosses over Bonifacio's "Cry of Balintawak" and the circumstances of his execution at the hands of Aguinaldo's men. "What, indeed, happened in the Revolution of 1896?" he asks. He then cites personal rivalries, the corruption of officials of the first republic, their returning of the friar lands to their colonial owners, and so forth. In other words, the problems were internal, due to "racial deficiencies and corruption, whether brought about by colonialism or not." Without recognizing this "we cannot understand the meaning of the Philippine Revolution, nor, for that matter, the Democratic Revolution which has become the necessity of the present" [*ibid.* 68]. Marcos attempts to ride on the back of the ideologue

Apolinario Mabini, Aguinaldo's adviser, who wrote of the need for social regeneration, a purging of bad blood, an internal as well as external revolution. The instrument for this revolution would be the "political authority" —Aguinaldo's republic then, and Marcos's now.

Marcos and his radical critics, while calling for revolutions of totally different sorts, were really participating in a common discourse. This is not surprising since Philippine nationalism, after all, is constructed upon a history of opposition to a colonial and alien "other." Without great monuments or a court culture to serve as an alternate focus or centre of national aspirations, the ensemble of events and ideas called "the Revolution of 1896" has had to serve as some sort of charter or as the legitimizing principle for subsequent calls for unified action. By 1970, through the reformulation of certain basic issues in the history of the Philippine Revolution, and the displacement of Rizal by Bonifacio, the consciousness of a generation of youth (which included junior military officers, junior politicians, seminarians, Muslim students, etc.) had been opened up to the possibility of revolutionary change. Some found in Marcos's TRD a useful compromise, a means of getting on with their careers while still contributing to a "revolution." The youth activists, on the other hand, greeted TRD with laughter and derision, clutching instead an amulet-like little red book titled *Philippine Society and Revolution*, in which a Bonifacio-centered view is celebrated. Its author Amado Guerrero bluntly states that the 1896 revolution is like today's national democratic revolution, but "of the old type." In an attempt to arrest the proliferation of this discourse (among other reasons), Marcos declared martial law, burned the offensive literature, confiscated the mimeo machines, banned the red flags with the "K" on them, and threw the errant professors, students, politicians and journalists in jail.

Martial Law, by proscribing the use of overtly radical literature, actually enhanced the role of historical metaphors in enabling critical individuals to locate themselves vis à vis the regime. The pro-Bonifacio camp of the 1960s itself became split. A segment of it, hoping (as others had done in previous regimes) to promote its version of history under the Marcos signature, went on to design and write Marcos's multi-volume work *Tadhana: The History of the Filipino People*. Others went to join the NPA or the myriad of CPP support groups. Still others sought to again rewrite the history of the Unfinished Revolution in order to challenge the regime's claim to its heritage. Among

these counter-histories was Renato Constantino's *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* [1975b], which brought together, and added empirical depth to, the shifts in historical interpretation of the 1960s.

We have seen thus far that the students from the "First Quarter Storm" period, the Communist Party from 1968, and Marcos all provided historical depth to their calls for revolution by appealing to the Unfinished Revolution of 1896. But what of the so-called EDSA Revolution of 1986? By the 1980s the Agoncillo/Constantino/Guerrero historical construct had become fully established among a generation of students. This construct, however, was hard put to accommodate the events triggered by Benigno Aquino's assassination in 1983. Aquino's death bore a resemblance to the execution of Jose Rizal in December 1896 (Aquino himself was aware of the possibility of his emulating Rizal), and not a few people of influence (e. g. Cardinal Jaime Sin) recognized this soon after the event and built on it in their speeches. There are other aspects of this event with historical resonances the sum of which could and were tapped for mass mobilization against the Marcos regime [see Iletto 1985]. But all this had little to do with the dominant historical construct which excluded the role of religious symbols and the notion of martyrdom. Rizal—not the Rizal of the establishment but the martyr Rizal worshipped by peasant movements—had reentered the historical mainstream via Aquino.

During the election campaign of January–February 1986, Corazon Aquino made no attempt to emulate the oratory of earlier presidential candidates who invariably made reference to the pantheon of heroes, the national struggle, the unfinished revolution, and so forth. Instead she focused on her relationship with her deceased husband and on the criminal act perpetrated by the Marcoses. Her coverage of history seemed shallow, her view of the future undefined. Her "simple" campaign style in fact alarmed her advisers so used to the bombast of other candidates. In a Tagalog comics version I have seen of her life and her destiny, there is no connection with Philippine history farther back than the Japanese occupation. All this stands in contrast to the Marcos election style which emphasized his link with past heroes and his role as leader of a nation moving forward. Despite all this, Marcos lost the election.

Perhaps it was simply that people could no longer be moved by the Marcos rhetoric or were tired of it. At a deeper level, though, two points come to mind: first, Corazon Aquino would have had problems, anyway, latching on to the *male* pantheon

of heroes of the revolution. Her campaign style must be seen in terms of a "feminine" mode of resistance to authority attached to a different set of myths. Secondly, it seems that the pro-Cory forces had rediscovered the fact that before the Philippine Revolution took place Spanish colonialism had provided much of the Philippine territory with a common religious affiliation: Christianity. It was this sense of belonging to a religious community that Cardinal Sin successfully tapped during the "people power" revolution of 1986. The earlier proponents of a Rizal-centered history of the revolution would have understood this all too well. Horacio de la Costa, who subscribed to this view and saw it being torn to pieces in the heated debates of the 1969-71 period, must have been laughing in his grave.

The Left's boycott of the 1986 election was based on a logic stemming from a class-based interpretation of Philippine history: Agoncillo's *Revolt of the Masses* paradigm refined and extended by Constantino and Guerrero. The election, they argued, pitted members of the ruling class against each other and thus could never bring about real change. The anti-Marcos movement led by Aquino was not supposed to be part of the people's struggle for emancipation. Yet, despite the boycott call, many members of the radical movement did go out to participate in the EDSA demonstrations. As with the rest who were out in the streets, there was no need to locate their actions within a deeper, "scientific," time frame. They had had enough of Marcos, and Aquino provided a moral focus for active resistance against the regime. They certainly were not, in stark contrast to the youth of the First Quarter Storm of 1970, continuing the Unfinished Revolution.

A sense of participating in the grand forward movement of history (the sort both Marcos and the National Democratic Front tried to tap) was clearly absent in 1986. Nevertheless, many observers called the event "the Philippine Revolution of 1986"; and what a strange coincidence it was that the number 1986 was a simple rearrangement of 1896! The fact is that words and images like "1896," "resisting authority," "people's struggle," "revolution," *kalayaan* (liberty), "dying for the country," "the martyr Rizal," "Bonifacio, who fought the Spaniards with knives and sticks," are deeply etched in the consciousness of Filipinos who have gone to school. Though the particular events and names may have been forgotten, confused, and dis-ordered, this historical consciousness did enable people to recognize that events such as EDSA, the February Revolution, and "people power" were possible. Thus the crowd could cheer wildly

when coup plotters Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel Ramos—echoing Bonifacio in 1896—announced on February 24, “*Ito ang araw ng ating kalayaan!*” (This is the day of our liberation!). But this event was discrete and intense, hardly conceived of as a link in a great chain leading from past to future.

In a magazine issue aptly subtitled “The Unfinished Revolution” published immediately *after* the event, various writers argued that “people power” had yet to be transformed into “people’s power”; the EDSA “revolution” was unfinished in that it had not yet led to the transformation of religious, political, economic, social and other structures.²⁾ As Francisco Magno put it, in another publication, the February Revolution was merely “a political revolution but one that remains unfinished because the political structures of dictatorship have not been completely transformed” [Magno 1986]. The sense of a revolution being “unfinished” was undoubtedly what led many “cause-oriented groups” to maintain a stance of “critical collaboration” with the Aquino government. But were they hooking their projects onto the older discourse of the 1896 “Unfinished Revolution”? Has this discourse run its course? Will the coming celebrations of the centenary of the revolution effect its alteration or rejuvenation? Since, as I have tried to show here, the “Revolution of 1896” has been a powerful, though not exclusive, feature of Filipino discourses of identity and change, we can expect it to surface in quite unexpected forms. For example, during the coup attempt of December 1989, rebel General Edgardo Abenina issued a rather garbled statement that the coup was an extension of the 30 November 1889 [sic] “true Filipino Revolution” that would restore the “dignity of the Filipino race,” and “redeem the country’s mortgaged sovereignty and finally break the chains of social slavery” (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 Dec. 1989). Such statements are laughable only if we ignore the material force that historical interpretations have had in Philippine politics.

References

- Agoncillo, Teodoro. 1956. *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan*. Quezon City: The University of the Philippines.
- _____. 1970. Ang kaangkupan ni Andres Bonifacio sa kasalukuyang panahon. In *Lectures on Great Filipinos and Others, 1967–1970*. Manila: National Historical Commission, 1971.
- Agoncillo, Teodoro; and Oscar Alfonso. 1960. *A Short History of the Filipino People*. Quezon City: The University of the Philippines.

2) *Nagliliyab* 1, 1986 (Claretian Publications).

- Cariño, Feliciano. 1986. Illusion and Reality: Some Questions and Reflections on the Aquino Ascendancy and People's Power. *Tugon* 6 (2): 77-84.
- CEPEP [The Communist Educational and Propaganda Offensive in the Philippines]. 1964. Manila: National Intelligence Coordinating Agency [NICA]. typescript.
- Constantino, Renato. 1969a. Roots of Subservience. *Graphic*, 18 June. In *Dissent and Counter Consciousness*.
- _____. 1969b. Veneration without Understanding (Third National Rizal Lecture, 30 December). In *Dissent and Counter Consciousness Manila*, 1969.
- _____. 1974. Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience. In *Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness*.
- _____. 1975a. Nationalism and Partisan Scholarship (Lecture Delivered before the U.P. History Club, 18 September). In *Neocolonial Identity and Counter Consciousness* (1988).
- _____. 1975b. *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. Manila: Tala.
- Costa, Horacio de la, SJ. 1965. The Course of Philippine History. In *The Background of Nationalism*. Manila: Solidaridad.
- Daroy, Petronilo Bn. 1988. On the Eve of Dictatorship and Revolution. In *Dictatorship and Revolution*, edited by A. Javate-De Dios, P. Daroy and L. Kalaw-Tirol. Metro Manila: Conspectus.
- Guerrero, Amado. 1971. *Philippine Society and Revolution*. Hong Kong: Ta Kung Pao.
- Ileto, Reynaldo. 1984. Orators and the Crowd: Philippine Independence Politics, 1910-1914. In *Reappraising an Empire*, edited by Peter Stanley. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University.
- _____. 1985. The Past in the Present Crisis. In *The Philippines after Marcos*, edited by Ron May and Francisco Nemenzo. London: Croom Helm.
- Magno, Francisco. 1986. The Political Dynamics of People Power. *Kasarinlan* 1 (4): 13-18.
- Marcos, Ferdinand. 1967. History and National Progress. *Historical Bulletin* 11 (4): 345-352.
- _____. 1971. *Today's Revolution: Democracy*. Manila.
- _____. 1973. Towards a New Social Order: The Rationale of Martial Law in the Philippines. *Historical Bulletin* 17 (1-4): 1-26.
- _____. 1976 ff. *Tadhana: The History of the Filipino People*.
- Pimentel, Benjamin. 1991. *Rebolusyon! A Generation of Struggle in the Philippines*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Quezon, Manuel. 1929. Andres Bonifacio, the Great Plebeian. *Historical Bulletin* 7 (3), 1963: 245-248.
- Rafael, Vicente. 1992. Patronage and Pornography: Ideology and Spectatorship in the Early Marcos Years. *Kabar Seberang* (James Cook University) 21.
- Reynolds, Craig. 1987. *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.
- Salazar, Zeus. 1970. Ang sigaw sa Pugad Lawin. *Pingkian* (Aug.-Sept.).
- San Juan, Epifanio Jr. 1971. *The Radical Tradition in Philippine Literature*. Manila: Manlapaz.
- Saulo, Alfredo. 1969. *Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila.
- Torre, Edicio de la. 1986. *Touching Ground, Taking Root*. Quezon City: Socio-Pastoral Institute.
- Veneracion, Jaime. 1971. Pagbabalik-aral sa tradisyong historikal ng Pilipinas, 1900-1960. *Katipunan* 1 (2): 24-39.
- Zafra, Nicolas, et al. 1956. 'The Revolt of the Masses': Critique of a Book. *Philippine Studies* 4 (4): 493-514.