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Democratic Transition, edited by Ethier

Review Author: Benjamin T. Tolosa, Jr.

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Book Reviews



Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Edited by Diane Ethier. Hampshire, England: Macmillan Press, 1990. xiii, 280 pages.

The peaceful transfer of government from Corazon Aquino to Fidel Ramos after generally fair and credible elections, marked a first in 26 years for the Philippines. The transition opened another phase in the ongoing democratization process in the country.

Events in the Philippines, however, only highlight what has been a global experience of democratic transition and consolidation since the late 1970s. The collection of essays edited by Diane Ethier precisely underlines this worldwide phenomenon. The book's central contribution lies in the broad comparative and historical perspective it brings to the study of democratization.

The Ethier collection is divided into two main parts which correspond to the title of the book itself. One part is composed of essays covering a range of cases and issues on the political economy of democratic transitions. The other part comprises studies on the role of particular factors in bringing about democratic consolidation: political parties, constitutions, economic ideologies, social movements, social concertation and electoral systems. However, there is a separate introductory chapter written by the editor herself which discusses the theoretical issues informing the analyses of particular cases and which also defines some of the key terms used in the study, (e.g., democratic transition and consolidation; liberalization and democratization). It is quite apparent even from Ethier's essay that the book is heavily influenced by and takes off from the earlier four-volume work, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, edited by O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986).

Most of the essays deal with the Southern European and Latin American experiences. There is only one article which looks into Southeast Asia: David Wurfel's work on "Transition to Political Democracy in the Philippines: 1978-88." I shall focus my comments on this particular essay without, however, overlooking the larger comparative volume in which it is located.

Wurfel starts by placing the Philippine case in terms of the categories developed by the O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead study. He restates the distinctions made between "liberalization" and "democratization." The former is described as "a process of change which takes place within an authoritarian regime and under the control of its leaders" (p. 110). It involves an opening up of the political system whose chief purpose is actually the legitimization of the authoritarian regime. The latter term, by contrast, is defined as the "institutionalization of uncertainty"—echoing Adam Przeworski's description found in the earlier cited multi-volume work. It is characterized by a shift to institutional arrangements where "no group is able to intervene to change the rules just because their interests seem threatened" (pp. 110–11). Even ruling elites are not in full control of any institutionalized procedures for rule change. Wurfel notes that the two processes may blend with one another historically and empirically. For analytical purposes, however, they should be viewed as conceptually distinct.

Following the book's overall framework, Wurfel also distinguishes between "democratic transition" (under which the Philippines is classified) as "the period which begins as liberalization ends and concludes when the new democratic rules of the game are formally accepted" (p. 111) and "democratic consolidation" as a long and ongoing process which "signifies the gradual acquisition of legitimacy for the new rules" and whose only well-defined conclusion is "its failure in a coup or revolution" (p. 111).

Wurfel points out that the Philippine case has not been treated in the academic literature on transitions in which classifications have been made according to sources of initiative for redemocratization. Using Alfred Stepan's categories (also in O'Donnell et. al), Wurfel says the Philippines could be placed under three types of transition: "society-led" (because of the rise of mass opposition movements after August 1983); initiated by a "grand oppositional pact" (because Aquino and Laurel joined forces against Marcos); and characterized by "an organized violent revolt coordinated by democratic parties" (because of the tacit alliance between the forces around Mrs. Aquino and the military plotters). Wurfel notes, however, that the Philippine case is also unique with respect to the significant roles played by the Catholic Church and the United States government and the largely non-violent character of the popular uprising that toppled the Marcos dictatorship (pp. 112–13).

Wurfel then goes on to narrate what to Philippine readers are the familiar events which led to the calling of National Assembly elections in 1978 and 1984 and of the "snap" presidential elections culminating in the "people power revolution" in 1986 (pp. 113–22). What were initially attempts of Mr. Marcos to create political legitimacy for his regime led in the end to its being completely discredited and to its eventual collapse. "Liberalization" gave way to "democratization."

Wurfel discusses the various dilemmas faced by the Aquino regime in its first two years in office. Three sets of goals and tasks are identified as central during this period: the restoration of constitutional democracy; the repair of the damage inflicted by the cronyism and human rights abuses of the authoritarian regime; and the promotion of economic growth, equity and autonomy which is required of any Third World government.

Mrs. Aquino was obviously most successful in the first category of goals. The clearest and most recent proof of this achievement is the holding of relatively clean and honest elections in May and the peaceful transfer of power in June of this year. But Wurfel notes that even the task of restoring constitutionalism was fraught with many dilemmas and dangers. Before new national and local officials could be elected in 1987 and 1988, Mrs. Aquino had to rescind the 1973 Marcos Constitution, abolish the legislature, remove various local government officials from their posts and personally appoint a Constitutional Commission to draft a new charter (pp. 122-23).

According to Wurfel, President Aquino was far less successful in the two other sets of tasks. The objective of recovering "ill-gotten wealth" encountered legal obstacles. The desire to reduce graft and corruption ran against the historical practices of the Philippine elite—of which the President's family is a part (pp. 124-25). The initial attempts to resolve the insurgency problem peacefully and to promote human rights were met with intransigence both from the armed Left and the newly politicized military, particularly the leadership of the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM)—a group which was a key player in the downfall of Marcos. The continuing threat of coups d'état from the military interventionists presented a real problem for the Aquino government. "This was the supreme irony of the democratization process. The intense politicization of the military from 1985, which proved essential for toppling the autocrat, remained the primary threat to the consolidation of political democracy from 1986" (p. 126). The article was in fact written before the most serious coup attempt in December 1989.

Wurfel recognizes the economic recovery of 1986-88 as a real though perhaps limited and unsustainable achievement (as subsequent events were to prove). But he also notes the growing disenchantment with the government because of continuing poverty and inequity. At the heart of the disappointment was the impasse in agrarian reform. The Aquino government "restored not only the institutions of constitutional democracy . . . but the social structure, and the elite dominance through fractured neo-patrimonialism which characterized the 1960s . . ." (p. 128). Thus, Wurfel is not overly optimistic about the prospects for democratic consolidation in the Philippines.

There is much to reflect on and study further in Wurfel's observations about the Philippines. He mentions in particular, the volatile combination of poverty and social inequality and of widespread politicization and

mobilization in key sectors of society as having possible negative implications for long-term democratization in the country.

Beyond the Philippine case, the book provides the opportunity to view the above tensions in terms of other countries in Europe and Latin America which are undergoing or have gone through similar experiences.

Taking a cue from Wurfel and some of the other essays in the book, perhaps there is a need to transcend an overly "political" understanding of democratic transition and consolidation (which informs the work of O'Donnell et. al and to a certain extent also this volume). Much can be learned from a closer and more systematic investigation of the socioeconomic bases and character of democracy. Such an approach can enrich our understanding of the meaning and challenge of democratization across varying national and historical contexts.

*Benjamin T. Tolosa, Jr.
Development Studies Program
Ateneo de Manila University*

Wood and Stone: For God's Greater Glory. Jesuit Art and Architecture in the Philippines. By Rene B. Javellana, S.J. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991. xiii, 264 pages.

"Somehow in the popular mind, Jesuits and the arts do not mix," writes Fr. Javellana in the preface. "Very little has been written about their contribution to Philippine art and architecture."

With this book, the author abundantly makes up for that lack and devotes painstaking scholarship to the little that remains of the Jesuit legacy of art and architecture in the Philippines, and also to what has lamentably disappeared.

The Jesuits arrived in the Philippines in 1581 and worked in Manila, Rizal (or to be precise, the area now called Rizal), Cavite, Marinduque, Iloilo, Cebu, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, Bohol, Samar, Leyte, and parts of Mindanao, until 1768 when they were expelled by Charles III of Spain. Returning in 1859, they resumed working in Manila and established missions throughout Mindanao.

Although the Jesuits built numerous churches in Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, not all of them were of stone. One gathers from the text that most of them were not of stone. Of forty-three that were of stone, only fifteen have survived. These include Maragondon, Kawit, Silang and Indang in Cavite; Boac and Santa Cruz in Marinduque; Lauang, Capul and Wright (Paranas) in Northern Samar; Guiuan and Sulat in Eastern Samar; and Baclayon and Loboc in Bohol. Among the fortress-churches, Boac, Capul, Guiuan and Sulat still have parts of their fortifications. Only seven churches