

Disciplinary Reactions: Alienation and the Reform of Vote Buying in the Philippines

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8-22-02 draft

Prepared for delivery at:

“Trading Political Rights: The Comparative Politics of Vote Buying,” International Conference,
Center for International Studies, MIT, Cambridge, August 26-27, 2002.

The 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association,
Boston, August 29 - Sept 1, 2002.

Clean election reform in any country is in part a disciplinary project.¹ To reform an electoral system - to reduce or eliminate vote buying, voter intimidation, fraudulent voting, ballot box stuffing, and the like - is to prohibit or make unacceptable certain kinds of acts. This reality suggests a need to study carefully whether reformers have an adequate understanding of the people and practices they seek to reform. History shows us that this is often not the case, especially when the object of reform is the “other” (Scott 1998). It also suggests a related need to understand how people who are the target of reform experience and react to these disciplinary efforts. Whether voters (who are the subject of this paper, but other actors as well) protest, acquiesce, resist, subvert, or embrace specific measures will have significant implications for their implementation and ultimate effect.

Rarely are these aspects of clean election reform studied. One intriguing exception is the archival research of Déloye and Ihl (1991) into voided ballots cast during the 1881 French legislative elections. To reduce social pressure on voters, French lawmakers had introduced paper ballots, and imposed strict rules to disqualify ballots with extraneous writing or markings on them. Ordinary people, however, still felt a need to express their opinions about candidates, politicians, and issues while voting. Many voters thus penned in their own messages, including this memorable line: “*merde...*to all the deputies...none of them are worth one good pig.” 8% of ballots cast in the 30 *circonscriptions* under study were voided for the inclusion of such annotations. Analyzing these writings, the authors discover that many voters, for various reasons, resisted official efforts to standardize and discipline the voting procedure.

Another notable exception is the work of Garrigou (1988) who, drawing on Foucault, examines the advent of secret voting in France. As he sees it, the voting booth was a technology designed to depersonalize political relationships, to separate voting from other social activities. In doing so, however, it also emptied voting of its social content and meaning.

There are also contemporary instances of voters reacting in unanticipated ways to reform efforts, what we might call for the sake of convenience “disciplinary reactions.” The South African 1998 law which

¹ Much of the fieldwork for this paper was conducted in the Philippines from January through August 2001. This research was made possible by a grant from the Fulbright Scholars Program. Additional funding was provided by the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at MIT. I would like to thank the Institute of Philippine Culture and the Political Science Department at Ateneo de Manila University for providing me with an institutional home. I am also indebted to Alfredo Metrio Antonio, Marion Ravinera Pantaleon, Jorge Rivas Alberto, and E-Anne Enriquez for their inspired research assistance. I am also grateful to Myrna Alejo, Suzanne Berger, Jenny Franco, Ben Kerkvliet, Carl Landé, and Tony Moreno for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

required barcoded identity documents occasioned one such reaction. As a news item from the February 23, 1999 issue of the Mail and Guardian reports:

Villagers in Mpumalanga's rural hinterland have refused to register for the coming elections and have instead accused the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of paving the way for the Anti-Christ. People in villages such as Daggakraal chased IEC registration officers out of their villages last week, insisting the campaign to issue bar-coded ID books smacks of biblical prophecies predicting the end of the world. "Villagers are terrified of bar-coded IDs because of the belief that the Anti-Christ will force people to have numbers tattooed on their foreheads," said provincial IEC spokesman Leon Mbangwa. "It's all part of some strange form of rural millennium fever and clearly illustrates the kind of obstacles we have to fight just to get some people registered." Some rural residents also insist election officials are collecting names and addresses to assist debt collectors.

The new bar-coded ID requirement apparently clashed with the religious beliefs of Mpumalanga villagers. These beliefs most likely draw upon millennialist African Zionist and Pentacostal Christian teachings about the return of the Anti-Christ at the end of time foretold in Revelations 9-13 (Thompson 1997, 89-90; Anderson 2000).²

Disciplinary reactions, we might conjecture, are likely to occur when reformers attempt to impose standards of moral, correct, or proper electoral conduct on voters who do not share the same standards of morality, correctness, or propriety. It is this clash of cultures which provokes voter reactions unanticipated by reformers - reactions that can range from alienation to noncompliance to reinforcing the behaviors the reformers seek to change. While there exist any number of cultural divides that might generate such clashes - defined by religion, ethnicity, level of individualism, and the like - it is important to single out for discussion the divide of class. Democracy, government accountability, and the rule of law are, after all, demands characteristically articulated by burgeoning entrepreneurs and middle classes. More to the point, clean election reform in many countries around the world has been an undertaking of the middle and (sometimes) upper classes - from the progressives in the early 20th century United States to the urban middle classes of Taiwan, Mexico, Thailand, South Korea, and the Philippines today. The targets of reform, in contrast, are often the poor.

Even the cases of disciplinary reaction discussed above appear to have a class dimension. In France, the imposition of vote secrecy was part of a larger 19th century European middle class preoccupation with

² Of course, a belief that barcodes carry the mark of the beast is not unique to Mpumalanga villagers or black South African Pentacostals. White South African urbanites discussed the satanic use of barcodes when their use spread throughout the country in the 1990s (Phia Steyn personal communication June 13, 2002). Indeed, this belief appears to be but a local manifestation of an urban myth gone global (www.snopes.com). What does seem particular in Mpumalanga is how villagers acted upon this belief in the realm of elections.

privacy - in clothing, home life, correspondence, as well as electoral expression (Gay 2002, 253-79). In South Africa, fear of Satan's tattoo, we learn from the news item, went hand in hand with a fear of debt collectors. It may not be coincidental that the rural municipality in which Daggakraal is located has been the site of intense land clashes between wealthy (white) farmers and impoverished (black) rural laborers. President Thabo Mbeki, when he toured the region, went so far as to describe it as the home of modern slavery.³ It may well be that the religious qua electoral anxieties of poor laborers overlay a deeper conflict with landowners. If so, then class is certainly an issue in this part of South Africa, albeit in a way that differentiates it from countries with strong middle class reform movements.

To explore disciplinary reaction and the class divide in a more contextual, substantive way, this paper will examine in some depth the case of the Philippines. The goal is to place current efforts to clean up elections - vote-buying in particular - in the context of the class divide that has so defined recent political events there. It should be noted that the elections under study here - the legislative and local elections of May 2001 - came on the heels of a quite a tumultuous series of events. In the five months leading up to the elections, there was an aborted impeachment trial of President Joseph "Erap" Estrada on charges of graft, bribery, and corruption; a massive popular demonstration which resulted in his forced resignation; Estrada's subsequent arrest; another, even larger, wave of demonstrations protesting his arrest which culminated, just two weeks before the elections, in a violent attempt to storm Malacañang Palace and remove from power the new president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Lying beneath this tumult is a gaping class divide. Those who sought to remove Estrada from the presidency were drawn largely from the middle and upper classes, while those who tried to defend or reinstall him were for the most part poor.

Making Sense of Class in the Philippines

Because class is a key category for this analysis, a few words on its meaning in the Philippine context are in order. Class distinctions are important and real to most Filipinos, though precise class boundaries are hard to delimit. There is a longstanding debate among academicians about the structural attributes of "the middle class" or "the bourgeoisie" (see for instance Lallana 1987; Turner 1995). As for opinion pollsters and market researchers, they distinguish between five classes - labeled class A, B, C, D, and E - that are defined in terms of wealth or lifestyle. Class A are the "super rich." They include business tycoons, senior executives, and hacienda owners. Class B are the "normal rich," among them national or provincial government officials, well-established doctors and lawyers, medium-sized farm owners, and successful business people. Class C

³ "Mpumalanga Spends R32m uplifting rural 'slaves.'" [African Eye News Service](#) 4/11/2000.

is the middle class. It includes people who lead comfortable lives, and are able to indulge in a few luxuries. Included in class C are small farm or business owners, mid-level managers, successful accountants and architects, supervisors, and municipal officials. Class D is the lower class. Their households have some comforts, but they basically live a hand-to-mouth existence. They tend to be farm tenants, blue collar workers, or low paid white collar workers. They might be clerks in government agencies, taxi drivers, or small stall owners in public markets. Class E are the destitute who face great difficulties in meeting their basic needs. They might be street vendors, farm hands, or manual laborers. They may also be unemployed or hold irregular jobs (Trends-MBL nd; Laquian and Laquian 1998, 211-12). Estimates of the class composition of the Philippines using this schema vary somewhat. Depending on the survey, classes A, B, and C - the middle and upper classes - together make up between 7 and 11% of the population, class D between 58 and 73%, and class E between 18 and 32%.

The use of these lettered categories has, notably, spread beyond the polling and marketing industries. Journalists writing for the daily papers regularly talk about the “ABC crowd.” People in urban centers sometimes also use these categories to designate themselves and others. Residents of Metro Manila (the city of Manila itself plus surrounding cities and towns) are familiar enough with these categories that pollsters can ask interviewees to place themselves into one of them.

There are, of course, still other categories that ordinary Filipinos use to designate class. When speaking about wealth, speakers of Tagalog (the most widely spoken language in the country) sometimes distinguish between “*mayayaman*” (the rich) from “*mahirap*” (the poor). When speaking of politics and social order they might differentiate “*elitista*” (elites) from “*masa*” (masses). In the realm of taste or culture they differentiate those who are “*burgis*,” “*sosyal*,” or “*coño*” (from the upper class, but more broadly classy, smart, chic, snooty, acting upper class) from those who are “*bakya*” (literally wooden clog, but means poor, tacky, cheesy, old-fashioned, no taste, poor person’s taste) or “*jologs*” (low class, low brow, crass). These categories, to be sure, are only partially overlapping. Not everyone who is wealthy is a *coño* sophisticate. Not everyone who is poor has provincial *bakya* taste.

It also important to note that an awareness of “middleness” is growing, no doubt as the number of managers, teachers, and other white collar workers has itself has grown in the past few decades. Essayist Asuncion David Maramba, among others, has given voice to this new middle class. She declares in the preface to her book [View from the Middle](#):

I believe in the middle class values of hard work, good education, property ownership, stable family life, respectability, initiative, self-reliance, and reasonable comfort. I am neither rich nor poor. As such I sometimes suffer the middle class unease with the uppity *burgis* on the one hand and the lower classes on the other. I can be an embarrassment to my *burgis* friends

- my taste can be tacky; I can be frightfully plain; I dislike high society. Nobody's stock will rise because they know me. And I'm an insult to my pro-poor friends - I haven't even seen Smokey Mountain;⁴ I prefer to ride in a car (I've said that I've had my share of public transportation) and I don't fall for every plea for the poor (1991, xi).

This passage is almost a manifesto of what being middle class stands for. Indeed, we might view it as part of a larger debate within Filipino society about what it means, exactly, to be *burgis* or middle class or *bakya* or *coño* or *jologs*.⁵ Class is, after all, in part a cultural construction. It no doubt has something do to with wealth or one's place in the economy. But it is also constructed out of shared values, tastes, habits and (most importantly for our inquiry) political commitments (Bourdieu 1984).

For the purposes of this analysis, the middle and upper classes - however loosely we must content ourselves with defining them - will be grouped together since reformers tend to be drawn from both strata. Among the most active participants in clean election reform groups are middle class white collar workers, educators, and church leaders; upper class local capitalists and corporate managers who perceive their business interests to be damaged by the lack of transparency and accountability in government; and middle and upper class students attending elite universities or private high schools. Another reason for grouping the middle and upper classes together is that the number of people who belong to these classes is relatively small. Consequently, pollsters typically group the rich A and B classes together with the middle C class when presenting their findings. The little quantitative data that is available thus does not often permit finer distinctions.

To understand how class affects clean election reform, it is first necessary to get some grasp of how both the well-off (ABC classes) and the poor (DE classes) perceive the current electoral system. The next section will thus examine briefly and impressionistically how the well-off tend to view the current state of Philippine democracy. The section that follows will look more systematically at how the poor tend to perceive it - or at least how a random sample of people in one urban poor community see it. The final three sections will, respectively, examine the class composition of the two main civil society associations involved in cleaning up elections, explore some consequences of the higher class impulse behind these reform efforts, and offer some comparative reflections on why such efforts sometimes provoke unanticipated reactions among the poor.

⁴ Smokey Mountain is a squatter settlement in Manila located at a huge, smoldering garbage dump off of which many residents subsist.

⁵ Other voices include Lacaba (1977) on *bakya*, Francisco and Arriola (1987) on *burgis*, Macadaeg (2001) on *coño*, Tobias (2001) and Oliveras and Guevarra (nd) on *jologs*.

Philippine Democracy Viewed from Above

To many in the middle and upper classes, I think it is fair to argue, elections are a source of both frustration and anxiety. Election after election, politicians who they perceive to be inept, depraved, and/or corrupt get returned to power. In the May 2001 election, for instance, a child rapist serving a life term won a congressional seat, as did a candidate fighting extradition to the U. S. on charges of wire fraud, tax evasion, illegal campaign contributions, and conspiracy to defraud the government. Actors, entertainers, and sports heroes with little or no experience in politics routinely do well in the polls. The senate now counts among its 24 members an action star, a comedian, and a basketball player. In 1998, action stars won mayoralty races in San Juan and Kalookan City, gubernatorial races in Cavite and Pampanga, not mention the race for the presidency of the Republic (Celdran 2001).

Many in the middle and upper classes are, consequently, left with a feeling of electoral powerlessness. Together, the ABC classes make up no more than 11% of the electorate, which means they are not often decisive in electoral outcomes. Whoever wins the vote of the D and E classes wins, period. Such was the (successful) strategy of presidential candidate Joseph “Erap” Estrada, who ran in 1998 on the platform of “*Erap para sa Mahirap.*” (Erap for the poor). Winning 38% of the class D vote and 48% of the class E vote, he was not hurt by weak support among ABC voters, of whom only 23% cast their ballots for him. Going into the election Estrada knew he did not need their votes, and felt little need to court these more wealthy voters. Some ABC voters had reportedly said they would leave the country if Estrada were to win. His reply, broadcast on national television, was an indifferent “they can start packing” (Laquian and Laquian 1998, 111). Even the politics of Makati City - financial center of the Philippines, and home of some of the poshest residential subdivisions in the county - is determined largely by the vote of the poor. When Mayor Jejomar Binay’s bid for reelection in 1995 was opposed by Makati’s elite he responded disdainfully that “you only compromise five percent of the people here, and when it comes to votes, yours don’t matter, we can even do without counting them” (Gloria 1995, 83). His assessment was correct, and he won.

Most politicians thus work hard to cultivate the poor vote, often by sponsoring community “projects” such as school building, street lighting, well digging, and drainage cleaning. They also provide more direct payoffs to voters by supplying potential supporters with food, money, free medical care, scholarships, discounted funerals, and the like. To protect this pool of votes, politicians also take measures to prevent the relocation of poor voters to areas outside of their bailiwicks. In Quezon City, for instance, a congressional representative tried to postpone the completion of a major roadway until after the election so that “his” squatters would not be resettled elsewhere. For similar reasons, when President Estrada ordered the relocation of poor communities along creeks and rivers prone to flooding, the Quezon City Council passed

a resolution requesting a deferment of that order for people living along two dangerous waterways in the city.⁶

Many in the ABC classes are troubled by the kind of politics which results. Typical is the opinion of this newspaper columnist:

Many of the ills complained about in the preparation, conduct and post-election activities have their roots in the flawed Martial Law Constitution....Under the old 1936 Constitution - only citizens at least 21 years old who were able to read and write were given the privilege to vote. On the theory that we should “democratize” the right of suffrage, under the Marcos Constitution, *illiterates* were allowed to vote and the voting age was lowered to 18 years old. I have no problem with that provided that the requirement of literacy was kept. It is common practice that illiterate voters are accompanied by relatives or friends who are authorized by law to do the voting for them. Th[ese] (with some exceptions) are the voters who are usually from the poor or squatter areas especially of the urban centers who are usually herded, fed and paid by politicians for their controlled votes.... You are wondering why some mayors of urban towns and cities are or pretend to be helpless in preventing squatting on government as well as private lands?... Why sidewalks are appropriated by “rolling stores” cum living quarters? The simple answer is that these usually illiterate squatters are the politician’s piggy bank controlled votes to win an election. The more squatters the better!⁷

Some better-off Filipinos thus feel contempt not only for dirty or incompetent politicians, but also for the poor who keep reelecting them, for the poor who, in the words of the columnist above, allow themselves to be “herded, fed, and paid.”

These contemptuous feelings towards the poor found an outlet in text messages exchanged by anti-Erap mobile phone users during the gathering of hundreds of thousands of mostly poor pro-Erap supporters in late April 2001 at EDSA.⁸ Text messaging, it is important to note, is wildly popular in the Philippines

⁶ Neil H. Cruz, “Mayor abuses constituents in Multinational Village,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 6/22/00. Still, when selling or developing urban public lands stand to bring local governments a windfall profit, local politicians do choose to evict squatters and demolish their houses (Karaos 1993; Berner 1997, 184).

⁷ Rene Espina, “Minding Other People’s Business,” Manila Bulletin 5/20/01.

⁸ EDSA is the main thoroughfare that runs through Metro Manila. It was the site of the mass demonstrations that culminated in the ouster of Marcos in 1986, an event commonly referred to as “EDSA 1.” It was also the focal point for the disproportionately middle and upper class “EDSA 2” protests that led to the ouster of Estrada in January 2001 (a Pulse Asia survey found that 65% of the adults who rallied at EDSA 2 came from the ABC classes; if class D rallyists with some college education or middle class occupations are included, then the total middle and upper class representation jumps to 74% [Bautista 2001, 8]). The gathering of the poor at EDSA in April 2001 has been dubbed by some as “EDSA 3.”

among those wealthy enough to afford cellphones: subscribers send at least 70 million messages daily.⁹ The political power of text messaging became evident during the oust-Erap “EDSA 2” rallies when anti-Erap jokes, news flashes, and instructions were exchanged at a furious pace.¹⁰ Many observers believe that texting played a pivotal role in mobilizing and organizing demonstrators and supporters. The power of text reappeared during “EDSA 3,” though this time around the text messages took aim not only at Erap, but also at the poor who gathered to support him.

Some text messages questioned the motives of those who went to EDSA 3 in a way that mocked their hunger and poverty: “EDSA 1: free the nation from a dictator. EDSA 2: free the nation from a thief. EDSA 3: free lunch, dinner, breakfast and snacks too..... let’s go!” Those who participated in EDSA 1 and EDSA 2 were moved by their principles, the message implies, while those who gathered at EDSA 3 were only there to receive free handouts. Other messages derided those who went to EDSA 3 for being stupid: “The world’s looking at the Philippines again. The rally at EDSA will be in the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest gathering of fools, idiots and imbeciles ever.” Still other messages disparaged those at EDSA 3 for being not only ignorant and poor, but also unclean: “Calling all the filthy (*dugyot*) and ignorant, the toothless and unclothed, let’s prove we have no brains - go to EDSA, please pass.” This form of derision was not confined to texting: in the Tagalog-language media, the poor who rallied at EDSA 3 were referred to as *mabaho* (smelly) and *hindi naliligo* (unbathed), while leaders of the Catholic Church criticized the “profanation” of the EDSA Shrine, and its being turned into a “dump site.”

These dirt-centric messages and phrases, I believe, reveal a form of class anxiety.¹¹ As the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) has taught us, “dirt” is something that is not in its proper place, and thus potentially dangerous. In the eyes of many ABC voters, the poor did not belong at EDSA. That place is a hallowed venue of protest reserved for the righteous middle and upper classes. As one journalist recalls, using the collective “we” of the ABC crowd, “We screamed at the thought that the Edsa Shrine had been raped, mocked and infested by people we deemed not worthy to tread on the holy grounds. We even went

⁹ According to a June 2001 Pulse Asia survey, 63% of those in the ABC classes own cellphones, compared to only 18% in class D, and 4% in class E.

¹⁰ A sample of EDSA 2 text jokes can be found in Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (2001).

¹¹ For manifestations of class anxiety reflected in discourses of “dirt” and “smell” in early 20th century Sweden and pre-World War II England see Frykman and Löfgren (1987, 261-62) and Orwell ([1937] 1958, 127-36).

so far as to say they have no right to be there because that territory was ‘ours.’”¹² Even the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) asked those at EDSA to hold their protests elsewhere. The poor were literally out of place.

To push the argument even further, EDSA 3 can be seen as a microcosm of Philippine politics. A view of the poor as dirty did not take form suddenly in reaction to that protest. Columnists in the English-language press have for years referred to the poor as “the great unwashed.”¹³ And as we have seen, the poor are out of place not only at EDSA but in the electoral realm as well. It is because they hold undue influence in determining electoral outcomes, many of the better-off believe, that politics is today stinking and rotten.

The organizers of the EDSA 3 protest played over the loudspeakers a ribald drinking ditty called “Gloria Labandera” (Gloria the laundrywoman) as a way to degrade President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.¹⁴ To their surprise the president, shrewdly seeing an opportunity to court the poor, embraced the image. With pride, she revealed to the nation that she was, in fact, the granddaughter of a laundrywoman. Soon after, the National Food Authority began selling discounted rice and sugar from Gloria Labandera rolling stores, while her supporters launched a movement called “*Alerta Labandera*” (Alert Laundrywoman) which seeks to improve the lives of the poor in Metro Manila. A detergent manufacturer even proposed to the president using the name Gloria Labandera for a new line of soap.¹⁵

The new president, in a metaphorical sense, is poised to launder the dirty nation. But getting rid of dirt requires more than metaphorical cleansing or promotional gimmicks. Cleansing requires real violence. “Filth is precisely that which we are taught to renounce and repel forcefully,” writes Filipino scholar Vicente Rafael, “while the inability to separate oneself from it is taken to be a pathological sign of immaturity and

¹² Jose Javier Reyes, “The Poor That Everyone ‘Cares For’ Finally Gets to Edsa,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 5/4/01.

¹³ It is unclear how and when the expression “the great unwashed” entered Philippine discourse. It was already in use by 1996, and is probably much older than that. It appears so often today in the Philippine press that it is almost a cliché. In just one newspaper, Business World, it was used 34 times over the past five years. The expression itself is of British origin, and appears to have been coined in the 18th century by Edmund Burke (Brewer 1999).

¹⁴ Loi Estrada, wife of former president Joseph Estrada and newly elected senator, has even programmed her cellphone to use this tune as its ringtone.

¹⁵ These efforts have left most pro-poor and women’s groups unimpressed. One responded by staging a laundry washing skit mocking the “anti-poor policies” of the President during her first State of the Union address.

perversion that requires corrective intervention.”¹⁶ As Rafael suggests, there are at least two ways to clean that which is morally dirty: it can be repelled or corrected. Middle and upper class reformers in the Philippines have contemplated both strategies.¹⁷

To repel dirt is to push it back to where it belongs. Thus one proposal circulating among the intellectual elite today is to clean elections (and thus politics) by removing the poor from the political scene altogether. There are, for instance, those who suggest barring the poor, or some portion of the poor, from participating in elections at all. The challenge, for those who hold such views, is to find a legal basis for this disfranchisement. Some have proposed not allowing squatters to vote in the place they live because they are not legal residents of that location. By the logic of one lawyer, “under our law, it is required that a voter must be a resident of the place where he proposes to vote for at least ‘six months immediately preceding the election.’ And when the law speaks of ‘residence requirement’ it obviously refers to a ‘lawful residency.’” Another idea is to disfranchise those who do not file tax returns, since “the greater mass of tax evaders and illegal residents of crowded communities usually dictate the outcome of popular elections.” Still another is to require voters to pass a competency test in order to “limit the democratic exercise to the middle class.” The topic of higher voter qualifications has even received attention at the lofty Newsmakers Breakfast Forum.¹⁸

None of these solutions have been implemented. Nor is it likely that any will be soon, since each would face serious political and constitutional challenges. Thus most reformers - for practical, political, or ethical reasons - have banked on a different way to put the poor in their place. They have opted instead for corrective intervention. That is, they have tried to discipline the poor, to train them to vote correctly. “We

¹⁶ Vicente L. Rafael, “Dirty Words,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 7/24/01.

¹⁷An alternative to cleaning dirt is to dilute it, a strategy that is also receiving serious consideration. One proposal is to cut the strength of the poor vote by granting the right to vote to overseas Filipinos, who are presumed to be better-off. Referring to these overseas voters in a letter he wrote to the Manila Standard, one Quezon City resident thus marvels, “count them by the millions - enough to counteract our *masa* voters [voters from the masses] who sell their votes in every election” (7/30/01).

¹⁸ In order of citation: Neil H. Cruz, “Stop Politicians from Coddling Squatters,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 7/31/00; Federico D. Pascual, “If We Deny Voting Rights to Squatters, Tax-evaders?” Philippine Star 8/3/00; Jaime T. Licaucó, “Concerned Filipinos Abroad Write on What’s Happening to the Country,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 6/5/01; Ivar Gica, “Gov’t Fund for Pol Parties, Lesser Poll Commissioners,” Manila Bulletin 7/3/01.

call the poor dumb for not voting wisely,” one columnist observed, “which is just another way of saying for not voting the way we want them to.”¹⁹

Voter education, however, requires knowledge about those to be educated. To effectively teach people how to vote “wisely” requires understanding the reasons why they vote “unwisely.” But after EDSA 3 there was a sudden awareness among members of the middle and upper classes that they did not really understand those whom they want to educate. “Isn’t it amazing that in this day and age there still exist undiscovered islands in our archipelago?” writes one commentator. “In early May we discovered one such island: a colony of smelly, boisterous and angry people. They are the poor among us.”²⁰

Philippine Democracy Viewed from Below

How, then, do the poor - this “undiscovered colony” - understand Philippine democracy, and their place in it? To explore this question I, along with two research assistants, conducted 139 interviews with a random sample of registered voters in four areas of Barangay Commonwealth, Quezon City.²¹ Quezon City, located within Metro Manila, is the largest city in the country. It has a population of over 2 million (the population of Manila itself has only 1.5 million). Commonwealth itself is the largest barangay in Quezon City, with a population of about 120,000.²² The people who live in Commonwealth are predominately poor. The four areas in Commonwealth under study, with a total population of about 14,000 registered voters, have no class A or B residents, and only 10% who belong to class C. The vast majority fall within the D and E classes. Barangay Commonwealth is thus a typical urban poor community.²³

To learn about how the urban poor of Commonwealth perceive Philippine democracy, we began by trying to figure out how people understood the meaning of “*demokrasya*” - the Tagalog rough equivalent of

¹⁹ Conrado de Quiros, “Tongues on Fire,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 5/1/01.

²⁰ Leandro V. Coronel, “Discovering the Poor” Philippine Daily Inquirer 5/19/01.

²¹ We chose at random from the voter registry 2% of the people who were listed as living in each of the four areas. Of the people who actually still lived there - many had moved abroad or to the provinces after registering, and a few had died - our response rate was 81%. Another 11 non-random pilot interviews were conducted. No information from these pilot interviews has been included in the descriptive statistics that follow. Some statements made during these interviews have, however, be incorporated into the paper. They can be identified by their belonging to the “A” series of interviews, (A1, A2, etc).

²² A barangay is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines.

²³ Ranked against other barangays in Metro Manila, Commonwealth places 10th in the number of poor households, and 6th in the number of makeshift dwellings (Rebullida, Endriga, and Santos 1999, 27-30).

the English word “democracy.”²⁴ *Demokrasya* itself Spanish loan word. When residents of Commonwealth were asked what non-loan Tagalog term might be used to translate *demokrasya*, almost all responded “*kalayaan*.” *Kalayaan* means, roughly, freedom or independence (Independence Day is “*Araw ng Kalayaan*”).²⁵

There are several types of *kalayaan* that people in Commonwealth identify as being part of *demokrasya*. Among the most commonly named are the freedoms of movement, speech, and religion, as well as the freedom to start a business, choose political leaders, or make choices about one’s lifestyle.²⁶ Still, to most people interviewed, the *kalayaan* of *demokrasya* is not without limits. Both private citizens and people in government are expected, variously, to stay within the law, to do nothing that is hurtful, or to take actions that promote the welfare of others. Thus according to one rag seller, “you can do anything you want, as long as it’s not bad” (G30). Or as an unemployed woman stated, “what I know of *demokrasya* is that you have

²⁴ The Philippines was first a Spanish and then an American colony. Today English is understood by most Filipinos, while it is rare to find people who still speak Spanish. Nevertheless, many Spanish loan words, such as *demokrasya*, have become integrated into Tagalog, the most widely spoken language in the country. All interviews for this study were conducted in Tagalog, or at the interviewees prompting, Taglish, a mixture of Tagalog and English commonly spoken in Metro Manila. For a discussion of the goals and methods involved in this type of linguistic inquiry see Schaffer (1998).

²⁵ These meanings are relatively new, making their appearance only in the 1880s. According to the linguist and poet Virgilio Almario (1993, 116), it was the Philippine propagandist Marcelo H. Del Pilar who first used *kalayaan* in this way, when he chose this term to translate “*libertad*” in a Spanish-language essay written by the most renowned Filipino nationalist, Jose Rizal. Members of the *Kataastaasang Kalagang-galang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (Highest and Most Esteemed Assembly of the Children of the Country), a secret society devoted to achieving independence from Spain, further popularized the word by adopting it as the name of their revolutionary organ in 1896 (Agoncillo 1996, 82; Sta. Maria 1998, 16-20). Historian Reynaldo Ileto offers the following genealogy of the word: “Prior to the rise of the separatist movement, *kalayaan* did not mean ‘freedom’ or ‘independence.’ In translating into Tagalog the ideas of ‘liberty, fraternity, equality’ learned from the West, propagandists like Bonifacio, Jacinto, and perhaps Marcelo H. del Pilar built upon the word *layaw* or *laya*, which means ‘satisfaction of one’s needs,’ ‘pampering treatment by parents’ or freedom from strict parental control” (1979, 87). *Kalayaan*, then, is a word of relatively new vintage. Prior to the 1880s, dictionary writers such as San Buena Ventura (1613), Santos (1794), and Noceda and Sanlucar (1860) rendered the Spanish word “*libertad*” into Tagalog as “*kamaharlikaan*” (the state of being a freeman, not a slave). Unlike *kamaharlikaan*, *kalayaan* was never used to refer to social rank. The new word connoted instead a more fundamental state of being.

²⁶ Understanding *demokrasya* to mean *kalayaan* is not unique to this community, or even to the poor. Similar views have been expressed by everyone from villagers in the province of Bukidnon to union officials in the province of Davao to high school students in various parts of the country to cabinet members, legislators, and business leaders (See the studies by Contado, Lee, Nava, Nuera, and Tordesillas in Diokno 1997).

freedom (*kalayaan*) to speak out, the freedom to do what you want, as long as you don't harm other people" (R23). An empty bottle collector similarly remarked that "you are free to do anything as long as it's not against the law, and it's good for others" (A7).

For some interviewees, the limits placed on how one acts - behaving in a way that is decorous, polite, respectful - appear to be a more fundamental part of *demokrasya* than the freedom to act itself, as the following statement of an elderly rag maker shows: "when your child is of the proper age and wants to enter a life of marriage, he needs to ask permission from his parents - this is *demokrasya*. If there were no *demokrasya*, he would do anything he wants. He could even go to another country" (G21). For this respondent, *demokrasya* seems tantamount to respecting one's parents.

It is not only individuals who are expected, when *demokrasya* is present, to act in kind, beneficial, or respectful ways; so are people in government and other large institutions such as banks. Consider what this *sari sari* (variety) store owner has to say:

Sari sari store owner: [*Demokrasya* is].... freedom (*kalayaan*), you have the freedom to do what you want.

Interviewer: Is there *demokrasya* in the Philippines right now?

Sari sari store owner: Yes, in some ways. Like where we live, if we complain [to the housing authority] that there's something wrong in our unit, they would fix it. When I complained about our bathroom, they fixed it. It's like that, you have the right to complain about anything you don't like.

Interviewer: Was there *demokrasya* during the time of Marcos?

Sari sari store owner: There was. They provided loans for the poor, like fishing loans. My father was able to get one from the DBP [Development Bank of the Philippines].... We were able to pay some of it back, but not everything. Because as the sea gets older, the harvest becomes smaller. There was no more catch, and then my father's equipment broke down. But the bank didn't try to collect.... For me, it's an example of *demokrasya* because they didn't force us to pay our debts (A6).

For this woman, *demokrasya* appears to adhere in the responsiveness and leniency of bank and government.

To many respondents, the problem with Philippine *demokrasya* today is that many people and institutions do not act in such ways, that limits on *kalayaan* are not in fact respected, that private citizens and government officials act in ways that are rude, hurtful, and unlawful. In the words of one barangay health worker:

What I don't like about [our] *demokrasya* is that there is an excessive choice of words.... People don't care if they're hurting each other.... If you are democratic, you are free to speak out. But many are vulgar when they speak. They don't mind if what they say is hurting other people (S2).

More specifically, a major problem with Philippine *demokrasya* to many residents of Commonwealth is that the poor in particular are not shown kindness or respect. As a dressmaker explains, “there is no *demokrasya* at this time because they [the rich] don’t listen to the poor. The way they look at us is really ugly” (G13). One woman described her own personal experience of this ugliness:

The rich treat us so inhumanely. They look at us as if we were rats. When I used to work as a house helper my employer used to beat me....Someone called on the phone, and she accused me of giving out the number. She started hitting me all over. She was rich so she felt she had the right to do that (G47).

Like this woman, many in Barangay Commonwealth are acutely aware of their poverty, and perceive this poverty to be a root cause of the powerlessness and injustice they experience. In the words of a computer technician, “only those who have money can have power” (G3). A hospital food service worker explained similarly that “the law is for those who have money. If you are poor, they just kill you” (G11). Even within Barangay Commonwealth, differences in income lead to power inequalities. One of the unemployed women quoted above complained that in her neighborhood association “if you have nothing, they won’t care about you....They give priority to those who have money. In meetings, they let you speak, but they don’t listen to you. You can speak, but it’s like they don’t really listen” (R23).

This experience of not being listened to, of not being taken seriously, understandably leads to feelings of insult and indignity - even when not accompanied by physical abuse. Such feelings help explain why EDSA 3 protests received such widespread (though not universal) support from Commonwealth residents. To EDSA 3 supporters, the demonstrations represented above all a plea or a demand on the part of the poor to be noticed, to be heard:

Interviewer: Why do you think people are taking part in these demonstrations?

Shoe vendor: They are fighting for what they believe in, for what they want other people to know, like about how the poor are being ridiculed. Like us, they want their voices to be heard. They want to express what they feel.

Interviewer: What do these poor people want to express?

Shoe vendor: That they want to be noticed (R4).

As this vendor explains, it is not only that the poor feel unnoticed by the rich. Many also feel ridiculed.

In this context, even small acts of class ridicule took on big meaning to protesters gathered at EDSA 3. As one Commonwealth resident explained, while he was at the protest rally “some cars of wealthy people passed us by and they threw coins at us. In their eyes we are not worth any more than pocket change. It’s because of things like that that emotions ran high” (E11). The issue of ridicule is also central to how this scrap metal dealer made sense of EDSA 3, days after the end of this mass demonstration:

The poor are forgotten. Small people are taken for granted. The rich are given priority. What happened two days ago, it wasn't good. They were mocking the poor. I heard them say it. They said that those people [at EDSA 3] are so poor that they have nothing to eat. A while ago I was listening to dzEC [a pro-Erap radio station]. Somebody called, and said that he heard [anti-Estrada senatorial candidate] Recto saying that those in EDSA 3 are poor people, that they have nothing to eat. It was so mean of him to say that. He shouldn't have said anything like that about the poor because we eat the same food, we all eat rice. Why do you have to insult the poor when they're the ones who'll vote for you during elections? It's not only the rich who have the right to vote. They are already poor, so you don't have scorn them. You should just help them so they can have a better life. Don't insult them because it'll only hurt their feelings (R2).

It was scornful behavior not only on the part of individual politicians, but also by the government as a whole that justified to some residents of Commonwealth the violent march on the presidential palace. Speaking of the people gathered at EDSA 3, a pawnshop vault custodian explained:

It would have been better had the government paid attention to them. If the government hadn't antagonized the people there, they wouldn't have done it [marched to the palace]. The people were under the sun, tired, hungry, and the government didn't even pay attention to them....Nobody from the government even bothered to visit them, to say "here is something from the government. please excuse us for not providing more." Bring the Red Cross, food, or water from the government just to pacify them. But the government didn't even bother to pay any attention to the people there, so they got furious (R12).

Thus to many Barangay Commonwealth residents, true *demokrasya* requires that everyone, even the poor, be treated with dignity.²⁷

Many residents of Barangay Commonwealth are strong supporters of former president Estrada because in their eyes he, unlike other national politicians, treats the poor with dignity. He shows them respect, notices them, cares about them, has pity on them. Writing about the poor, Maria Christina Astorga, chairperson of the Ateneo de Manila University's theology department, had something like this in mind when she wrote:

Just as they feel a distance and alienation from us, the *masa* [masses] feel a spontaneous connection with Erap. Rightly or wrongly, they believe that he has in his heart their concerns. He is on their side. He speaks their language, he knows their idiom, he plays their

²⁷ The importance that people attach to the concept of dignity, and to acts of compassion which a concern for dignity give rise, transcend politics and Barangay Commonwealth. Scholars have found that dignity, compassion and pity are central to mediating unequal power relations in various aspects of everyday life, for many different kinds of people, including Visayan fishermen (Polo 1985), Catholics in Bicol (Cannell 1999, 231), and agricultural workers in Central Luzon (Kerkvliet 1990, 269, 272-73). To be treated with dignity appears to be a deep and widespread aspiration among the less powerful.

game. They feel that he is one of them and is for them. *Si Erap ay para sa mahirap* [Erap is for the poor].²⁸

It is this connection with Erap, this feeling that Erap cares about them, that helps explain why so many poor people stand behind him in spite of the allegations of corruption and plunder leveled against him. Typical are the opinions of this housewife:

Interviewer: What can you say about Erap?

Housewife: He is a kind person. I feel sorry for him for what happened, for everything that they did to him. He's kind to the people, to the poor. Those things [his ouster and arrest] shouldn't have been done to him.

Interviewer: What about the accusations against him?

Housewife: Maybe they are true, but I don't really know because I'm just an ordinary person. All I know is what I hear from the news. But what I can say is that he's a kind person.

Interviewer: But what if those allegations are true, wouldn't you get angry with him because he robbed the citizens of this country?

Housewife: I can't do anything about them if they are true. But for me, he is still a kind person (S3).

What really seems to count for this woman is Erap's compassion.

In terms of electoral politics, this moral calculus leads many voters to choose candidates whom they perceive to be caring, kind, and helpful; candidates who respect their *kapwa* - their fellow human beings, especially those who are poor.²⁹ As one housewife explained, "a politician who treats other people [*kapwa*] well will always win" (A9). Or in the words of a low-level accountant, "When we vote for a person...he should do good things for us. He should be able to help us if we're in need. If there is a disagreement among us, he should show us that he's concerned" (E14). Another housewife voiced similar sentiments, "[I voted for] Noli de Castro because I know he's kind [*mabait*] and helpful [*matulungin*]. If we approach him, I'm sure he can help us" (G22). Consider, finally, the reasons why this unemployed widower voted for then-Congressman Sonny Belmonte to be mayor of Quezon City:

He's very helpful to fellow human beings [*kapwa*]. He helps the poor. He helped me personally. When my wife was dying, I asked for his help. I told him I didn't have the money to pay the hospital bills, and he gave me 5000 pesos. I had first gone to

²⁸ Quoted in Art A. Borjal, "Erap and the Masa," Philippine Star 12/5/00.

²⁹ On the meaning and significance of "*kapwa*" see Enriquez (1986).

[Congressman] Liban.³⁰ The people in his office told me to go to the Quezon Institute, or to go ask Belmonte. They told me to go here; they told me to go there. My gosh, they made me feel so stupid [*tanga*]! (E13)

This old man did not vote for Liban because his staff refused his request for assistance. Worse, they gave him the run-around. To him it was humiliating and shaming; it made him feel like a fool. One thinks back to the comment made by the scrap metal dealer above, “they are already poor, so you don’t have scorn them. You should just help them so they can have a better life.” Belmonte just helped. He treated the man with dignity. What he experienced with Liban’s staff, in contrast, was scorn and insult.

Politics, then, for many among the poor in Barangay Commonwealth is a class politics of dignity. “Bad” politics is a politics of callousness and insult, while “good” politics is a politics of consideration and kindness. The upper and middle classes tend to have a different view of what “good” politics ought to look like. To these classes, good politics is often called “new politics” (*bagong pulitika* in Tagalog) - a politics of issues, rather than personalities and political dynasties; a politics based not on cronyism, but on accountability and transparency. Thus one of the nation’s most respected commentators, Amando Doronila, describes new politics as a politics “less driven by personalities, dynasties and patronage,” while Anna Marie Karaos, a leading scholar, speaks of new politics as “changing the day-to-day practices of bureaucrats, politicians, and ordinary people particularly in debating issues, obtaining and disclosing information and exacting accountability from those making decisions.”³¹ “Bad” politics is, in contrast “*trapo*” politics. *Trapo* is short for “traditional politician.” It is also a play on words in the Tagalog language, where *trapo* means “dirty rag.” *Trapos* are, as one editorialist put it “unprincipled politicians who use all the dirty tricks to get elected and re-elected, make promises they don’t intend to keep, use public office to enrich themselves and do various other things that corrupt government and society.”³² *Trapo* politics is thus a politics of patronage, dirty tricks, corruption, dynasty, and private interest.

Good politics for many in the upper and middle classes is, in sum, the clean politics of transparency; while bad politics is the dirty politics of rag-like corrupt politicians. As we have seen, this is a different ethical calculus than that used by many of the poor, at least in Barangay Commonwealth. For these poorer

³⁰ Dante Liban, another candidate for mayor in the May 2001 election, was at the time a congressman for district 2, Quezon City. Belmonte was congressman for district 4, Quezon City. Barangay Commonwealth is located in district 2.

³¹ “Opposition, Civil Society Also Hold State Hostage,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 6/18/01; “Civil Society in the New Politics,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 7/4/01.

³² “Trapos, Sunshine and Solidarity,” Manila Times 6/13/01.

people, good politics is often a politics of personal dignity, a politics in which politicians treat the poor with kindness and compassion, while bad politics is a politics of insult and rudeness. It might not be an overgeneralization to say that if the master trope of good politics for the rich is cleanliness, for the poor of Barangay Commonwealth it is dignity.

It is thus not surprising that to many residents of Commonwealth, both *trapo* and *bagong pulitika* are foreign concepts. Less than 1 in 5 people in the random sample had even basic knowledge of how *bagong pulitika* is being used in contemporary political debate, while only half those interviewed knew how *trapo* is today used. Regarding the word *trapo*, it is interesting to note that to about 1 of every 25 respondents, *trapo* is a term that refers not to (certain kinds of) politicians, but to the poor. More specifically, they understand it to be a term used disparagingly by the rich to describe the poor, especially those who gathered at EDSA 3. As the law office liaison officer quoted above stated: “*Trapo* is a rag. Those who are in the upper class look at those who belong to the lower class as *trapo*. Just like in EDSA 3. The rich really mocked the poor who went there. They called the people at EDSA 3 *trapos* (R6).” Similarly, a sari sari store owner who was at EDSA 3 commented: “*trapo*, isn’t that a rag? Like in EDSA 3, those of us who attended were referred to as rags because we are uneducated. I heard that, uneducated, because we are poor” (G20). This displacement of the term from politicians to the poor is, I would suggest, indicative of the politics of (in)dignity described above. What was originally a term of derision for dirty politicians has become in the eyes of at least a few residents of Commonwealth, a word that the rich use to ridicule the poor. *Trapo* and *bagong pulitika* are, in short, categories only infrequently used by residents of Barangay Commonwealth - at least with the meanings attached to them by the elite.

Class and Clean Elections

Clean election reform - and more broadly the effort to replace “*trapo*” politics with “new” politics - is disproportionately an upper and middle class project. Perhaps the two most prominent voluntary organizations involved in cleaning up elections are the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), which conducts a “quick” parallel vote count to deter and detect vote padding and other forms of “wholesale” cheating, and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV), which fields pollwatchers on election day to deter intimidation, vote buying, and other forms of “retail” malpractice. Both

organizations also engage in voter education. In the May 2001 elections, NAMFREL claims to have fielded more than 150,000 volunteers nationwide, while PPCRV reports that it had in place more than 450,000.³³

NAMFREL and the PPCRV are both dominated by the upper and middle classes. While a wide array of civic associations and church groups - from the Women's Action Network for Development to the National Council of Churches in the Philippines - belong to NAMFREL, big business plays the leading role. The general secretary of NAMFREL, Guillermo Luz, is also the executive director of the Makati Business Club, the country's premier business association whose membership consists of CEOs and senior executives representing the largest corporations in the country. The national chairman of NAMFREL, Jose Concepcion, Jr., is also chairman of the board of the Concepcion family-owned RFM Corporation, the country's second largest food and beverage conglomerate. The national secretariat of NAMFREL, tellingly, is located in the RFM corporate headquarters. The list of business and professional associations that have donated labor, money, and materials to NAMFREL reads like a who's who of the Philippine corporate world. Among them are the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Management Association of the Philippines, the Bankers Association of the Philippines, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, and the Federation of Philippine Industries (whose chairman is Raul Concepcion, Jose Concepcion's twin brother). Business and professional organizations have leadership roles in the organization's most dynamic provincial chapters as well. As one observer noted, "free and fair elections' is the new business of business" (Hedman 1998, 166; see also Hedman 1999).

As for the PPCRV, its origins can be traced to a small breakfast hosted by Jaime Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila, in May 1991. Among the guests were Commission on Elections (COMELEC) commissioner Haydee Yorac, and Henrietta de Villa, the National President of the Council of the Laity of the Philippines. As the conversation turned to the upcoming 1992 election, those present decided to initiate, in words attributed to Yorac, a "big organized systemic endeavor" to "repel the evil" of goons, guns, and gold (Bacani 1992, 40). The PPCRV was officially launched five months later by the Archdiocese of Manila, and it soon spread nationwide. While Cardinal Sin is the honorary chairman, and the seven member board of advisors are all bishops or archbishops, the PPCRV is a lay organization. The national chairman comes from

³³ In the watershed 1986 presidential elections, NAMFREL fielded some 500,000 pollwatchers, and its parallel vote count was pivotal in discrediting the victory claimed by Ferdinand Marcos (Byington 1988, Goldman and Pascual 1988). Since the early 1990s, NAMFREL has focused its energies on these counts, while other national organizations, most prominently the PPCRV, have taken over responsibility for pollwatching.

the laity, as do most members of the national executive board. The PPCRV relies, furthermore, on the (lay) parish pastoral council (PPC) of each parish to supply coordinators and volunteers.

The lay membership of the PPCRV is disproportionately middle class. As National Chairman de Villa (1992) noted in her first report to the COMELEC, the “PPCRV attracted and tapped various types of laity, not just the usual ‘stockholders of the Church,’ still, the involvement of the poor, as deduced from the data, was not clearly manifested.” (de Villa 1992). The same concern - that “volunteers belong to the middle class/less from grassroots” - was echoed in a 1996 national conference report (PPCRV 1996). This class bias can also be seen at the local level. In Barangay Commonwealth, the 41 PPCRV volunteers for the May 2001 elections who live in the four areas under study were, on the whole, wealthier than the random sample of registered voters: 27% of the PPCRV volunteers belonged to class C compared to only 10% of the random sample. Not only did Commonwealth PPCRV volunteers tend to be better-off; they also appeared to share middle class values. They were, for instance, much more likely to participate in EDSA 2 than other residents of Commonwealth: 41% of the volunteers joined the protest, compared to only 3% of the random sample of registered voters. And while no PPCRV volunteers participated in EDSA 3, 19% of the random sample did.³⁴

Consequences of the Class Divide

That those who are most active in the push for clean elections tend to belong to the middle and upper classes has consequences. For one, it has generated distrust and anger among the poor towards reform-minded organizations or their leaders. Part of the problem is that the campaign for clean elections has become bundled with partisan attacks on former President Estrada and his allies who, to reformers, represent the worst kind of *trapo* politics. Indeed, both the national chairman of NAMFREL and its general secretary were, in the months and weeks leading up to EDSA 2, among the most highly visible and vocal figures calling for Estrada’s resignation, as were Cardinal Sin, the honorary chairman of the PPCRV, and other officials of the Catholic Church.

We can see the alienating effect of this anti-Erap position most clearly at the grassroots level, especially with regards to the Catholic Church. In Barangay Commonwealth some Catholic parishioners have, since the ouster of former President Estrada, disassociated themselves from the church, citing the frequent “political” and “anti-Erap” sermons of the parish priest and Cardinal Sin as their reasons.³⁵ Even

³⁴ All 41 PPCRV volunteers were interviewed for this study.

³⁵ NAMFREL too has come under attack for being partisan, leading some to ask who is watching the watchdog.

national leaders of the Catholic Church acknowledge that the poor are distancing themselves from mainstream Catholicism. In the words of Father Anton Pascual of the Catholic Church-operated Radio Veritas, “We saw in Edsa 3 that the poor [are] no longer with the Church” (Rufo 2001, 8). In Barangay Commonwealth, many of these alienated parishioners have stopped participating in church activities, including those sponsored by the PPCRV.³⁶ Even some neighborhood leaders of the church have distanced themselves from the PPCRV, refusing to help recruit volunteers for the May 2001 elections. The loss here is not only to the Catholic Church. Democracy also suffers to the extent that one of the national organizations best positioned to be a genuine agent of reform is in danger of becoming discredited among the poor.

The higher class impulse for reform has had other troubling consequences as well. Perhaps most importantly, it has led to an information gap, to misperceptions on the part of reformers about the nature of (some) dirty electoral practices. Their efforts to reduce or eliminate such practices are thus sometimes ineffective or misguided. These misperceptions are perhaps easiest to see when it comes to the issue of vote-buying, a common practice during election season. A nationwide survey found that about one of every ten Filipinos was offered cash or material goods to vote for a particular candidate in the May 2001 elections, and of those, about seven of every ten accepted what was offered.³⁷ Thus nationwide, almost 2 million people received some form of payment.

Many in the middle and upper classes share the opinion, voiced here by a newspaper editorialist, that “the masa [masses] treats elections as mere fund-raising circuses.”³⁸ Votes, by this view, are simple

³⁶ Some observers of national politics argue that the poor are flocking to El Shaddai, a charismatic offshoot of the Catholic Church, and the Iglesia ni Cristo (Tagalog for “Church of Christ”), a homegrown Filipino church. Leaders of both groups have been strong supporters of former President Estrada, and able to mobilize large numbers of people to demonstrate on his behalf. In Barangay Commonwealth, however, El Shaddai has not attracted many members, in part because the parish priest until recently did not allow its members to organize within the parish. Of the 83 Catholics in the random survey, only 4 identified themselves as members. The main alternative to Catholicism in Barangay Commonwealth is the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC). About 31% of the random sample were INC members, of whom a handful had converted from Catholicism within the past 5 years. None of these recent converts, however, stated that politics played even a minor role in that decision. Nor could local INC church leaders recall anyone converting for political reasons. Catholics in Barangay Commonwealth who are unhappy with Cardinal Sin and the parish priest are distancing themselves from the church, but they do not appear to be joining El Shaddai or the INC - at least not yet.

³⁷ This survey was conducted by Pulse Asia in June 2001. The sample consisted of 1200 voting age people nationwide. Six questions on vote buying were included by the author. Additional results are reported below.

³⁸ Jarius Bondoc, “It’s Not Just Erap, It’s the System,” Philippine Star 4/1/00.

commodities that poor folks exchange for money, without any moral or political reflection. It follows that an important way to combat vote-buying is to provide poor voters with a moral education to, in the words of one journalist, “rescue” them “from the bondage of ignorance.”³⁹

Leading up to the May 2001 elections, NAMFREL, in cooperation with the Advertising Board of the Philippines, sponsored a variety of TV, radio, newspaper, and magazine public service ads on the evils of vote-buying. NAMFREL and the PPCRV also distributed pamphlets, flyers, and posters, while several corporations also placed their own newspaper ads. Because of the high concentration of poor voters in the largest urban areas, the ad executives who coordinated the NAMFREL and corporate campaigns decided to target Metro Manila.

The aim of much of this material was to teach poor voters that selling votes should not be seen as an economic transaction devoid of moral content or political consequence. One NAMFREL handout challenges voters: “Ask yourself, why is the candidate treating your vote as a commodity or an item in a sari sari store?” A newspaper ad placed by NAMFREL reminds voters that “your vote is valuable. It does not have a price.” Still another asks “do you love getting paid or do you love your country?” A full-page newspaper ad placed by 3M Innovation (the maker of post-its) tells voters: “Don’t be blinded by money. Vote with your conscience.” Another newspaper ad paid for by Red Horse Beer warns voters that “a little pocket change won’t put you ahead. Don’t sell your vote. Vote for the right candidate.” Pagbabago@Pilipinas - a group of artists, educators, businessmen, and professionals dedicated to social reform - distributed a song through NAMFREL and parish offices called “You Can’t Buy Me” (*Hindi Mo Ako Mabibili*). The song contains the following lyrics: “You can’t buy me. I won’t make that mistake again. You think because I’m poor, you can fool me....What do you think, I don’t have self-respect? No, you can’t buy me.”

These public service ads echo - in a more polite form to be sure - some of the same assumptions present in the derogatory EDSA 3 text messages. The poor, in both cases, are presumed to be desperate, short-sighted, and lacking in moral or political discernment. Just as the text messages assume the poor went to EDSA for the free meals and not out of principle, these ads assume that the poor participate in elections simply as a way to come into some fast money without regard to their self-respect or long-term well-being, let alone the well-being of their communities. They literally “sell” their votes.

But do many poor voters really sell their votes? An assumption of these voter education materials is that those who accept money will in fact cast their ballots for the candidate on whose behalf they received

³⁹ Belinda Olivares-Cunana, “Students Should Help Educate Voters,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 3/13/01.

the money - thus the call for voters to vote with their conscience, out of love of country, or for the right candidate. Yet the national post-election survey shows that only 38% of poor (class D and E) voters who accepted money voted for the candidate, or roster of candidates, on whose behalf the money was offered. Of that 38%, one in five said they would have voted the same way had they not been offered anything. Thus, in the final analysis, money appears to have influenced decisively the vote of only about 30% of the poor voters who accepted it. This finding indicates that what is commonly called vote “selling” is usually more complex than a simple exchange of votes for money or goods.

Indeed, those among the poor who accept money have mixed sets of motives for doing so. To be sure, economic motives are powerful. In the national survey, 29% responded that they accepted the money because they needed it. But there are other, more morally-laden reasons as well, including a desire not to embarrass the person who did the offering (9%), a belief that it is an obligation of candidates to give money or things to their supporters (9%), and a wish to get something from the rich or powerful (6%). These differing motives establish different sets of responsibilities of voter to candidate.

Open-ended interviews in Barangay Commonwealth, as well as with a non-random sample of 22 people who accepted money from *liders* (ward leaders) in two other barangays in Quezon City, help provide a fuller and still more complex picture - at least for poor voters in Metro Manila.⁴⁰ We learn, for instance, that to many of those interviewed, voting for a candidate who offers money is ill-advised because the candidate, if elected, will need to recoup that money through graft and corruption. As one office administrator from Commonwealth remarked:

You spend your money on buying votes, and where will you get it back if you win?...How will you earn back the millions that you spent? You spent all your money and your term in office is short. How will you do it? Maybe you'll get the money illegally once you're in office (G8).

Other people find voting for a money-offering candidate to be unwise because such a candidate is less likely, in their estimation, to feel any obligation to his or her supporters once elected. “If the people vote for you because you paid them,” remarked one housewife from Commonwealth, “nothing will happen. You will not help the poor because you have already paid them off” (E19). Voting for candidates who offer money is, to many voters, not only imprudent, it is also ethically wrong because it is tantamount to “surrendering your right to vote” (R12) or “selling your principles” (R6), or “being forced” to vote in a particular way (E34, G19). Thus many people who are offered money turn it down. If they do accept it, they do not vote for the

⁴⁰ These non-random interviews can be identified by their belonging to the “V” series of interviews, (V1, V2, etc).

candidate. In the words of one voter, “the money goes in the pocket, the vote goes on the ballot” (G29). That is, money should not influence one’s choices; it should stay in the pocket.

A majority of people to whom money is offered nationwide accept it. Why? As the national survey discussed above suggests, there are a variety of reasons. Some voters, especially the poorest of the poor, do so out of economic hardship. According to the national survey, 64% of the people in class E who accepted the money used that money to buy food. As one poor vendor (class E) from Commonwealth explained, “[it’s ok to accept money] because it’s a favor given to us poor people. But we don’t have to vote for the candidate just because he gave it to us. We are entitled to our own principles” (G28).

Still others accept money because they do not see (or choose not to see) all forms of money-giving as attempts to purchase their votes. Often *liders* who actually distribute the money say it is simply a “handout” or “goodwill money” (*pamigay*) that does not obligate the voter to the candidate. Indeed, many voters distinguish between the practice of giving money with strings attached (what they usually call “vote buying”) and giving money without such strings (what they usually call “goodwill” money). The latter is usually seen as less problematic than the former. In the words of one unemployed voter from Barangay B: “It’s definitely not ok to buy votes! That’s against the law. But to spend money for the purpose of spreading the candidate’s name and goodwill, I guess that’s ok” (V8).

Goodwill money is given as a gesture of generosity on the part of a candidate. It carries no explicit understanding that the voter will cast a ballot for that candidate. What it may do is to demonstrate to the voter that this is indeed a candidate who cares, who pays attention to the poor. It did, at least, seem to have that effect on one laundry woman from Barangay Doña Imelda, who explained that “there were no conditions attached to the money that they gave me so I didn’t feel I had any obligation to them. But I voted for them just because they bothered at all to give me something” (V6).⁴¹

Whatever their reasons for accepting money, many people who do so still feel a kind of moral unease. One respondent explained how his father accepted goodwill money from a local *lider*, but only after his parents spent the night fighting about it. This unease often surfaces when people talk about how they used the money they received. One Barangay Commonwealth sari sari store owner explained: “I used the money for drinking. That money is not intended for useful things. It was like a bribe for your right to vote.

⁴¹ Money offered as a gesture of goodwill also generates social pressure to accept it. Some voters feared social ostracism or retaliation had they rejected the offers. A jeepney driver from Barangay Doña Imelda explained: “I was persuaded to accept the money because of the *lider*’s persistence. Refusing an offer like that might be construed to be an act in defiance of the candidate’s goodwill. It would also identify you as a voter against the candidate. You would also be seen as going against the flow” (V2). Or as a vendor from Commonwealth put it more pithily, “it’s about keeping good relations” (E28).

Vote for me and I'll give you 500 pesos. It shouldn't be used to buy food for your family" (A3). Implicit in this statement is a common belief among Filipinos that ill-gotten wealth should not be used to feed one's family (or for other basic needs) because, as the saying goes, "it might cause a stomach ache" (*baka sumakit ang tiyan*). This constraint may explain why, according to the national survey, about one out of every three people who accepted money from a candidate in the May 2001 elections used at least some of that money to buy alcohol or to go out with friends.

It is thus not surprising that some voters view any offer of money negatively, whether strings are attached or not. Yet even many of these voters see nothing wrong with accepting non-monetary gestures of goodwill such as food. One meat stall owner from Barangay B thus explained, "I accepted the food. It was free from all the candidates. It was a way for them to spread their goodwill. Money is a more serious matter since it's like buying votes" (V19). It is perhaps out of a desire to avoid any appearance of vote buying that in Quezon City the more savvy candidates in the May 2001 elections were less likely to offer money than various services and goods - from shopping bags full of food to free medical care to discounted funerals. These candidates seemed to follow a rule of thumb articulated here by a Commonwealth sari sari store owner, "you don't have to bribe people. Do them some favor. Aid them if they need something" (A1).

One might object to this analysis on the grounds that it does not take into account voter education campaigns of elections past. Perhaps the attitudes observed today are the results of (more-or-less) successful campaigns of previous years. This objection cannot be dismissed lightly, but I do not think the evidence shows that past education campaigns have had a major impact. The scope and intensity of voter education in the May 2001 elections was new. Reformers were energized by EDSA 2 and EDSA 3 in ways that they had not been in the past. This was, for instance, the first time that NAMFREL conducted a mass advertising campaign. In past elections, the strongest voice on the issue of vote-buying was the Catholic Church. In more than a dozen pastoral letters, statements, and exhortations dating back to the 1940s, the CBCP has repeatedly preached that vote-buying is "sinful," "immoral," "violate[s]...the dignity of human beings," and "makes its perpetrators unworthy of the Body of the Lord."⁴² To gauge the effectiveness of these church teachings, we asked the random sample of Commonwealth residents whether they were aware of the Catholic Church's stand on vote-buying. All the non-Catholics responded that they were unaware of it, in addition to 84% of

⁴² Quoted here are Gabriel M. Reyes, Archbishop of Manila, "Joint Statement of the Philippine Catholic Hierarchy on Electoral Right of Catholics," October 2, 1951; Ricardo J. Cardinal Vidal, Archbishop of Cebu, "Joint Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on the Snap Election," January 25, 1986; and Oscar V. Cruz, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, "'Pastoral Exhortation on the 1998 Elections," January 31, 1998.

the Catholics. Of the 16% of the Catholics who did have some idea, most were familiar only with Jaime Cardinal's Sin's position, in the twilight of the Marcos era, that voters should "take the bait but not the hook" (Youngblood 1993, 199). The CBCP has since that time repudiated this position, stating flatly that accepting money is never "alright," even if voters follow their conscience.⁴³ Still, if Commonwealth residents claimed knowledge of the church's position, they were likely to recall Cardinal Sin's position of the mid-1980s. The most plausible explanation is that people today have found in his statements a religious stamp of approval for attitudes they have already come to hold. Indeed most respondents who expressed the opinion that it was okay to accept money as long as one voted according to one's conscience were completely unaware that Cardinal Sin, or anyone in the Catholic Church, had ever given such counsel. For these reasons, I do not think that past teachings of the Catholic Church have shaped significantly the attitudes we see today.

It appears, rather, that the moral calculus involved in deciding whether to accept money or food or service is to many urban poor voters embedded within, and derived from, the politics of dignity described above. It is okay to accept such gifts if they come from candidates who are simply showing consideration, paying attention, offering a helping hand. A similar kind of calculus appears, furthermore, to be employed by the rural poor. Indicative is how voters in the village of San Isidro, Bataan reacted to reformist candidates who ran on a platform of a new politics of clean elections. To distinguish themselves from corrupt traditional politicians, they refused to distribute money, or even to shake people's hands. To voters this refusal signaled an unwillingness to "be in solidarity" with the community. As a result, the reformists fared poorly on election day in San Isidro (Alejo, Rivera, and Valencia 1996, 108-109), as they have in other rural parts of the country for apparently similar reasons (Hawes 1989, 17).

The larger point is that voter education materials that tell people not to treat their votes like commodities may either miss the mark or be too univocal since most poor voters do not think of their votes in that way. In fact, when we showed four anti-vote buying ads to 54 voters, including 24 who had accepted money, only one said that seeing these ads would have changed his mind about taking money (but not about his choice of candidates). All others responded that the ads would have had no effect whatsoever.⁴⁴ Indeed 19 of the 54 people had seen one or more of these ads during the election campaign, and reported that the

⁴³ Oscar V. Cruz, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, "Catechism on the Church and Politics," February 1998.

⁴⁴ Interviewees were asked to comment on four ads: The NAMFREL "Your vote is valuable. It does not have a price" and "Do you love getting paid or do you love your country?" ads, as well as the Red Horse Beer "A little pocket change won't put you ahead" and the 3M "Don't be blinded by money. Vote with your conscience" ads.

ads did not influence their choices at that time. Just as significantly, one of every three voters who did not accept any money was downright offended by the ads, calling them “hurtful” or “insulting.” “They think I can be bought for pocket change?” snapped one indignant retiree, “don’t the know I wouldn’t accept even a large sum of money?” (E49). A researcher writing on the urban poor provides an explanation for why these voters may have felt so offended:

What matters most to people...is the way others attribute or deny value to them as human beings. It is primarily in this context that wealth differences are to be understood. Indeed, it is the common *burgis* [bourgeois] tendency to portray the lives of the poor purely in terms of material deprivation that people...find so degrading and shaming. Seen as eking out a bare hand-to-mouth existence, they are effectively denied their own humanity and culture (Pinches 1992, 174).

It is precisely this *burgis* portrayal of the poor as people driven only by material need, as people without principles, that provided the basis for voter education in 2001, and that seemed to pique several of the respondents.

Most poor voters we interviewed, to summarize, do not like the feeling of being bought. Their reasons for accepting things from candidates are complex, and are often tied to their vision of what good politics ought to be, or how good politicians ought to behave. Voter education materials that ignore this reality, and instead reproduce middle and upper class stereotypes of the poor, do not appear likely to change the behavior of those who accept money from candidates. Such attempts at voter education, to make matters worse, may be offensive to voters who do not engage in vote selling at all. This offensiveness is but another “injury of class,” to borrow a phrase from the sociologist Richard Sennett, that further deepens the rift between rich and poor (Sennett and Cobb 1973). Such small injuries on their own may be of little consequence, but compounded many times over they threaten democracy by making future outbreaks of rage on the part of the poor a dangerous possibility.

Rich and poor, then, appear to have different visions of what “good” politics ought to look like. To many of the better-off, good politics is the clean politics of issues, transparency, and accountability, while to the many of the poor it is a politics in which candidates and officials treat the common people with dignity and kindness. Clean election reform in the Philippines, as a result, has a class dimension. Reformers are drawn disproportionately from the middle and upper classes, while those targeted for reform - “education” in the language of the reformers - are the poor. The project of reform, looked at in this way, is an effort to discipline the poor, to inculcate them with the values of the better-off. There are at least two ways in which this class character of reform frustrates the larger project of deepening Philippine democracy. First, some among the Catholic poor (who make up the bulk of the voting population) find the political education they receive from the Church to be alienating, the result of which is to discredit its attempts to clean up the

electoral process. Second, voter education campaigns crafted by those in the middle and upper classes misunderstand the nature of practices among the poor they wish to reform. These campaigns, at least with regards to vote buying, are ineffective and offensive, one consequence of which may be to further estrange the poor not only from the rich, but from democracy itself.

None of this should be taken to suggest that all reform efforts are deleterious to democracy. To be sure, some are clearly beneficial. The quick count of NAMFREL helps deter politicians and their confederates from padding and shaving vote tallies. PPCRV volunteers who staff voters assistance desks in polling centers around the country help thousands of voters find their precincts, thereby reducing the number of disfranchised voters.⁴⁵ What this analysis does suggest is that well-off reformers should think more deeply about the practices they seek to reform and the people they seek to change.

Comparative Perspectives

Under what conditions is middle and upper class reform likely to provoke reactions on the part of the poor that are injurious to democracy? Evidence here is thin, but a consideration of the Thai experience might provide some clues. Thailand, with regard to vote buying and attempts to reform it, is strikingly similar to the Philippines. To begin, vote buying in Thailand is endemic, perhaps even more so than in the Philippines. One survey, for instance, found that 47% of voters in the 1988 election reported having their choice of candidates influenced after receiving money or material things. In a 1996 survey, one in four voters surveyed in Ratchaburi province believed vote-buying was legal. Nationwide, candidates spent an estimated 4 billion dollars on buying votes in that election (Ockey 2000, 86-87).

In addition, the ethical universe in which vote buying takes place is also similar to that of the Philippines. Reporting on the results of a national opinion survey, two Thai scholars commented that vote buying “is an act of ‘giving with compassion’, a gift of good will or *sin nam jai*. It is paid for people to go and vote for them on election day. It is bribery of a sort, but it is not binding on the receiver who can still take gifts from many candidates and vote however he likes” (Pasuk and Sungsidh 1994, 153).

As in the Philippines, middle class groups actively work to promote clean elections. Most important is PollWatch, a volunteer election monitoring organization. One survey found that 64% of PollWatch

⁴⁵ An inability to find one’s precinct - sometimes because one’s precinct assignment has been changed, and sometimes because one’s name has been removed from the voters’ list - is a major cause of voter disfranchisement in the Philippines. In May 2001, it was a common problem experienced by voters at Barangay Commonwealth and elsewhere. Even NAMFREL chairman Jose Concepcion, Jr. and Senatorial candidate Perfecto Yasay were unable to vote because of it.

volunteers in the 1992 election belonged to the middle class (LoGerfo 2000, 228-29). Indeed PollWatch prefers to recruit its members from the middle class. As one scholar observed during the 1995 election, “since low education levels are seen as one of the main supports of election fraud, PollWatch actively recruited ‘educated people’ - students, teachers, business people, lawyers, civil servants - to work at the volunteer level” (Callahan 2000, 9). Thus, as in the Philippines, there is a class dimension to clean election reform: urban middle class organizations such as Pollwatch are trying to discipline how the rural poor vote. As one scholar commented on the 1992 election, “these middle class stalwarts were acting to ensure that Thailand’s largely rural electorate would choose only ‘good’ politicians who did not buy votes” (LoGerfo 2000, 229).

Part of this disciplinary effort involves, furthermore, voter education. Typical is a voter government public service television spot described here in an article appearing in Thailand’s Sunday Nation:

After the news there is a one-minute promotion by the interior Ministry’s Local Administration Department to create political awareness and warn against vote-buying.

On the screen appears a sinister-looking, portly political character in his early 40s, sitting behind his desk with stacks of Bt100 bank notes in front of him. “Tomorrow. Ah, tomorrow is election day,” he says. “Let’s go and buy up all the votes in the villages, shall we?”

Actors portraying the canvassers cry out in unison, “Let’s go. Let’s go. Buy whole villages to send out big boss to the House of Representatives.”

Another shot shows canvassers, with their bags bulging with cash, strolling into village after village, handing out Bt100 to anyone who looks over 18. And then policemen appear out of the blue and begin chasing the canvassers (6/25/95, Quoted in Callahan 2000, 129).

More to the point, as in the Philippines, the poor have sometimes reacted to these educational efforts in ways unanticipated by reformers. Telling is how one rural voter named Somchai reacted to this ad. The Sunday Nation article continues:

Somchai could not help but laugh. What do city people who create such ads know about vote-buying anyway? He has seen vote-buying in all previous elections. There were no canvassers with their bags. Nobody was stupid enough to do what the characters on TV were doing (ibid).

Callahan, in his study of PollWatch, explains where he thought this ad, and others like it, go wrong:

Although PollWatch, police, and media reports actually do confirm scenarios of bags of cash as in the TV ad, the point is that the election process is not characteristically conducted by sinister-looking outsiders “buying up” whole villages with an indiscriminate distribution of cash. Rather [...] vote-buying is usually conducted by the respected members of the community with the full cooperation of the police. Although PollWatch ads are not so simplistic, many of their posters reproduce such logic. (2000, 129).

As in the Philippines, voter education ads that target the poor misrepresent the nature of the practice they seek to reform, leading here to a reaction of ridiculing incredulity on the part of Somchai.

Disciplinary reaction in Thailand has taken other forms as well. During the 1995 election, voter education ads run on television had another kind of unanticipated effect - on schoolchildren of all people. Callahan, commenting on another item in the local press, explains:

To promote the elections, mock polls were organized in many schools. But in one primary school there were unexpected results: "one team bribed the others with candy, while another straightforwardly stuffed papers with their candidate numbers into the hands of younger pupils." This was not seen as a natural thing for Thais to do. Rather, as the assistant principal told the press, it was the product of modern media culture: "They did not know they were doing anything wrong. They saw anti-vote-buying advertisements on TV but did not get the whole message. They thought bribery might help them win, so here we got plenty of candy today" (2000, 133).

Children were not the only ones to draw the "wrong" lessons from voter education campaigns. A network of Thai election monitoring organizations hosted a series of educational forums in Chiang Mai province in 1999, with funding provided by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. A primary goal of the forums was to teach voters not to sell their votes. After interviewing some 1700 attendees, evaluators found that, perversely, "there was a slight increase after the forum in the number of participants who believed that it was wrong to sell their votes and not vote for the buyer" (Thornton 2000, 29). In other words, the forums (like the anti vote buying ads to which the school children were exposed) reinforced or produced the very beliefs they were designed to dispel.

It is, finally, important to point out that, as in the Philippines, the cause of reformist misunderstanding and unanticipated voter reaction appears to lie in the gap between higher class and lower class moral registers. As one informed scholar put it: "In the eyes of the middle class, it appears that politicians, local influentials, and rural voters conduct an election pattern which is, at best, a deviation from an ideal notion of democracy, or, at worst, shameful and immoral. To most rural dwellers and candidates, however, they are acting morally in accordance with the existing social norm" (Anek 1993, 122).

In both Thailand and the Philippines, then, poor voters have reacted to public education efforts in ways unanticipated by reformers. Whether such disciplinary efforts have had the unintended effect of alienating voters (in the Philippines) or producing/reinforcing beliefs about the efficacy of vote buying (in Thailand), they have failed to enhance the quality of the resulting democracy. What has gone wrong? Why have the higher classes not understood better (or at least represented more constructively) the lower class practices they are trying to reform?

Only a few informed guesses can be ventured here, since comparative data is sorely lacking. Nevertheless, two comparative points seem salient. First, attempts by higher classes to discipline the poor around the world have by no means been limited to electoral behavior - they have also extended to work

habits, hygiene, sexual conduct, home economics, sobriety, and the like. Many of these efforts have also been experienced by the poor as patronizing and alienating (Ehrenreich and English 1973, 70-72).

Second, such disciplinary efforts appear to be typical of middle classes in formation, of new middle classes seeking to differentiate themselves from the poor, to define who they are in contrast to the poor. Class, it is important to recall, is in part a cultural construction which requires cultural work of self definition. This task of self definition, it seems, often gets transformed into a project of hegemony as new classes attempt to impose their recently created “superior” lifestyle on the poor (Frykman and Lofgren 1987). In this context it is important to note that sizeable middle classes in both Thailand and the Philippines are fairly new, being a product of the Asian miracle of the 1970s-90s (Hewison 1996, 139-145; Pinches 1996, 115-123). One consequence of this newness is that the middle classes in both countries are culturally somewhat inchoate. In the Philippines, “the newness of the middle classes gives rise to *homines novi* in search of a format and a culture” (Mulder 1997, 115); while in Thailand, “diverse fragments and diverse constructions...have not yet been conflated into a single social class” (Ockey 1999, 245).

This incipientness of middle class culture has led to much storytelling by middle class intellectuals in both countries as they try to work out what it means to belong to the middle class. In Thailand such cultural work has resulted in an ongoing effort “to construct the Thai middle class in terms of political practice and ideology” (Ockey 1999, 240). In the Philippines it has produced what one historian called “‘burgis projects’ - efforts on the part of middle upper class intellectuals to construct and display Filipino society and culture mainly to themselves” (Cullinane 1993, 74). As in Thailand, there is a strong political and ideological component in that construction.

Public service ads that describe the evils of vote buying, I would suggest, might be part of these middle class storytelling projects. Political education campaigns, in other words, might not only be intended for the poor; they may also serve to remind middle class Thais and Filipinos of who they are and how they are different from - and morally or politically superior to - the poor. One scholar thus described the drive to curb vote buying in Thailand as an unintended form of “middle-class cultural imperialism” which has resulted from attempts to construct a class ideology. “The unfortunate side-effect of these attempts,” he writes, “has been to consolidate a conviction among the middle classes that democracy belongs to the middle class, and that the lower classes are incapable of effective participation in a democratic system. The middle class frustration with the common practice of vote-buying is the most dramatic indication of this attitude” (Ockey 1999, 245-246). The same could have been written of the Philippines.

It may thus not be coincidental that, in the Philippines, many of the anti-vote buying print ads produced for the May 2001 elections ran in the English-language newspapers read mostly by the middle and

upper classes, just as frequently, or even more frequently, than they did in the less expensive, Tagalog-language tabloids preferred by the poor. The ad placed by the makers of Red Horse Beer for instance, appeared only in English-language newspapers (even if the ad itself was in Tagalog). Also suggestive is the fact that the agencies involved in crafting the Philippine ads did not, as they usually do, submit their ideas to focus group testing. Instead they relied, in the words of one ad executive who coordinated the NAMFREL campaign, on their “own observations and personal experiences.” This comment shows to what extent the ad makers relied on their own conventionalized view of the poor when crafting their messages. Whatever the intent, the effect was to communicate higher class sensibilities to both higher and lower class audiences. The problem, of course, is that the resulting stereotyped images of the poor, however reaffirming to the self-image of higher class Filipinos, stood little chance of changing the behavior of the poor, and sometimes aroused instead their indignation and resentment.

Conclusion

This analysis has had to leave many important issues and questions unaddressed. With regard to the Philippine case alone, it has little to say about how rural voters view vote buying and efforts to reform it, or the distinctive contribution of upper class reformers to the misrepresentation of the urban poor. It has not discussed the views of vote-buying politicians, those who bankroll them, or members of the higher classes who distance themselves from reformist groups.

Nor has this analysis delved into the question of whether vote buying is really a serious defect of the Philippine and Thai electoral systems, or whether efforts to discipline vote sellers reflect instead middle class fantasies and anxieties blown out of proportion. Callahan (2002, 24) goes so far as to argue that in Thailand “vote-buying is not as big a problem as is our obsession with it.” It could thus be asked why reformers in both countries have not tried to change more earnestly the deeper political and economic structures which have given rise to a host of extra-legal political practices, of which vote buying is but one. Or it might be asked why reformers have not focused more intensively on other, more clearly nefarious, practices such as the use of violence as an election strategy. In the May 2001 Philippine elections there were 100 election related deaths, with another 141 people wounded. When 76 people were killed and 26 injured in the 2002 barangay elections, the COMELEC chairman expressed satisfaction that it was “generally peaceful,” while the PPCRV

chairman described the violent incidents - which included 42 shootings, 9 liquidations, 7 gunfights, 6 ambushes, 3 cases of harassment, 3 strafings, 3 abductions, and 2 bombings - as “isolated.”⁴⁶

These (and other) questions notwithstanding, some conclusions can still be drawn. Most importantly, it has hopefully been demonstrated that efforts to clean up elections are disciplinary projects that sometimes go awry. From this perspective, clean(er) elections represent not solely a triumph of democracy, but also an outcome that may carry with it unanticipated reactions and unforeseen costs. These unhappy consequences can result from, among other things, a clash of moral codes, especially ones that pit higher class reformers against lower class “wrongdoers.” Such class-based clashes are likely to originate, more speculatively, in attempts of new middle classes to build a political culture of their own, and the distorting effect that this culture building project has on how higher class reformers perceive, and act upon, the poor and their politics.

⁴⁶ “May 14 Elections Bloodiest Since ’86,” Philippine Daily Inquirer 5/24/01; “75 Killed, 26 Injured in Polls.” Philippine Star 7/16/02.

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