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**The New Media, Society & Politics  
in the Philippines**

*By Raul Pertierra*  
2012

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## *Abstract*

The Philippines is a paradox. The country is one of the most democratic and liberal societies in Asia, with a long history of western institutions and cultural practices. It is the only Christian-Catholic country in Asia and one of the most religious nations on earth. Its women are among the most liberated in the world, occupying senior positions in government, education and business. Its media is legendary for its critical stance and free-wheeling approach. It launched the so-called people power movement in 1986, inspiring other countries in non-violent revolution. It has accepted and domesticated the new media enthusiastically, making it the texting capital of the world and among the highest users of Facebook. The country is also known as the economic basket case of Asia, living on the income of its overseas workers. It is also among the most corrupt in the region. Its political elite rules uninterruptedly, winning elections repeatedly. It is the only country without divorce and contraception is too expensive for its poor. After Iraq, the Philippines is the most dangerous country for journalists.

One may well ask: how did all these things come about? The Philippines is a palimpsest where traditional, modern and postmodern influences manifest themselves contemporaneously. Its politics is traditional, its culture modern and its media postmodern. Understanding the role of new technologies, such as digital media, under these circumstances requires an appreciation of incommensurable factors that are nevertheless intercalated. The surface of Philippine politics appears imperturbable but underneath it, notions of the political are being reformulated as a consequence of the new media and its globalizing influence.

# Perspectives on Philippine Politics

The Philippines remains one of the most liberal political regimes in Asia. Since its independence in 1946, the country has adhered to a western style democracy, holding regular elections and allowing its coverage in the media. Even when President Marcos declared martial law (1972), he made sure to follow legal procedures ensuring its legitimacy. The period of martial law was marked by the suspension of certain basic rights and the detention of prominent political personalities, including the father of the current President (2010). Martial law was imposed in response to a growing communist insurgency and a rising Muslim militancy in Mindanao. Whatever the gain in political stability brought by martial law was eventually undermined by the growing resistance to Marcos' rule and the deterioration of the economy

In 1986 Marcos was forced to call an election that resulted in his eventual overthrow. Corazon Aquino's victory was never confirmed electorally but massive public support and the loss of military leadership catapulted her to the presidency. A new constitution was enacted and the country returned to its normal political condition. All throughout the period of martial law, Marcos enjoyed the support of his American sponsors. Only towards the end did the Americans decide that a change in leadership was preferable to the country's possible decline into instability.

## **Political parties**

Following the American pattern, the Philippines had two major parties – Liberals and Nationalists. But unlike their American counterparts, these parties did not espouse distinct political programs but consisted simply of loose alliances among elite politicians. This network of political alliances has since continued, splintering whatever unity existed in the earlier coalitions. Politicians switch from one party to another as it suits them. Ferdinand Marcos himself changed parties in order to secure its leadership and later established a new party (Kilusang Bagong Lipunan; KBL- in English: New Society Movement) under his control. Presently, several dozen parties exist alongside the Liberal and Nationalist parties. Despite this apparent diversity the main political agenda is still decided by the network of influential leaders. Political parties do not consist of grassroots members who espouse and adhere to an ideological



position but rather to a list of potential clients willing to support their patrons. An innovation (1987) was the introduction of the so-called party list system. A number of seats in congress are reserved for candidates who represent marginal groups unable to secure representation through the normal electoral process. Groups with minority interests such as the labour sector, peasant and women's groups now have some representatives in congress, including sexual minorities such as gays and lesbians. Despite their small numbers and lack of resources some party list candidates have achieved national status through their advocacy of important issues such as the environment and women's health. The party list system holds the potential of reshaping the political landscape. But even this process has been infiltrated by powerful politicians such as Juan Miguel Arroyo (son of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo), who represents tricycle drivers and security guards.

## **Politics of patronage**

Traditionally, political leaders were based in their landed estates and commanded the votes of their constituents. An expanding economy and a growing differentiation of society, including the mass media, have ensured that political leadership is presently broader. This includes the military, wealthy businessmen and most importantly media celebrities. Once in office politicians are primarily concerned with ensuring their re-election, including members of their family. Their main strategy is to offer patronage to as many people as possible and to maintain a favourable media image. Apart from material resources, control of the media, either through ownership, patronage or celebrification is the main avenue for political success.

The view of politicians as mainly self-serving is shared by many Filipinos and echoed in the words of a politically engaged Catholic bishop.

*...if most of the Filipino politicians do not really command the respect, much less the trust of most of the people ... the reason is not a deep secret. Philippine politics is usually understood ... as a means to gain power and to accumulate wealth... (Archbishop Oscar Cruz, Viewpoints, 05/15/2012; The Daily Tribune)*

## **Political mavericks**

The patronal strategies mentioned above represent the normal and expected route to political victory. Naturally, there are exceptions and President Corazon

Aquino was one of them. Although Cory, as she is referred to, came from a long line of political families, enjoyed great wealth and had a privileged upbringing, no one would have predicted her triumph over Marcos. He was the consummate politician, held enormous resources and enjoyed the support of a broad sector of the population gained through patronage or fear. His formidable wife, Imelda, was a political force on her own. Initially, they mocked Cory's feeble attempts to gain political attention, calling her a mere housewife without any political experience. Imelda, dressed in her elegant gowns mocked the dowdy Cory. While Imelda saw politics as a form of theatrical spectacle, Cory portrayed it as the theatre of redemption.

Underlying Cory's challenge was the assassination of her husband Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino on his return from America in 1983. Marcos had the media well under his control and the event was barely mentioned in the main press. However, the alternative media and other grassroots organizations called for a massive display of grief. The assassination also attracted international interest and ensured that Marcos had to be seen to respond appropriately (e.g. a commission was appointed to investigate the matter but with no firm results). Three years later, this grief was still circulating among Filipinos and Cory became its flashpoint. EDSA (acronym of a major avenue surrounding Manila) (1986) was the result and the world applauded as it watched nuns and students defy the tanks and deliver roses to the soldiers. People Power was launched and the images of non-violent crowds demanding justice and reform were being watched around the world. A few years later similar uprisings took place in Poland, East Germany and Beijing. While not historically novel, the image of Filipinos massing in EDSA constituted the first 'electronic revolution' (Brisbin, 1988) viewed in real time by a global audience.

Soon after, Philippine politics resumed its normal pattern, including a repetition of EDSA in 2001 (known as EDSA 2) when President Estrada (extractor and populist politician) was removed from office through another display of people power. While EDSA was seen by the foreign press as a sterling example of a peaceful revolution, EDSA 2 was generally perceived as an illegal removal of a duly elected president. However, most local commentators saw no difference between these two expressions of people power.

## **People power, *communitas* & cultural flashpoints**

Religion played a central role in EDSA, not just as a mobilizing process but as a central symbolic component. In a sense, EDSA was above politics, it was

more like a ritual of social renewal (*communitas*). It was non-partisan and for this reason, the organized Left refused to participate. The crowds, including families with children, were mostly celebratory rather than confrontational. Although the images of EDSA featured nuns with their rosaries and young seminarians offering food and flowers to the soldiers, many ordinary people treated it both as a festival and as a show of defiance against Marcos. For many Filipinos, EDSA was a miracle.

If EDSA was a miracle, EDSA 2 revealed the cunning of politicians to exploit social unrest. Although the Catholic Church also played an important role in EDSA 2, this event was more secular and displayed the full range of political ideologies supporting Estrada's removal. The radical Left demanded the replacement of the entire political structure rather than simply replacing the president. But the putschist nature of EDSA 2 soon became evident as political brokers quickly regained control. Both are instances of people power but the second was an internal putsch taking place in moments of political instability. While EDSA may be seen as a case of *communitas* - a condition of social effervescence requiring the reaffirmation of social bonds (Perterra, 1989), EDSA 2 was more orchestrated and merely replaced one official by another within the same structure.

## **The power of media - old & new**

More importantly, what both EDSAs shared was the centrality of media. While EDSA preceded the new media, its extensive cover both in the local and global press made it a major media event. The turning points in EDSA were all media-inspired, from the live broadcast of the battle over a major television station, to the abrupt cut-off of Marcos' presidential speech. Brisbin (1988) describes EDSA as the first successful revolution waged through the electronic media. We are now more accustomed to seeing media as a necessary element of warfare following the invasion of Iraq with its images of shock and awe. The common practise of embedded journalists, as against the earlier war correspondents, situates media as a weapon of war. As Baudrillard (1988) has argued, television brought the ugliness of war into people's living rooms and in the process domesticated it. It is no longer a spectacle but an aspect of everyday life. The new media has taken this domestication even further.

EDSA 2 was also clearly a media event. The impeachment trial of President Estrada was widely followed in all media, especially on television. The crowds that gathered when the trial was aborted used texting as a mode of soliciting

protestors. While some scholars (Rafael, 2003) have claimed that texting played a major role, others (Perterra, et.al, 2002) dispute its centrality but concede that the new media was an important element in soliciting the crowd. The removal of President Estrada in EDSA 2 is described as a *coup d'text*.

## **Contemporary Philippine politics**

Cory's son, Benigno Aquino Jr (Noynoy) won undisputedly the presidential election in 2010 and presently enjoys considerable support in his campaign against corruption. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, also a former president's daughter, is the main target of Noynoy's campaign, which also includes impeaching the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. These apparently dramatic events are part of the rough and tumble of Philippine politics.

What strikes many foreign observers of Philippine politics are both its rambunctiousness and the resurgence of its disgraced politicians. The present (2012) composition of the Philippine Senate starkly illustrates this point. The Marcos family is back in power, with Imelda as congressman, her son Ferdinand as senator and his sister Imee as governor of their province. Estrada, after several years in confinement for plunder, has been pardoned and is almost certain to become mayor of Manila. His son Jinggoy is a senator. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, although under arrest for corruption, is congressman of her province and her two sons are also in congress. Similar comments apply to all the other sitting senators and most politicians.

President Noynoy was a congressman and a senator before voted into the presidency, largely as a sympathy vote following Cory's death. All of them have been voted into office legitimately. This illustrates the persistence of political dynasties across generations and even within a generation. EDSA ended in 1986 but a generation later, many of its leading players, including protagonists, still play major political roles. This picture of political longevity and resurgence often through family ties is also reproduced at the provincial and local levels.

## **Celebrification and the world of simulacra**

But the other major route to political office is through celebrification. President Joseph Estrada, a former actor, is its most successful exemplar, followed by his actor son Senator Jose (Jinggoy) Estrada, major action stars Senators Manuel Lapid and Ramon Revilla Jr. (son of a senator/actor and whose wife, Lani Mercado is a former actor and now congressman), television star Tito Sotto

(his wife Helen Gamboa also a noted actor/singer) and a popular newscaster Senator Loren Legarda. A rising political star is congressman Manny Pacquiao who amassed a fortune as a boxer and now hosts his own television show. Direct ties to celebrities also help. Philippine politics includes a world of simulacra, where the media provide the stage for successful self presentation. While *realpolitik* is a major basis for power, a dash of fantasy and simulacra are a major help in attracting votes. The ideal combination involves a good political pedigree, material resources and media connections. All the current senators enjoy at least two of these requirements and most hold all three. With appropriate adjustments, these requirements apply at all levels of Philippine politics. Here media is the main canard, since it can also be used against political opponents.

### ***Realpolitik* versus local media**

The reference to the dangers confronting Filipino journalists is a major issue. These dangers have mostly affected local journalists involved in heated political issues. Although it is not always the case that journalists are killed because of their professional activities, many have clearly paid for their lives in crossing local politicians. Despite changes in the national culture, many local politicians still act like predatory warlords. Local media is often under their authoritarian control (e.g. radio, newspapers). While the Ampatuan clan in Maguindanao may be a gross instance of such control, many other local politicians react with violence when they perceive their interests to be challenged. Often in cahoots with the military and local police, journalists and other activists have often felt their power. Needless to say, sometimes journalists themselves act as *agents provocateurs*. They act as attack dogs for local politicians against their opponents.

### **Elections as displays of power or the expression of people's sovereign will**

The Philippines' political elite manages to win elections through the astute and effective use of resources involving a range of legal and paralegal processes. The common expression to describe this strategy is guns, goons and gold. One may add celebrity as the fourth ingredient. Whereas elections often serve as a legitimizing strategy to wield power, there are also cases where they represent the peoples' sovereign will.

The election of President Joseph Estrada in 1998 may be such an example. He won overwhelmingly despite being the acknowledged underdog. In a twist of irony, Estrada lost to Noynoy Aquino in 2010, whose election may also be credited to the people's sovereign will. Estrada was reported to have said that if Cory hadn't died when she did, he would have regained the presidency. In these two expressions of the peoples' sovereign will, exceptional factors intervened. President Estrada has a particularly strong image as a protector of the downtrodden. His personal lifestyle (wine, women & mateship) is the fantasy of many Filipinos. He has successfully merged his screen persona into his political one. In his case, the simulacrum is true.

On the other hand, Noynoy had a generally unspectacular political life as congressman and senator except for not being associated in any major corruption scandal. Like his mother Cory, he did not seek power but circumstances obliged him to continue the family tradition of rescuing the country from the vestiges of corruption. The consequence was the undisputed election of Noynoy to the presidency. This was clearly a personal rather than a party vote since Noynoy's vice-presidential candidate (Mar Roxas) lost to Estrada's candidate (Jejomar Binay).

These two examples illustrate the dilemma of a democratic politics in conditions of great social inequality. Catholic prelates, well aware of this dilemma, advice their parishioners to accept money but vote according to their conscience. Presumably, this explains the victory of poorly resourced candidates who nevertheless triumph against overwhelming odds.

These baffling and complex political scenarios continue to puzzle political observers who often resort to irony or sarcasm in attempting an explanation. Luis Teodoro, a prominent commentator writes:

*This is the Philippines, a stage where idiots pretending to be geniuses, murderers posing as beneficiaries of humanity, victimizers acting like victims, and villains being held up as heroes are daily spectacles that make finding out who's really what behind the masks the effort of a lifetime (Luis Teodoro, Business World, 16 February, 2012).*

In the absence of rational explanations for the paradoxes of politics, commentators often resort to humour or scandal. The new media present more opportunities to indulge in such forms of analyses. Examples are presented later.

# Philippine Media Landscape

Philippine media is among the oldest and the most free in Asia. The Philippine press is known for its irreverential approach and the pugnacious character of its leading journalists. The Philippine Daily Inquirer, a leading newspaper often features two ideologically opposed commentators writing on political affairs. Conrado de Quiros has been waging a ceaseless and often obsessional battle against Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for years. On the other hand, The Daily Tribune never tires of attacking the present government of Noynoy Aquino. The government rarely censors the media although it has been known (during President Estrada) to withdraw advertising support for newspapers critical of its policies. Only relatively strict libel laws constrain reporters from covering controversial issues.

But while the media is free it is also highly partisan. People with interests ensure that they have access to media reportage either through direct ownership or through economic or political means. Reading different newspapers often gives one the impression that they are referring to distinct realities. While there is considerable media diversity, the ideological spectrum is much narrower. Ownership of the media explains this lack of ideological spectrum. The national newspapers are in English and owned by prominent families with powerful connections to broad sectors of society. They are generally conservative. Regional newspapers are published in English or in the vernacular and mostly restrict themselves to local events and personalities. There are several popular tabloids written in Filipino and therefore more accessible to the ordinary citizen but they rarely comment on serious national matters. There are no major Left wing publications apart from partisan pamphlets. Generally, the print media, while highly regarded, is limited to middle class urban readers.

Radio and television are the major electronic media and enjoy a much wider circulation throughout society. Radio is generally in the vernacular and mostly addresses local issues, sometimes amid great controversy. Feuding politicians employ local journalists to attack their opponents, often with tragic consequences. Almost all journalists killed worked for local radio, television or newspapers. The so-called impunity associated with these killings results from the lack of control of the national government over local political warlords, the most notorious being the Ampatuans from Maguindanao province. They massacred

over 35 journalists (23 November 2009) accompanying a candidate running for governor in the province. The case remains one of the highest single incidents involving the killing of journalists. Most of these journalists worked for local radio and newspapers but the case attracted both national and global condemnation. However, despite this attention, the case is bogged down in the judicial system and in the meantime several crucial witnesses have disappeared or been killed.

While radio is probably the most extensive source of information for most Filipinos, television has become the main source of entertainment. Most television programs are in Filipino although regional stations also broadcast in their vernaculars. Television receives by far the greatest source of advertising income. According to Asian Media Barometer in 2011 television got (76 per cent) radio (18 per cent) and print media only (4.7 per cent) of advertising income. But these figures do not necessarily reflect the political significance of these media. Generally, the print media is the most influential nationally and radio plays an important role locally. While television provides regular newscasts and current affairs programs, its main role is in providing entertainment, except during critical periods such as national disasters or political crises where its evocative imagery is most compelling.

The Philippines remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. Since 1986 when democracy was restored, 133 journalists have been killed, the majority related to their work. There seems to be an element of class or status in these killings since they all involve local or junior members of the profession. No major journalist working for a prominent media outfit has been summarily killed, although some have been kidnapped by Muslim secessionists and later rescued. Apart from the Ampatuans, who are currently in jail, no prominent personality has been successfully convicted for the murder of journalists, often despite compelling evidence. This has given rise to the term culture of impunity, a somewhat misleading term, since many other killings (not journalists) also remain unsolved. The military has also been accused of disappearances that have not resulted in convictions. The most prominent case that has remained unresolved decades later is the assassination of Benigno Aquino, Cory's husband in 1983. While one may not expect the Marcos regime, being the main suspect, to resolve this murder, the ascendancy of Corazon Aquino to the presidency in 1986 was equally unproductive. Only low ranking soldiers were convicted and no mastermind was ever determined. This indicates that the culture of impunity operates deeply within Filipino society. While this event was covered extensively by contemporary media no new information has



been discovered. Like other aspects of Philippine society, the media operates within often unstated but marked limits. Uncovering the real masterminds of Benigno Aquino's assassination remains uncharted territory.

The Asian Media Barometer (2011:8) concludes:

*In summary, the media landscape in the Philippines is characterized by diversity, freedom, an active stock of journalists and citizens and an executive and legislature slow on media reforms. However, operating in a culture of impunity and in one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, it comes as no surprise that even the free and rambunctious media of the Philippines reflect the constraints of fear and a growing concentration of ownership in their journalistic practice. Within this context the courage of many journalists is as remarkable as the lack of self criticism of the media remains deplorable.*

The critical comments above refer to the often provincial and self-serving orientation of Philippine media. Most media engage in shameless self promotion and often report their own activity as news. While many journalists show remarkable courage, there is also a practice of self censorship operating. Ces Drilon, a noted television journalist was kidnapped by her informants in Jolo but released unharmed. How this release came about is not discussed because repercussions involve both local and national power brokers. Most media is in private ownership, with varying degrees of interference on the part of owners. While there are nominally some state operated media outfits, they are usually ineffective or propagandist.

The greatest threat to media freedom lies ironically in its uncontrolled nature. The tragic siege of a tourist bus several years ago (24 August 2010) reflects the often unbridled actions of journalists desperate to score news scoops. Journalists interfered recklessly during the delicate negotiations between the police and the kidnapper resulting in the botched rescue attempt. This free-wheeling style of Philippine media is a consequence of the intense competition between networks and their attempts to satisfy peoples' interest in gossip, violence or scandal. A more reflective, balanced and responsible approach to news reporting is often lacking.

The lack of self reflection of local media gives it a provincial air, where local events are reported as though of great national importance. Foreign news is

poorly covered except when Filipinos are involved such as kidnappings by Somali pirates. This localism was evident in EDSA 2, when foreign journalists pointed out that ousting an elected president raises issue of legitimacy. Almost all prominent local commentators excoriated these foreign journalists, accusing them of not understanding Philippine realities. Admittedly, being caught up in the euphoria of the moment makes it difficult to pass cold judgment on events. One possibility of reducing the localism of the media is to encourage or allow foreign ownership. This is presently constitutionally unallowable.

## **Is the new media any different?**

It is in this context that one must carefully assess the role of the new media in shaping the political process. The importance of the traditional media has been mentioned but its effectiveness may well derive from its top down non-interactive nature. In contrast, the new media is highly interactive and bottom up. Philippine democracy, despite its nomenclature, is not built on town hall style interactive exchanges but on tight patronal networks. The old media is ideally suited for this purpose with its broad but non-interactive reach. Television (1953) was introduced into the Philippines as a tool for political campaigning but it took some time before this medium became effective (del Mundo, 1986). Only when the medium switched from English to Filipino during the mid 1970s, with its greatly expanded audience, did it enjoy mass appeal. Radio and film proved to be much more successful in persuading the masses to support political candidates. From the start, these media were aimed at a general audience. The political success of actors such as President Estrada can be traced to their mass appeal. The continuing mediatization of everyday life has given extra vitality to media stars and allowed them to convert popularity into political support.

The new media, in contrast, encourages personal interaction and the free flow of opinions. Personal opinions and critical exchanges are not normal elements of Philippine political recruitment with its emphasis on subservience, conformity and hierarchy. Party policy is the prerogative of leaders who rarely allow dissent by ordinary members. Patronage politics assures followers their rewards as long as they continue to support the patron.

For the new media to significantly affect politics, its structure has to change from a top down to a bottom up system. In other words, the political structure must allow the views and interests of ordinary people to shape policy. The

new media certainly facilitates the free flow of opinions and its effects are slowly affecting the public mood. Facebook and YouTube are now routinely mentioned as indicators of public opinion. Most politicians are aware of these sources of information and are beginning to adjust their practices to address these concerns. They now commonly join Facebook, have their own web sites and even blog. But the final consequences of these new forms of political activity have not yet transformed the political landscape. The latter retains its traditional structure, indicating that new sources of information do not necessarily transform well established political interests.

## **Media & minorities**

A major failing of the mainstream media is its general neglect of cultural and other minorities. The major networks are based in Metro Manila and most of their reporting is Manila-based. References to Imperial Manila are common complaints aired in the Visayas and Mindanao. While national events often take place in the capital cities, the plight of cultural minorities is rarely discussed in the media except during disasters and other calamities. Local media can be expected to raise certain issues pertinent to minorities but their coverage is limited and seldom seen as nationally relevant. Moreover, according to Longboan (2009):

*Based on extrapolated data, there are roughly 18 million indigenous people in the Philippines, making up 20 percent of the country's total population... (Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, Vol 1, No 2.)*

This isolation has not been addressed by the mainstream media. Only some of these indigenous peoples have access to local newspapers and radio, while the majority rely on sporadic and often misconceived reports in the national media. The oldest local newspaper was established by Ibaloy, a tribal minority in the Cordillera region. On 28 April 1947, the *Baguio Midland Courier*, the longest-running local newspaper in the Philippines and the first indigenous newspaper was published (Longboan, 2009).

In this case, the possibilities offered by the new media may be more promising. Blogging has become an acceptable avenue for Igorots (generic term for Cordilleran peoples) to express views that rarely merit comment in the mainstream media. The case of the urinating Igorot statue illustrates

the mobilizing capacity of the new media. The controversy started when an American posted on YouTube a picture of a statue of a man urinating against a wall. This statue supposedly depicted an Igorot and quickly attracted the attention of several local bloggers who objected to the ethnic stereotype. Online activity was complemented by letters written to the local authorities in Baguio City. The offending statue was removed and an apology offered by the owners of the establishment. The controversy was also featured in a major national daily. In this case the new media, provoked the attention of the mainstream media. Longboan sees this as evidence of the new media providing a more sympathetic voice for cultural minorities. She writes:

*Igorot ethnic identity construction on the Internet is, to a large extent, rooted in the Igorot's struggle to provide a more accurate representation of who they are now, in these present times... Blogs appear to enable them to 'actively design their own meaning systems instead of passively consuming the meaning system of the prevailing social order (Igorots in the Blogosphere: Claiming Spaces, Re-constructing Identities, Liezel C. Longboan, 2009:13)*

Longboan's discussion of Igorot cyber groups shows us the complex interaction between globalization and its effects on locality. While reinforcing the latter, it also transcends it by including outsiders as sympathetic members. E-igorot consciousness includes a virtual ethnicity in two senses. It involves actual Igorots as well as those who identify with them in cyberspace. This new virtual space is itself a location for developing both old and new ethnicities. Identifying ethnicities has always been problematic since these include both material (e.g. places, practices and genealogies) and symbolic elements. The delimited and patrolled boundaries associated with nation-states are constituted differently in local communities, where mobilities and boundaries are often shifting. For this reason the new media may assist not only in the maintenance and reproduction of identities in diaspora but also in generating new forms of ethnicity, combining actual and virtual elements. E-igorot ethnicity is one expression of this extended identity.

Anthropologists have noted how the new media allows indigenous groups not only to express their voice to a global audience but also to question the assumptions made about the emancipatory possibilities of cyberspace. Ginsburg (2007) points out that the term Digital Age locates minorities as existing prior to this age. Traditional societies are often thought as existing in a remote past rather than in a contemporary present. Ginsburg asks- *who*

*has the right to control knowledge and what are the consequences of the new circulatory regimes introduced by digital technologies?* Many members of indigenous communities, while welcoming the internet also express concern over its totalizing powers. The commoditization of knowledge and the notion of intellectual property rights involving custom and folklore are among their major concerns. Ginsburg argues that we have to rethink the notion of Digital Age to include rather than marginalize indigenous communities. The political consequences of such rethinking are now being debated in forums such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS: 2003). A major concern is access to the new media and other expressions of digital inequality.

# Perspectives on New Media & Democracy

The importance of access to information was graphically illustrated in 1983, when Ninoy Aquino was assassinated on his return from exile in the U.S.A. Even before the new media existed, alternative sources of information were available such as an underground press (eg. Mr & Ms), radio station (Veritas,), street theatre (Legasto, 1994) and informal sources circulating rumours, gossip and jokes. But these alternative media mainly relied on top-down circulation of information rather than the person-to-person character of the new media. Moreover, they were episodic, irregular, unreliable and non-cumulative. Networking takes new dimensions using mobiles and the internet and it is this mobilizing capacity that opens the possibility of initiating radical change. Scholars such as (Rheingold, 2002) have argued that smart mobs such as the crowds characterizing EDSA 2 are among the most effective examples of this mobilizing capacity.

Hitherto, the public sphere has been dominated and controlled by mainstream interests and discourses. The old media can be seen as an extension of elite interests into the public sphere. The new media interrupt these interests and discourses. While they also conflate private with public, they insert new political perspectives and interests. Mobiles are a good example of the personal being political – they convert private interests into political issues. An example discussed later concerned a young woman reporting in her blog a private altercation with a politician that created a public outcry. In this sense, the new media open up new possibilities hitherto limited to dominant groups and interests. Ordinary Filipinos may have had political opinions in the past but they generally communicated these only to a limited network of kin, friends and associates. Presently, people text, use e-groups, YouTube, blogs and social networking sites such as Facebook, to air personal views much more widely. Their political consequences, however, remain undefined. Access to wider sources of information may be necessary but not sufficient to bring about political change.

## The effects of technology in the Philippine context

Despite the early adaption of modern technology in the Philippines, no significant social transformations were achieved as a direct result of their usage. These technologies were centered in Manila and mostly acted as symbols of imperial power rather than as agents of social change. The steamboat arrived in 1849, the telegraph in 1876, the railway in 1888, telephone in 1890, motorcar in 1900 and the electric tram in 1905 (Pertierra, 2003). These technologies had only recently been invented in the West and their effects were not uniformly felt elsewhere.

Other communication technologies followed soon after, such as film (1897), radio (1922) and television (1953). These media quickly became popular but mainly provided escapist entertainment rather than the basis for new cultural perspectives. Indeed, the mass media became an extension of and support for political domination. Hence, families with political ambitions ensure that they have access to and control of media. The media is also used in religious proselytization (e.g. El Shaddai, JIL). Rarely is the mainstream media used in expressing dissent and challenging established authority (Del Mundo, 1986). While the new media may open new avenues for expressing dissent, their capacity to translate dissent into political action remains unclear. Nevertheless, they have transformed the media landscape to reflect a more varied range of perspectives.

### Data of new media use

According to Cesar Tolentino, an expert on ICT (personal communication IN 2012: data culled from NCIT):

*29.7 million internet users as mid-2010 (ITU)*

*70 % of internet users access the internet via internet cafes (Nielsen)*

*25 % of internet users access the internet at home*

*40 % of which are DSL*

*57 % of which are fixed wireless broadband*

*3 % of which are cable broadband*

*10 % of internet users access the internet at school*

*5 % of internet users access the internet at the office*

*NOTE: Some internet users access the internet from more than one access point. Hence, the totals do not add up to 100 per cent.*

*There are more than 30,000 internet cafes in the Philippines (i-Cafe Pilipinas)*

While the internet is not yet as accessible as it is in the West, mobiles have taken the country by storm. Presently about 85 per cent of Filipinos own or have direct and easy access to cellphones. There are about 60 million cellphone subscribers in a population of 88 million. No other technology has been accepted with such enthusiasm. Moreover, cellphones are not only mobile, allowing perpetual contact, but highly interactive. They connect to virtually all existing electronic services (e.g. radio, television, newspapers, and internet). Freed from the constraints of spatial location, cellphones allow perpetual interaction with absent interlocutors. They generate an ambient but absent presence. Cyber or virtual communities are easily generated by these new media.

## **Political change & the new media**

The removal of President Estrada in 2001, described as a coup d'état marked the coming of age of the new media - *Vox populi vox dei* takes on new meaning in the digital age. EDSA 2 marked the political significance of mobile phones, the only communications media not under the immediate control of elite interests. Mobile phones have been able to transform the media landscape in unexpected ways. Traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers have become more interactive, requesting their audience to text in their opinions and interests. While traditional media provided most of the information and entertainment available to Filipinos, mobile phones and the internet now provide alternative sources. These new sources often bypass the censoring and filtering mechanisms used in earlier media. While formal censorship is rare, other mechanisms are used in the mainstream media that effectively limit access to controversial views. A recent art show was cancelled because Catholics objected to the portrayal of Christ – this image was immediately made available on the internet, causing the controversy to include alternative voices, something the mainstream media is loath to do. The new media also give Filipinos better access to the global information system.

However, as an earlier study indicated (Perterra, et. al, 2002), the importance of the new media for political action has been exaggerated. Filipinos do not act politically mainly on the basis of information received but rather on more substantive and often pre-established grounds. Using the Philippines as an example but including other cases, Miard (2008:27) argues that:



*The effect of mobile phones is either inexistent, too weak to be measureable, or offset by other factors. The simple assumption that mobile phones alone will create a measurable impact on political activism cannot be sustained...*

Loyalties and alliances usually frame the political actions of most Filipinos and the new media, while providing new information, generally confirm existing expectations. The consequences of new communicative technologies vary according to both cultural and societal structures. In cases where these structures are heavily intermeshed, the autonomy of communicative action is severely restricted. Philippine politics is not just a discursive practise but, more importantly, consists of material structures limiting the possibilities of discourse. A culture of critical discourse is poorly developed in such circumstances.

## **New media as political tools**

Recent research into the influence of the new media on political action in the Philippines is at an early stage. Aguirre (2009) has looked at the relationship between social movements and the new media. He examined their role in the context of the ouster of President Estrada and the apparent failure in forcing President Arroyo to resign. The decisive effect of the new media in Estrada's ouster is still a contentious issue, even if most researchers appreciate the role of mobiles and the internet during this event. Aguirre (2009) argues that structural forces favoured Estrada's ouster while they did not in the case of Arroyo. In the absence of a confluence of factors favouring change, new media activism is insufficient to achieve it. In other words, the new media in itself is unable to bring about fundamental political change. Noynoy's electoral victory depended more on the symbolism of death (Cory's funeral & public sympathy) than on rational disapproval of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's regime.

Mirandilla (2009) has looked at the role of the new media in the campaign strategies of major politicians. While their use of the new media is growing in sophistication, the effects are not yet likely to be significant. Political information and practice are still based on more traditional sources or substantive grounds.

*...there is no doubt that the Internet has already started to reshape the information and communications environment of the Philippine political landscape. However, the Internet does not promise a panacea to cure a sleeping interest in politics (Mirandilla, 2009:112).*

Citing other studies, Mirandilla points out that the new media mostly affects those already heavily into it rather than the average user. Politically motivated users employ the new media to extend their political practices but most people are neither as savvy nor active.

*As an emerging practice, cybercampaigning in the Philippines has yet to play a transformative role.... Campaign reforms can only take place with improved political maturity of Filipinos—both politicians and the electorate... Using ICTs to make campaigns more efficient, affordable, interactive, and grassroots-oriented is just a first step toward creating a new brand of election campaigning in the Philippines, which, hopefully, will also translate to better governance in between elections (Mirandilla, 2009:114).*

This is hardly a surprise since revolutions are not achieved through singular means, including the media. Nevertheless, in knowledge-based societies, the flow of information may be critical for initiating change. Castells (2000) has argued that networks operate differently from hierarchies and the new media more closely approximates the former. But since the Philippines is not yet a knowledge-based society (although networks are widely developed), the influence of media, whether new or old, is limited.

In a more recent article (Mirandilla-Santos, January 30, 2012), Mirandilla looks at the success that President Aquino achieved through his use of social media such as Facebook. Taking a page from the Obama campaign, Noynoy deliberately cultivated social media as a way of contacting the youth. Within the first two months of his campaign Noynoy (2010) had over 95,000 'friends' in Facebook, dwarfing all the other presidential candidates. Building on this early success, Noynoy also has a website (Official Gazette. <http://www.gov.ph/2010/10/11>) meant to engage citizens in a conversation with the President. However this site is generally not very interactive, thus not allowing multiple exchanges among interlocutors. Instead it resembles the top down approach of most politicians. Mirandilla notes several ways in which this website can be made more interactive but so far this does not appear to have been achieved.

In other words, while important gains in cyber-campaigning were achieved, these gains have not been followed up sufficiently post-election.

Perhaps a more successful example of politicking using the new media is the case of Gabriela, a women's party group that won two seats in the 2007 elections. A study of Gabriela reveals a concerted attempt to make full use of the new media given its limited resources (Karan, Gemenio & Tandoc, 2008).

Gabriela has an extensive network of well honed activists following many years of organizing support for a broad range of women's issues. This network also extends overseas, drawing support from global feminist organizations. Combining on the ground personal contacts with the reach of the new media allowed the party to achieve a significant political victory. While the internet, particularly social media, played an important role in its cyber-campaign, the mobile phone proved to be more useful given its broader reach within the country. In addition, the party shrewdly used video clips on YouTube and other sites that were later picked up by the mainstream media. This is an example of using the new media as a source of news for the old media. It illustrates the tendency of media to comment on itself, an observation earlier made in relation to E-gorot bloggers.

## **The politics of blogging**

However, the influence of new media is growing if only indirectly. The old media and politicians now regularly note the opinions expressed in social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Political blogs (e.g. [gmanews.tv/lisandro-claudio/](http://gmanews.tv/lisandro-claudio/) or [moncasiple.wordpress.com/](http://moncasiple.wordpress.com/)) increasingly influence both public opinion as well as the political elite. The importance of blogs lies not so much in their circulation but on the nature of their readership. Studies have shown that politically active and influential people base many of their opinions on blogs (Farrell, H. & Drezner, D., 2008). Like the readers of influential but specialized academic journals, blogs represent a new source of political information. But unlike academic journals, blogs also aim at a generalized readership, following their origins in popular culture. Filipinos are among the most avid bloggers in the world. However, one must exercise caution regarding the political effects of blogging. China has by far the biggest number of bloggers (200 million; Hamid: 2012) and they constitute a political force that the government must increasingly address. However, according to Hamid (2012), most of these blogs refer to private or personal matters, while those that comment on political issues often follow or sometimes anticipate issues raised in the mainstream press. While there is no doubt that blogging

has significantly altered the information landscape in China, its ultimate consequences remain unpredictable. Hamid (2012) argues that the new media is as much a safety valve as it is a force for political change.

The situation in the Philippines with its liberal press and uncensored media poses other constraints. Filipino bloggers, like their Chinese counterparts overwhelmingly write about private matters but also contribute to continuing political issues (Mirandilla, 2011). The undeveloped nature of the public sphere as an autonomous discursive space explains why Filipino bloggers easily switch from private matters to public issues. But, as mentioned earlier, what may begin as a private complain may evolve into a public issue. An important feature of blogging and other online exchanges is their global scope. The large diasporic Filipino communities readily mobilize on issues that concern them, politics being among the most relevant. The limitations of local reporting are compensated by online sources of information. No longer are Filipinos hostages to the provincial views of local media.

## **New media & youth activism**

There are increasing attempts at incorporating the new media as part of political activism. Anthony Cruz, a well know media activist and blogger organized local bloggers to resist the proposed constitutional changes suspected as a step to extend President Arroyo's term. Using Facebook, Cruz called on Pinoy bloggers to indicate their opposition to these constitutional changes in their sites (<http://tr.im/no2conass>). He also organized a grand eyeball meeting on 26 July at 10- 12 am (2009) at the EDSA shrine. He suggested bloggers wear black on that day and badges advocating 'real change' not 'charter change' or 'No to Conass'. His group is called Para sa Bloggers Kapihan (at sa Pilipinas Kontra ConAss na rin), indicating both a virtual and an actual political grouping. This combination of the virtual-actual link is a common feature of the new media in the Philippines.

According to news reports about 12,000 people attended the above rally. This relatively low number was, however, boosted by a much higher virtual attendance. The website supporting No to Conass quickly attracted more supporters than the eyeball meeting and its makers claimed that number would reach 100,000 sympathizers. This prompted a well known political commentator and blogger to propose organizing more virtual rallies in the future (Ople, C., 2009).

There have also been instances of the new media initiating political controversies later taken up by the traditional media. A prominent cabinet member and his adult sons were accused of manhandling a father and his young son and daughter during a confrontation at a golf course. The daughter wrote about this confrontation in her blog which was quickly picked up by other sympathetic commentators. The print media picked up the story and soon after, a political storm broke out and the cabinet member was forced to issue an apology. Ironically, upon investigation, it seemed that both parties were equally to blame. But in the meantime, the politician family's reputation had been smeared.

The new media is quick to capitalize on popular (mis)conceptions such as the abusive nature and rapacity of most politicians. Other cases of political scandal are regularly featured on YouTube or in blogs. On 3 September 2009, after a TV interview of Miguel Arroyo (the former President's eldest son & congressman from Pampanga) discussing the sources of his acquired wealth, YouTube and bloggers angrily attacked his perceived mendacity and corruption. Despite these new and uncontrolled sources of information, their ultimate effects in transforming political structures remain untested. Whether these examples reflect popular discontent or actually fuel it is difficult to assess. President Arroyo was highly unpopular towards the end of her term and the new media simply made this unpopularity better known.

More recently (2012) President Noynoy has also received his share of new media activism on the part of young students at the University of the Philippines. Accusing the president of being lazy, these students coined the term noynoying to refer to his reputed lackadaisical manner. It quickly spread to YouTube and other media. While such criticisms have constituted older political activism, the new media provides a platform not always supported by the more conservative print media. In this case the old media is forced to take up issues raised by bloggers and other users of the new media.

In this sense, the new media are having an effect on political reporting and even political action. It is only their long term effect that remains in doubt. Unless structural change occurs, it is possible that the political elite will eventually domesticate and even subvert the new media for their own purposes. There are enough examples of old conservative causes that are given renewed life by the new media. Televangelism is an example of an old missionizing zeal given new life by modern media. Text God and digital prayer brigades are examples of new media use for old religious interests.

## **New media, e-government & social movements**

Various government agencies have incorporated e-governance as part of their practice but these services have not yet resulted in a significant improvement in governmentality. The technology is often inadequate to the task and the resources for their implementation are often lacking. Most e-government services simply allow for the transmission of information but do not translate the information into practical action. A study conducted by students at NCPAG (National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines) concluded that most government departments either do not use e-services or use them inadequately. The potential for citizen-government interaction is available through mobiles but the broader support structures, including attitudinal orientations, are still largely missing (Colobong, et. al, 2009). In other words, the new media is tokenly incorporated into old bureaucratic structures.

A more interesting question regarding the influence of media in initiating fundamental change relates it to civil society and social movements (Aguirre, 2009). Sociologists have pointed out that democracy is a defining and central concept of modernity. Initially seen as a narrow political act (suffrage, voting), the concept of democracy is being applied across wider areas of life, from the public to the private sphere. This democratization of increasing areas of life from politics to the economy, religion, gender and sexuality is still playing itself out. Politically, this includes the capacity to organize around issues often overlooked by the formal structures of the state. Social movements and civil society are a direct consequence of applying democracy to areas of life outside the formal political structures. The recognition that society exists beyond the state motivates people to pursue collective goals outside or even against existing political structures. An essential component of civil society and social movements is access to information, particularly if the traditional media is unable to provide it.

NGOs (non-government organizations) are a common feature of Philippine society, reflecting both the openness of political structures as well as the ineffectiveness of the state. Their efficacy varies from highly significant (e.g. community health, non-formal education) to insignificant (e.g. improving governance), with most NGOs in between. In the field of ICT, several civil society groups are also active in lobbying the government and the private sector, with mixed results. In a study of their influence in shaping government ICT policy, Hecite (2009) writes:

*Major hurdles to CSO participation ... are the following: lack of a consumerist rights movement, lack of policy and political audience, the need for capacity building and CSO strategy, and the need to develop critical practices in engagement. (These CSOs) remarked that the constituents as consumers of ICTs such as mobile phones should be the policy audience of their advocacies and agenda. The absence of genuine consumer –rights minded citizens contribute to the absence of policy audience... The capacity to engage is another issue. Aside from the lack of financial and logistical resources, CSOs often times face challenges in sustaining participation because of lack of skills and knowledge about the processes within governments. Furthermore, ... (one CSO) indicated the need to utilize critical practices that will ensure interventions will be people –centered and pro-marginalized.*

The hurdles mentioned reflect general features of Philippine society, including the basis for consumerist activism. TXT-Power, a very successful lobby group opposes any increase in the costs of sending text messages. They can rapidly mobilize their members to bombard politicians and media with their objections using SMS. So far, they have succeeded in maintaining the low costs of texting. In this case, both the interests and the technology reinforce one another. But this conflation of political interests and technology is rare in the Philippines, although the mobile phone at least promises communicative access.

# Perspectives on New Media & Society

## Key symbols & the new media

Anthropologists have argued that most cultures employ key symbols to signify and mobilize important aspects of society, including politics (Leach, 1976). These symbols articulate social structural relationships and organize practices using ritual and other symbolic media. Aside from inadequate juridical structures, this is a major reason why attempts to prosecute public officials often fail. It also explains why former President Estrada can re-enter politics despite being convicted (and pardoned) of plunder. He may be a felon but he retains the charisma of a movie star. This charisma supports his political ambitions as well as shapes the political landscape.

Modern polities generally limit these key symbols to the minimum to prevent the conflation of these distinct areas of contemporary life. All societies require key symbols for their members to unreflectively respond to common challenges. Ideas of national security, the integrity of the homeland or the sanctity of borders are among the most important key symbols in modern or even postmodern societies in the West. The American gut response to the tragedy of September 11, 2001 may have been understandable but, many years later, is seen as disproportionate, punitive and counterproductive. Key symbols around religion, security and the homeland were quickly mobilized even at the risk of committing mistakes and oversights.

## Death as a mobilizing ritual

The expression of grief at Corazon Aquino's (5 August, 2009) funeral indicates the mobilizing potential of powerful rituals. Corazon Aquino's political influence had long since gone but her moral stature remained untarnished. While she could no longer significantly mobilize people to join her political crusades, the power of symbolism and ritual was expressed in the displays of solidarity at her funeral. Mrs. Aquino regained her political authority through the mobilizing capacity of death and passed it on to her son. This authority and its transfer can only be achieved through ritual since it no longer depends on strategic material alignments. Ritual power can be stored for long periods



and Mrs. Aquino's can be traced back to her husband's death in 1983, in EDSA 1986 and even EDSA 2001.

Identifying what these key symbols are and how they initiate action is a major interest of anthropologists. Even in modern and postmodern societies, symbols retain their capacity for action and mobilization. Rhetoric, charisma and persuasive appeal are as important in the present as they were in the past. Modern media has extended these powers beyond their original reach. The effectiveness of televangelists and digital prayer brigades are examples of this new capacity. Modern paradoxes such as the persistence and even growth of religious fundamentalism in a secular and technological age would not be possible without the pervasive and global dissemination of religious rhetoric.

The popularity of President Noynoy Aquino combines familial politics, ritual efficacy and structures of mobilization made possible by media. Conrado De Quiros (well known political commentator for the Philippine Daily Inquirer), a strong supporter describes this event as EDSA 3 masquerading as an election. In other words it combines political strategy, spectacle, moral crusade and social transformation. Rather than being presented simply with a strategic political choice, the 2010 election is seen as a reaffirmation of moral values and key symbols. These values and symbols provide the normative consensus for other institutions to operate successfully. They predate and make possible the political order. Their central constituent is ritual. Like myths, key symbols are not meant to explain reality but to provide the motivating force for acting in an otherwise perplexing world.

Seeing the 2010 elections simply as a political exercise is a misunderstanding of Philippine reality. Instead, the elections should also be seen as an attempt to restore a moral order threatened by a corrupt regime. The role of media both old and new in this restoration is a major concern of this paper.

## **Digital inequalities**

With the exception of class, cellphone and internet use in the Philippines is comparatively neutral. Gender and generation certainly influence the way cellphones and the internet is used but similarities often transcend differences. Hence, men may text more sexual messages or visit more sex sites on the Web than women; young people may spend more time playing games than their elders; college students use more sophisticated social networking sites such as Facebook.

Class is the main impediment to a more equitable access to the new media, except for mobiles, which are now within access of almost everyone. But, as others have argued (Qiu, 2009), even when the new media is widely accessible, the realities of class manifest themselves unabated. Only a structural rather than an informational revolution will mitigate these inequalities. Despite all these significant differences, basic similarities remain. The technology itself favours open possibilities for acting. Sometimes it appears as though a device such as the cellphone has its own Geist or power to cause its own effects. This ability is illustrated in its role in EDSA 2. But the new media, like all other technologies, such as the telephone, radio and television, are socially constructed and located. Their effects are only the result, even if unpredicted and unintended, of the possibilities that they make available to their human operators. There is no magic in their success or mystery in their appeal. Technologies such as the cellphone seem to capture the rhythm of our epoch. They express the *Zeitgeist* (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) or the motivating spirit of our world. They represent mobile connectivity, an increasingly important characteristic of our times.

## **Obligating connections**

This connectivity may itself constitute a new basis for exploitation. Overseas workers are certainly less stressed if they can easily keep in contact with their families but the consequence of maintaining contact may itself impel workers to work harder and for longer periods. In this sense, mobiles reproduce and increase social labour. Mobiles play an essential role in emotional work, necessary for the reproduction and maintenance of social relationships. They are part of the material structures that ensure production, distribution and consumption (Hochschild, 1983).

Some workers such as call center operators don't have to physically leave the country even if they have to adopt attitudes that imply that they are abroad. Web cam sex providers can offer their services from the comfort and even the safety of their homes. The new media plays an essential role in transnational labour and not all forms are equally emancipatory.

The new media are necessary tools in a global world. This need for connectivity can be expected to grow not only as the world gets more complex but also as people become even more mobile in search of employment, security or leisure. The numbers of Filipinos seeking opportunities abroad is not expected to abate in the near future. They will retain ties with family and friends left

behind. In the Philippines itself, the need for closer communication can also be expected to increase for similar reasons. In an increasingly mobile and transforming world, contact with significant others remains one of life's few constants. Just as important are the changes in identity in a postmodern world. New identities are emerging outside the traditional categories of gender, generation, ethnicity or class. New hybridities will emerge with even greater communicative potentials. The cellphone and internet revolution has just begun.

## **Individualizing technologies**

The new media generates a greater sense of individualism, cultivated through relations with strangers as well as its endless capacity for private and personal entertainment. The new media generates an expanded field of social relationships as well as a virtual world within which counterfactual ones may be pursued. Increasingly, these actual and virtual worlds intersect, further blurring their differences.

Hannerz (1993:105) has noted:

*As she changes jobs, moves between places, and makes her choices in cultural consumption, one human being may turn out to construct a cultural repertoire which in its entirety is like nobody else's.*

In this sense, culture becomes totally individualized, uniquely combining actual and virtual elements. While the uniqueness of individual experience is a feature of all cultures, the contemporary emphasis on consumer choice and the wide variety of patterns of consumption available make this insight particularly relevant. One can now choose, given the economic circumstances, a particular lifestyle from a broad range of available ones, from eating preferences, to sexual practices, religious beliefs and even the means of death.

As Bauman (2005) argues, while all societies consume, only contemporary capitalist societies are explicitly organized around consumption. Furthermore as Miller (1997) has pointed out, consumption is now an integral aspect of our identity. Added to these distinct patterns of consumption is the increasing digitalization of life. Paraphrasing Bauman, we can say that while all societies communicate, only contemporary society has the technological capacity to organize itself around communication. In the past, hierarchical or centre-

peripheral structures were necessary to facilitate communication, presently the digital world consists of spatially dispersed but closely integrated networks. Power consists in the capacity to activate these networks across broad systems.

Admittedly, this view of culture as personal choice is not as developed in the Philippines as it is in many western countries but similar forces are acting on Filipinos to widen their lifestyles. In the past, Filipinos mainly interacted with kith and kin. Presently, overseas work, global culture, and the new media have greatly expanded the range of social contacts from online marriages, foreign travel and social networks. Filipinos are among the greatest users of Facebook and the country proudly declares itself to be the texting capital of the world. Unlike their American counterparts, Filipinos use the new media as much to expand their social network as to maintain former relationships. It is this capacity to immediately invite strangers into circles of intimacy that surprises western observers (Pertierra, 2010). Paradoxically, the absence of the notion of the stranger as contemporary quickly transforms the stranger into a consociate.

Pertierra (2010:9) writes:

*Despite its universal features, the new communication media mirror and reproduce existing cultural orientations. This explains why Filipinos took to texting so naturally. It also explains why social networking sites such as Friendster and Facebook are so popular. They not only allow instant connectivity but provide an outlet for expressing opinions and beliefs. Collado compares the Facebook entries of her American and Filipino friends (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 24 September 2009). Her privacy settings are very restrictive and details of her latest activities are generally not published. In contrast, most of her Filipino friends allow full access to information in their Facebook account and readily share details of activities, interests and contacts. This contrast in Facebook behaviour mirrors features of American and Filipino culture. The former guards the differences between the private and the public worlds, while Filipinos readily conflate them.*

## An expanded public realm

The new media have expanded the public sphere, hitherto limited to elites whose interests dominated public issues. Now, the Internet Café has become a site for new practices, connecting strangers with similar interests. These are obliged to develop a discourse free of localizing references in favour of global ones. Whether discussing the best gaming strategies, the most popular celebrities or the latest YouTube scandals, their members are drawn from a wide social network.

The new media have expanded the possible domains of both authenticity and inauthenticity by exposing users to expanded social networks. These expanded networks require new forms of communicative understanding resulting in finer cultural nuances. For example, workers in call centers learn to be aware of the cultural idiosyncrasies of their foreign clients and in the process realize their own cultural biases.

This awareness of difference generates a wider public realm. By public realm, I mean an audience whose membership includes a wide variety of subject positions, interests, and values (Hampton, Livio, and Session 2008). Heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity, characterizes these audiences and effective communication requires the recognition of difference.

This expansion of the public realm may hold the key to the political significance of the new media. So far Filipinos have mostly used the new media to explore their personal interests and extend their social networks. Inevitably this will lead to new political perspectives already manifested in the blogging and other practices mentioned earlier. Whether these practices will generate new political structures or replace old ones remains an open question.

De Leon (2007:72) provides an example of how the internet has expanded the world of deaf Filipinos:

*When I'm on the net I don't feel disabled or left out. The Internet opened doors for me. With the Internet, I was able to meet other people like me. My circle of friends widened – from everywhere in the Philippines to people abroad. I often share my problems with them since they can connect with me given the fact that we're in the same condition.*

## Life in media

It is not only the case that increasing areas of everyday life are being mediated technologically but this mediation becomes an essential part of our selves.

*In this abundantly mediated and progressively mobile lifestyle, media are such an augmented, automated, indispensable and altogether inalienable part of one's activities, attitudes and social arrangements that they disappear — they essentially become the life that people are experiencing on a day to day basis (Deuze, M., Blank, P., Speers, L.: 2012)*

For a mode of life to operate effectively, its underlying assumptions must work invisibly. A native speaker is usually unaware of the rules of grammar which generate her talk. For a set of ideas to be effective they must have the assent even of those whose interests are opposed to them. Gramsci's notion of hegemony is more applicable presently because more of our lives are mediated by systems of which we are unaware.

Not only are we surrounded by media but living in media has become part of everyday life. The internet, mobile phone, iPod and cable TV are among the most recent media but print, photography, film and radio are equally significant. Most public events and spectacles are conducted in terms of media participation and exposure. Earlier, the trial of President Estrada and presently the impeachment of Justice Corona are as much media as political events. In fact, the distinction between media and politics becomes blurred if not totally irrelevant. Hence their previous containment in one area such as politics inevitably spills over into other areas such as entertainment or civil involvement.

## Mediatization of everyday life

*.... in a media life, people, groups, networks and institutions observe themselves in the selection terms of media, that is, in terms of whether they are relevant and of interest to media. In the process, the media's systems of reference and criteria for selection gradually come to structure the way people live their lives in media. (Deuze, M., Blank, P., Speers, L., 2012)*

Living in media means that signs and images become the main reality around which we orient our lives. But media images and signs mostly refer to other signs and images as media increasingly refers to its own realities. The simulacrum becomes the dominant image and endless reproduction gives it greater potency. Performance and spectacle characterize this new reality not only in the world of entertainment but also in everyday life as it adjusts to the requirements of media.

Our private life, from shopping, leisure and the home are permeated with media representations. Not only do we base our standards on media but our notions of desirability, success and achievement are media driven. Consumption is not only material accumulation but also cultural production. Through acts of consumption we become who we think we should be. Facebook and other social networking sites reproduce our lives in media, mimicking media personalities by opening our lives to the general gaze.

In the past, art mimicked life – presently life mimics media. Politicians are among the most adept illustrations: President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo becoming a Nora Aunor (local superstar) look alike, Senator Jamby Madrigal using Judy Anne Santos (famous star) in her campaign, Senator Miriam Santiago described as having sexy legs and all of the above required to sing and dance like real stars. Media exposure becomes the safest way to a political career and once voted in politicians start to behave with the haughtiness of drama queens. The close links between media and politics indicate that both draw on the simulacra of the real.

## **The remixability of the real**

*... the political/economical clampdown on media and the use of media for the coordination and amplification of activism and protest are practices premised on a similar assumption: that people as individuals as well as institutions are looking at social reality as under permanent construction – as something to intervene in, redirect, manipulate, and transmutate... The remixability of the real has become a property of lived experience. Questioning reality is the first and most fundamental step towards changing it. (Deuze, 2012)*

The notion of reality derived from media images suggests that it is open to intervention rather than simple apprehension or adaptation. The real is not presented to us as immutably given but as constructed, interpreted and

reconstructed. The question is who does this construction – only those few allotted this task or is it open to democratic participation?

Following Durkheim (1915), truth is a category that, like all others, ultimately depends on its social construction. Given the centrality of media and the complex interventions that they entail, the notion that social reality is contrived rather than immutably given becomes feasible. Moreover, as argued earlier, social reality is dominated by signs that mainly refer to themselves. Life becomes a spectacle in both private and public domains.

These political spectacles require mass participation made possible by the new communication technology. This is the basis of the Arab Spring and other social movements insisting on a wider participation in constructing the real. Our own experience of EDSA also illustrates the capacity of media to generate crowds. The centrality of communication in this process of mobilisation explains why the new media now enters all aspects of our lives. But it is one thing to generate crowds, it is another to construct and maintain new structures. The Arab Spring movements and EDSA 2 are examples of movements that can topple established regimes but are less successful in replacing them with stable ones.

## **Gossip, scandal and the new media**

Mangahas (2009) has conducted a pioneering study of a new genre (but old fascination) known as scandal. Filipinos more than any other people in the world seem to be particularly interested in 'scandal' production and circulation, in making and consuming it, as well as sharing it by means of the available new technologies. Mangahas points out that according to Google Trends, the Philippines ranks first in the world for looking up the single search term "scandal". The Philippines (#1) and Pakistan is far behind in #2. By language, Tagalog also comes in as #1, Vietnamese is a distant 2nd place. This interest in scandal peaked around May 2009 and although Google cannot explain this increase, most Filipinos can readily hazard a guess. This surge in Google search for scandal coincided with the Senate investigation involving the affair between a young actress and her medical doctor lover, who himself was the paramour of a known cosmetic surgeon. This case linked the movie world with high society and medical practice, ensuring its notoriety and fascination. The only factor lacking was politics but the senate inquiry ensured its potential as scandal. Many other similar instances of scandals are readily available in digital and other forms such as videos, film, and even television.



While the interest in sex and other unconventional behaviour may be intrinsic objects of interest resulting in gossip, rumour, and scandal, the technologies of their production, distribution, and consumption have been significantly enhanced by the new media. Following Mangahas (2009), scandals are *objects that are 'made', copied, shared, bought and sold, and 'pirated' in the Philippine context.*

They have become commodities in the new digital economy. Mangahas (2009) points out that scandal is constituted through mediated forms of communication. Disclosure and commentary through media are not secondary or incidental features of scandal, they are constitutive of it. The conflation of the politics of scandal and the scandal of politics is a common feature of the new media. Media stars are of course the best placed to survive this taint.

## **Revolutionary technologies or just media hype**

The mobile and the internet are undoubtedly among the most important technological inventions of recent times. Their very ordinariness and easy assimilation into everyday life often disguises the fundamental transformations they are bringing about. Never before have human relationships been so intimately affected in so fast a time. The long term result that this explosion in communicative exchanges will bring about is still uncertain, although we can identify some immediate consequences.

At the very least, the new media has set the communicative potential for a wider democratising discourse. If philosophers, such as Habermas (1984) are correct, it may also extend communicative rationality via an extended public sphere. Some of these changes are already evident, such as the growing importance of popular culture and its marginalization of the hitherto dominant aesthetics. High Culture has now become simply one of a range of cultural choices, even as it retains its basis in class and status. Some of these changes were brought by the expansion of mass media such as film, radio and television. These have allowed the promulgation of popular opinion via media such as talk-back radio and other entertainment avenues. The new media simply amplify these opportunities to share views, opinions and perspectives with the broader public. For once, the public sphere consists not only of privileged voices, expert opinions and authoritative views but also the interests of ordinary people. Some claim that this wider public sphere is resulting in an age of the uninformed. Others claim that this is the price of a more democratic public sphere. As a wit puts it: *Never before in human history*

... have so many been surrounded by so much that they can't follow (Iyer 2000, 28). This surplus of knowledge but lack of sense has political implications manifested in much populist rhetoric locally and abroad. It also favours media stars adept at simplifying and conflating issues.

## **Expanded networks or virtual communities**

According to Varnelis (2012:4):

*Today, we inhabit multiple overlapping networks, some composed of those very near and dear to us, others at varying degrees of remove. The former are private and personal, extensions of intimate space that are incapable of forming into networked publics. Interest communities, forums, newsgroups, blogs, on the other hand, are sites for individuals who are generally not on intimate terms to encounter others, sometimes with the goal of making acquaintance, sometimes on a deliberately anonymous and ephemeral level. These networked publics are not mere consumers. On the contrary, today's political commentary and cultural criticism are as much generated from below as from above.*

It is these wide networks that give the new media the potential for social and political change. Many Filipinos have hundreds of friends in Facebook. Some are old friends or family members with whom relationships are of long-standing but others, probably the majority, are new acquaintances or friends of friends. These until-recently-strangers, are incorporated into our circle of intimates with whom we share both private and public information. Within this large expanded discursive network we develop new interests and become aware of global concerns. Multiply this for the nearly one billion people currently subscribed in Facebook and we get an idea of the extent of the discursive universe we presently inhabit. Add to this the equally large network in the Internet and other polymedia to get an idea of the scope of this new communicative world.

## **Online connections**

A practical example of this expanded sociality is online relationships. What protocols or norms govern cyber friendships? Some trusting Filipinos have discovered that such 'friendships' are not always what they proclaim to be. On

the other hand, Westerners often comment on how revealing and indiscreet their Filipino online friends are (Pertierra, 2010). The former assumes that cyber and corporeal friendships are essentially the same, while the latter extends notions of privacy into cyberspace. Facebook often conflates these positions, transgressing norms on privacy and public exposure.

Are these virtual networks capable of generating stable structures beyond discursive limits? Are they anchored in material structures that guarantee their actual reproduction or do they remain virtual? Networks do not always generate communities. The latter require more than communicative exchanges. They also require material structures that ensure their viability beyond the exchange of messages.

## **Technology and the future**

We can never fully predict what effects technology will have on its users. Technology designers never know what role will eventually prevail and accumulate among consumers. When western technologies became available in the Philippines, they operated mainly at a symbolic rather than a practical level. For this reason, the Philippines never developed a culture of technological innovation. Technology was part of the theatricalization of power employed by an emerging state anxious to appear modern. Manila became the centre of power and technology was its most prominent symbol.

While technology acts on the external world it also affects our sense of self - we become the technology. This is particularly so with communication technologies. Earlier technologies were not very effective in transforming Philippine society, but the mobile and the internet are proving to be drivers of social and cultural change. They have become not only icons of contemporary life but practical agents of transformation. We live not only in a technologically mediated world but one dominated by media representations and consumerist practices. These technologies constitute who we are, how we see and act in the world.

While the new media may be a continuation rather than a break with the industrial revolution, the world is no longer what it was. The ability to communicate with anyone, anywhere at any time, changes the parameters and possibilities of human action. Following Levy (2011), a global and collective knowledge is now at our fingertips. But it may take some time before we appreciate its transformative effects.

## **Evolving technological consciousness**

*Most authors ..... scramble for concepts to label, classify, claim and tame ... the Digital Generation, iGeneration, net Gener, Generation Upload, and Generation C ... Such terms are generally used for people born after the early 1990s who grew up after the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the proclaimed end of the Cold War (1991), after the Tiananmen Square protests and subsequent massacre in China (1989), after the release of Nelson Mandela (1990) and the end of Apartheid in South Africa (1994), after the end of military regimes and dictatorships across Latin America (Argentina, 1983; Brazil, 1985; Suriname, 1988; Chile, 1990), as well as after the introduction of the World Wide Web and the digital mobile phone in 1990...(Deuze, Blank & Speers, 2012)*

The quote above associates generational identity, regime change, authoritarian rule, racial and political liberation with the introduction of the World Wide Web and the mobile phone. While it would be wrong to claim a causal relationship, their close affinity cannot be denied. They are instances of a deeper revolution reflected in the change from the analogue to the digital world. While the former is based on similitude, the latter is pure artefact. Culture, as artefact, increasingly shapes peoples' understanding of the world. Society, as a structure of relationships, comes under this artefactual notion of culture. Being is deconstructed as meaning and reality is seen as a succession of tropes or images. In the end, this reality reveals itself as a simulacrum. Henceforth, our lives in media consist of spectacles and other simulacra.

Communicative transformations are often caused by structural realignments. In this case, the quest for personal freedom, free markets, racial equality and democracy ushered a global dialogue greatly facilitated by the media. The success of the internet and the mobile phone while phenomenal is based on earlier structural transformations such as globalization, mass communications and the rise of financial capitalism. The internet generation may well represent a new stage of social evolution, but its ends depend on the achievements of their predecessors.

## **New media & civil society**

Various commentators have noted the decrease in civic participation in societies such as the U.S.A. (Bellah, R. et.al, 1986). This social malaise is related to

the conditions of modern life with its mobility and fast pace, changing values, consumerist practices and transforming roles. Under these circumstances, it is increasingly difficult to remain collectively committed or involved. But the new technology makes staying in contact with friends, places or causes, easier. Long lost high school or college friends, previous neighbourhoods and earlier commitments can now be recovered digitally. The loss of civic involvement may be restored and even strengthened by the rise of online communities. The election of Barack Obama is a good example of the power of micro-coordination made possible by the internet. Whether this will generate new forms of civic engagement remains to be seen but the conditions of possibility have been set.

Much of the literature on the effects of the new communication technology on social life has been conducted in the U.S.A. Bellah (op.cit.) and others have documented the decrease in local involvement of Americans in the last couple of decades. A former feature of American democracy since de Tocqueville has been its strong civil networks often substituting for more centralized structures favoured by European states. A recent survey (Hampton, et.al: Pew internet study, 2009) shows that Americans have not significantly become more isolated than they were decades ago although there has been some decrease in the extent of social networks. It seems that the new communication technology helps extend people's social networks and also makes these networks more diverse. However, the original finding that Americans are becoming less involved in their local communities and have fewer social resources still holds. Deeper structural forces rather than communication technologies seem to be the main factors in determining strong and weak ties binding Americans.

Nevertheless, other researchers (Marche, 2012; Turkle, 2012) argue that the new media, while connecting us to more people, results in greater social isolation. What the new media seem to be doing is shifting the nature of social ties from the corporeal (face-to-face) to the virtual. This shift is not necessarily less social but definitely less corporeal. Paradoxically, the new media has not necessarily spatially extended social ties since most Americans use the technology to contact those close at hand (Hampton, et.al: Pew, 2009). As culture becomes more differentiated and consumer choices more varied, lifestyles become individualized. The new technology may assist in connecting individualized lifestyles along new axis other than kinship, locality or consociation. This may explain why, although social networks are not extensive, users of the new media tend to have more non-kin as well as non-familiars in their networks (Hampton, et.al: Pew, 2009).

As Howard & Parks argue (2012:14):

*...social media are inherently social; meaning that beyond a particular proprietary tool, there is very social content. ...this issue illustrates how the content of social media is different from the content of other news media, even when it is dealing with the news. Design choices and infrastructure both shape and are shaped by users' social activities in ways that far transcend the traditional categories...*

Much has been written about the political role of social media. It is still too early to assess social media's political potential. However, as against other media also concerned with news and information, social media has a certain relevance that responds to our digital age – it mimics connectivity. But this mimicry may also be its fatal flaw; it may connect us mainly to others like ourselves, resulting in forms of cyber-balkanization. In this case, society consists of isolated groups communicating mainly within themselves.

## **Technologically mediated communication**

Much of contemporary communication no longer depends primarily on unmediated body-to-body exchanges (Fortunati, 2005). Communication technologies such as mobiles also bring about changes in the inner-world of their users that have significant social and cultural consequences. They encourage a more privatized and personalized orientation to the world. They enable a discursive intimacy hitherto difficult if not impossible in non-affluent societies such as the Philippines (if you don't have a room get a cellphone). Moreover, private orientations may quickly coalesce into collective actions through the rapid transmission of information. The mobile phone also encourages a greater sense of individualism, often expressed in the establishment of virtual relationships with strangers.

This shift, from the corporeal to the virtual, is taking place in the Philippines among families with overseas workers. Contact with overseas kin is certainly increasing because of the new technology but it is also shifting the nature of relationships. Scholars have documented this shift.

*Within the past few years a revolution has been taking place, one with huge consequences, but so far subject to only limited systematic research” (Madianou & Miller: 2012: 1).*

The authors are referring to the increasing importance of polymedia in shaping, experiencing and representing our lives. Many Filipinos depend on the new media to maintain family relationships. Relatives who work abroad remain in touch with family using the internet, Skype and other media. These relationships are built on previous experiences but are conducted under new circumstances. They are not necessarily less authentic but lead to very different expectations. These long distance (and often long term) relationships are now part of everyday life. While incorporated into everyday life, digital and corporeal relationships operate according to distinct logics. Relationships built on digital and corporeal presence develop along different paths. The expectations of overseas parents and their stay-at-home children can often be exacerbated when the relationship is conducted digitally. Ironically, while the ready accessibility of polymedia mimics everyday life, it disguises their important differences. Thus, mothers overseas say that the new media allow them to act like real mothers again: commenting on and supervising their children’s daily activities. However, the children perceive this behaviour as undue interference on the part of an absent mother. On their return from overseas, parents like to continue the relationship where they left it several years earlier but in their absence, the children have matured and developed new interests. What appear to be equivalent relationships (digital and corporeal) are exposed as significantly different. The very success of polymedia to mimic aspects of everyday life makes their differences invisible. Their conflation often leads to unexpected results.

## **Discursive intimacy**

The new media has facilitated communication greatly. As a consequence, the orientation of relationships has shifted from a practical quotidian basis to a mainly discursive context. An example of this shift occurs among overseas workers. Mothers in Hong Kong daily text detailed instructions to their children in Ilocos and convey greetings via Facebook. This communication mimics everyday life but on their return mothers realize that the relationship has been significantly transformed. As an informant confided – *it’s easy talking to my mother on the cellphone or on Facebook but its hard dealing with her when she visits.*

Some may claim that online relationships are not as authentic as face-to-face ones. But our research on mobiles and the internet (Perterra, 2010) indicate that this loss of authenticity online is not always the case. It simply means that the original relationship has shifted focus, with both gains and losses in authenticity. People are more honest regarding certain matters online but are also more deceptive in other ways. Children can often be more open to their parents through texting than face-to-face. In earlier days, people expressed themselves more honestly in letters or diaries, now they do so in Facebook.



# Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that media plays a central role in contemporary society. Not only does it provide us with the information we need but, as importantly, it shapes who we are and what we desire. This mediatization of everyday life is further extended by the new media. Whereas the old media shaped the general context of our lives, the new media individualizes this context to suit our particular circumstances and interests. The new media gives us the impression that we control the media environment within which we operate. We choose our friends in Facebook, follow events in Twitter, download music and videos of our choice, shop at our leisure and even remix and reorganize all these features in our personal blog. It seems that media is now under our control. But this is illusory; it is media that controls us by allowing these choices.

The Philippines is a developing society with a mixture of traditional, modern and even postmodern features. These elements all act contemporaneously, producing a complex palimpsest of motives, beliefs and practices. Often they verge on the weird and the bizarre.

Communications with the recently dead are not an unusual phenomenon in the Philippines & other parts of Asia (Bahrendregt & Pertierra:2009). In the past, one had to obtain the service of a medium to make contact with the recently deceased. A ritual known as *naluganan* (Pertierra, 1988) was a regular feature of mortuary practices. When many locals became overseas workers, it was sometimes necessary to contact the traditional medium overseas. The ritual was then performed using the mobile. While the new media allow us to communicate with physically absent others, it also opens the possibility of extending these communications to the supernatural realm. Filipinos are regularly exhorted to bombard the heavens with appropriate text messages instead of traditional prayers. While these practices may be encouraged by telecom providers, they nevertheless draw on pre-existing cultural beliefs.

While media, both old and new are intimately related to contemporary politics, much of the political structure antedates them. Despite the shifting alliances, the rise and fall of families and individuals, structures of power exhibit a pattern that is longstanding. This power depends on the support of a network

of followers consisting of bilateral and ritual kin, affines, consociates and others whose loyalty is assured by patronage. Initially, land was the major source of patronage but as society evolved into more complex forms, other rewards became available, such as employment, protection, business opportunities and electoral support.

If EDSA was the first revolution waged through the media, EDSA 2 showed the power of the mobile. Since then, many other movements have employed the old and the new media such as the Arab Spring, with mixed results. In fact, with the benefit of hindsight, one can now question to what extent both EDSAs were revolutionary. Philippine politics today looks remarkably like it did a generation ago – the main actors remain the same or have passed their roles to their children. But, since then, the world has changed significantly and so has the Philippines, even if this change is not reflected in the country's politics. There seems to be a disjuncture between the political structure and the broader society. To put it differently – the political elite have continued to remain in power despite the changes in society. As the French say – *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. How they have managed this is a paradox but the media and elections may hold the key to resolving it.

Media theorists such as Baudrillard (1988) have argued that the Vietnam War was waged in people's living rooms as much as in the fields of Southeast Asia. The event of 9/11, the shock and awe over Baghdad, the recent demonstrations in Cairo against Mubarak and the hostage incident resulting in the death of 8 Chinese tourists in Manila are as much events in and of media as they are real. All of these involve powerful images that motivate feelings, generate beliefs and produce actions. The boundaries between the 'real' thing and its corresponding image disappear, merging the two into a media-event. It is this media-event that perdures.

Given the apparent stability of Philippine politics, what effects has the new media made? As mentioned by earlier scholars, the new media does not seem to have appreciably altered the structure of politics. Political clans are as entrenched as ever, class and status hierarchies remain in place, economic, material and cultural resources are unevenly distributed. But the only thing not directly under their control is the flow of information.

Unlike the old media which is firmly under the control of the political and social elite, the new media is dominated by multiple users, usually ordinary Filipinos texting and talking about personal matters. But given sufficient numbers, the

personal becomes political. What may have started as a personal conversation between friends soon spreads throughout their various networks. YouTube and Facebook are good examples of personal exchanges morphing into public discussions.

The personal is political served as the mobilizing call among American feminists convinced that hitherto private relationships such as the family and the home, conceal important political structures (Hanisch 1970). By exposing such relationships as political, feminists were able to influence the tone of public discussion about emancipation, hitherto limited to class and race, to include gender. A similar thing happened in the sphere of economics, hitherto seen as paid work. Housework and emotional nurturance are now seen as essential aspects of the new economy. The rest is herstory.

A similar thing may be happening with the new media. It may not be significantly transforming the old politics but instead it is redefining what counts as political. Electoral success may remain firmly under the control of the old political order but new political norms may be evolving to better reflect the contemporary world. The discourse of transparency may be such a norm. Another is a new found interest in the environment and its protection. These norms are particularly favoured by the youth who are also the main users of the new media. The new media also encourages the shift from personal to collective issues. Blogs and social networking sites often blur the difference between the private and the public, constituting a new understanding of the political. As the democratization of everyday life proceeds, we may expect these norms, hitherto marginal, to take central place.

The new media operates in an informational environment that encourages the broad sharing of messages. While the Philippines is not an information based society, it is however very much a networked culture. This is shown by its appetite for scandal mentioned earlier. Drawing on its premodern notions of the limited good and the vicarious pleasure in *schadenfreude* or scorn, Filipinos readily share information detrimental to people in authority. These networks are easily mobilized be it to share gossip, rumour or practical information. The new media is ideally suited for this cultural propensity. Unlike the old media which may also be used for propaganda, personal messages are given greater currency since their source come from people within the network.

While no immediate or significant transformations in Philippine politics may be directly credited to the new media, changes in the informational

landscape are certainly having an effect. The importance of texting in EDSA 2 (*coup d'text*), resulting in the ouster of President Estrada, has received much attention and is often cited as an example of the power of the new media. Our research (Pertierra, et. al: 2002; Miard, 2008)) has shown that this claim is an exaggeration even if we acknowledge that mobiles were extensively used. It was the combination of old and new media, with the support of structural forces such as the military, sections of the elite and civil society that toppled the already shaky Estrada regime (Pertierra, 2002).

The major effect of the new media is in mobilizing existing networks and plugging them into the new information system. The information system itself generates new networks. This conjunction geometrically extends networks beyond their initial range. Their effects are seen when online commentaries are taken up by the mainstream media and transformed into public issues. This strategy was effectively used by Gabriela in the 2007 elections resulting in their winning two party list seats. In this sense, the new media is extending the public sphere by opening its participation to include normally excluded Filipinos. What effects this extension of the public sphere will ultimately produce is still open for debate. Will it deepen the forces of democracy or simply reinforce consumerist practices?

Humour, scandal and gossip have been the favourite responses of the weak in criticizing the powerful. Hitherto, these responses of the weak have had very limited scope but the new media has finally opened up limitless channels for their expression. Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, texting and YouTube are among these possible channels. While expressing dissent through humour and scandal have a long vintage dating back to Aristophanes, the new media has certainly both spread its coverage and its participation. One no longer has to have great literary skills to command public attention in Facebook or YouTube. Elitists may see this as the ascendance of the untalented. This view of democratic participation was shared by many 19th and early 20th century intellectuals. The age of the proletariat has finally been achieved with the help of the new media. American Idol and reality television are only some of its manifestations. Their Filipino counterparts are just as popular and already this model of public participation is being suggested in choosing the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. But more explicitly political expressions of this new found democracy can be seen in the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street Movement and Spanish protestors at the Puerta del Sol. These are not only new forms of political protest but also new understandings of what constitutes the political. It is this new understanding of the political that the

new media promises. Whatever the future may hold, what is certain is that the new media will be a major player in its determination. This applies as much to the Philippines as it does to the rest of the world.

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