

Coup d' etats in an Open Society: **The Philippine Experience**

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If the method of rational critical
discussion should establish itself, then
this should make use of violence obsolete.
*For critical reason is the only alternative
to violence so far discovered.*

Karl Popper, *Reason or Revolution*.¹

Introduction

Socio-political events in the Philippines always seem to have been drafted like melodramas from which people draw fascination, inspiration and mostly humor, despite the seriousness of the issues. The recent July 27 "Oakwood mutiny" or "failed coup d' etat"² against the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has motivated me once again to write my reflections on this matter. I am not an expert political scientist but merely a student of philosophy attempting to invoke philosophical paradigms to analyze concerns affecting our government and society at large. In this case, I will employ Karl

¹ "Reason or Revolution" in *The Myth of the Framework. In defense of science and rationality*, edited by M.A. Notturmo (London: Routledge, 1994), 69.

² Actually, the incident started in the late evening of July 26, 2003 and ended at around 10 in the evening of the next day, July 27. It looked like a mutiny but the government elevated it to the crime of coup d' etat. The case is still under investigation. For consistency and to avoid legal hassles, let us just refer to the incident as a mutiny.

Popper's concept of the open society as my lens in examining this controversial topic of coup d'etats in the Philippine society.³

I have two reasons for writing this essay. First, it is the duty of all citizens in a democratic society, most especially educators, to emphasize the use of reason and not violence to attain a good end. As Popper said, "It is the obvious duty of all intellectuals to work for *this* – for the replacement of the eliminative function of violence by the eliminative function of rational criticism."⁴ Second, some of the leaders in that mutiny are personally known to me, particularly those graduates of the Philippine Military Academy belonging to the *Marilag* class of 1995. I had the opportunity of discussing with some of them, prior to the said mutiny, problems affecting Philippine society. If my recollection serves me right, I never suspected that they would resort to such action to air their grievances against the government. It is therefore a problematic why supposedly well and democratically educated young officers of the Armed Forces "mutinied" against a constituted government. I will try to answer the following questions: 1) What is an open society? 2) Can the Philippines be described as an open society? 3) What are possible reasons why members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines mutinied or staged coup d'etats? 4) Is a *coup d'etat* justifiable in an open society?

The Open Society

By an open society, we mean that concept of democracy propounded by the philosopher Karl Popper (1902-1994) found mainly in his socio-political works, *The Poverty of Historicism* (1944) and *The Open Society and its Enemies* (two volumes, 1945). Though more popularly known as a philosopher of science, Popper is also

³ See my contribution to the Philippine Independence Centennial celebration, "The Philippines as a free society in the light of Karl Popper's philosophy of freedom," *Unitas*, vol.71, no.4 December 1998, 491-501. I also attempted to use this Popperian paradigm in my talk to the philosophy students of St. Vincent de Paul College Seminary, Quezon City, on January 28, 2001. "The People Power II in the light of Popper's political philosophy."

⁴ "Reason or revolution," 69.

considered as a leading luminary in the advancement of democratic-liberal ideas. Charles Hartshorne, an American philosopher of religion, described him as the "greatest living philosopher in our time."⁵ Karl Popper vehemently opposed the two World Wars, and criticized the totalitarian influences of the philosophies of Plato, Hegel and Marx. To some extent, he could be given credit for the downfall of communism in Germany and the Soviet Union. Helmut Kohl, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, has this to say about him: "The triumph of freedom and democracy in Europe demonstrates that Karl Popper was right. His message for the future is that we must remain alert; critical rationality is the precondition for the coexistence of people and nations in dignity and peace."⁶

The open society is a democracy. In it, the government may be said to be of the people, by the people, for the people. But what really distinguishes an open society from the closed or totalitarian society is that its leaders can be replaced without bloodshed. Thus the crucial political question is not "who should rule"; "whom should we elect"; but rather "how can leaders, once elected, be regulated (checked) so as not to abuse their powers?" "How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?"⁷ Of course, personal qualities of a leader are important, but history has taught us that even the "best and the brightest" may turn out to be ruthless dictators. So, the least that can be done to ensure democracy is to have a tradition of rational critical dialogue and to have institutions that can check and balance the powers of the rulers. This may not be a foolproof guarantee, but leaders in an open society will have second thoughts before abusing their powers. Indeed, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.

⁵ Charles Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*. Edited with introduction by Mohammad Valady (Illinois: Open Court, 1997), 18.

⁶ Written as a tribute to Karl Popper in his revised autobiography, *Unended Quest* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

⁷ David Miller, ed. *Popper Selections* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) 320. See volume 1 of *The Open Society and its Enemies*, p. 121; also *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 25.

Karl Popper propounds three general guiding principles⁸ of an open society:

- 1) maximum of individual freedom for the citizens to live as they wish;
- 2) minimum of unavoidable suffering;
- 3) piecemeal social engineering.

The principles imply that there is no absolute freedom, for the freedom of one is relative to the freedom of the other. The state is a necessary evil to ensure order and proper conduct of the citizens. There are unavoidable sufferings such as natural calamities, but the state should see to it that there are contingencies so as to reduce the people's trauma to the minimum. Economic and political reforms should be piecemeal, considering the different variables of cultures, market climates, and lifestyles. These reforms should improve the citizens' quality of life.

George Soros observes that as a universal idea, the open society "cannot be properly defined; every society must form its own definition, yet the definition must incorporate some general principles, including fallibility and a concern for others."⁹ The following suggestions made by Aryeh Neier, however, may be accepted as specific conditions of an open society.

- Regular, free, and fair elections;
- Free and pluralistic media;
- The rule of law upheld by an independent judiciary;
- Constitutional protection for minority rights;
- A market economy that respects property rights and provides opportunities and a safety net for the disadvantaged;
- A commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts; and
- Laws that are enforced to curb corruption¹⁰

The open society seems to be far from a utopia, for it is already existing in the different parts of the world in varying and modifying

⁸ See my article, "The Philippines as an open society," *Justitia*, vol. 1, 1994, pp. 53-76.

⁹ George Soros, *Open Society. Reforming Global Capitalism* (New York, Public Affairs, 2000), 122.

¹⁰ George Soros, 133.

degrees. It presupposes an educated citizenry and a tradition of the use of reason rather than violence in implementing reforms.

The Philippines as an Open Society

It may be very difficult to describe in detail the complexities of Philippine society; what with its rich history, varied languages and cultures, etc. Powerful western countries label it as belonging to the Third World, in other words a developing country. Despite its being Asian in location, its government and other institutions are patterned after that of the West.¹¹

The concept of the open society is taken from the experience of western democracies, hence it is not alien to Philippine society. In my previous article¹² regarding the applicability of the open society to the Philippines, I conjectured that some of its principles are already practiced in our society. Generally, we may describe the Philippines as being on its way to becoming an open society, or perhaps a unique Philippine open society.

The Republic of the Philippines is founded on liberal democratic principles. The highest officials of the land are chosen by election, which is generally peaceful. There has been occasional bloodshed though during election periods. There are also institutions that check and balance the powers of the leaders, like the churches, mass media, and the academe. The three branches of government are in place, which ideally should be the bulwark of this check and balance of powers. Considering the three guiding principles, there is freedom for the citizens to live as they wish, and reforms are also done piecemeal. Many aspects of an open society are already in place in the Philippine society.

Much is still to be desired though in our society. The citizenry in general is still not well politically educated. Though we may have already a tradition of reasoning, there are still many groups

¹¹ See for example Remigio Agpalo, *Adventures in Political Science*, with introduction by Zeus Salazar (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1992). Also F. Landa Jocano, *Philippine Prehistory. An anthropological overview of the beginnings of the Filipino society and culture* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, Diliman, 1975).

¹² See "The Philippines as an Open Society."

who do not want negotiations and critical debate but prefer the use of force and violence to advance their interests. Our people are still experiencing avoidable misery. Graft and corruption is rampant in the government. The institutions that are tasked to check and balance the powers of the leaders are either also corrupt or incapable of doing so. Necessary reforms to improve the services of government agencies or to rid them of graft and corruption are not properly carried out for lack of political will or because of political indebtedness. Although there is still a democracy, there seems to be a feeling of hopelessness for reforms to improve our society. The vicious cycle of corruption seems hard to break, and reforms are exercises in futility. There seems to be an inefficiency and ineffectivity in the system that is supposed to perform check and balance of powers. The race then is how to have power in the government and to enrich oneself and one's families, at the expense of national interest.

Coup d' etats in the Philippines

According to the *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, "coup d' etat" is a french term meaning, "a sudden, forceful stroke in politics; especially, the sudden, forcible overthrow of a government." Mutiny (from Latin *movere*, *motus*; to move) is defined as "a forcible resistance to or revolt against constituted authority on the part of subordinates; specially, an insurrection of soldiers or seamen against the authority of their commanders; open resistance to officers or opposition to their authority." Rebellion [from Latin *rebellio* (*onis*), a renewed war] denotes "1. an act of or state of armed, open resistance to authority, government, etc.; 2. A defiance of or opposition to any control." The said dictionary listed the following terms as synonyms: insurrection, sedition, revolt, mutiny, resistance, contumacy, anarchy, revolution.

The terms may not have technically and legally the same meaning but they share the same sense of being an act against an established authority. Regardless of the legal and semantic intricacies, let me just focus on the military rebellion against the civilian government.

The formation of the Philippines as a state dates back to 1898 when General Emilio Aguinaldo, the head of the Philippine revolu-

tionary government, proclaimed independence from Spanish colonial rule. But immediately after, the Americans colonized the country and introduced their system of education and government. English became a language widely spoken by the Filipinos. Since then, except for a short incursion by the Japanese during World War II, the American influence has pervaded Philippine society. The government may be Filipino but the issue of whether the country has truly become an independent state and free from foreign dictations is still debatable up to this day.

The conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos plunged the nation down to an economic debacle. Then, in February 1986, with the perceived riggings of presidential election results (the contest between the dictator Ferdinand Marcos against Corazon Aquino, widow of a slain opposition senator, Benigno Aquino), a group of military and civilian leaders, led by Fidel Ramos, Gregorio Honasan and Juan Ponce Enrile, staged a mutiny against the Marcos government. This may be the first coup d'etat in post-Liberation Philippines. The people, led by the Catholic Church, supported the mutineers, which phenomenon then snowballed to what is now called the bloodless EDSA Revolution of 1986. The Marcos family and their cronies were forced out of the country. Corazon Aquino was installed as the first woman president of the Republic of the Philippines.

Soon after, misgivings among government leaders as to the sharing of power became apparent. The fledging democratic institutions which were still sobering up from the drunken spell of the dictatorship, were dangerously challenged by attempted coup d'etats, the bloodiest of which happened in December 1989. Colonel Gregorio Honasan, with the perceived support of the disillusioned Juan Ponce Enrile, turned against the Aquino government. The uprising was suppressed with the help of the Air Force of the United States of America. The coup plotters were imprisoned. Honasan, however, eventually escaped from his military jailers. It was perceived that the support he got from the military officers was premised on a promise for a better life for soldiers and the eradication of graft and corruption in the government. The Aquino government was accused of having betrayed the ideals of the 1986 Revolution.

With the perceived failure of President Corazon Aquino to curb out cronyism and corruption in the government, crusaders

against graft and corruption became the icons of the young generation. Such was the case of Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago. Her political party bannered a platform of a graft-free Philippines.¹³ She was very popular among young students and professionals. During the 1992 election, she almost won the presidency, narrowly losing to eventual winner Fidel Ramos, amidst allegations of cheating and other irregularities. It was perceived that Ramos won because of the endorsement of his predecessor, Corazon Aquino, and the support of the military.

President Fidel Ramos was a military man, and he capitalized on it during his incumbency. He granted a blanket amnesty to soldiers who participated in the 1989 coup d'etat, reinstating many of them back to their former ranks and posts. He sued for peace with the largest Muslim secessionist group in the country, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and even with the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA). He sold properties belonging to the Armed Forces of the Philippines to the private sector promising that the proceeds would be used for the modernization of the military. This would turn out to be empty promises for there were also allegations as to massive mismanagement of public funds. But the military was happy. As to the chief coup plotter of 1989, fate or rather "Filipino political ingenuity" has comfortably turned Gregorio Honasan into an honorable senator of the Republic.

Then came the cinematic fate of Joseph Ejercito Estrada. President Estrada was a popular president, being a movie actor, convincingly winning the 1998 presidential election. He was supportive of the military, in fact, pursuing a no nonsense war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a breakaway group of the MNLF. Two years into his incumbency, allegations as to his engaging in money laundering by accepting bribes from illegal gambling merited a senate investigation and impeachment trial. The trial was open to public and was aired on radios and televisions. In January 2001, when there was a perceived maneuvering by his allies in the Senate to derail the proceedings, people came out to the historic EDSA Shrine and demanded his resignation. It was again

¹³ I wrote a paper based on her discourse on graft and corruption. See "A semiotic analysis of graft and corruption in the Philippines", *Justitia*, vol. 2, 1994.

the Catholic Church that spearheaded the mass demonstration against the President. Later on, military and government leaders switched sides to the opposition, which eventually forced Joseph Estrada to step down from the presidency. In fairness to him, what he did was an honorable act, for abetting a bloody confrontation between his loyalists and the opposition rallyists.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was the Vice-President and titular leader of the opposition. She was the logical choice to replace the disgraced Estrada. Therefore, immediately after the Estrada family left Malacañang Palace, Arroyo was sworn in as the second woman president of the Republic of the Philippines. Her administration will also be plagued by intrigues and allegations of irregularities committed by her staff and members of her family. Then came another armed expression of dismay against her government.

The July 27 Oakwood Incident

On July 26-27, 2003, around 300 elite soldiers led by junior officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, bringing with them high caliber firepower, occupied Oakwood, a posh hotel in the commercial district of Makati City. They call themselves the *Magdalo* group. They accused the government and high-ranking military officials of widespread graft and corruption, resulting to the poor living conditions and avoidable sufferings and deaths of the foot soldiers and junior officers. They demanded immediate reforms! The stand-off ended peacefully, with no single shot fired, after grueling negotiations. With the enthusiastic coverage of the international and local media, their voices have been heard, loud and clear! Again, graft and corruption was the issue and the seeming inability of the government to address this problem. Even the legitimacy of the Arroyo administration was brought to the fore.

The government was quick to condemn it as a coup d'etat. Arrests were made and the participants have been imprisoned. Some civilians including Senator Gregorio Honasan, mentioned earlier as a prominent figure in previous coup d'etats, has also been linked to the group. A commission has been formed to investigate the allegations and the cause of the uprising. The Senate of the Republic also made an investigation. The leaders of the group insisted that it was a mutiny. There have been accusations and counter-accusations hurled against each other.

The details will not be discussed here. To the question as to "why did they do it," there are varied answers. It could be politically motivated. The soldiers and officers may have been deceived and merely used by politicians. It could be an honest demonstration of hopelessness and dismay in the government. It could be a filial act for the love of the country. But one thing is clear, and people agree on this point, that there is widespread graft and corruption in the government. Even Jaime Cardinal Sin, who figured prominently in the two previous bloodless revolutions, initially condemned the rebels, but later on thanked the group for the wake-up call to address the malaise of graft and corruption.

A noted scholar on Filipino psychology, Virgilio Enriquez, observes that Filipinos are people-oriented. Our core value is *kapwa* (shared identity). We are peace-loving, that is why we put premium in justice, truth and reason. "*Katarungan* (social justice) is now invoked as an indispensable condition for peace in Philippine society, in the same breath as food and employment."¹⁴ "Two concepts related to the value of *katarungan* are *katutuhanan* (truth) and *katwiran* (reason)."¹⁵

So there may have been a perceived injustice committed by the government against the soldiers and the Filipino. The mutineers may have believed that the truth is on their side. They may have truly wanted to do something good for the country. They may have believed that there is no other recourse by which reforms can be pursued other than the use of arms.

Graft and Corruption, and Legitimacy as Causes of Uprising

It has been said that "every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good."¹⁶ The science of the good for man is politics.¹⁷ That is why for Aristotle, man is a political animal. What Karl Popper observes though is that man is more of an ideological

¹⁴ Virgilio Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology. The Philippine Experience* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1992), 48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 1, translated by W.D. Ross.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Bk. 2.

animal. "It is an encouraging fact that countless men, from ancient to modern times, have been ready to live and to die for their convictions, for ideas – ideas which they believed to be true. Man, we may say, appears to be not so much a rational animal as an ideological animal."¹⁸ That is why man must struggle to be always as rational as possible. So what is the rationality of an armed uprising? It must have been because of conviction that truth is on their side, for something good, either for themselves or for the country or for both.

Two reasons emerge as the major reasons for staging a military revolt; viz., graft and corruption in the government, and the legitimacy of an administration. Legitimacy is defined as

"[t]he principle which indicates the acceptance on the part of the public of the occupancy of a political office by a particular person, or the exercise of power by a person or group, either generally or in some specific instance, on the grounds that such occupancy or exercise of power is in accordance with some generally accepted principles and procedures of conferment of authority."¹⁹

In the Philippines, the primary basis of legitimacy is through popular election.²⁰ Agpalo says that "...millions of Filipinos have already been educated or politically socialized to become used to or accustomed with the election of the national political elite by the electorate."²¹

In the uprisings against the presidents of the Republic, from Ferdinand Marcos to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the legitimacy of their government has always been an issue. Marcos, because of his

¹⁸ Karl Popper, "Reply to my Critics", in *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*. The Library of Living Philosophers. Ed. By Paul A. Schilpp, Vol.2. (Illinois: Open Court, 1974), 1149.

¹⁹ Geoffrey K. Roberts, *A Dictionary of Political Analysis* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 113.

²⁰ Remigio Agpalo, 190. "The primary basis of legitimacy of the political elite at the national level in the Philippines is civil legitimacy. This kind of legitimacy has been established in the country by several elections since the first national election held in 1907. In these elections, Filipinos invested their national leaders with authority by means of giving their consent through elections."

²¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

dictatorship; Aquino, because of the way she came to power, so as the case of Arroyo; Estrada, because of his moral ascendancy. However, it may be said that *coup d' etats* happened only in the Marcos, Aquino, and Arroyo administrations.

The administrations of the lady presidents Aquino and Macapagal-Arroyo have been subjected to similar questions on legitimacy, exemplified by this critique:

"In brief and other words, the so-called "People Power Revolution" at EDSA is pure and simple propaganda, thriving on glittering generalities and reification of abstractions. Actually it is a coup d' etat launched by former Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and General Fidel V. Ramos. As a coup d' etat which installed Madame Corazon C. Aquino as President of the Republic, it was an illegitimate means to invest Madame Aquino with the authority of the President. It was a violation of civil legitimacy as established by Philippine tradition."²²

That the constitution ratified in 1987 which is the bedrock of our government "is illegitimate in terms of civil legitimacy because the commissioners who formulated the proposed constitution were not elected by the people as required by the principle of civil legitimacy established by tradition in the country."²³ This is because the commissioners were appointed by President Aquino. However, the ratification of the constitution by an overwhelming majority during the February 2, 1987 plebiscite legitimized the Aquino administration. In the case of Macapagal-Arroyo, the support of the other institutions in the society has likewise legitimized her government. It can then be inferred that in the Philippines, a government can be legitimized either by a general election or by the support of the other independent institutions.

What is a more high strung issue though, is graft and corruption. Not that this is new, but it strongly strikes the sensitivity of the Filipinos. In my article "The semiotic analysis of graft and corruption," I intimated that graft and corruption has been associated by Filipinos with colonization and oppression. It therefore touches on the painful collective memory of bondage. A Filipino

²² Ibid., 193.

²³ Ibid., 195.

may be doing it himself, but he reacts strongly against it. Perhaps this is part of the cultural psychosis. As to why the coup d' etats against Marcos and the civil uprising against Estrada were successful, it is perhaps because of the strong civilian backing, particularly the support of the Catholic Church.

The church-state relation is another hot and complicated issue.²⁴ In an open society, religion is welcome but the inviolable constitutional separation between the church and state should always be observed.²⁵ In the Philippines, the Catholic Church, through her bishops, has always been active in political affairs. The bishops have spoken strongly against graft and corruption in Philippine society. In its 1989 CBCP Pastoral Exhortation *Thou Shalt Not Steal*, it says "Stealing from public funds is so much more food plucked from the mouths of the starving..." And just before the Oakwood incident, the Catholic bishops again issued a statement condemning graft and corruption. It pointed out that for a country saddled by more than \$52 billion in foreign debt, graft and corruption is a social and moral evil. The Philippines is the 11th most corrupt among 102 countries.

"The added loss of an estimated \$48 billion to graft and corruption over the past 20 years – reportedly about 40 percent of the government's annual budget – is simply morally unacceptable. It is the poor who suffer most from corruption. Public funds that should provide development for the poor are stolen." P.10 (CBCP Pastoral Exhortation *Let "Integrity" Flow Like a Stream*, 2003)

"Corruption has weakened the resolve of many to work for change as they are gradually being conditioned to accept and tolerate systematic and institutional corruption as being part of the nature of things, and no longer as a matter of individual wrongdoing by those in power. These corrupt systems have become so established that they can even boot out well-intentioned and crusading officials in critical offices notorious for graft and corruption." (CBCP, 2003)

²⁴ See my article, "The Church and state relations in the Philippines."

²⁵ George Soros, p. 131. "Open society has nothing against religion. But the principles of open society would be violated if religion tried to dictate those who do not subscribe to it."

The Catholic Church has spoken thus, but she cannot distance herself from the present administration. By spearheading the mass action that toppled Joseph Estrada, she is perceived to be responsible for putting the present administration in office. Besides, because of the controversies hounding the Catholic Church in the Philippines, her moral ascendancy has also been questioned, which makes her silent regarding irregularities in the government. So for the young military officers who have a lot of grievances against the government, there seemed to be no other institution to turn to. Alright, they went straight to President Macapagal Arroyo, yet there was no immediate action regarding their complaints.

The Open Society and the Use of Violence

Being a predominantly Christian country, the Judeo-Christian morality has been rooted deeply in the Filipino psyche. So the use of violence even to attain a good end is automatically condemned as immoral. "The end does not justify the means." All armed rebellions are considered immoral. Therefore *coup d' etats*, in as much as force is employed, are also immoral.

This however needs a further scrutiny. The 1986 rebellion against Ferdinand Marcos was justified by the support of the many civil organizations, particularly the Catholic Church. The rebellions against the Aquino administration, did not draw support from these organizations but instead earned the ire of many of them. The 2001 revolution was a different case. The mass demonstration against Joseph Estrada was initiated by the civil society groups led by the Catholic Church. The defection however of the top military officers to the sides of the demonstrators can be interpreted as a rebellion, which is again justified by the "popular" support. So there has been an ambivalent evaluation as to when is military rebellion justifiable. It seems that the support of the majority church spells the difference. And the general public seems tolerant or indifferent to this.

Let us now focus on the military rebellion of July 27 and present the mutineers' strongest arguments.²⁶ Unlike previous

²⁶ Popper has always proposed that in an argument, the strongest position of the opponent is to be considered, rather than just finding the weaknesses of the argument. See *The Poverty of Historicism*.

coup d' etats, the "Oakwood incident" is a unique specie. For one, the leaders were young captains. Among them, there appeared to have no unanimous decision to really overthrow the current government. There was also no overt support from civilian leaders and top government officials. They claimed that they were merely expressing their grievances like student activists who mass demonstrate in the streets. Their bringing of high caliber firepower was only for the purpose of self-defense. Besides, there was an initial act to reach out to the President, which unfortunately bogged down. They believed that the normal channels for expressing their complaints and reforming the military institution had not been effective; the self-correcting mechanism of the institution had been paralyzed. They also expressed distrust on the powerful mass media. They could claim that no violence was involved but only a threat to violence, in as much as they agreed to negotiate, no single shot was fired, and they returned to their barracks peacefully.

Free and open expression of subordinates to their superiors in the Armed Forces of the Philippines seems to be unheard, partly perhaps because of the military culture. There have been cases of junior officers who refused to condone illegal activities of their superiors, ended up dead or dismissed from the service. Who dares speak openly against military abuses? If the young mutineers wanted only to be heard, then why not immediately go the media or to other institutions like the Senate which can echo their voices? Perhaps they do not have enough hard evidence to support their allegations! In our society, truth is not enough. It is to be supported by evidence. While it is a healthy legal practice based on the principle of the accused presumption of innocence, for it is better to free the guilty than imprison the innocent, this has also been blatantly abused. Rarely has it happened that moneyed and powerful people are imprisoned. So even if the rebels have evidence, this can easily be maneuvered by the corrupt judicial system. They were correct in assessing that to have a maximum impact of being heard, they have to resort to mutiny. If they left their arms and went to the streets to demonstrate, they would not have achieved the same effect.

They went to the President herself, but no immediate action was taken. The leaders of the group have been identified and branded as activists. They are also under surveillance and their

life are in danger. Their military career is over. They are pushed to the wall. Did not Sun Tzu wisely advised that an embattled enemy must also be given an outlet?²⁷ The President could have provided this.

By bringing their firepower, they were open to violence. But the fact that they conceded to a negotiation that averted bloodshed, they really may not have had a resolute intention to engage in actual combat. Except perhaps to an economic loss, there was no damage to life and property unlike the 1989 coup d'etat. Was it really just an honest expression of disgust? Only them know.

Surely it was an illegal act, but its morality or immorality cannot be categorically determined. Initially, Cardinal Jaime Sin, leader of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Manila, outrightly condemned the act as devilish, but the following day, he somehow relented and instead thanked the leaders of the mutiny for addressing the evil of graft and corruption. Logic tells us that you do not thank someone who does an immoral act. Only history will be the final judge.

As the events unfold now, it seems that some good came out of that mutiny. The President has expedited the release of benefits for the military. Lifestyle checks have been conducted on the military generals and top government officials. Recently, even the family of the President has been under rigid scrutiny. Allegation of money laundering has been hurled against the First Gentleman, husband of the President. It seems that even the first family and their relatives will have a lot of explaining to do.

Despite the *argumentum ad hominem* attacks against the leaders of the Oakwood mutiny, who may not really be paragons of virtues, people seem to regard them with leniency. Aside from the good results cited above, most crucial is the fact that there was no actual violence that happened during the mutiny. Had there been bloodshed, the perception could have been very different. As experienced in the past coup d'etats, bloodless incidents were tolerated by the people as long as it has mass support, especially by the Catholic Church.

²⁷ "If you besiege an army you must leave an outlet." Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 7, p. 199.

So why did they not go to the influential Jaime Cardinal Sin, a leading architect of bloodless revolutions? As has been mentioned earlier, the Philippine Catholic Church is as of the moment experiencing crises due to sex scandals committed by her ministers. Besides, the principle of the separation of the church and state is inviolable, and thus, the mutineers may not want to be saddled by such baggage.

So is the mutiny justifiable then?

Karl Popper concedes that violence may be justifiable to overthrow a tyrannical rule. To preserve democracy, a state may use force to disable those who want to grab power by violent means. If the regime is tyrannical, if peaceful means may not be sufficient, then force may be employed to remove the tyrant.

Principles of Liberalism may be described (at least today) as principles of assessing, and if necessary of modifying or changing, existing institutions, rather than of replacing existing institutions. One can express this also by saying that Liberalism is an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary creed (unless it is confronted by a tyrannical regime).²⁸

Considering Philippine history, the coup d'etat which ousted the Dictator Marcos is justifiable. His regime looked every bit a tyranny. But such cannot be said of the Macapagal-Arroyo government. While it may be true that graft and corruption is prevalent, the President is definitely not a tyrant. On this criterion alone, any mutiny is not acceptable. However, if the use of arms is for the purpose of self-defense, and to even up the power-status of those involved in a heated argumentation, for there seems to be truly not equality between a superior and an inferior in a dialogue, then a threat to violence, may be considered politically acceptable. If a survey was to be conducted today, people would have judged the Oakwood incident as illegal, and would have argued that its leaders would be subjected to a court martial (of which the leaders are amenable to), but they would have second thoughts in condemning it as immoral. If, as Aristotle said, the science for the good of man is

²⁸ Karl Popper, "Public Opinion and Liberal Principles" in *In Search of a Better World. Lectures and Essays from Thirty Years* (London: Routledge, 1992), 157.

politics, then it may be said that if it has contributed to more good than harm in Philippine society, if "it makes some people better and no one worse off," then the Oakwood incident may have been politically correct. If not, then that was an outright attack on democracy, on the open society. Popper says, "What is necessary is to work for a more reasonable society in which more and more conflicts are settled rationally. I say 'more reasonable!' There is strictly speaking no reasonable society, but there is always one that is more reasonable than the existing one and toward which we should therefore strive. That is a realistic demand and no utopia!"²⁹

Conclusion

Our excursion to the topic of coup d' etats in the Philippine society and their evaluation using Karl Popper's open society paradigm, has rather been long. It is now imperative to wrap up the discussion.

Considering the principles of the open society and its specific conditions, and having in mind many limitations, it can be said that the Philippines is on the way to becoming an open society. Slowly, we are forming our own appropriation of the open society concept. The most important indicator is that leaders are replaced without bloodshed. Normally, it is by popular election. However there can be instances where mass demonstrations of civilians with the support of the military, or a military rebellion supported by the civilians which toppled down leaders of the Republic, can be justifiable. The Philippine society passes the test of leaders being replaced without bloodshed. The threat of the use of force may be acceptable, but actual violence is condemnable.

The Philippine society, as shown in its recent history, has shown that "mouthfire prevails over gunfire." This is again a reaffirmation that ours is more of an open society than a closed society. Coup d' etats without the support of civil organizations, specifically the majority religion is unjustifiable. However there is still a lot

²⁹ Thomas Ferguson, "Sir Karl Popper: On the question of reform or revolution. An interview," *Listening*, vol. 1, winter 1975, p. 92.

of work to be done to remind the people that change for the better begins from within. The leaders elected by the people are reflections of their political maturity. It imperatively applies to us that we should always use our intelligence. As the Enlightenment beckons: *Sapere aude!* Dare to use your intelligence!

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