Reproduced from *A Changeless Land* by David G. Timberman (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991). This version was obtained electronically direct from the publisher on condition that copyright is not infringed. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Individual articles are available at < http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg >

A CHANGELESS LAND

Continuity and Change in Philippine Politics

The **Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)** was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional research centre for scholars and other specialists concerned with modern Southeast Asia, particularly the many-faceted problems of stability and security, economic development, and political and social change.

The Institute is governed by a twenty-two-member Board of Trustees comprising nominees from the Singapore Government, the National University of Singapore, the various Chambers of Commerce, and professional and civic organizations. A ten-man Executive Committee oversees day-to-day operations; it is chaired by the Director, the Institute's chief academic and administrative officer.

A CHANGELESS LAND

Continuity and Change in Philippine Politics

DAVID G. TIMBERMAN

M.E. Sharpe INC, New York, USA

INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
Singapore

© 1991 Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Published in 1991 in Singapore by
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 0511

Published in 1991 in the United States by
M.E. Sharpe Inc
80 Business Park Drive
Armonk, New York 10504
USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Timberman. David G.
A changeless land: continuity and change in Philippine politics/ by David G. Timberman.
p. cm.
ISBN 1-56324-011-4
ISBN 1-56324-012-2 (pbk.)
1. Philippines—Politics and government—1988. 2. Political culture—Philippines. 3. Philippines—Economic conditions—1986. I. Title.
JO1416.T56 1991
959.904—dc20 91-24055
CIP

ISBN 981-3035-86-2 (soft cover, ISEAS, Singapore)
ISBN 981-3035-87-0 (hard cover, ISEAS, Singapore)

The responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in this publication rests exclusively with the author and his interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the Institute or its supporters.

Typeset by The Fototype Business
Printed in Singapore by Star Standard Industries Pte. Ltd.

This book is dedicated to
the friends and family members
who helped me see it
through to completion.

Contents

Acknowledgements ix

introduction Continuity and Change in a "Changeless Land" xi

PART ONE: **Traditional Philippine Politics** 1

chapter 1 Philippine Society and Political Culture 3

chapter 2 Traditional Government, Politics and Economic Affairs 33

chapter 3 The Forces of Change 52

PART TWO: **The Authoritarian Experience, 1972–86** 73

chapter 4 Authoritarianism and Its Impact 75

chapter 5 The Decline and Fall of Marcos, 1983–86 124

PART THREE: **Democracy Restored** 165

chapter 6 The Politics of Survival, 1986–88 167

chapter 7 The Restoration of Democracy under Aquino 200

chapter 8 The Military and Other Political Actors 245

chapter 9 The Communist and Non-Communist Left 288

chapter 10 The Politics of Economic Recovery and Reform 322

chapter 11 The Prospects for Change in a "Changeless Land" 374

Bibliography 401

Index 422

Acknowledgements

This book is the product of the intellectual, emotional, and financial support generously given by many people over the course of more than three years. Without this assistance and encouragement this book simply would not have become a reality.

First, I am in debt to the many people in the Philippines I met and came to regard as friends during the three-year period I lived in or regularly visited the Philippines. I am particularly indebted to Professors Cayetano Paderanga, Alex Magno, and Carolina Hernandez, all of the University of the Philippines, for their interest and assistance. My thanks also go to Governors Daniel Lacson and Luis Villafuerte, Senator Heherson Alvarez, Congressman Bonifacio Gillego, and Mayor Richard Gordon. I also owe a great deal to Elena Lichauco Small, Bien Tan III, Agnes Caballa, and through his writing, Frankie Jose, for introducing me to many wonderful and fascinating aspects of life in the Philippines. Special thanks are also due to Susan Lampadio, who taught me more about the Philippines than I could ever have learned from reading any number of books. I am also grateful to a number of American friends who assisted me in ways large and small: Mary Carlin-Yates, James Callahan, and Bryant George, all from the U.S. Embassy; Marjorie and Albert Ravenholt at the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation; Steve Golub of the Asia Foundation; and journalist-cum-historian Gregg Jones.

Secondly, it is with deep appreciation that I acknowledge the encouragement provided by Professor K.S. Sandhu, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore, and the

generous research fellowship and financial support provided by ISEAS. I am also grateful to Chandran Jeshurun for his valuable support and encouragement as well as to the staff of the Institute's Publications Unit for their patience and excellent editorial assistance.

Thirdly, I wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by a number of colleagues and friends in the United States. David J. Steinberg of Long Island University and John Bresnan of Columbia University gave generously of their time and advice. Marshall Bouton of The Asia Society, Terry George of the Ford Foundation, Christopher Sigur of the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, Russell Phillips of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Donald Klein of Tufts University all gave much appreciated support and encouragement. Thanks also go to my friends, James Weaver and Percy and Ken Langstaff, for their hospitality during the hot summer of 1988. Lastly, this manuscript might never have been completed without the encouragement of Teri Dieu-Huong Vo and the editorial advice of my father, E.L. Timberman, Jr.

While all of these people, individually and collectively, deserve a large share of the credit for this book, I alone am responsible for all of its contents and shortcomings. For this reason, nothing in it should be construed as representing the views of any of the organizations with which I have been or presently am affiliated.

Continuity and Change in a "Changeless Land"

> Looking fretfully at the land around him, he realized that in all the years he had been in Manila nothing in the countryside had changed, not the thatched houses, not the ragged vegetation, not the stolid people.
>
> Changeless land, burning sun – the words turned in his mind and he decided that they would someday make the opening lines for a poem.
>
> Changeless land?
>
> – F. Sionil Jose,
> *My Brother, My Executioner*

This book examines the elements of continuity and change in Philippine politics and government over the last quarter century. The period covered, from the early 1960s through 1988, encompasses three distinct phases: the decline of "traditional" élite democracy, the imposition of martial law and "constitutional authoritarianism" under Ferdinand Marcos, and, most recently, the restoration of democracy under Corazon Aquino. By examining the elements of continuity and change during this period, this study attempts to provide a context for understanding current and future political developments in the Philippines.

Is the Philippines, to borrow Philippine novelist F. Sionil Jose's phrase, a "changeless land"? Looked at one way, the events of the

last twenty-five years suggest that there have been important changes in Philippine politics and society. The declaration of martial law by Ferdinand Marcos in 1972 was a dramatic break with the post-war democratic tradition. Moreover, Marcos claimed his authoritarian regime was carrying out a "revolution from the center" in order to create a "new society". The toppling of Marcos in February 1986 has come to be known as a "people power revolution". The resulting restoration of democracy by Corazon Aquino, though not revolutionary, was a significant (and welcomed) change after almost fourteen years of dictatorship. More recently, the nearly successful military coup attempts in August 1987 and December 1989 were the bloody indicators of another important change, namely, the increased role of the military in politics.

Accompanying and perhaps underlying these changes, however, is considerable "changelessness". There is a sad constancy to the poverty, inequity, and injustice that characterize Philippine society, particularly in the countryside. There is a long history of society, politics and economic affairs being dominated by a relatively small and surprisingly durable group of conservative families. Consequently, there is also a history of successive governments – both democratic and authoritarian – being unwilling or unable to enact much needed socio-economic reforms such as land reform. There is a timelessness to the highly personalistic nature of politics as well as to the rituals and rhetoric of political discourse. There is a predictable repetitiveness to the charges of election fraud, corruption, nepotism, and incompetence. And there are recurring debates over what it means to be a Filipino, the appropriate role of the government in the economy, and the Philippines' complex "love–hate" relationship with the United States.

This mixture of continuity and change raises several important questions. First, how could a nation that has gone through so many changes actually have changed so little? Second, why has the long-standing poverty and injustice of Philippine society not caused more change, and more radical or violent change? Third, is the Philippines' apparent resistance to change a source of political stability or instability? And finally, does a mechanism exist to enable peaceful and positive change in the future?

These questions are of more than just intellectual interest for at

least two reasons. First, the issue of change in Philippine society is an important, enduring, and very real concern to many Filipinos. For many members of the traditional élite, change is viewed as inherently threatening, and therefore it is something to be minimized and controlled. But for many other Filipinos, the promise of sweeping – and perhaps violent – change has considerable appeal, as demonstrated by their willingness to follow leaders who have called for such change – leaders as diverse as Ferdinand Marcos, Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party, and Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, the leader of several military coup attempts.

For still other Filipinos, however, the effects of change, and their attitudes about it, have been more mixed. Consider the peasants of Central Luzon, for example. A particular socio-economic change – the break-down of traditional patron–client relations under the pressure of the increasing commercialization of agriculture – prompted many peasants to join the Hukbalahap revolt in the late 1940s and early 1950s in an effort to restore the status quo. Twenty years later, however, some of these same peasants were transformed into staunch supporters of the Marcos government because of its land reform programme. As these examples show, Filipinos continue to debate how much change there has been, how much change is desirable, and how it should occur.

Secondly, the exploration of continuity and change in the Philippines is also of interest as a case study of the transition from an authoritarian government to a democratic one. The transition from authoritarianism to democracy was a dominant global trend during the later half of the 1980s, and was one that Filipinos can take pride in contributing to. The case of the Philippines, however, is different from many others because it is that of a society attempting to return to democracy. The Aquino government's programme of political and economic reform implicitly assumed that the restoration of the main features of pre-martial law democracy was both desirable and possible. A closer look at democracy as it was practised before martial law, however, raises worrisome questions about the effectiveness and equity of traditional élite democracy. And if traditional democracy was seriously flawed in 1970, then it is reasonable to question if its restoration in the latter half of the 1980s is in the best interests of the country as it faces the even larger challenges of the 1990s.

By examining the elements of continuity and change in the Philippines this book seeks to do four things that, to the best of my knowledge, have not been done elsewhere. First, it seeks to place both the Marcos era and the Aquino government in a broader cultural and historical context. Secondly, it attempts to present a comprehensive account of Philippine government and politics during the critical first years of the Aquino government. Thirdly, it offers an explanation of why the restoration of democracy under Aquino, with all its attendant shortcomings, occurred as it did. And finally, it attempts to go beyond the personality-oriented approach most journalists have used when describing contemporary Philippine politics, and instead looks at the policies and institutions.

I attempt to show that after almost fourteen years of authoritarianism, a predominantly "traditional" style of democratic government and politics has re-emerged since 1986. At the same time, however, no society is static, and there have been a number of significant changes in the traditional pattern of government and politics. The re-emergence of traditional government and politics raises two important questions about the future. First, can traditional democracy successfully cope with the political, social, and economic challenges that the Philippines faces in the 1990s? And secondly, is this type of democracy enduring, or is it so flawed that it cannot survive? The future is, of course, impossible to predict, but the evidence gives little cause for optimism.

My assessment of democracy under Aquino focuses on the first two and a half crisis-filled years of the Aquino government (February 1986 to July 1988). Only passing reference is given to subsequent developments, such as the December 1989 coup attempt. This may seem too limited or dated to some readers. However, I believe that it was precisely during this earlier period that the major contours and dynamics of Philippine politics in the post-Marcos era emerged and solidified. The Aquino government made fundamental choices about its ideology, politics, and policies. A new pattern of civilian–military relations was established. A new constitution was promulgated and congressional and local elections were held. The national legislature and local governments became operative, and political parties began to realign. The economy began to recover from the worst abuses of the Marcos era and important economic policy decisions were made.

What has happened since mid-1988 is largely just a continuation of these earlier developments.

It will quickly become obvious to the reader that this book is a highly synthetic work. I sift through and borrow from the observations and analysis of many people. The cement that holds it together and gives it value, I hope, is my effort to trace the elements of continuity and change from the pre-Marcos period to the present. I make no pretenses of offering a new, tidy, or all-encompassing model of Philippine politics. Instead, I have tried to identify important influences and recurring patterns of behaviour, as well as present and weigh the varied interpretations of Philippine affairs that I find most plausible. The result is, I hope, a composite framework that can serve as a helpful guide to understanding contemporary Philippine affairs.

In Part I of this book (Chapters 1–3) I sketch the key characteristics of traditional pre-martial law government and politics and identify the political and socio-economic changes that were under way prior to the imposition of martial law in 1972. I conclude that traditional élite democracy was seriously, but not necessarily fatally, flawed. Its failure, I believe, was due primarily to Marcos's personal political ambition, but also to the absence of a strong commitment to democracy within the traditional political and economic leadership.

In Part II (Chapters 4 and 5) I trace the initial successes and subsequent failures of the Marcos dictatorship. I show that while Marcos was responsible for many significant changes in the nature of government and politics, he also succumbed to or chose to reinforce a number of "traditional" patterns of government and politics. I discuss the sad legacy of the Marcos era in considerable detail because of its important influence on politics and the economy during the first years of the Aquino government.

In Part III (Chapters 6–11), the major part of the book, I describe the return to democratic government and politics under President Corazon Aquino. I show how a combination of factors caused Aquino to restore a political system similar in many respects to pre-martial law élite democracy. At the same time I identify the ways in which the post-Marcos political landscape is different from the pre-martial law period, including the increased influence of the military and entrenchment of the communist movement. I also examine the Aquino government's major economic policy decisions with a view towards

determining the government's commitment to improving the distribution of economic opportunities and benefits. Particular attention is paid to the process resulting in the passage of the 1988 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL), which, I believe, reveals an extremely limited commitment to genuine socio-economic change on the part of the political leadership. Finally, I conclude by suggesting a number of major challenges that the democratic system will face in the 1990s, and identifying some of the factors likely to determine the system's success in meeting these challenges.

The division of this book into three parts reflects the three major periods of Philippine politics since the 1960s: élite democracy, authoritarianism, and restored democracy. The divisions, however, also serve a second purpose, relating to the reader's level of expertise. The first part is intended to provide the non-specialist reader with the historical and cultural context I believe is necessary to understand contemporary Philippine politics. It is a distillation and interpretation of many earlier works familiar to specialists on the Philippines. The second part is a review and assessment of Marcos's authoritarianism, considerably more detailed than Part I. Its value to the specialist reader, I hope, will be in its fairly comprehensive analysis of the effects of Marcos's policies on government, politics, and the economy. Part III, which covers the restoration of democracy under Aquino, will be of interest to the specialist and non-specialist alike.

There is at least one important topic *not* covered in great depth in this book: the role the United States plays in Philippine politics. An extended treatment of this complex and controversial topic is omitted in part because of the limitations of time and space, and in part because I believe that the U.S. role in domestic Philippine affairs is often over-stated. This is not to say that the role of the United States in Philippine affairs is insignificant. American popular culture continues to pervade the Philippines. The United States still has a significant, though much reduced influence on the Philippine economy. The Philippine-U.S. relationship, and particularly the presence of the U.S. military bases, continues to be an important issue in domestic Philippine politics. Moreover, the United States has played a very important role at certain critical points in Philippine history, such as when the U.S. Government quietly accepted Marcos's imposition of martial law in 1972; when the United States pressured Marcos to

hold a free and fair election in 1986; or most recently, when the U.S. air force intervened to help quell the December 1989 coup attempt. On the whole, however, I do not believe that the U.S. Government has a sustained or decisive influence on most of the political and governmental processes described in this book. Put another way, I believe Filipinos – and not Americans – are the ultimate determiners of their nation's political destiny.

Finally, this book is a personal effort to understand and explain a sometimes frustrating, often paradoxical, and always fascinating country. Like many other foreigners who have lived there, I have been simultaneously impressed and distressed by Philippine society. I have been impressed by the hospitality and generosity, the patience and perseverance, and the intelligence and humour of Filipinos. But at the same time, I have been distressed by the predominance of self-interest, the inequity and injustice, and the lack of unity and consensus in Philippine society. This book, therefore, is my own effort to understand, and where possible reconcile, some of these apparent contradictions.

Over the years, more than a few American observers of Philippine affairs have been guilty of judging the Philippines by American standards. I have tried to avoid perpetuating this tradition by drawing extensively on Filipino commentary and analysis. Moreover, when criticizing certain shortcomings and failures of Philippine politics, I have tried to use the standards and criteria I have heard Filipinos use. And when assessing the challenges facing the Philippines, I have tried to view these in the context of the national goals and aspirations articulated by many Filipinos. But in the final analysis, I am what I am – an American commenting on another culture and society. I hope the Filipinos who read this will accept that my observations are based on a genuine interest in and concern for their country.

San Francisco
August 1990

David G. Timberman

The Philippines
Luzon Strait
South China Sea
N
Laoag
Tuguegarao
LUZON
Ilagan
Bontoc
San Fernando
Baguio
Lingayen
San Jose
Baler
Palayan
Iba
Clark Air Base (U.S.)
San Fernando
MANILA
U.S Facility Subic Bay
Philippine Sea
Cavite
Lucena
Batangas
Daet
Naga
Virac
Legaspi
Mamburao
Calapan
Boac
MINDORO
Catarman
Masbate
MASBATE
Catbalogan
SAMAR
Borongan
Kilibo
Roxas
PANAY
Silay
Iloilo
Tacloban
LEYTE
San Jose de Buenavista
Bacolod
CEBU
Cebu
PALAWAN
Puerto Princesa
NEGROS
BOHOL
Surigao
Tagbilaran
Sulu Sea
Dumaguete
Bohol Sea
Butuan
Tandag
Dipolog
Cagayan de Oro
Pagadian
Malaybalay
MINDANAO
Cotabato
Sultan Kudarat
Davao
Tagum
Mati
Basilan
Zamboanga
Digos
Isulan
Koronadal
Jolo
SULU ARCHIPELAGO
Celebes Sea
CHINA
HONG KONG
PACIFIC OCEAN
SOUTH CHINA SEA
PHILIPPINES
BRUNEI
MALAYSIA
INDONESIA