Social Movements and Democracy: Experiences from the Philippines and Thailand

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In recent years, civil society has become broadly considered to the "cradle of democracy". (Purdue, 2007:1). Civil society-based social movements have been pointed to as important elements in the democratization process.

From the late 1970s onwards social movements have played an important role in the ending of authoritarian regimes in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Teorell, 2010: pp. 100-101; Schock, 2005: 1-5). However, in the period after the achievement of a democratic breakthrough, the relationship between social movements and democracy is complex. Social movements can act as maintainers and as challengers of democracy (Ibarra, 2003: 1). The objective of this article is to examine such complex relationships in the Philippines and Thailand.

The Contribution of Social Movements to Democratic Breakthrough

According to the transition paradigm, a major school of thought in democratization studies, "democratization is largely contingent on what elites and individuals do when, where and how" (Potter, D et al 1997: 17). As Carothers put it, "all that seemed to be necessary for democratization was a decision by a country's political elites to move toward democracy and ability on the part of those elites to fend off the contrary actions of remaining antidemocratic forces" (Carothers 2002: 8). But social movements rather than elites were decisive forces in democratic breakthrough in the Philippines and Thailand.

The Philippines

On 21 September 1972 Ferdinand Marcos signed Presidential Proclamation No. 1081 declaring martial law. During the night of 22 September 53 leading opposition members were arrested and the next day the military padlocked the Congress building and shut down the media. Such actions signaled the end of electoral democracy which had been in effect in the Philippines since the Second World War (Timberman 1991: 66). Under the dictatorial regime of Marcos, the following decades witnessed widespread human rights violations. Students, academics, journalists, businessmen, laborers and peasants were arrested, tortured and killed. In addition, the regime also plundered the Philippines's economy through the use of various kinds of corrupt practices (Abinales and Amoroso 2005: 193-211; Aquino 1999). The brutality of the regime drew strong opposition from variety social groups and movements, especially from the National Democratic Front (NDF). Opposition to the Marcos regime escalated after the killing of opposition member Benigno Aquino in 1983. The opposition culminated in a massive popular uprising widely known as EDSA 1 (after the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue or EDSA where the majority of protests took place) that toppled the Marcos regime in February 1986. Ironically, it was moderate social movements and disaffected military officers, not the Left, that fought Marcos before martial law all the way up to the uprising and that, through its leading role in "people power" brought back democratization to the Philippines (Timberman 1991: 154).

Thailand

Democratic transition in Thailand was more complicated than in the Philippines. In 1973 Thailand witnessed its first popular uprising, which eventually toppled the authoritarian regime. The uprising marked a turning point in Thai democratic development. According to Anderson, during the "democratic period" of 1973-76 "Thailand had the most open, democratic political system it has experienced, before and since" (Anderson 1998: 289). However, the "democratic period" was ended by a bloody coup that killed more than 100 people in October 1976. The violence ended hopes for peaceful change. After the coup, some 3,000 activists joined

the armed struggle of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) (Wedel and Wedel 1987: 150). In response, Bangkok adopted new policies to win over the left, and so isolate the CPT. Political activities were allowed and general elections were held in 1979. A year later amnesty was granted to those who had joined the armed struggle. The return to electoral politics and the introduction of the amnesty started a new round of limited democratization popularly known as "semi-democracy". Semi-democracy was a form of parliamentary rule dominated by the military (Somchai 2006: 55-58). In February 1991, Thailand experienced another coup. However, in May 1992 there were massive popular protests that finally ousted the military from power (Tamada 2008: 25). After the events, according to Tamada, "the military….suffered a particularly severe setback and was rapidly displaced from the political center stage" (Tamada 2008: 69). The diminishing of military power opened the way for political reforms in Thailand.

Social Movements after the Democratic Transition

The Philippines Case

In the Philippines, members of some moderate social movements, including social democrats, worked closely with Corazon Aquino during the anti-Marcos campaign. After Aquino came to power, she appointed some of their leaders to several important cabinet posts, including labor secretary, executive secretary, and presidential spokesperson. In addition, Aquino set up the Presidential Social Fund to finance NGOs directly. NGOs also participated in the design of the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (1987-1992). More importantly, apart from radicals who boycotted the 1986 election, NGOs played a prominent role in the writing of the new constitution. When Aquino appointed a fifty-person commission to write the new constitution, nearly half of its members were activists who had experience of social issues such as land reform, ethnic conflicts, and gender issues. The major aim of the commission was to prevent "another Marcos" by imposing the no-reelection clause. Other measures involved constraints on

presidential power vis-à-vis the congress and language that would make it more difficult to declare martial law in the future. An important secondary aim of the constitution was to expand the political system to include formerly excluded actors. It stipulated that 20 percent of the 250 House seats would be filled by a party-list system via proportional representation (Eaton 2003: 475).

These changes had significant consequences on government-social movement relationships in the Philippines. Firstly, the policy of recruiting individuals from social movements into the Cabinet or other organs of the government initiated by Aquino was followed by most of the following presidents. There were a number of changes that shaped government-social movement relations. According to Reid, the changing situation after the downfall of the Marcos regime required a new strategy toward social movements. He points out that "the contradictions between the appearance of democratic rule and the lack of substantial benefits to the poor, combined with high levels of social movement activism, meant that the state and the historical block had to respond in new ways" (Reid 2008: 19). At the same time, there were also changes among social movements. The setback of radical social movements associated with the revolutionary Left opened the way for a proliferation of moderate social movements. Moderate social movements did not aim at total social transformation. Their alternative vision of political and social development appeared to fragment into a succession of projects. Because the activities of these movements usually centered on aspects of livelihood promotion, and service delivery, they needed to cooperate with the state rather than oppose it. These trends, argues Reid, were evident in the broad spectrum of development-centered NGOs and even among left-leaning social movements (Reid 2008: 19-20).

To illustrate the above argument we will look at types of "crossover" of social activists into the government. The first example is the case of the Movement for Popular Democracy (PopDem). Initially, PopDem was a trend within and then breaking from the Communist Party of the

Philippines (CPP). In the early 1990s, they entertained the idea that the goal of PopDem could be achieved through alliances with the most appropriate political clan with an interest in enacting substantive social reform (Reid 2008: 20). In 1998 when Estrada won an election, Horacio Morales and Edicio de la Torre, leaders of PopDem joined his government. Morales, who was appointed secretary of the Department for Agrarian Reform, justified his decision to join the government on the ground that it would help to accelerate the process of land reform (Reid 2008: 22).

When Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became president after Estrada was ousted in 2001 by EDSA II (Hedman 2006: 167-183), prominent NGO leaders, who had played an important role in the event, were appointed to the new Cabinet and other posts. The chairman of CODE-NGO, Corazon Soliman, was appointed the secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The National Coordinator of CODE-NGO, Dan Siongco, was appointed to the Board of the Development Bank of the Philippines, the representative of the National Peace Conference and Gaston Ortigas Peace Foundation to CODE-NGO, Teresita Quintos Deles, was appointed vice-chair of the National Antipoverty Commission. Ayala Foundation Executive Director and CODE-NGO Council Member Victoria Garchitorena was appointed head of the Presidential Management Staff (Franco 2004: 134). It should be noted that under the current government of Benigno S Aquino III, Soliman and Deles were appointed the Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development and Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process respectively. In addition, prominent figures from Akbayan (see below) were also presented in the government. Ronald Llmas was appointed Presidential Political Advisor, Loretta Rosales was appointed the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, and Joel Rocamora became the Lead Convenor for the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC).

Secondly, the expansion of the political system to include formerly excluded actors or the party-list system encouraged social movements to set up political parties to compete in the election. The most important development on this issue was the setting up of political parties to compete in the elections by the Left, prominent among them are Akbayan and Bayan Muna. In January 1998, the leftists groups and those who split with the CPP, Bisig, Pandayan and Siglaya formed the political party Akbayan. ND founded another political party Bayan Muna in September 1999. Apart from these two, there are smaller leftist groups, such as Sanlakas, AMIN, ABA, PM, and Abanse Pinay, compete for party-list seats (Quimpo 2008: 143, 173).

Thirdly, the cooperation between social movements and sections of elites in EDSA I had become the repertoire of protest in the Philippines. During times of political crisis, protesters seemed to try to imitate EDSA I as a solution to the problem. The ouster of Joseph "Erap" Estrada in January 2001, later known as EDSA II, is an example. Estrada was elected to the vice presidency in 1992 and to the presidency in 1998 by the largest vote margin in Philippine history. His popularity, especially among the poor, came from his long time movie superstardom, his "underdog" image, and the styling of his campaign under such slogans as "Erap for the poor" (Hedman 2006: 172). However, roughly a year in office, the popularity of Estrada dropped significantly as reports of cronyism, factional infighting, feuds with the media, the apparent failure of his anti-corruption campaign and the slow implementation rate of his antipoverty programs increased public cynicism (Abinales 2001: 158).

Moreover, Estrada's personal habits alienated himself from the elites. His gambling, drinking, and womanizing habits offended the sensibilities of the Catholic Church leadership and many middle and upper class circles. His national lottery scheme caused dissatisfaction among congressmen, provincial governors, because it was awarded to a close presidential crony. In addition, many businessmen were worried about his populist promises and the slogan "Erap for the poor" during the 1998 election campaign.

After he became the president, their resentment against his management of economic policy increased (Hedman 2006: 168-169). Actually, the economic performance of the Estrada government was not so bad. In 1999, the Philippines witnessed a 20 per cent increase in exports that helped to turn the trade deficit into a US $4 billion surplus. The Philippines also experienced positive economic growth. Moreover, the cronyism of Estrada did not have the same devastating impact as Marcos's. Although, his family became richer after he became president, most of their businesses were not in the manufacturing, finance, or agricultural sectors and did not have the effect on the economy that the businesses of the Marcos's did (Abinales 2001: 158).

In 2000, the anti-Estrada campaign gained momentum in Manila and other major Philippine cities, calling for him to resign. The protests picked up additional steam and mass support in October of that year following the revelation by Luis "Chavit" Singson, a drinking and gambling buddy of Estrada, that the president has been accepting hundreds of millions of pesos in "protection" money from *jueteng* (illegal numbers game) operators. Estrada, declared Singson, was the "biggest *jueteng* lord in the country"; from November 1998 to August 2000 the president had received bribes amounting to P414 million out of the P545 million *jueteng* collection nationwide (Hedman 2006: 173; Doronila 2001: 13). According to Abinales, *jueteng* is the centerpiece of the informal economy. It is operated nationwide by networks of operators, politicians, and law enforcement agencies. Politicians and lowly paid military officers alike had come to depend on *jueteng* money as part of their income. It was no surprise that a national leader wishing to be always resource-ready for any electoral competition would get involved in *jueteng* (Abinales 2001: 160).

The anti-Estrada forces were composed of the elites and social movements. According to Reyes, the Resign/Impeach/Oust Erap campaign (RIO Erap) was composed of broad and diverse forces representing various social strata and institutions, such as, the Catholic Church (The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines), business circles (The Makati Business Club), political parties

(The United Opposition organized by the Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo). RIO Erap also included former President Corazon Aquino (Reyes 2001: 3, 6). These groups represented the elites who opposed Estrada. Additional to the elites in the anti-Estrada campaign were a variety of moderate and more radical social movements. The best known moderate social movement was the Caucus of Development NGOs (CODE-NGO). For the radicals there were Bayan, Akbayan, Sanlakas, and others (Reyes 2001: 7-10). It should be noted that not all anti Estrada groups worked in the same coalition. According to Arugay, there were two grand coalitions of civil society organizations during the RIO campaign: the Konggreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Kompil II) and Erap Resign Movement (ERM) (Arugay 2004: 240). Kompil II was composed of NGO networks (CODE-NGO), issue-based and sectoral coalitions (Freedom from Debt Coalition and the National Peace Conference), church-based organizations (Gomburza), Leftist groups (Bisig, Social Democratic Caucus, Sanlakas), party list groups (Akbayan), business groups (Makati Business Club), and individuals, while ERM comprised of Bayan, Gabriela, the Promotion for Church's People Response (PCPR), KMU, TUCP, KMP, COPA and known progressive individuals (Arugay 2004: 265, 270; Bautista 2001: 5). These two coalitions worked closely with Arroyo (Arugay 2004: 295). Both Kompil II and ERP supported Arroyo to replace Estrada as the president by citing the constitutional succession. Within Kompil II only Sanlakas and the Bukluran ng Manggawang Pilipino (BMP) and allied groups under the coalition PARE advocated a more radical solution under the slogan "Resign All". They adopted a hard-line stance against not only Estrada but also Arroyo and the constitutional succession (Reyes 2001: 12). Their position was rejected by others on the grounds that it would threaten the fragile united front which would benefit only Estrada (Casino 2001: 253). For Sanlakas, such an argument was hopeless. "Why did we risk our lives to replace one corrupt politician with another corrupt one?" (Wilson M Fortaleza, interview, 24 May 2002). However, those who supported Arroyo hoped that when she came to power she would recognize the role of civil society in governance. As Velasco recounted:

"Perhaps less known to the public, Kompil II leaders also started dialoguing with then Vice-President Gloria Makapagal-Arroyo, parallel to its public campaign. Kompil II's Steering Committee presented its civil society agenda in a post-Estrada scenario to Arroyo as early as 28 November 2000... Engaging Vice President Arroyo on her platform was part of Kompil II's concerns from the very beginning. At the second Coordinating Council meeting on 9 November 2000, there was an extensive discussion on Kompil II's framework vis-a-vis Arroyo. The minutes of the meeting reflect that "while some view her as a traditional politician, the need for her substance on her positions, however, can be viewed as a starting point for discussion"... Kompil II would urge her to "recognize the importance of civil society in governance" (cited in Arrugay 2004: 295).

The anti-Estrada campaign escalated when senator-jurors voted against the opening of the "second envelope" which allegedly contained supporting evidence regarding Estrada's corrupt acts (Arrugay 2004: 297). On 18 January 2001 hundreds of thousands Filipinos poured into the EDSA shrine area. When the numbers of protesters reached a million the next day, the leadership of the military and police withdrew their support from Estrada and expressed support for Arroyo. This act signaled the end of Estrada's presidency.

The January 2001 revolt, which was widely known as EDSA II, on the surface appeared to be a spontaneous popular mobilization but actually there were some sort of elite maneuvers behind it. As early as October 2000, there were several meetings between Arroyo and prominent figures from the military about withdrawing support from Estrada (Joaquim 2002: 225). However, military and police authorities would move only with sustained massive popular mobilization. As Carroll revealed; "the military was watching and was said to be asking for 1,000,000 warm bodies as proof that there was a critical mass behind the move for resignation or ouster of the president" (Carroll 2001: 242). It was social movements that provided "warm bodies". Carroll's account also showed how the course of action against Estrada unfolded. He wrote that when the masses began

assembling at the EDSA shrine "former Defense Secretary Renato de Villa, aide to Vice President Macapagal-Arroyo, met some of the opposition leaders there. It was decided to wait 48 hours to see whether the reaction would last, and if it did, to move" (Carroll 2001: 244). On 20 January, while there was a negotiation between Estrada's people and those of Arroyo, the Supreme Court made the decision to recognize Arroyo as president which led to her oath-taking (Carroll 2001: 245). This move finalized Estrada's fate and sealed the victory for EDSA II.

After EDSA II, Estrada was arrested on 25 Aril 2001. His arrest caused anger among the urban poor, who supported Estrada. On 30 April hundreds of thousands of urban poor in Manila came out to the EDSA shrine. The next day the protesters stormed the presidential palace. The event was more or less known as EDSA III, although the terminology was disputed. This EDSA was the protest of the poorest of the poor. As Reyes points out, "Estrada's base is among the more marginalized sections of the working people. They belong not to the lower rungs but to the basement of society, usually ignored and with the least protection from the laws" (Reyes 2001: 27). The protest faced negative reaction from the middle class. The protesters were branded "hakot force" paid by pro-Estrada politicians (Melencio 2010: 172). There were text messages, opinion columns and media statements showing their contempt for the EDSA III masses. They claimed that people who joined EDSA III were ignorant and stupid (EDSA 3 2001: 4). It is interesting that social movements, who declare that they work for the poor, also adopted hostile attitude toward the poor of EDSA III (Melencio 2010: 173).

The Thai Case

Following the collapse of the military-dominated government in 1992, there were attempts to reform the political system in a more liberal direction, eventually resulting in the promulgation of a new constitution in 1997. The new constitution addressed three important areas: extending rights and freedoms and limiting the arbitrary power of the state, creating a mechanisms of checks

and balances to make bureaucrats and politicians more accountable, eliminating money politics and restoring legitimacy to the political process (Connors 2002: 39-44). In the process of constitution drafting, NGOs got involved in the issues of decentralization, participation and empowerment. They successfully incorporated into the 1997 constitution the concept of community rights over natural resources, which in essence means giving people the right to self-government, and the right to manage local resources at all stages of development. Such success led to an optimistic view of the strength of social movements in building grassroots democracy and providing necessary forums for the "voice of the people" to be heard and taken into account by government (Naruemon 2002: 194-195). In line with this expectation the 1997 institution was dubbed the "people's constitution".

There were three elections under the 1997 constitution, in 2001, 2005 and 2006. All of these elections were won by one political party, the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) of Thaksin Shinawatra. The victory of TRT partly came from the popularity of the party's pro-poor policies. TRT won more seats than any other political party. In the 2001 general election TRT won 248 of the 500 parliamentary seats and in the 2005 general election TRT fared even better when it won 377 out of 500 seats. This was an unprecedented parliamentary majority (Somchai 2008: 106). Up to the 2001 general election, social movements in one way or another tacitly supported Thaksin because they wanted to get rid of the Democrat Party, which had conflicts with movements. However, after Thaksin came to power, conflict between both sides developed. policies (Kewin and Kengkit 2010: 454-459).

The Thaksin-social movement conflict mentioned above tangled with intra-elite conflicts, resulting in the social movement-elite alliance against Thaksin under the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). On the one hand, PAD was made up of groups who could be described as urban elite or as conservatives, while on the other side, stood social movements. Under the common slogan "Thaksin *Ok Pai*" (Thaksin Get Out!), PAD was able to organize protests against Thaksin in Bangkok, the South (Chumphon, Surat Thani, Hat Yai, Songkhla,

Patthalung, Pattani and Trang), and the Northeast (Ubon Ratchathani, Surin, Khon Kaen and Nakhon Ratchasima). Sometimes the number of participants in Bangkok reached hundreds of thousands (Pye and Schaffar 2008: 40).

Despite the common slogan, factions within the PAD had their own agendas. Elites, they wanted to get rid of Thaksin by royal intervention. Royal intervention meant having the monarch replace Thaksin with his own man as interim prime minister. The agenda of social movements was based on concrete demands, such as, no patenting of medicines via free trade agreement, pensions, land reform, the situation in the south, democratic media, etc.. However, on 23 March 2006 royal intervention had become the slogan of the PAD. It argued for royal intervention based on Article 7 of the constitution as the only way to solve the national crisis and to initiate the process of political reform. It should be noted that royal intervention was the choice social movements chose as a means of ousting Thaksin instead of an election contest. The reason for this was that Thaksin's electoral power was so strong, it was impossible to defeat him via the ballot box (Pye and Schaffar 2008: 54-55). The anti-Thaksin campaign ended when the military staged a coup on 19 September 2001. According to Pye and Schaffer, the coup was "indeed a repeat of this royal intervention, but this time backed by military force" (Pye and Schaffar 2008: 56). For Thongchai, the 19 September coup differed from any previous coup because it was "carried out by the military but probably not for the military themselves. As it is widely known now, the coup was engineered by Prem, the President of the Privy Council…It was a royalist coup with support from the 'people's sector' movement" (Thongchai 2008: 30). Kengkit and Hewison commented on the role of social movements on this issue that "in this sense, the activists became the willing allies with the most conservative forces in Thai society" (Kengkit and Hewison 2009: 469). The decision of social movements to assault parliamentary democracy is astonishing if we keep in mind that it was social movements that led the way in the struggle against military dictatorship in Thailand from the 1970s onwards.

While social movements supported the coup, millions from the rural masses came out to oppose the coup under the banner of the Red Shirts on the grounds that it was against democratic rule. The Red Shirts were rural/urban voters who supported Thaksin and/or opposed military dictatorship. The main group of Red Shirts is the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). Apart from the UDD, there are numerous smaller Red Shirts groups and also independent individual red shirts. All of them worked together in the form of networks; they did not have a centralized organization.

It was like "things turned upside down" because for decades villagers have been blamed for the failure of democracy in Thailand. Now they were coming out to defend democracy. The attitude of villagers towards a military coup was clearly shown in the 2007 referendum. In August 2007, the coup-installed Prime Minister General Surayud Chulanonth, a former army chief and privy councilor, wanted to hold a referendum for the 2007 draft charter. Even though state officials, including the military, tried hard to pressure villagers to vote for the referendum, the majority of them still voted against it (Thai Politics Research Center 2007).

What were the factors behind the changing attitude of villagers? For Thai mainstream media, because of their ignorance and greed, villagers were lured to support Thaksin (Pravit 2010). Some even considered them barbarians (The Nation 7 April 2009). Most urban intellectuals, middle classes and social activists believed that these rural dwellers were the victims of Thaksin's populist policies (Chairat 2009: 50). Their attitudes echoed the opinions of the Bangkok elite who regarded their rural folk as uneducated and uninformed and needing to be guided by them (Chirat 2010: 7). Apart from political bias, such ideas failed to grasp structural changes in Thailand's countryside that released villagers from traditional bonds and enabled them to engage in a new form of political mobilization.

After the Second World War up to the 1970s, the subsistence economy in the rural areas was gradually integrated into the market economy. Agricultural commercialization was facilitated by the construction of roads in the countryside from the 1960s onwards. The roads gradually linked most districts and sub-districts to towns and connected villages to the outside world. Town-village interaction opened the door for acquiring cash income via other kinds of economic opportunities, including migration to towns. From the 1980s onwards, the subsistence economy in rural societies was fundamentally transformed to the market economy. Such transformation was marked by the intensification of migration to the city and foreign countries, the increasing engagement in non-farm economic activities inside the village, the rise of commercial farming, and, more importantly, the introduction of electricity and communication technology to most rural communities.

The rural transformations mentioned above had significant impacts on mass mobilization in rural areas on a number of ways. First, the transformations undermined the centrality of the village to rural dwellers, and, as a result, encouraged individualism among villagers (Field notes, 31 November 2009). Growing individualism among villagers and political competition within the village as a consequence of democratization (see below) tended to weaken village authority and village social networks. Second, town-village interactions and the spread of communication technologies, with television, newspapers, magazines, internet, satellite dish and mobile phone led to what Shanin called "acculturation", "the process of disintegration of traditional and specific peasant cultures under the impact of mass communication" (Shanin 1971: 299). The disintegration of traditional culture helped to nurture new values and norms within the countryside. Third, town-village interactions and the spread of mass communication also enabled rural dwellers to learn about the outside world. As a result, villagers were not blind to what was happening in society. Because they were better-informed, villagers demanded a greater voice in national affairs.

The above account showed that rural transformations led to changes in the consciousness of rural dwellers. The new consciousness had played a key role in

facilitating popular participation in the anti-dictatorial rule campaign. Nevertheless, there was another factor that was crucial to popular mobilization in rural communities: democratization. Democratization between 1979 and 2006 had a positive effect on popular mobilization in a number of ways. First, after an amnesty was granted to armed insurgents in 1980, political-related violence committed by the state in rural areas gradually decreased. Second, partial de-centralization undermined traditional power structures within the village. Third, political experience under parliamentary democracy for nearly three decades helped villagers to understand some basic principles of democracy such as the political equality of one person one vote and the principle of majority rule. After the referendum new elections were held in December 2007. Although TRT was dissolved and a new constitution was designed to undermine the political influence of Thaksin, People's Power Party (PPP), as the successor to TRT, managed to win the elections comfortably. In May 2008 the PAD came out to launch a "final war" against the government and a month later occupied the Government House. At the end of 2008 the PAD increased its pressure by occupying the domestic (Don Muang) and international (Suvarnabhumi) airports. A few days after the airports occupation, the PPP was dissolved by the Constitutional Court. A new government was formed by the Democrat Party with the support of defectors from PPP, backed by the military (Kanokrat 2012: 230-231).

The concerted efforts by the PAD, the military, the Constitutional Court and the Democrat Party drew strong responses from the Red Shirts. In April 2010 the Red Shirts organized a massive protest in Bangkok, demanding new elections. They put pressure on the government by mobilizing at the heart of the capital city's business district. The two-month long protest ended in bloodshed, with nearly one hundred dead and more than two thousand injured. Most of them were redshirts, shot by military snipers (Human Rights Watch 2010). The event was among the worst human rights violations to happen in Thailand. However, Thai social movements who portrayed themselves as the champion of human rights protection did not even bother to issue a statement, not to mention take any action, on the event.

Social Movement and Democracy

From the above account, we can see that social movements in the Philippines and Thailand are crucial to democratic transition. They are the main forces in the mobilization against authoritarian regimes. However, after parliamentary democracies were restored in both countries, the relationships between social movements and democracy have become more complicated. Re-democratization brought in new actors, new interests and new channels for political mobilization that resulted in various kinds of political alliances. In both countries, we see social movements forming alliances with elites, conservatives and military against an elected president/prime minister. They justified their unconstitutional acts on the grounds of tactical maneuvers to achieve more lofty goals. These are desperate moves rather than well thought ones. Is this kind of argument justifiable? In Thailand, the coup put the country into the worst political crisis in Thai history. In the Philippines, many believe that Arroyo is worse than Estrada. In hindsight, the effort to achieve democratic goals through undemocratic means does not work for social movements in the Philippines or Thailand; it would be better if they followed constitutional rule and let people learn the lessons by themselves. Another interesting point on the role of social movements after democratic breakthrough is that while they claim that they represent the poor, many of them tend to stand on the opposite side of the poor. Moreover, activists, like elites and middle classes, look down upon the poor who disagree with them; they keep accusing them of stupidity, ignorance and greed. Such disagreements lead to another unacceptable stand on the part of social movements; they ignore human rights violation against the poor.

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