

# Revisiting the 'Aquino Magic': Extending Neoliberal Interests and Foreshadowing Communicative Capitalism in the Philippines

Mae Urtal Caralde

The media hype over former president Corazon Aquino's burial, specifically the cinematic coverage of big network stations and the outpouring of voices on print and new media about "Cory Magic," are conscious and purposive articulations of a historical event. This paper contends that in this event and its attendant images, participated in and co-created by the population, lies an implicit strategy that intensifies the neoliberal project.

The constant reference to and revival of the "Cory Magic/Aquino Magic" can be rationalized as a phenomenon wielded by the media and the state to do a makeover of its political institutions constantly racked by crisis and instability under a neoliberal setup. This is made possible through the operation of communicative capitalism as evidenced by how the media orchestrated the coverage of Cory Aquino's burial, accentuating necropolitics in the name of democracy while effacing the symbolic efficacy of people's power.

**Keywords:** *Cory Magic, EDSA, 1986, EDSA Uprising, Neoliberalism, necropolitics, communicative capitalism*

## Introduction

As early as March 2008 the Filipino nation knew that former President Cory Aquino, known to be the icon and restorer of democracy, was suffering from cancer. This news came while Cory was busy joining rallies calling for the resignation of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, then successively implicated in scams like the anomalous National Broadband Network (NBN) deal with the China-based ZTE Corp. More than a year later, on the morning of August 1, her death, though somehow anticipated, still came as shock to many Filipinos. Thousands thronged the streets as her body, laid in a flatbed truck full of flowers, was paraded in the streets of Manila. Many who have witnessed the event, both personally or virtually, would say that it was close to a repeat performance of the massive funeral march for Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, a staunch critic of former President Ferdinand Marcos, and Cory's husband. Sen. Aquino was assassinated in 1983.

Political analysts claimed that with the outpouring of people and emotions at the death of an icon, "people power" is still alive and relevant.

Amando Doronila, for one, was quoted as saying “It is a political movement coming alive again to deliver a signal: Don’t tamper with the legacy.... It demonstrated that people power is still a force” (Mydans, 2009). This statement carries three major points for consideration. First is the presumption that people power is a political movement “coming alive” from a seemingly dormant state, stirred by the death of none other than the icon of Philippine democracy herself. Second is the notion that people power is a “legacy,” a relic, a nostalgic image of the face of Filipino democracy, constantly challenged and threatened, which therefore must be protected. And lastly, that people power is still potent; like a talisman endowed with magical powers or a wonder pill capable of healing social illnesses.

The beginnings of the 1986 people power can be put in the context of several factors, such as the ravages of Martial Law and the consequent pressures exerted by the US government and international community upon Marcos to prove that he still had the mandate of the people in the midst of labor unrest and armed revolution. Because of this, Marcos called for snap elections on February 7, 1986, where he would face Cory Aquino, the widow of his fiercest, and not to mention popular, opponent, the late Sen. Aquino (Gatmaytan, 2006). Disgruntled by massive electoral fraud, Cory Aquino successfully called for demonstrations of civil disobedience. Giving more impetus for the burning keg were huge anti-fascist mobilizations and general strikes or *welgang bayan* staged by the militant left. All these, aggravated by a military mutiny organized by Vice Chief of Staff Fidel V. Ramos and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, compounded and led to the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship on February 25, 1986.

Although there were several factors and personalities who played a vital role in the uprising, it was Cory Aquino’s persona who stood out as a symbolic image that mobilized a broad anti-dictatorship alliance. She was captured in the Filipino imagination as the widow in black that later donned herself with yellow during the campaigns, the devout “Filipina Maria,” the housewife-turned-president and the country’s restorer of democracy.

Thus, the “Cory Magic” was born out of “the idea that she (Cory) had gone through sacrifice, martyrdom, and that she was a woman...but this magic is reinforced by our own participation...there was a lot of participation, a lot of commitment to a dangerous enterprise” (Dr. Gaston as quoted by Aquino, 1990). As Tadiar (2004) puts it:

Only Cory could pose a counter-hegemonic challenge against Marcos.... Cory managed, as no other oppositional leader had, to become the other half of Marcos, personifying

the blockage of his identity, the absolute limits of his embodiment of the Republic of the Philippines. (p. 191)

“Aquino Magic” in this study is defined as the distinct formation of an imaginary, using Ninoy and Cory Aquino—including their kinship background, affiliations with the church and personal traits—as prime material that incites or stimulates people power.

This study assumes that the Aquino Magic aside from being a popular construction, has as its mass base, “the church, the military, the business community, and moderate labor” (Aquino, 1990). The Aquino Magic was an indispensable ingredient in the formula to oust a dictator without resorting to a bloody revolution and an inspiration of a political movement dominated by the middle class. It gave Filipino democracy an image and a face, easily picked up by the local media and international community because of its popularity. For the US government, the Aquino Magic became a saving grace for the maintenance of their political, economic and military interests in the region.

This study problematizes how the Aquino Magic was exhausted to intensify US-imposed neoliberal policies and how it implicated the kind of “democracy” that we have. To sustain the overall neoliberal project, the Aquino Magic must also keep up with the times and so it has undergone scrutiny, evolution and subsequent makeovers vigorously facilitated by communication networks. It also aims to describe how necro-politics, as a particular type of biopolitics, is at play in contemporary Philippine political narratives and in the rejuvenation of the middle class notion of democracy.

### **Pseudo-democracy**

Cory Aquino’s ascendancy to power in 1986 can be understood through a political narrative lens pervasively utilized in the country’s electoral processes. First is the “populist,” “rich-versus-poor” narrative and the other is the “reformist,” “good governance” narrative (Thompson, 2010). Critical of the Marcoses’ blatant corruption, human rights violations and grave misuse of power, Cory Aquino’s campaign script in the 1986 snap elections was clearly inclined to the reformist agenda, and not revolutionary (Thompson, 2010). As Thompson states, “Cory Aquino’s campaign emotionally capitalized on the martyrdom of Ninoy Aquino” (p. 8) as a signifier for the restoration of democracy. It is also important to note that Cory inherited the support and sympathy of the people upon the assassination and death of Ninoy, transforming her from a plain housewife into the first lady-president of the republic.

Along this line, Gatmaytan (2006) outlined two alternative accounts of people power that is not “burdened by the insistence that it aspires to be a democratic revolution” (p. 3). First is that people power is just an “expression of outrage against a public official, sparked by government action” (p. 3), such as a coup attempt. And second, that people power is but “a withdrawal of allegiance from one official to another” (Gatmaytan, 2006, p. 3). In a summary report of Cory Aquino’s leadership (Aquino, 1990), her administration was described as a backlash against the Marcos dictatorship and that two of the most popular expectations from her presidency were the ouster of Marcos leading to the restoration of the democratic processes of the pre-martial law period, and the implementation of crucial restructuring in accordance with the principles of social justice and economic equality. However, when Cory Aquino assumed office and with kinship politics still deeply entrenched in our culture, Marcos’ “crony capitalism” or the blatant use of political connections to the president to build business empires, was swiftly replaced by “Cory cronyism,” this time at the auspices of the Cojuangco and the Lopez clan (Roces, 2001).

Gatmaytan (2006) further discussed and debunked the “transition paradigm” or the belief that the move from authoritarian and dictatorial rule is an automatic and smooth transition to democratic government. In fact, according to a 2002 United Nations Development Program report, “out of the 80 countries who undergo democratization, only 47 developed into full democracies while the remaining do not seem to be transitioning to democracy but rather towards *pseudo-democracies*” (Gatmaytan, 2006, p.20).

As easily and as quickly as “people power” swept the nation, disenchantment grew regarding the promise of a new democracy. Months after her inauguration in 1986, Cory Aquino went for an official visit to the United States and forged renewed alliances with the Reagan administration in terms of economic, political and military policies. Highlights of President Reagan’s welcoming speech included: the US government’s commitment to help Cory Aquino crush the armed communist guerrillas who remained a “threat” to democracy; the commitment to invigorate the economy through free trade and private investment; the increase of Philippine exports to the US; the maintenance of the US military bases; and a \$100 million grant of economic support funds for the Philippine transition government (Aquino, 1986).

Perhaps one of the events that shamefully unmasked the fascist and pro-landlord nature of Cory’s presidency was the January 22, 1987 Mendiola Massacre. In this protest action in the streets of Mendiola, militant fisherfolks and peasant organizations called for the passage of genuine

land reform, a legitimate demand aligned with the promised reforms of the administration based on economic redistribution. Instead of responding to their demands, government forces fired on the peasants, killing 13 people and arresting several others (Ranada, 2014). Clearly, Cory Aquino did not only comply with the neoliberal governmental design envisioned by the US for the Philippines, her presidency also emerged to be no different from the fascist Marcos regime.

### **The Neoliberal individual: I am Ninoy-I am Cory**

Neoliberalist rationality foregrounds the role of the market as the prime regulator of the economy and the basis of state legitimacy. Cory Aquino's administration, for example, boasted of an economic recovery program through a comprehensive structural reform that "relies on the private sector to carry the main burden of the growth" (Maranan, 1989, p. 74). Her stabilization program faithfully adhered with the structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which included import liberalization, tariff reduction, withdrawal of government subsidies on basic services, privatization of state enterprises and deregulation. While these policies were advantageous to the elite, which comprises 10% of the population, it meant widespread economic crises for the workers, peasants and small businesses.

If the Cory administration was characterized by the prevalence of extreme poverty, mounting foreign debts, almost half a dozen coup attempts and glaring weaknesses in governance, then what made it survive and still exude the aura of democracy? If there was disenchantment with the promise of democracy, why was it not registered and denounced by the very same people who thronged EDSA in 1986? Can this be attributed to the workings of the "magic" in Cory's persona?

These questions lead us to neoliberalism's specific techniques of control, which involve the consent and participation of the individual in the neoliberalist project. As such, neoliberalism also "involves the dissemination of market values to all institutions and social action" (Brown, 2003, p. 40), and it re-organizes or re-structures its techniques of governance by "shifting the regulatory competence of the state onto the 'responsible' and 'rational' individuals" (Lemke, 2001). It is neoliberalism's prime characteristic to "extend its economic rationality to formerly non-economic domains," such that individuals are "interpellated as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life" (Brown 2003, p.42). Along this line of thought, the economic man or the neo-liberal individual, does not rationalize his/her predicament based on the broader perspective of institutional structures that impede economic mobility; rather, he/she turns reflexively towards himself/herself. It is the

strategy of neoliberalism to shift the responsibility for all its failures and shortcomings, brought about by its exploitative policies, into the domain of individual responsibility, thereby transforming social problems into a problem of “self-care” (Lemke, 2001). The media along with a network of manufacturing and advertising companies are instrumental in the formation of the neo-liberal individual. A popular yet subtle example of this is the *I am Ninoy* campaign of the Benigno S. Aquino Jr. Foundation, which was jumpstarted during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EDSA uprising in 2008 and later expanded to the “I am Ninoy-I am Cory” campaign upon the death of Cory in 2009.

A catchphrase used in the campaign reads: “There is a Ninoy or Cory in all of us. They both offered their lives to bring our democracy back to life; it’s time we play our part” (www.iamninoy.com, 2010). In this campaign, iamninoy-iamcory items were sold (such as shirts and watches), whereby a portion of the sales goes to the foundation’s programs in governance, livelihood, education, environment and health (www.iamninoy.com, 2010).

Retail partners selling these merchandise numbered about 23 companies, including well known lifestyle stores like Bench, Karimadon, Bayo and Mint to name a few, and the campaign has raised the handsome amount of P13M as of the time of this writing (Benigno S. Aquino Jr. Foundation, 2010).

Internalizing the values of Ninoy and Cory in our lives through this campaign may not seem harmful. In fact, proponents of this advocacy boast of its success, specifically among the youth, in instilling patriotism and self-sacrifice. But one should ask, towards what end and for whom shall the people or the individual do his/her part? In the neo-liberal view of the economic man, the potential for collective action or people power is discouraged and replaced with the values of individual self-improvement and self-fulfillment. As described by Brown (2003), “a neoliberal citizen is not one who strives with others to alter and organize social, political and economic options . . . a model neoliberal citizen is opposite of the public-minded individual; indeed, it would barely exist as public” (p.43).

Participation and patriotism in the “I am Ninoy-I am Cory” campaign have been narrowly equated with the purchase of Ninoy and Cory memorabilia. The potential and possible risk of collective action is now contained in a campaign, fashionably crafted to gloss over the inadequacies of the government institutions. By highlighting that the internal factors or traits of the individual are the vital element for societal change, rather than the dismantling of exploitative economic and political policies, the state has turned the population into its very own shock absorber, burdened by responsibilities supposedly consigned to the government.

The very method wielded to restore democracy has now been rationalized as an obstruction to democracy's survival. Thus, the economic man, instead of rallying to the streets, would rather calculate and attune his actions according to what is favorable to the economy, because according to the neoliberal design, it is only through one's own optimization of marketable resources that she/he can benefit from the system. As Dean (2010) aptly puts it, "any attempt to ensure something like the public good must fail because collective benefit can *only* be secured through the pursuit of individual self-interest" (p.8).

This, according to Foucault (1993), is the kind of "governmentality" under neoliberalism:

Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word... is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (pp. 203/204)

Along this line Foucault proposes, "political analysis must start to study the 'autonomous' individual's capacity for self-control and how this is linked to the forms of political rule and economic exploitation" (Lemke, 2001, p. 14).

### **Bio-politics and Necropolitics of the Aquino Magic**

Following the above discussion cues us to Foucault's theorizing of biopolitics and how this is intertwined with Lacan's psychoanalytic notion of drive or the movement "outwards and back," a repetitive circuit or cycle (Dean, 2010, p. 9). The loop of drive in neoliberalism manifests when government's repeated failure to deliver its economic promise becomes its justification for intensified domination and exploitation through the use of explicit state apparatuses, or rather more subtly, through biopolitics. Along this line, Foucault presents neoliberalism's sustaining engine as a circuit of freedom and security. Neoliberalism aims to produce or disguise freedom by utilizing the language of liberal democracy, and at the same time, conditions the population that their existence is in constant danger.

It is from here that this study contends that the Aquino Magic is one of several means by which biopolitics is implicated in the management of neoliberal governmentality. The Aquino Magic, as a biopolitical object, interpellates the individual to do his/her part of rendering self-sacrifice, by way of internalizing the values set by Ninoy and Cory, in advancing

democracy while sparing the government from its obligations to the people. As such, it becomes a potent instrument to project the illusion of freedom and democracy, but at the same time remains an instrument that constricts or traps the population in constant stagnation, apathy and blindness.

This study conducted a focus group discussion with five individuals from the academe. The respondents, who asked for their names to be withheld because of their institutional posts or church affiliations, were purposively chosen based on their age bracket which is between 35-50 years old, and based on their perceived receptivity to current events and popular politics. All, except for one respondent who is from Iloilo, are based in Metro Manila from the Martial Law years until the EDSA 1986 uprising. All of them were not affiliated with any progressive or militant organization when the EDSA 1986 uprising happened. However, two of the five respondents (respondents A and B) revealed that they were present in EDSA 1986 because they were spontaneously persuaded by their families and friends. Respondent A, who is older, recalled that he, along with his girlfriend, took the time after work to join the festive rallies, and even made placards bearing anti-Marcos slogans. Respondent B, who is much younger, recalled that they were living near EDSA during that time, and her parents would often bring her along when they gave food to people rallying in the streets.

The discussion among the respondents revolved around the following questions:

- How did your involvement or awareness of the EDSA 1986 uprising affect your current views regarding our government and country in general?
- What are your perceptions about the Cory Magic that paved the way for EDSA 1986 and the supposed restoration of democracy after years of Martial Law?
- How did the event and the notion of Cory Magic affect your values?

For the first question, all five respondents revealed that, as a result of EDSA 1986, they became more critical regarding issues of graft and corruption in the succeeding administrations, even if they are not part of any political organization. The event somehow heightened their consciousness on the importance of good governance and the potential of a united people. However, from the high hopes that they had after EDSA, they feel and remain helpless because nothing substantial really changed.

Views on the Cory Magic also differed. While most of them thought Cory was really the “one,” on hindsight they say that it could have been any

another person and the results would have been the same, because after all, everybody was fed up with Marcos. Respondent B revealed that for her family (whose parents inculcated in them the values of Cory, such as resilience and strength as a woman), Cory and no one else could be the symbol for change. Respondent C, who is affiliated with Iglesia ni Cristo and places himself as apolitical, admits that Cory's religiosity and steadfastness in the midst of trials are some of the traits that he admires and want to emulate to become a good citizen. If the situation became even worse after Cory's administration, all respondents agree that it is because Filipinos fell short in internalizing the values of Cory; and in effect, society did not change. "We are good in doing people power, but after that we relax, we forget to sustain and internalize it in our daily lives," says one respondent (personal communication, Feb. 27, 2014). Another argued that we cannot put all the blame on our government and leaders, but must look closely on our own actions if we want change to happen. Noticeably, all respondents, considering that they are neoliberal subjects, point to the lack and deficiency of the individual rather than of the government which enacted policies that were really no different from those of the ousted dictator.

The Aquino Magic owes a lot to the personal qualities of Cory Aquino, such as "bravery, resilience, religiosity, a cloistered family and educational background and a character that displayed a strong sense of fatalism or accepting things as they come" (Aquino, 1990). But more than this, it is also associated with the collective sympathy and public mourning of the people upon the death of Ninoy, romanticized as an icon of patriotism and martyrdom. Aside from the reformist agenda of Aquino's party during the 1986 snap elections, sympathy votes (or *botong abuloy* in local parlance) figured in Cory's ascent to the presidency. Similarly, the same scenario happened with the son, Benigno "Noy" Aquino III in the 2010 elections.

Along this line, Mbembe's (2003) logic of martyrdom and necropolitics sheds light on how death is closely associated with power, in that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (p. 10). In analyzing politics, he asks "what place is given to life, death and the human body and how are they inscribed in the order of power?" (p. 11). To explain this further, he draws from both the Hegelian paradigm and Bataille's insights on how death structures politics and the individual. The Hegelian paradigm assumes that the human being becomes a subject when he/she indispensably confronts death in the struggle and labor against nature. It is this living with the preeminence of death that thrusts human beings in the creation of history, thus defining "politics as death that lives a human form" (p. 15).

On the other hand Bataille's notion of death assumes that "life exists only in bursts and in exchange with death" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 15). He argues that while death putrefies the body, the human being is not totally eliminated. Death for Bataille is comparable to luxury as it is considered to be an absolute expenditure, "it is the most luxurious form of life, that is, of effusion and exuberance: a power of proliferation" (p. 15).

Through these ideas, the deaths of Ninoy and Cory—as well as their bodies, devoid of life—became signifiers of freedom and the rejuvenation of political power. Distinctly living dangerous lives during the martial law years, Ninoy and Cory haggled with death and were thrust into the course of history because of the struggles and reforms that they advocated. Ninoy, even before his death, had imagined and prefigured his assassination by saying, "If it's my fate to die by an assassin's bullet, so be it. But I cannot be petrified by inaction or fear of assassination and therefore stay in a corner. I have to suffer with my people. I have to lead them because of the responsibility given to me by our people" ([www.iamninoy.com](http://www.iamninoy.com), 2010). Following Bataille's metaphor of the luxury of death, Ninoy and Cory's deaths were perceived as priceless sacrifices that paved the way for the restoration of democracy.

The Aquino family's decision to maintain Ninoy's body untouched by funeral embalmers, with his blood-stained suit and gunshot wounds visible to the viewing public, is also of interest in how it crystallized the notion of martyrdom. As Mbembe (2003) puts forward, "the body becomes the very uniform of the martyr . . . the body duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation" (p. 37); thus, the idea of redemption and immortality. This probably explains why there was such outpouring of emotions and clamor among people to see the remains of both Cory and Ninoy during their burials. It is along these narratives that the necropolitics of the Aquino Magic were formed and inserted in Philippine politics.

### **On the Making of a Political Icon**

The legend-like formation of the Aquino Magic, as opposed to the assumption that it was spontaneous, in fact necessitates the dangerous if not dubious participation of players other than the masses or the "people." Implicated in this legend formation are several actors, and also, as mentioned earlier, the mass base of the Aquinos—namely, the US government, the church, the military, big businesses and the moderate labor groups (Aquino, 1990). With the suppression of media networks during Martial Law, their participation could be said to be minimal, not until the eve of the EDSA uprising when the Lopezes issued an official statement of support to the uprising. These actors cast their support for Cory Aquino with an overriding interest at hand.

The US government wanted access to the Cory administration because of its strategic economic and military interests in the region (Aquino, 1990). The EDSA uprising had the blessings of the US government, with then-US Embassy spokesman Allan Coghlan boasting that it was through their cautious orders that Marcos refrained from firing at protesters in EDSA. Ex-consul-general Lewis Gleek further said that “the US media not only ousted a dictator, they also anointed his successor who was not even in EDSA and who eventually set aside the original mutineers” (Constantino, 2000, p. 426). The Lopezes, divested of economic power under the dictator, wanted to recuperate its loses and recover the companies the dictator sequestered, like ABS-CBN and Meralco, to name a few. The making of a political icon therefore is invested with an overriding calculation of strategic cost-benefit analysis on the part of the players.

Aside from these above-mentioned players, all instrumental in the making of the political icon, the members of the Aquino family themselves can be considered to have wilfully cooperated in this enterprise. After all, who else should generously benefit from Ninoy and Cory’s legacy but their children? We have seen how president Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Aquino III was easily catapulted to power after Cory’s death, thereby utilizing the reformist narrative begun by his parents through his “Daang Matuwid” slogan, which allude to values and traits such as good governance, transparency and accountability. This reformist script of the current administration is always compounded with the reference to the life, martyrdom and patriotism of Ninoy and Cory, functioning as a mark of guarantee, a political branding of some sort, to satisfy the erstwhile skeptical public. Proof of this is President Aquino’s 2014 State of the Nation Address (SONA), wherein he enumerates the so-called reforms his administration have done within five years in spite of pressing controversies over the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP), seen by critics as a mode of fortifying graft and corruption in government. After boasting of reforms in government, he then subtly shifted to an emotional tone near the end of speech:

*Mga Boss: Binigyan ninyo ako ng pagkakataong pamunuan ang transpormasyon. Kung hinindian ko ang hamon na iniharap niyo sa akin, para ko na ring sinabi na tutulong akong pahabain ang inyong pagdurusa, at hindi maaatim ng konsensya ko iyon. Kung tinalikuran ko ang pagkakataon, parang tinalikuran ko na rin ang aking ama’t ina, at ang lahat ng inialay nila para sa atin; hindi po mangyayari iyon...*

*Hangga't buo ang ating pananalig at tiwala, at hangga't nagsisilbi tayong lakas ng isa't isa, patuloy nating mapapatunayan na, "the Filipino is worth dying for," "the Filipino is worth living for," at idadagdag ko naman po: "The Filipino is definitely worth fighting for. (Aquino, 2014, p. 21 )*

(To you my Boss: You gave me the opportunity to lead the transformation. If I turned down the challenge you posed to me, it would be as if I am tolerating and prolonging the agony, and my conscience could not take it. If I turned down the opportunity, it would be like turning down my parents' legacy and all that they have sacrificed for us; this will not happen...

...Until we remain united in our trust and confidence, and until we remain the source of each other's strength, we will continue to prove that "the Filipino is worth dying for," "the Filipino is worth living for," and may I add: "The Filipino is definitely worth fighting for.")

In an attempt to closely parallel his mother's transition government following the dark years of Martial Law, President Noynoy Aquino thus refers to his administration as a herald of transformation and reform. He claims to be paving his *tuwid na daan* (straight path), steering the country away from the problems and troubles left by his predecessor, the Macapagal-Arroyo administration. It was as if the call for him to run for office, despite his reluctance, was predestined, given that he is the only son of two remarkable martyrs, Ninoy and Cory. Thus, to continue the legacy and the reformist narrative initiated by Ninoy and Cory, President Noynoy Aquino has to come up with his own rhetoric, which is that "the Filipino is worth fighting for". Banking on his still relatively high popularity rating and some cultural and political capital inherited from his parents through the Aquino Magic, President Noynoy Aquino definitely reaps the advantage. The Aquino Magic somehow serves as a neutralizer or an antidote to any harsh criticisms against his administration.

But the use of the Aquino Magic by the incumbent Aquino administration has recently been shamefully abused or misused by President Noynoy Aquino himself, as when he told grieving families of the fallen SAF (Special Action Force) 44 that he knew how they felt because he too lost his father and that they are now square, or even ("tabla-tabla na tayo"). This was a clear

comparison between the plight of the fallen soldiers and the assassination of his father, Ninoy Aquino. By tactlessly inserting the martyrdom of Ninoy and Cory into the Mamasapano and SAF 44 discourse, President Noynoy Aquino has instead incited anger and disgrace. It was perceived not only inappropriate but also a hard-sell, trying-hard exploitation of the effects of the Aquino Magic.

### **Aquino Magic and its Communicativity**

On the eve of the EDSA uprising in 1986, ABS-CBN released a statement revealing its support of the “revolution” from its inception:

Inasmuch as the Marcos martial law government illegally and forcibly seized the 5 television and 21 radio broadcasting facilities of the ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp. scattered around the country in 1972, and since the Marcos government and cronies operated them to their benefit and profit without any compensation whatsoever, the rightful owners—Lopez Family announce that they are offering the use of these facilities including Channel 4 at Broadcasting Center, Bohol Avenue, QC, to the new government for the duration of this crisis. (Oscar M. Roces, as cited by Roces, 2001, p. 142)

This statement, prefigured the role of the Lopezes in the Cory administration; most importantly, it heralded the emergence of communicative capitalism in the country. Jodi Dean (2010) briefly defined communicative capitalism as that “strange merging of democracy and capitalism. It does so by highlighting the way networked communications bring the two together” (p. 55).

In a study about kinship politics in the Philippines, Roces (2001) points out that the Lopez family indeed has an intention to recoup their sequestered businesses after the ouster of the dictator. But, “the family was also sincerely enthused about the challenge of rebuilding the Philippine economy . . . the fact that they are going to rebuild their business, meant that *ipso facto*, they were also contributing to the rebuilding of the nation” (p. 145). Aside from recovering ownership of ABS-CBN, the Lopezes also managed to regain Meralco, Channel 4, the Philippine Commercial and Industrial Bank, and the Philippine Commercial and International Bank, to name a few (Roces, 2001). Of course, this interest of the Lopezes, whether we merit its sincerity or not, is an indication not only of “Cory cronyism” or the deeply-rooted kinship politics in our country. It also signals a new capitalist formation at

the fore—communicative capitalism—through the constant reference and reproduction of the Aquino Magic.

This was vividly made manifest during the burial of Cory Aquino in 2009. ABS-CBN alone boasted that they harnessed some two hundred people: 21 cameraman, 13 desk editors, 30 reporters, 13 photojournalists and dozens of engineers. In less than 24 hours after the formal announcement of Cory's death, ABS-CBN managed to setup 70 moving lights and 17 cameras in the Manila Cathedral, and deployed hundreds more doing home-based operations for traditional broadcasting and online streaming (Roces, 2010). This wholesale mobilization of the network's TV, radio, print and online publication teams was not only the Lopez' way of showing reciprocity or *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) to the person who enabled their economic comeback after martial law, nor was it just about commemorating and immortalizing Cory's legacy. Beneath all these was an underlying political strategy necessary for the neo-liberalist vision to survive.

With the communication infrastructure of ABS-CBN deployed for the coverage of Cory's burial, there was heightened media proliferation, distribution, and intensified communicative access and opportunity offered for the public to witness an important event. But this media hype should in no way be understood as something that enables the public to be politicized, as they did during the ouster of Marcos. In this event, Cory's burial, the public's participation has been mediated by media, by way of making contributions via Facebook, Twitter, and live video-chat streaming. This opportunity and media access, however, serves to evoke the nostalgia of a democracy that never was, rather than serving as an opportunity for political action. To discredit the claims of critics that the Cory Magic has waned its popularity and efficacy, the Cory Aquino burial was carefully staged and creatively orchestrated primarily by the media.

Let us now look at the arrangement of networks of communication in place during the burial of Cory and how this fits in the characteristic features of communicative capitalism, namely: the fantasy of abundance, the fantasy of activity or participation, and the fantasy of wholeness (Dean, 2010).

Unlike the years of baffling silence under Martial Law, media now is more free to deliver information to the public. It was a gamble to broadcast the massive burial parade of Ninoy way back in 1983 because of media suppression; and hence, the limited access of information and curtailment of democracy. But, in the case of Cory's death in 2009, big networks now have the liberty of broadcasting blow-by-blow accounts of events that people can see in real time, whether on their TV screens or computer monitors, flooding all channels of information with data and images such as the outpouring of people in the streets to bid Cory farewell. This condition of arrant abundance

and availability of information, compounded by the stirring of people power nostalgia brought about by images that carry the symbols of democracy and freedom such as the yellow ribbon, exudes the presence of democracy, no matter how superficial it may be. This is what Dean (2010) describes as a feature of communicative capitalism wherein “enhanced communications access facilitates democracy...the sheer abundance of messages is offered as an indication of democratic potential” (p. 58). In arguing further, Dean states that under these condition of abundance “messages are more likely to get lost as mere contributions to the circulation of content” (p. 54), and in effect, while enhancing democracy, “it becomes a new form of hegemony” (p. 54).

This new form of hegemony is evident not only in ABS-CBN’s salient jurisdiction over the production, given that the Aquino family solely entrusted ABS-CBN to officially broadcast the burial rites, but more so in the way their production framed the whole event. In the *Salamat Cory* (Lopez, E. III & Santos-Concio, C., 2009) documentary produced by ABS-CBN, not only were the visuals comprehensive and provided an omniscient view of the event, it also illustrated in a cinematic way the huge gap between those who are in power and the masses they govern. The exclusivity of the Manila Cathedral may be one of the reasons why ordinary people should be cordoned and separated from the privileged few who were allowed and invited to sit inside the cathedral. But the way the documentary film *Salamat Cory* was edited and put together only further “naturalized” and magnified this social gap. In addition to this, the very personalities framed in the interior shots of the cathedral, are also the same political personalities representative of the dominant forces in the political and economic configuration of Philippine society.

In spite of this graphic illustration of power relations in the documentary film that occludes the presence of democracy, the people remain oblivious to this striking gap. The availability of media forms like live streaming and video-chat enabled the people who were set aside in the burial ceremony, to gain virtual access of the event, thereby seemingly closing the gap and blurring the class distinction so visually evident in the film. Along this line, we can connect the workings of fantasy participation in the “Aquino Magic” in the way this seemingly abundant contribution and easy access through network communication enables virtual participation. As one quotation from the book *Cory Magic* (Rodrigo & Roces, 2009) states:

I’m happy that the Filipino people showed and are still showing their gratitude to Tita Cory for all her sacrifices.  
(It) won’t last unless we do something concrete and turn all

these outpouring of love and support into a movement! Let us invite all our FILIPINO facebook friends into the TITACORY MOVEMENT FB group and be a force to reckon with! If we have all the numbers and through this medium... all stay informed on the events happening in our country. They can't possibly ignore us!

If we want our country to change, then it should start from us. Let us BE THE CHANGE NOW! (Anton Mari H. Lim, as cited by Rodrigo, Mercado & Roces, p. 378 )

This virtual participation is problematic and implicates the kind of false freedom and pseudo-democracy that we have. Through the registration effect of virtual participation by use of technology, people think that they are active when in fact they are passive or interpassive (Zizek as cited by Dean, 2010, p. 60). Interpassivity is an assumption by the subject that he/she is active through or by means of a fetish object that serves as a screen to project frantic activity while hiding one's passivity. This fetish object in our case is the internet and new media technologies.

So, while the quotation above is full of optimism about the new level of inter-connectedness and new means of empowerment among Filipinos through new media, there is really no action beyond the message. Virtual participation remains, as the term implies, simulated or superficial and therefore depoliticizing rather than empowering. I even ventured to go to one of the Cory Aquino Twitter and FB sites, but all I saw were just repetition of likes, brief comments and insights that do not really merit a substantial transformation into action.

But some would probably argue that the mere fact that actual and real people thronged the streets to pay their last respects for Cory can be considered real action, which, in a way, is empowering and inspiring. I contend, however, that this "activity," while it is argued as real, is limited and already pre-calculated or even a manufactured effect of media coverage. After all, a manageable visibility of moderate mobilization in the streets is a necessary cinematic backdrop of the whole drama. While this drama unfolds and is projected on our TV screens, monitors, projectors and mobile devices, reaching the farthest overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) in the Middle East or anywhere in the world, networked communications have blurred geography and exudes the fantasy of subjects belonging to the global or that fantasy of wholeness in communicative capitalism.

## Conclusion

The Aquino Magic managed at the level of the individual to provide the people with a constant false hope of freedom and democracy while freeing the government from accountability. It exhausted the utility of death and the notion of martyrdom in the creation of a political icon and proliferation of necropolitics. While the current Aquino administration reaps the advantages of the Aquino Magic, it has also contributed to its misuse and abuse for the purpose of sustaining political survival or in insulating itself from criticisms. Tadiar (2004), in referring to the effect of Cory Magic, therefore has a point in noting that “while it toppled down a dictator through ‘people power’, it diffused the people’s revolutionary potential rather than consolidated it as a significant counter-hegemonic power” (p. 191).

We could therefore say that the Aquino Magic and the people power drama it performed along with its actors is intensely linked to neoliberal governmentality. However, its most effective potential is in how it extends neoliberalism down to the population’s technologies of the self and in the fashionable, if not popular, operation of communicative capitalism. In breaking the spell of the Aquino Magic, Filipinos must regain and retrieve its own version of people’s power that is truly empowering.

## References:

- Aquino, B. S. III (2014). *State of the nation address of his excellency Benigno S. Aquino III president of the Philippines to the Congress of the Philippines*. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.ph/2014/07/28/president-aquino-iii-fifth-sona/>
- Aquino, B. (Ed.). (1990). *Presidential leadership and Cory Aquino: U.P. assessment project on the state of the nation*. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies.
- Aquino, C. (1986). *Democracy by the ways of democracy: Speeches of President Corazon C. Aquino during her official visit to the United States*. Manila: publisher?
- Brown, W. (2003). Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy. *Theory & Event*, 7(1). Retrieved from [http://muse.jhu.edu/login?type=summary&url=/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v007/7.1brown.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?type=summary&url=/journals/theory_and_event/v007/7.1brown.html).
- Constantino, R. (2000). EDSA revisited. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 30(3), 425-427. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/194233792?accountid=141617>.
- Dean, J. (2010). *Communicative capitalism: Circulation and the foreclosure of politics*. Retrieved from <http://commonconf.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/proofs-of-tech-fetish.pdf>.
- Gatmaytan, D. (2006). It's all the rage: Popular uprisings and Philippine democracy. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal*, 15(1), 1-37. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/194908072?accountid=141617>.
- iamninoy.com (2014, February 28). *I am Ninoy- I am Cory Movement*. Retrieved from [http://iamninoy.com/index.php/iamninoy\\_iamcory\\_movement/](http://iamninoy.com/index.php/iamninoy_iamcory_movement/)
- Lane, M. (1990). *The urban mass movement in the Philippines*. Australia: Panther Publishing.
- Lemke, T. (2001). The birth of biopolitics-Michel Foucault's lecture at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and Society*, 30(2), 190-207. Retrieved March 15, 2015 from <http://www.development.wne.uw.edu.pl/uploads/Courses/jkLemke.pdf>,
- Lopez, E. III & Santos-Concio, C. (Producer). (2009). *Salamat, President Cory: 1933-2009 A Tribute to the Mother of Philippine Democracy* [Documentary]. Philippines: ABS-CBN:
- Maranan, E. (Ed.). (1989). *The Philippines revolution of February 1986: Perspectives on the problems of transition from dictatorship to democratic space*. Diliman, Quezon City: Asian Center, University of the Philippines.
- Mbembe, A.(2003). Necropolitics (L. Meintjes, Trans.). *Public Culture*, 15(10), 11-40. Retrieved from <http://biopoliticssacrossborders.wordpress.com/2011/01/31/mbembes-necropolitics-notes/>
- Mydans, S. (2009). Political overtones surround Aquino funeral. Retrieved February 27, 2014 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/06/world/asia/06aquino.html>.
- Ranada, P. (2014). Roces, M. (2001). *Kinship politics in postwar Philippines : the Lopez family, 1946-2000*. Manila:De La Salle University Press.
- Rodrigo, R. & Roces, M. (2009). *Cory Magic: Her People's Stories*. Quezon City: ABS-CBN Publishing Inc.
- Tadiar, N. (2004). *Fantasy-Production: sexual economies and other Philippine consequences for the new world order*. Quezon City: Ateneo University Press.
- Thompson, M. (2010). Populism and the revival of reform: Competing political narratives in the Philippines. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 32(1),1-28.

**MAE URTAL CARALDE** is an independent filmmaker and a multimedia arts instructor at the Mapua Institute of Technology. She is a BFA Visual Communication graduate at the UP College of Fine Arts, obtained her MA Media Studies (Film)and currently pursuing her Phd in Media Studies at the UP College of Mass Communication. (corresponding author: [mae.caralde@gmail.com](mailto:mae.caralde@gmail.com)).