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## **Civil and Uncivil Society: Symbolic Boundaries and Civic Exclusion in Metro Manila**

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# Civil and Uncivil Society Symbolic Boundaries and Civic Exclusion in Metro Manila

This article interprets the two events in 2001 that deposed and attempted to reinstall Philippine President Joseph Estrada, known as Edsa 2 and Edsa 3, as two sides of a struggle over symbolic class boundaries. It argues that class is a particularly productive mode of analysis if attention is given to its cultural expression through status distinctions. In Metro Manila the distinction between *masa* (of the masses) and *di masa* (not of the masses) suggests two class positions contending over the right to the city. Because class making involves the expressly political work of representation, representations of Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 draw symbolic boundaries between civil and uncivil society.

**KEYWORDS:** SOCIAL CLASS • SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES • CIVIL SOCIETY • URBAN POOR

Why would one protest aimed at the ouster of a sitting president through extraconstitutional means be lauded as the manifest will of a civil society, while a second protest, staged months later at the same site but aimed at that president's restoration, be depicted in terms of conspiracy, criminality, and rebellion? The two events, Edsa 2 and Edsa 3, must be taken together as the two sides of a struggle, ostensibly over the figure of deposed Philippine president Joseph Estrada but, more fundamentally, over the symbolic boundaries regulating inclusion in civil society. This article presents a reading of Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 based on field research and the literature.<sup>1</sup> Specifically three sequential arguments are made. (1) Class can be a particularly productive mode of analysis if we pay attention to how it is expressed culturally through status distinctions, which convey the everyday experience of class as well as indicate a line of contestation grounded in separate and unequal fields of interaction. (2) Within Metro Manila, distinguishing between *masa* and *di masa* is a way of distinguishing between two class positions contending over what Henri Lefebvre calls the right to the city. Finally, (3) the symbolic distinction between civil and uncivil society informed representations of Edsa 2 as an organized, morally legitimate citizens movement and Edsa 3 as disorganized, morally illegitimate, and resulting from elite manipulation. The overall argument developed here anticipates a future research project and hence, is both directive and probationary. I should note at the outset that I overrepresent the perspective of Edsa 2 forces. This is not my ultimate intention. At this point, I simply lack empirical data speaking to the perspective of the Edsa 3 demonstrators. Mostly available documentary sources have Edsa 2 forces speaking for them. For the time being, it suffices to say that this dynamic speaks to the heart of my argument.

### Edsa 3

On 17 January 2001, a throng of mainly middle-class demonstrators took to the streets gathering along Metro Manila's main thoroughfare, the Epifanio de Los Santos Avenue or EDSA, a hallowed site in the city's geography of protest.<sup>2</sup> The demonstrators were outraged by charges that Estrada was receiving kickbacks from an illegal gambling game. Estrada had been impeached; however, during the trial his supporters in the Senate blocked a key piece of evidence, an envelope allegedly containing information on bank

accounts for which Estrada had signed under an alias. The Catholic Church and eventually the police and military joined in the mass demonstration that became popularly known as Edsa 2. Days later, on 20 January, the Supreme Court installed vice president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as president. Despite a wave of scattered protests, Estrada's supporters seemed to accept the development—until Estrada's arrest on 25 April. The spectacle of their president being taken into police custody instigated the massing at EDSA of demonstrators heavily composed of the urban poor. By 30 April the size of this self-proclaimed Edsa 3 rivaled that of Edsa 2. Yet many commentators discounted its size for its character. Text messages circulated depicting the Edsa 3 crowd as opportunistic, stupid, or dirty.<sup>3</sup> The major dailies would not even refer to Edsa 3 as such, Edsa status being too great an honor for what was disparaged as a "farce," a "riot," and a "desecration" of EDSA. Pundits pointed to the disbursement of food and money and the use of drugs by some of the demonstrators. One editorial derided the demonstration as *hakot*, a "rent-a-crowd" (Soliven 2001).

On 1 May a fraction of the demonstrators, goaded by Estrada-aligned politicians, stormed Malacañang, the presidential palace. They traced a path of riot, hurling stones at the police and torching the vans of TV stations that had, until that point, neglected to cover the event. After a siege of six hours, with four dead and over a hundred wounded, Edsa 3 dissipated. The demonstrators identified the targets of this fury in their so-called "rogue's gallery." Arroyo, Cardinal Jaime Sin, former presidents Fidel Ramos and Corazon Aquino, the Makati Business Club, and the two giant TV networks were all portrayed as pillars of elite domination. The success with which *trapos*<sup>4</sup> stoked sentiments of class antagonism reveals an unmeasured depth of resentment. Consider the enthusiasm with which the crowds received Jose "Jinggoy" Ejercito Estrada's goad to "punch mestizos in the nose"—not in order to break their noses but to flatten them so they would look like the *masa*.

Edsa 3 has been explained mainly in terms of elite manipulation and the *masa*'s susceptibility to populist appeals. To be sure, this argument goes a long way. After all, despite their avowed identification with the *masa*, the political elite's own class situation suggests little basis for empathy with it. As one columnist pointed out, the cost of one of Estrada's mansions could build 2,000 houses for the poor—an entire village—and Estrada had five mansions in just one subdivision. The cost of his Olympic-size swimming pool could

build 10,000 artesian wells, and the cost of just one, exceptionally plush, master bedroom a large school with 250 classrooms or a small hospital with 150 beds (Bondoc 2001). Moreover, the numbers of Edsa 3 largely resulted from the mobilization of factional support, in particular, the urban poor and the pro-poor Iglesia ni Kristo Church and the El Shaddai charismatic movement, as well as the activation of the electoral machine, with *liders*<sup>5</sup> tasked with delivering a certain number of warm bodies from the provinces to Manila. Many of these bodies were fed and paid. Finally, Edsa 3 came apart just as its leadership fractured, one segment wanting to storm Malacañang and the other balking—no doubt fretting about their political futures—at what was beginning to resemble a putsch. Under this argument, the question of why the poor were so easily, even willingly, manipulated is answered by faulting the poor for their benightedness. Cardinal Sin, in a gesture redolent with condescension, publicly prayed for the masa's forgiveness "for they know not what they are doing" (Araneta and Danao 2001). One editorial called them "cannon fodder." Paternalistic sentiments, like the following, were typical: "Clearly, the poor must produce their own leaders . . . create their own symbols, rid themselves of the weight of their bitterness . . . [or] they will remain raw material for the ambitions of cynical politicians and media icons, or warm bodies for military power grabs disguised as people power" (David 2001, 179).

However, even if we accept this argument, we would still have to explain why the terms (representations) used by the elite to incite the masa were so effective. For that matter, how do we explain the terms used by a self-styled modern sector to demean Edsa 3? And how to account for the depth of feeling—resentment or disdain—behind such terms? Clearly, an exclusive focus on elite domination obscures a dimension of symbolic struggle that is key to a more robust understanding of Philippine urban politics, both at the levels of collective action and individual interaction. The kind of representations mobilized on either side of Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 indexes a boundary that is both deep-seated and pervasive, a boundary that organizes an array of distinctions in its reinscription, such that mundane details—where one shops, what one wears, and how one wears it, what TV shows one watches, whether one drives or "commutes" (i.e., takes public transportation)—which say nothing in themselves, are made to divulge status distinctions. They are read as clues; sniffed out, so to speak, by an impeccable "nose" for social class.

## Class Making

Class analysis is not a popular mode of explaining politics in the field of Philippine Studies. The preferred, if not predominant, framework is that of elite or oligarchic democracy.<sup>6</sup> Many of the scholars who study class point to the multiplicity of factors obscuring class distinctions and, hence, class identification: its complexity and variance across settings (particularly across the urban-rural divide); the predominance of patronage relations in directing alignments; competing horizontal links of kinship, provincialism, local association, and of course, formal enfranchisement; the complicating role of migration and remittances; and the dominance of discourses that implicitly dismiss it (Turner 1977; Magdalena 1980; Pertierra 1988; Kerkvliet 1990).<sup>7</sup> As a result, the economic categories that class demarcates largely fail to correspond to any real sense of community. There is little feeling, in other words, for actually belonging to a class. Consequently, class either poorly predicts social action or it does so bluntly, embedded within more salient principles of identification like status.

In fact, Philippine scholars of class regularly note an acute status consciousness relative to, and expressive of, a class "unconscious." Turner (1977, 323) describes status as "a constant concern bordering on a consuming passion" for the residents of the provincial town in which he conducted his dissertation fieldwork. Having vainly searched for signs of class in another provincial town, Lynch (1959, 96) identifies, as class, two status groups: "big" versus "little" people, distinguished simply by the single criterion of "security derived from assured and adequate income." Magdalena (1980) adapted the anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner's work to develop a "reputational approach" designed precisely to measure economic class through status. Pinches (1999a), and in less explicit ways Kerkvliet (1990) and Pertierra (1988), argue for a close, if not practically inextricable, connection between class and status, with the latter generally expressing the former. Tellingly the most popular model of "class" structure—an A through E classification system widely utilized by journalists, policy makers, and marketers, with "AB" representing the upper class, "C" the middle class, and "D" and "E" the lower classes—relies heavily on status indicators.<sup>8</sup>

Weber (1914/1978), of course, defined status as expressing a specific style of life through the consumption and use of goods. Whether a particular stylization of life is imbued with honor or stigma is a cultural question; hence, status is properly a cultural category. To consider class and status

together as the material and symbolic aspects of the same phenomenon is simply to correct a narrow conceptualization of class as strictly an economic category and to restore a cultural dimension vital to robust explanations of social action (where, otherwise, material interests would be left to account for history).

Moreover, to recover class analysis as a mode of thinking about and explaining politics is to correct a tendency congenital to the elite democracy approach to view Philippine politics simply as the politics of the Philippine political elite, and to clarify a wider and more fluid political field. Indeed, the most productive contemporary class analyses within the field take culture and its historicity into account and, as a result, disclose dimensions of politics otherwise obscured. For example, according to Aguilar (1998), the class domination of Negrense *hacenderos* (sugar planters) throughout the twentieth century cannot be viewed as being simply the result of their preponderant wealth. Rather, the “mesmeric effect of Mestizo Power” was predicated on displays of mystical prowess, displays which were enhanced by their wealth, to be sure, but also by their race, education, Masonic ties, and lifestyles, and as well by a certain “cultural ambidexterity” that allowed them to move advantageously between colonial and subaltern domains (ibid., 224).

Because economic class divisions are expressed through cultural distinctions, the symbolic struggles that matter to and move people to act are effectively class—or, more precisely, *class making*—struggles. As Bourdieu (1987, 1991) argues, common conditions and common dispositions only recommend an *analytical* division into classes. Class becomes real—i.e., a basis for identification and action—only once it is represented as such, that is, once various distinctions are collectively taken to delimit actual groups. Class making consists in the expressly political work of representation. That is to say, class is a project aimed at transforming categories into groups (see also Brubaker 2002). This view entails a focus on both the kinds of representations in which actors engage and the kinds of power—what Bourdieu calls “capital”—underwriting such representations; in other words, on both *symbolic* and *social* boundaries.<sup>9</sup>

The literature on symbolic boundaries compels us to recognize social exclusion as cultural as well as structural, consisting not only in a structurally unequal distribution of resources and rights, but most evidently in the common everyday practices that continually reproduce a defined measure

of social distance.<sup>10</sup> While symbolic boundaries are most often used “to enforce, maintain, normalize, or rationalize” social boundaries, they may also be used to contest and reframe them (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 186). Because the nature of this relationship takes shape within specific social and cultural contexts, it is never given and, therefore, requires investigation. With regard to my own investigation, Alexander’s (1992; cf. Alexander and Smith 1993) work is particularly suggestive. He recommends a focus on the “civil symbolic sphere,” arguing that symbolic codes regulate inclusion in society. This mode of analysis could be quite productively applied to third world cities.

For my purposes, third world cities constitute a distinct context of inquiry, one defined by the conflict between two ascendant populations, the middle class and the urban poor, over issues of space and citizenship (that is, the right to participate in civic life). There is literature establishing the explosive growth of the urban poor as an urgent problem across the third world (Davis 2006; UN-HABITAT 2003; 2001). There is, as well, literature documenting the lifestyles and taking measure of the political significance of a growing urban middle class, the main exponents of a self-styled modern sector (Bautista 2006; 1999; Rivera 2001; Owensby 1999; Pinches 1996). Lacking is a consideration of their everyday interaction on the level of culture, and of the resulting political consequences. Specifically, how does everyday boundary work function in the public sphere as a mechanism of civic exclusion? Conversely, how is it used to contest and reframe civic exclusion?

It is not sufficient to argue elite manipulation or simply to demonstrate that Edsa 2 was mainly middle class in composition and that Edsa 3 drew heavily from the urban poor. These arguments fail as cultural explanations. In order to explain the representations that animated Edsa 3, we must pay attention to the “symbolic labor” (Bourdieu 1987) or “symbolic boundary work” (Lamont 1992) that went into defining the lines of contestation.

### **Masa and Di Masa**

#### **A sense of class**

A sense of class pervades everyday life. It is evident in language: in the use of Filipino or English and in the accent of one’s English (the more American, the more “classy”). It is evident in the configuration of spaces and in the practice of spacing, from the tide of squattervilles lapping at the walls of sub-

divisions to the allowable measure in between bodies; and it is inscribed in the bodies themselves, in hair and skin color, in posture and conduct, in how they smell. It expresses a particular set of styles and is manifest in predispositions by taste—in music and food, in entertainment and vice. As Bourdieu (1987, 5) observes, a sense of class is a sense of one's place, which at the same time is a sense of the place of others. Common, everyday practices—the accumulation of mundane choices circumscribed by a sense of one's place—structure class, making it seem concrete and external as well as intuitive.

In July and August 2007, while conducting a small-scale research project designed precisely to flesh out this sense of class, I asked several middle-class women to define the *masa*. Their responses were so self-assured that it quickly became clear that their definitions invoked a familiar boundary, one they retraced repeatedly in their everyday life.

Ms. Flores: They watch *Wowowee* and *Eat Bulaga*. They read tabloids. Because they lack breeding, they lack finesse. For example, they talk loudly inside the jeep or FX or they talk with their mouths open.<sup>11</sup>

Ms. Perez: Take, for example, my secretary Bebeth. She just got married. While she really wanted her wedding dress to be classy, it came out garish (*bakyang-bakya*) anyway. She chose a dress with a V-neck, a large sash with embroidery that looked like a mosquito net, and it had glitter! It's like Bebeth can recognize classiness but can't quite copy it.

A term like *masa*, along with its numerous symbolic cognates (*jologs*, *bakya*, *baduy*, *promdi*, and so on), almost all of which evoke the image of unsophisticated provincial migrants to the city, designates a particular status position but is commonly used to convey the everyday experience of class in Metro Manila. An exposition of the term will be instructive. Quite literally, *masa* means “of the masses.” According to Villegas (2001), the historian Teodoro Agoncillo popularized the term with his book about Bonifacio, *The Revolt of the Masses*, published in 1956. The term gained increasing currency throughout the 1960s and 1970s, probably in no small part due to the burgeoning Leftist movement. Of course, at the time *masa* meant something like “the people,” in the exalted sense of “the people's democracy,”

but over time developed a primary connotation of vulgarity closely associated with poverty, a lack of refinement, and ignorance. It came to mean something like “the great unwashed,” indicating ironically the excesses of democracy. The term is more commonly used as an adjective. As such it is normally employed derogatively, as in the above passage, Bebeth's wedding dress, being in bad taste, is *pang-masa*, that is, fit only for the *masa*. (The word is not always derogatory. Sometimes, in a move invoking its original connotation, calling oneself *masa* is a point of, often nationalist, pride.) As a noun, it is usually a way of characterizing the poor as politically, morally, and aesthetically backward. While there is not one word that adequately serves to indicate the opposite condition at its most basic, the term *masa* is often deployed precisely in order to distinguish this position of being *di masa*, literally “not *masa*,” against it. Cullinane (1993) and others use the term *burgis* to designate this position. Although it is not at all current, I prefer *di masa* because it immediately conveys the distinction at issue and, at the same time, suggests the inequality in symbolic power informing it. *Masa* is the “othered” position, the one that must be distinguished against in order to establish one's own position as normative and thus efface it.

This distinction between *masa* and *di masa* would seem to follow from the colonial distinction between civilized and uncivilized. It would do well to remember that this distinction is drawn foremost across time, with the modern and the savage putatively inhabiting temporalities separated by a period of civilization, a civilizing period; and it would seem just so, in the scene of postcolonial democracy, with the modern and the vulgar, a distinction which Chakrabarty (2000) notes informs efforts to differentiate between the citizen and the “not yet citizen.” As stated earlier, more than poverty *masa* indicates a lack of fluency in modern cultural codes; or, in Bourdieusian terms, a lack of cultural capital. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a kind of competence with regard to a “legitimate culture.” In the Philippine context, legitimacy is associated with a “modern” orientation. (One robust measure of cultural capital in the Philippines would seem to be the ability to emulate lifestyles in the West or to reinflect them in distinctly Filipino ways.) This orientation is inculcated mainly through the institutions of family and school. Hence, as the dominant discourse on Edsa 3 illustrates, the modern sector typically characterizes the *masa* in terms of a lack of schooling and breeding, and they view their role with regard to the *masa* as a tutelary one. At the same time, however, their status is defined by the *masa*'s very degrada-



tion. Because the social limit between masa and di masa is a source of symbolic power, social distance must be carefully preserved through practices that continually reinscribe the “restrictions on social intercourse” (Weber 1914/1978, 932) defining their status.

Estrada expertly exploited this distinction for political capital. By fashioning himself as the masa’s representative, he successfully mobilized along this line, accomplishing, Bello (2001) notes wistfully, what had eluded the Left for decades. Tapping deep currents of resentment, he styled himself a “modern Bonifacio” and, during Edsa 2, portrayed himself as the victim of “Makati-based *insulares* and *peninsulares*”<sup>12</sup> in order to advertise his complicity with the masa.

### The right to the city

Within the social context of Metro Manila, distinguishing between masa and di masa is a way of distinguishing between two class positions contending over what Henri Lefebvre calls the right to the city.

Rampant land speculation, poorly regulated land markets, and the state’s abdication of its planning functions to private enterprises compound an already extremely skewed distribution of land in Metro Manila (Shatkin 2008). Meanwhile, rates of urban migration, driven by the demand for low-skill, low-wage, often contractual (“flexible”) work in the manufacturing and service sectors, continue to increase (Shatkin in press). Consequently, land values have grown exorbitantly. Between 1992 and 1995 alone, the land values of central locations tripled; they increased by 1,000 percent in some areas on the urban fringe (Berner 1997, 124). Prohibitive land values have rendered legal tenure impossible for most of the city’s workers. “The price of one square meter anywhere near the commercial centers,” writes Berner (ibid., xv), “far exceeds the annual income of any jeepney driver or security guard.” As a result, while the urban poor comprise a fifth of Metro Manila’s population, from 33 to 50 percent live in informal settlements (Bautista 1998; ADB 2001; Karaos 2003). Squatters comprise a “community of fate,” the vanguard of a class-like “popular sector” distinguished by its restricted life chances and diminished means of consumption, that is, its reduced access to formal markets and basic services (housing mainly, but also education, health care, and standard municipal provisions like garbage collection, sewerage, potable water, and electricity). The term squatter, by the way, connotes many of the same things masa does but in a way that is specific to illegal settlers. For example, one of Velasco’s (2005, 2)

respondents takes pains to distinguish the status from the fact of informal settlement: “We’re not squatters. We just live here.” (*Hindi kami squatter. Nakikitira lang kami rito.*)

In contradistinction, the urban middle class represents the primary exponent of a self-styled modern sector. It has been growing in size and political significance since the 1960s. Consisting mainly of elite (credentialed) workers—i.e., professionals, administrators, officials, and managers—and the petty bourgeoisie, the middle classes comprise 32 to 40 percent of all households in Metro Manila, by far the largest concentration in the country (Bautista 1999; Rivera 2001). The middle class has been playing an increasingly activist role in Philippine politics over recent decades largely through participation in so-called civil society organizations. These organizations furnished the organizational infrastructure of Edsa 2 and, to a large extent, its people power. According to one survey, 47 percent of the demonstrators in Edsa 2 were middle class (“C” in an A-E scheme); 56 percent, if we count the educated segment of the working class (“D”), including, as Bautista (2001, 9) argues we should, those groups with a certain degree of “political literacy” indicative of a “modern sensibility.” Rivera (2001) characterizes the middle class by its “lust” for modernity,<sup>13</sup> also noting on the basis of survey data its intense class consciousness. This consciousness plays out spatially through symbolic boundary work.

“Objective distances,” Bourdieu (1987, 5) writes, “tend to reproduce themselves in the subjective experience of distance, remoteness in space being associated with a form of aversion or lack of understanding, while nearness is lived as a more or less unconscious form of complicity.” It might be said that the converse is equally true, that the subjective experience of distance tends to reproduce itself by positing objective distances. That is to say, boundaries drawn symbolically not only reflect but also regulate, reinforce, and sometimes produce (become manifest in) spatial boundaries.

Metro Manila is a patchwork of discrete spaces kept discrete, however crushed together, by symbolic boundaries. The modern and popular sectors are neighbors in fact but not in truth. Their respective spaces are organized by divergent spatial logics, and to an extent are mutually forbidding. Pinches (1994, 22) describes finding his way in a middle-class neighborhood through the universal “language” of bureaucratic order—streets with names, arranged in a grid—while deciphering the spatial form of the poor barangay only “by coming to know the social form: as particular openings, closures, rises, falls,

twists and turns in the spaces between dwellings came to be associated with particular families, households or neighbors.”

Hence, a lack of association translates into a lack of recognition, particularly on the part of the upper classes, whose relative power allows them to all but ignore the people who clean their houses and raise their children. And yet they find themselves hemmed in, besieged, by the unruly spaces of unplanned development, hostile colors in a game of Go. To compensate, they deploy strategies of enclosure (behind walls, gates, and guards) and exclusion (largely by designing spaces to discourage *masa* patronage or render it prohibitive). The “cleansed” spaces are then linked in a way that obviates the *masa* such that “the wealthy increasingly experience the city as an archipelago of carefully planned consumer, residential and work spaces (malls, condominiums, gated subdivisions) connected by elevated, climate controlled transport” (Shatkin 2005, 20).<sup>14</sup> Such restructuring articulates a city within the city, a fantasy Manila of a first world future; thoroughly modern, thoroughly integrated into the circuitry of capital. Ultimately, however, it articulates merely a conceit of the city unencumbered by the *masa*; a conceit of escape.

Symbolic boundaries are patrolled from above by acts of shaming, such that “when people find themselves in the company of others more privileged than themselves, or are faced with this prospect, they commonly say ‘we feel ashamed’ (*‘nahiya kami’* or simply *‘nakakahiya’*)” (Pinches 1988, 179). There is, moreover, a constant parrying across boundaries, perhaps necessarily, in order for each side to continually affirm its social reality. Pinches (1992) documents practices of negating and emulating *burgis* values among the urban poor of Tatalon. The poor often vacillate between strategies because of the inherent limits of each. Practices of negation—like, for example, quitting a job because of a condescending boss—activate values held in solidarity with other poor people, a sense of dignity, but can carry heavy consequences, in this case the loss of income. In contrast, practices of emulation may bring “respectability” but undermine feelings of class fraternity. Pinches cites the predicament of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who may want to use their earnings to enhance their social standing by, for example, relocating to a better neighborhood. Their success in terms of social mobility, however, is “contingent on accepting the very criteria used to denigrate [their] class or status” (ibid., 85). These kinds of predicaments, he argues, suggest a view of hegemony as an “active entanglement.” The status hierarchy is at once

“both tantalizing and brutalizing” because the poor find themselves imbricated “in the institutions and mores of bourgeois life [even] in the very process of resistance” (ibid., 86, 88).

Shame regulates as well the symbolic partitioning of urban space. To illustrate: one of my respondents, a construction worker named Mang Pedro, refused to enter Jollibee, a fast-food restaurant, despite my repeated invitations. He would choose to eat his hamburger outside the premises, clearly feeling that he would be “out of place”<sup>15</sup> if he entered, not only in the sense of being personally uncomfortable but also in the sense of having trespassed. We see these dynamics of shame at work in Edsa 3. The massing at EDSA of Edsa 3 demonstrators was taken as an occupation, in Cardinal Sin’s words, a “desecration”; one suspects this was not because, as some claimed, people urinated near the EDSA shrine but because of the shrine’s appropriation by the kind of people who, according to stereotype, lacked a sufficient sense of shame *not* to urinate nearby.

### Civil and Uncivil Society

Symbolic boundary work is significant in structuring social life. Efforts to distinguish between two class positions, *masa* and *di masa*, clarify a line of contestation grounded in separate and unequal fields of interaction. Distinctive lifeworlds account for contradictory conceptions of politics rooted in divergent moral codes. For the *masa*, “bad” politics is a politics of callousness and insult, while ‘good’ politics is a politics of consideration and kindness. In contrast, many in the upper and middle classes tend to view ‘bad’ politics as a dirty politics of patronage and corruption, while they see ‘good’ politics as a clean politics of issues, accountability, transparency” (Schaffer 2005, 15; see also Kerkvliet 1990). At this point, I may now develop my argument in full.

The structured symbolic categories of pure and impure, phrased in the colonial categories of civilization and barbarism, inform the cultural terms of inclusion into and exclusion from civil society. In particular, the symbolic distinction between civil and uncivil society informs representations of Edsa 2 as an organized, morally legitimate citizens movement and Edsa 3 as disorganized, morally illegitimate, and resulting from elite manipulation. This distinction draws substantially from Chatterjee’s (2006) notion of “political society,” by which he means that domain of subaltern political activity falling outside civil society. While civil society exists within the cultural field of the market economy and civil law, the prototypical figure of uncivil society



is taken to be the squatter, a figure whose very livelihood and habitat are premised on the violation of law.

In the Philippine context, civil society is most aptly defined in terms of an “organized citizenry” united by a specific set of normative, hence political, commitments (Carroll 2002, 6). While these commitments are portrayed as universal, in actuality civil society is largely the expression of a middle-class constituency comprising nongovernmental (NGO) and professional organizations.<sup>16</sup> A conception of modernity as an ethical project animates civil society. Its exponents view their proper relation to the *masa* as tutelary (hence, disciplinary), conceiving their task in terms of the *masa*’s incorporation behind their leadership. Of course, this conception presupposes the *masa*’s exclusion from civil society, which is also to say that it conceals the symbolic boundary work of actively excluding the *masa*.

Civic exclusion operates on the basis of “civic competence,” a variable often conflated with education but more accurately indicates a condition of cultural and moral fitness according to the prevailing norms of discourse. The lack of such fitness is cause to discount, or at least mediate, the democratic right to speak and be heard. Then avowedly pro-Estrada senator Miriam Santiago is mistaken to conclude that “this is just a numbers game,” that by simply mobilizing more people than were at Edsa 2, Edsa 3 would compel legitimacy and Estrada would be reinstalled. The question of why the *masa*, despite their numbers, count for *less* is the question at the crux of Edsa 3. What is really at issue, in other words, is the symbolic domination of a self-styled modern sector endowed with the authority (cultural capital) to “define the situation” and the resources to objectify their definition. (Columnist Max Soliven [2001] noted that the stock market leapt eighteen points with the news of Estrada’s arrest and plummeted twenty-five points the very next day with the news of the massing Edsa 3 crowds.)

We should understand Edsa 3 against this context, as significant in its departure from a regime of symbolic domination, a departure marked by the *masa*’s sudden and ferocious visibility. Participants in Edsa 3 engaged in a politics of recognition; a politics against invisibility—against the kind of routine denigration described by one participant: “some cars of wealthy people passed us by and they threw coins at us. In their eyes we are not worth any more than pocket change” (cited in Schaffer 2005, 19). This kind of politics was the key to Estrada’s popularity among the *masa*. His campaign, his very persona, actively invited the *masa* to recognize itself

in him. Estrada purposely blurred the lines between his candidacy and his movie star persona as a tough guy or down-and-out loser, such that his persona *was* his candidacy: he played a man of the *masa*. Estrada’s stumbling on English, his swagger, his improprieties—his drinking, gambling, and mistresses—all comprised a performance precisely keyed to the scales of “low” culture.<sup>17</sup> Even though his administration failed to lower poverty incidence and was marked by an actual reduction in the poor’s access to education, electricity, and health services, it was sufficient that Estrada represented the poor in name (Balisacan 2001).

Consequently, Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 were performances of opposing conceptions of citizenship. Manifested in Edsa 2 was one conception based on normative ideals like good governance, the rule of law, an impersonal bureaucracy, and nationalism. This conception of citizenship was defined implicitly against the *masa*, a distinction Edsa 2 forces made explicit in Edsa 3. Edsa 3, in contrast, enacted a counterclaim to citizenship by positing a conception based on the demand for recognition and equal consideration, as well as entitlement norms. This counterclaim explicitly rebutted the conceit of Edsa 2 forces that they represented the people.<sup>18</sup> By promulgating a definition of citizenship shorn of cultural criteria—effectively, by equating citizenship with the *masa*—the demonstrators appropriated the narrative of popular sovereignty, compelling Edsa 2 forces to shift the emphasis of their argument to questions of civic competence on the basis of a different narrative, that of “progress.”

We might further explain Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 with regard to the segregation of Metro Manila, which would seem to have conditioned how the participants of Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 were mobilized and from where they were mobilized. If we disaggregate the composition of both demonstrations, we see that Edsa 2’s constituency was made up of two largely middle-class coalitions, Kompil II, comprising over 250 organizations, and the Estrada Resign Movement (a smaller coalition), and students from mainly elite universities (Rivera 2001; Velasco 2004; Arugay 2004). Edsa 3’s constituency, in turn, was made up of three main blocs, the largely lower middle-class members of the Catholic charismatic movement El Shaddai and the indigenous Protestant church Iglesia ni Kristo, and the mainly slum-dwelling urban poor.

The claim that the urban poor, Edsa 3’s core constituency, were unorganized and thus susceptible to demagogic manipulation is largely inaccurate. The urban poor associate in a different way through a different kind of

organization. The civil society organizations (CSOs) of Edsa 2 center around common issues, interests, or identities and are usually sectoral in scope; in contrast, the community-based organizations (CBOs) of the urban poor, being mainly parochial in scope, center around a common locality.<sup>19</sup> The CBOs are organized for the management of pressing communal tasks like defending against crime, fire, or demolition, and only incidentally become bases of political mobilization (Berner 1998). They not only comprise a locality but also define it.

Distinct patterns of social relations resulted in distinct patterns of mobilization, such that for Edsa 2 strong organizational ties mediated mobilization, while for Edsa 3 strong local ties as well as weak, asymmetric (hierarchical) ties with political patrons brokered by political entrepreneurs mediated mobilization. Furthermore, participants in Edsa 2 and Edsa 3, respectively, mobilized from different kinds of spaces. The former came to EDSA from schools and corporate and government offices—sites of professional association—while the latter came to EDSA largely from the informal settlements in which they lived.

## Explaining Politics

Consideration of symbolic boundary work as a social and political force clearly improves on explanations of Philippine politics by illuminating a significant and currently understudied dimension of social action. By way of conclusion, I situate my argument with regard to other works within the field of Philippine Studies that share my general topic and approach. The eminent compatibility of accounts drawn from various disciplines—sociology, anthropology, literature, and film—suggests the promise of cultural approaches in contributing toward more robust explanations of Philippine politics.

Hedman (2001) cites the growth in popularity of Philippine cinema as a significant factor in explaining Estrada's rise. She argues that Filipino movies fostered a new kind of social imaginary, a mass consciousness, by showing the *masa* representations of themselves. "Philippine cinema was the first to identify the *bakya* or subaltern culture,' and thus to forge 'direct linkages with the largely invisible masses'" (ibid. quoting Agustin Sotto, 43). Since Estrada's election, celebrity has become an increasingly effective means to political office. If celebrities are not candidates themselves, they are hired to endorse candidates. As the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism reports, "showbiz" managers loan out their *artista* clients to politicians

with increasing regularity; they arrange packages that include artista appearances in political rallies and motorcades, or the candidate's appearance on sitcoms and variety shows. Even the services of entertainment writers have been engaged to cover campaign beats and issue "praise releases" (Hofileña and Rufo 2001). Artista get elected not just because they are more easily recognizable but because the *masa* can recognize itself in the characters they play in movies and soap operas. But what is it they are really recognizing?

Del Rosario (2004, 45), drawing on Iletto's analysis, argues for an "uninterrupted line of interpretation" extending from the *pasyon* (a dramatical depiction of Christ's passion) to the *pelikula* (cinema) and *telenovela* (soap opera). The *masa* identify with these popular forms insofar as they reiterate cultural themes of suffering and redemption. Del Rosario suggests that Estrada's impeachment trial could be read as a kind of modern-day *pasyon*. Indeed, for the *masa* the issue was never that Estrada was innocent but that he was singled out for corruption in a field of corrupt politicians. The issue, then, was *why* he was singled out, a question dogged by the suspicion that it was because he was, as he had made himself out to be, one of them. The one event sparking Edsa 3 was the very public arrest of Estrada in his own home. The former president was fingerprinted and jailed, his "mug shot" published on the front page of all the dailies. Through his humiliation, the *masa* reexperienced their own daily shamings. The spectacle of their president being treated like a criminal galvanized their resentment. Estrada became, improbably, an embodiment of the *masa*'s suffering, their longing for deliverance from subalternity, and as de Dios and Hutchcroft (2003) have observed a proxy for their power.<sup>20</sup>

The film director Marilou Diaz-Abaya has observed that in Filipino movies redemption is always presented in terms of a *deus ex machina*, as miraculous (cited in del Rosario 2004, 59). Perhaps this is because the masses can conceive of redemption only outside the edges of their reality as presently defined.<sup>21</sup> Edsa, of course, is the preeminent political miracle. Reflecting on Edsa 1, Pinches (1988, 186) notes that the urban poor did not go out of political conviction so much as to partake in an event that he described as effervescent with *communitas*: "For a time, the Edsa uprising and the state of *communitas* that it embodied enabled the people of Tatalon to command recognition, to stand in the presence of the rich without having to contend with the power of shame." In the opening afforded by Edsa 3, I have argued that a politics of recognition took place. If we define politics after Ranciere

(1999) as an interruption in the order of domination by the “part-of-no-part,” we may come to the conclusion that, against the “commonsense” reading of Edsa 3 as merely the unhappy and discounted sequel of Edsa 2, it was the more significant for its breach in the fabric of symbolic domination.

## Notes

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- 1 My account of both Edsa 2 and Edsa 3 draws mainly from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and the *Philippine Star*, both major English-language dailies, as well as Doronila 2001a, b and Tordesillas and Hutchinson 2001.
- 2 The 1986 People Power demonstrations that ousted Ferdinand Marcos (Edsa 1) were held along EDSA.
- 3 For example: “Edsa 1: free the nation from a dictator. Edsa 2: free the nation from a thief. Edsa 3: free lunch, dinner, breakfast, and snacks too . . . let’s go!” (cited in Schaffer 2005, 11).
- 4 A neologism contrived by collapsing “traditional politician.” The word in Filipino means old rag, connoting, as David (2004, 150) puts it, the *trapos*’ “affinity with dirt.”
- 5 In this context, *lidars* are persons charged with rounding up votes for politicians.
- 6 This perspective has been advanced most cogently by scholars like Hutchcroft 1998 and Sidel 1999 who stress the “office-for-profits” angle, or state plunder as the means by which a “political class” is consolidated.
- 7 Aguilar’s (1994) gambling trope explains class disparities according to luck and skill, and as Pinches (1999b) has observed the gospel of entrepreneurship popular among the new rich, despite all evidence to the contrary, promotes a view of the Philippines as a meritocracy. Both ways of seeing negate the structural quality of economic class and all but legitimize it as a natural reflection of individual luck or merit.
- 8 Mainly, how well homes are constructed, with sturdy homes made of heavy, high-quality materials on one end and makeshift structures on the other. Other factors include the household head’s occupation, household income, and the presence of key commodities like running water or a computer (Arroyo 1990).
- 9 Lamont and Molnar 2002 define symbolic boundaries as conceptual distinctions positing social differences and social boundaries as objectified forms of social differences.
- 10 For an overview of the literature on symbolic boundaries see also Pachucki et al. 2007 and Lamont 2001.
- 11 *Wowowee* and *Eat Bulaga* are popular TV game shows. The jeepney and FX are local modes of public transportation.

- 12 *Insulares* and *peninsulares* refer to Spaniards stationed in the Philippines during Spanish colonial rule, the former to Spaniards born in the Philippines and the latter to those born in Spain.
- 13 Rivera 2001 borrows the phrase “lusting after modernity” from Owensby (1999), who studies the Brazilian middle class.
- 14 Shatkin (in press, 6) describes a strategy of “bypass-implant urbanism,” a series of initiatives by the private sector to “facilitate the flow of people and capital between [spaces of production and consumption] by ‘bypassing’ the congested arteries of the ‘public city’ and ‘implanting’ new spaces for capital accumulation designed for consumerism and export-oriented production.” Similarly, Tadiar (1993, 9) notes the extensive use of flyovers—when “there is nowhere to go but up”—to escape the poverty and haphazardness of the “public city.”
- 15 This is, of course, how Mary Douglas 1966 conceptualizes dirt, as something out of its proper place and, hence, contaminating.
- 16 The NGO sector is particularly robust in the Philippines. It encompasses a broad swath of “conscientizing” organizations—that is to say, organizations oriented toward development, advocacy, and community service work—and includes citizens, Leftists, and Church groups. Rivera 2007 puts their number conservatively at 203,000.
- 17 David (2001, 155) writes: “Whenever he speaks without a prepared speech, whether in English or Tagalog, he slides into a familiar grunt, a patented way of talking tough that immediately connects him with the *masa*, but which sharply alienates him from the intelligentsia and the middle class.”
- 18 It is a particular irony that the civil/uncivil society distinction pits the *masa* against the progressive sector, which would normally speak in their name as the sector (so it claims) truly representing “the people.” Given that Edsa 3 spanned Labor Day (May 1), the two premier labor organizations, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines and Kilusang Mayo Uno (May 1 Movement), staged a march toward the presidential palace, not, as would be customary, as an act of protest but in order to *defend* it from the Edsa 3 crowds (Jaymalin and Araneta 2001).
- 19 Shatkin (2007, 43) estimates that there are over 2,000 community-based organizations in Metro Manila. Berner (1997, x) defines locality as “a socially defined spatial setting.”
- 20 “For those who benefit but little from it, government is an abstraction, an alienated entity, whose only palpable dimension is the episodic patronage dispensed by bosses and politicians, which merely reinforces the poor’s real condition of dependence. The same alienated condition causes the electorate in many places repeatedly to elect convicted criminals, underworld characters, and known grafters, simply because such behavior is irrelevant to the more advantageous local clientelist functions those persons discharge, whether this be of a material nature (for example, the local privileges of Ilocandia and Leyte under the Marcoses) or a symbolic one (for example, Estrada’s image as champion of the masses). In either case, the same explanation must be adduced: the people’s own powers are projected onto a strong, charismatic personality, which then confronts them as a powerful icon to be venerated” (De Dios and Hutchcroft 2003, 65).
- 21 As Pertierra 1995 points out, the *masa* often slip into a religious idiom in expressing political demands because they find themselves continually outflanked in the language of secularism, their claims discounted as “irrational” or “impractical.” Aptly Bello 2001 described the Edsa 3 crowd’s fervor as “millenarian.”

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