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Protest Songs in EDSA 1: Decoding the People's Dream of an Unfinished Revolution

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Abstract: *“Twenty-six years after Edsa I, also called the 1986 People Power Revolution, exactly what has changed? People old enough to remember ask the question with a feeling of frustration, while those who are too young find it hard to relate to an event too remote in time.”* (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 25 of February 2012, 12)

The People Power-1 Revolution (also known as EDSA Revolution of 1986 or the Yellow Revolution) was a series of mass demonstrations in the Philippines that took place from February 22-25, 1986. The nonviolent revolution led to the overthrow of then President Ferdinand Marcos that would eventually end his 21-year totalitarian rule and the restoration of democracy in the country. The quote cited above generally represent the sentiment of the people in celebrating EDSA-1 yearly, such feelings of frustration, hopelessness, indifference, and even a question of relevance, eroded the once glorified and momentous event in Philippine history.

The paper aims to provide a historical discussion through textual analysis on the People Power-1 Revolution using as lens the three well known protest songs during that time namely: *Bayan Ko*, *Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo* and *Magkaisa*. Protest songs are associated with a social movement of which the primary aim is to achieve socio-political change and transformation. Protest songs also act as a catalyst for unity, the building of identity, and the expression of shared sentiment and aspiration. In the Philippines there exist a long tradition of protest songs. Filipino protest songs deal with poverty, equality, oppression, anti-imperialism and independence. From the revolutionary kundiman songs of the Katipunan for independence; songs of war by the HUKBALAHAP for continuity of struggle in WWII; protest music in adherence to Communism in the 1960's; and to the protest songs of democracy and social transformation as expressed in the People Power-1 Revolution. Protest songs reflect the long history of the Filipino struggle, the people's dream of finishing the revolution that started in 1896.

Key Words: Protest Songs; People Power-1 Revolution; Activism; Social Movement



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1. INTRODUCTION

“People Power” is a political term representing the populist driving force that characterized any social movement that the primary aim is social and political transformation through the overthrow of an existing government. In the case of the Philippines, it was characterized as a non-violent means that overthrew the Marcos regime who was in power for 21 years. The term “people power” is not new in the context of the Philippines, it was widely used in the 1970’s among community organizers. People power as a concept or as a label was used interchangeably with concepts such as “popular participation,” “empowerment of people,” and “community organizing and mobilization.” In 1978, Senator Benigno ‘Ninoy’ Aquino Jr. introduced its Tagalog equivalent as the name of his party “Lakas ng Bayan” or acronym LABAN with the L sign as its distinct feature.

There exist an abundance of literature discussing the People Power I Revolution of 1986. It is the sole objective of this paper to assess its historical significance using as lens the three well known protest songs of that time namely: *Bayan Ko*, *Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo* and *Magkaisa*. The study believe that People Power I protest songs manifest the people’s expression, sentiment and genuine desire for the betterment of the nation. The goal of this paper is to use primary accounts to substantiate its claims. The paper will subject the three protest songs through textual analysis using Denisoff’s study of social movement and protest songs. In the end, using the three songs as lens will provide insight and opportunity in decoding the people’s dream of an unfinished revolution that was EDSA.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study on social movement and class struggle can be traced back to Marx and Lenin. Workers according to Lenin, are singularly engaged in “outbursts of desperation,” therefore, an

organization must be formed and maintained to “take up the political education of the working class, and the development of political consciousness.” Lenin in his analysis, injected the factor of a “mobilizing force” that is the formation of a “social movement.” One way for “social movement” to be created and propagate “class consciousness” is the used of protest or propaganda songs (Denisoff, pp. 228-229).

In general, for Denisoff the objective of a protest song are the following: (1) The song solicits and arouses outside support or sympathy for a social movement or attitudinal orientation; (2) the song reinforces the value system of individuals who are a priori supporters of a social movement or ideology; (3) the song creates and promotes cohesion and solidarity in an organization or movement supporting the singer’s or composer’s ideological position; (4) the song attempt to recruit individuals to join a specific social movement; (5) the song invokes solutions to real or imagined social phenomena in terms of action to achieve a desired goal; and (6) the song directs attention to some problem situation or discontent, generally in emotion laden terminology (Denisoff, p.229).

Denisoff further characterized protest songs into two: Magnetic Songs and Rhetorical Songs. Magnetic Songs is defined as a song which appeals to the listener and attracts him to a specific social movement or ideology/beliefs which creates solidarity as expressed in the protest songs. Magnetic songs also persuades individuals to support or join the group. It also create cohesion or solidarity among the group and oneness in ideological makeup. On the other hand, Rhetorical songs is designed to point into some condition or phenomenon but requires little commitment and participation from the listener (Denisoff, p. 230).

3. BODY/DISCUSSION

In the Philippines there exist a long tradition of protest songs. Filipino protest songs deal with poverty, equality, oppression, anti-

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imperialism and independence. During the Revolution of 1896-1898 kundiman were used to uplift the spirit and boost the morale of Katipuneros. One such kundiman song was “Alerta, Katipunan” that was used by the KKK in 1896. Another one is “Marangal na Dalit ng Katagalugan” that was composed by Julio Nakpil. It is considered by many to be the very first National Anthem that was commissioned by the Supremo himself Andres Bonifacio in 1896.

During the American colonial period, “Bayan Ko” which was originally written in Spanish with the title “Nuestra Patria” by Filipino Propagandist and Revolutionary General Jose Alejandrino was used in Severino Reyes Zarzuela “Walang Sugat.” The zarzuela was first performed in 1902 as a protest against American colonialism in the Philippines. Its Tagalog lyrics, written in 1929 by Filipino poet Jose Corazon de Jesus will gain its prominence as a protest song after WWII. During the Japanese Occupation, songs by HUKBALAHAP members provided inspiration and a sense of continuity of struggle against the Japanese during the war years.

“BAYAN KO”

Protest song “Bayan Ko” regained cult popularity during the Martial Law years. The song was often used in mass protest against President Marcos. “Bayan Ko” was deemed seditious by the government as a result, public performance of the song was banned with violators facing arrest and detention. As a sign of extreme protest, people sang “Bayan Ko” during the funeral parade of Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. in 1983. “Bayan Ko” was also sang during the People Power Revolution in 1986, singer Freddie Aguilar led the crowd in singing this song to boost courage and hope among protesters. Such realities of the importance of the song in mass protest were captured in the following words:

“A highlight of those gatherings was the soul-stirring songs that local musicians performed to keep the crowd awake and alert. The most prominent musician of those times was folksinger Freddie Aguilar. In one particular rally at Liwasang Bonifacio, surrounded by people raising clenched fists and side by side with opposition figures Cory Aquino and former Sen Lorenzo Tanada, Aguilar played the acoustic guitar and sang ‘Bayan Ko’” (PDI, Feb. 25, 2015, p. 6).

The following are the lyric of the song:

Ang bayan kong Pilipinas,
lupain ng ginto’t bulaklak.
Pag-ibig ang sa kaniyang palad
nag-alay ng ganda’t dilag.
At sa kaniyang yumi at ganda,
dayuhan ay nahalina.
Bayan ko, binihag ka,
nasadlak sa dusa.

Ibon mang may layang lumipad,
kulungin mo at umiiyak!
Bayan pa kayang sakdal dilag,
ang di magnasang maka-alpas?
Pilipinas kong minumutya,
pugad ng luha ko’t dalita,
aking adhika:
makita kang sakdal laya!

“Bayan Ko” is classified as Rhetorical Song for it depict a particular and important history of the Philippines. For one, it gave a picture of the beauty and richness of the country prior to colonization (Spain, US and Japan) as can be seen on the first four lines of the first stanza. The last four lines of the first stanza describe the coming of the Spaniards, the first colonizer of the Philippines. The second stanza made an analogy of freedom of one’s country and the state slavery and colonization as paralleled to a bird in a cage. The last two lines

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in the last stanza induce the listener for an active role and challenge them to act for the country in attaining its former glorified state and condition. Such struggle of Filipinos for independence is also reflective in both American and Japanese occupation of the Philippines.

On the second note, “Bayan Ko” as a protest song continued its relevance even after colonization. Initially, during the late 50’s and 60’s the song advocate for the complete and total independence of the country under American influence and neo-colonial control. In the 1970’s until People Power I Revolution, the song “Bayan Ko” became the battle cry against a totalitarian regime and dictator that would be eventually ousted in EDSA in 1986.

“Bayan Ko” as a Rhetorical Song achieved the goal of invoking solution to a real or imagined social phenomena in terms of action to achieve a desired goal in this case the People Power I Revolution. It also directs attention to some problem situation or discontent like the case of the Martial Law Period. As a result, one can assess that “Bayan Ko” as a song embodies the spirit of struggle of the Filipino people against Marcos and its totalitarian rule that will eventually be culminated in EDSA. As a proof of this historical process, many believed that EDSA I did not actually begin on February 22, 1986. It began with a “noise barrage” in April 1978 when people in Manila showed their protest against the result of the first Parliamentary Election for the Interim Batasang Pambansa. In the said election, Benigno Aquino Jr. and his Liberal Party were routed by the party Kilusang Bagong Lipunan headed by Imelda Marcos and Carlos P. Romulo. Another important event that brought about EDSA was the assassination of Aquino that took place on August 21, 1983 wherein 2 million people marched for 11 hours from Sto. Domingo Church to Manila Memorial Park covering a distance of 32 kilometers. And lastly, the February 7, 1986 snap election between Corazon Aquino and Ferdinand

Marcos proved to be the final straw that witnessed the walkout of NAMFREL volunteers because of massive cheating in the election (PDI, Feb. 26, 2011, p. 20).

This historical process is further stressed by Law and Constitutional expert Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J. in the following words:

“There was never a moment, starting in Sept. 21, 1972. When the nation was not moving toward EDSA. The underground struggle, the bloody encounters, the groans of torture victims, the pamphleteering, the rallies, both political and religious, the silent storming of heavens by contemplative nuns, the whirl of fax machines, the electoral struggle under the most adverse circumstances and, yes, even the collaboration with the enemy---each in its own way contributed to the assurance of rebirth” (PDI, Feb. 28, 2011, p. 23).

“HANDOG NG PILIPINO SA MUNDO”

“Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” was a song composed by APO Hiking Society member Jim Paredes using as his inspiration the success of the People Power Revolution. The song was then performed by singers and artist who were active players in the EDSA Revolution of 1986. The song “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” was released two months after the historic event. An English version was also made and was released internationally bearing the title, “A New and Better Way--- The People’s Anthem.”

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As a protest song, “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” is classified as a Magnetic Song as it tends to persuade and attract listeners to join or support the cause of the movement in this case the EDSA Revolution. This reality can be seen in stanza 2, 3 and 4 of the song. Stanza 2 of the song attract listeners by expressing how proud one to be a “Filipino” to be one with the cause of EDSA which is to gain back freedom and democracy. Also manifested in the same stanza is the Filipino spirit of “bayanihan” as expressed in the words “magkakapit-bisig.” Stanza 2 clearly express the function of protest songs which is it promotes cohesion and solidarity in a movement. In achieving the goal of soliciting outside support or sympathy, stanza 3 more particularly the words “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” provided a very clear indication for this. Moreover, stanza 3 also reinforce the value system of individuals who are a priori supporters of the movement by re-instating the goals of EDSA which are “katotohan,” “kalayaan” and “katarungan.” Stanza 4 on the other hand entails unity among people and among social classes. Stanza 1, 5 and 6 pertains to valuing democracy, social justice, and a call for unity of all Filipino.

The following are the lyric of the song “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo”:

Di na 'ko papayag mawala ka muli.
'Di na 'ko papayag na muli mabawi,
Ating kalayaan kay tagal natin mithi.
'Di na papayagang mabawi muli.

Magkakapit-bisig libo-libong tao.
Kay sarap palang maging Pilipino.
Sama-sama iisa ang adhikain.
Kelan man 'di na paalipin.

[Refrain:]

Handog ng Pilipino sa mundo,
Mapayapang paraang pagbabago.
Katotohanan, kalayaan, katarungan
Ay kayang makamit na walang dahas.
Basta't magkaisa tayong lahat.

(Mag sama-sama tayo, ikaw at ako)

Masdan ang nagaganap sa aming bayan.
Nagkasama ng mahirap at mayaman.
Kapit-bisig madre, pari, at sundalo.
Naging Langit itong bahagi ng mundo.

Huwag muling payagang umiral ang dilim.
Tinig ng bawat tao'y bigyan ng pansin.
Magkakapatid lahat sa Panginoon.
Ito'y lagi nating tatandaan.
(Repeat refrain two times)

Coda:

Mapayapang paraang pagbabago.
Katotohanan, kalayaan, katarungan.
Ay kayang makamit na walang dahas.
Basta't magkaisa tayong lahat!

“MAGKAISA”

Protest song “Magkaisa” was composed by Tito Sotto and performed by Virna Lisa Loberiza. It was released on March 1, 1986 just a few days after the People Power Revolution. Also served as backup singers were Babsie Molina, Bambi Bonus and Vic Sotto. As a Magnetic Song, “Magkaisa” entice the Filipino people to unify and face the problem of the nation together. Stanza 1 convey this very important idea that we are of the same race--- of Filipino race. The overall tone of the song is very positive in eliciting hope, new beginning, facing the challenge of rebuilding, as clearly expressed in the 2nd stanza with words such as “magkaisa at magsama” at “Kapit-kamay sa bagong pag-asa.” Overall, the song “Magkaisa” reinforced the value system of each individual by tracing their common roots as Filipinos. The song also attempted to create and promote cohesion and solidarity among the citizenry, especially in that critical time of rebuilding the nation and laying the foundation of a new society.



The following are the lyric of the song “Magkaisa”:

Ngayon ganap ang hirap sa mundo
Unawa ang kailangan ng tao
Ang pagmamahal sa kapwa'y ilaan
Isa lang ang ugat na ating
pinagmulan
Tayong lahat ay magkakalahi
Sa unos at agos ay huwag padadala

Chorus

Panahon na (may pag-asa kang
matatanaw)
Ng pagkakaisa (bagong umaga,
bagong araw)
Kahit ito (sa atin Siya'y nagmamahal)
Ay hirap at dusa
Magkaisa (may pag-asa kang
matatanaw)
At magsama (bagong umaga, bagong
araw)
Kapit-kamay (sa atin Siya'y
nagmamahal)
Sa bagong pag-asa

Ngayon may pag-asang natatanaw
May bagong araw, bagong umaga
Pagmamahal ng Diyos, isipin mo
tuwina

(Repeat Chorus)

Magkaisa (may pag-asa kang
matatanaw)
At magsama (bagong umaga, bagong
araw)
Kapit-kamay (sa atin Siya'y
nagmamahal)
Sa bagong pag-asa.

DECODING THE DREAM: UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

Protest songs served as the best imprint of the people expression and aspiration in that very important historical place of time. The protest song “Bayan Ko” that gained its prominence in the 70’s and 80’s during the Martial Law and EDSA Revolution period, was in reality a time capsule of a “nationalist struggle” for genuine independence and socio-political transformation that its origin can be traced back from the colonial period of the Philippines. The song “Bayan Ko” had its roots from the KKK and the Revolution 1898, in fighting for the Independence of the “Inang Bayan.” This imbedded “nationalist struggle” will carry on as Filipinos will defend their independence against the American and later on against the Japanese. Such “nationalist mentality” that will again resurface during the Martial Law Years and gain climax in EDSA People Power I Revolution. On the other hand, protest songs like “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” and “Magkaisa” expressed the culminating spirit that was already won by the people in EDSA in 1986, values and principles such as hope, freedom, justice, and democracy.

In decoding the people’s dream that was EDSA People Power I Revolution, it remained nothing but an unfinished revolution. In 1987, Social Psychologist Dr. Patricia Licuanan pointed out the danger of not sustaining the very essence and spirit of People Power and morphing it into a “fad.” For Dr. Licuanan, people power is not merely the revival of the savage state of the Philippines, but its primary objective is to be “truly just” by equally distributing the “fruits” of economic prosperity of the country. This according to her can be achieved through the following: (1) building critical awareness, that is having analysis and discussion of Philippine reality/ history and context; (2) organizing people to be politically participative; and (3) developing ideologies or vision of a society and a government that the people want (Licuanan, 1987, pp. 27-28). She expressed her

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hopes and at the same time her anxieties in the following words:

“For the Filipino people, the February People Power Revolution was a special experience with spectacular results. But there is some danger as well that people power may become a fad with the superficiality and short-lived nature characteristics of most fads. This must not happen. We should therefore work to understand and appreciate people power and to systematically develop it as part of our daily lives so that the fruits of our finest hour as a people will continue to be reaped” (Licuanan, 1987, p. 29).

A newspaper article published by Bulletin Today in February 27, 1986 entitled, “Reconciliation?” emphasized the desire of the people for a government that is truly a reflection of the Filipinos’ hopes and dreams. A government that is committed to “democracy” and “justice” and a government run by people with proven integrity. In simple terms, a government of the people, by the people and for the people. EDSA is the “true” victory of the people as expressed in the following:

“This is the victory of the people. It was the ordinary man and woman who braved tanks and guns who turned the tide. Let no one forget this.... This is the victory of the people’s commitment to democracy and justice. Let no one forget this..... Our leaders have to form a new government and name men to positions. Let them not forget history in the allocation of power among the new officials. These should be men of proven integrity. They cannot be men who present themselves as new supporters...” (Bulletin Today, 1986, p. 4).

The danger that Dr. Licuanan foretold became visible two years after the EDSA Revolution. In celebrating the 2nd year of EDSA People Power, Bulletin Today a newspaper, published the following achievement of EDSA in the following realities:

“Two years after EDSA, this is the record:

The economy has not turned around. Law and order have broken down. The Communist revolutionary government has taken the initiative. Secessionist want Mindanao dismembered. Rich and powerful Administration allies are building private armies. Criminality and corruption are on the rise. The military is divided. Outsiders routinely and openly intervene in our internal affairs, often at the invitation and always with the warm consent of our leaders. Many perceive the leadership to be popular but weak and ineffective. There is speculation that martial law or emergency rule will be declared and the privilege of habeas corpus suspended.

Our very survival is at stake. Do we have a program, an agenda, by which we could save the nation?

The Government demands loyalty from the people. Has it shown corresponding loyalty to them? Is there not too much emphasis on loyalty to our leaders and too little on their loyalty to our people without whom we can have either peace nor progress?

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Individual loyalty must move upward-- from the citizen to the nation. But the loyalty of the government must flow downward--- to the people. Not by word but by deed. Not in terms of rhetoric but in terms of programs that translate to concrete reality a clear vision for all Filipinos.

Two years after EDSA, we need a Government whose loyalty is to the Filipino first. Together let us fight for it!" (Bulletin Today, 1988, p. 3).

Conrado de Quiros a newspaper columnist recounts the meaning of EDSA 30 years after. For him EDSA Revolution is a "successful failure or a failed success.... a mixture of epic success and epic failure... like Apollo 13." Success in terms of providing inspiration to other countries in following the Filipino example of change in a peaceful way. An example that the song "Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo" really stand for. But he also pointed out that EDSA was not long lasting because it died down quickly. In order to be truly living by the tenets of People Power, de Quiros suggested that people should be more vigilant of Filipino leaders in the performance and discharge of their duty. And in order for the virtues of people power to have a permanent presence in society, he recommended that Filipinos practice the "Spirit of voluntarism"; the "spirit of coming together" and the "spirit of bayanihan" on a day-to-day basis. And lastly, political change is eminent and can only be achieved by "shaming" the corrupts, and people should disassociate with them by not making them "ninong" or "ninangs" in baptisms and marriages, de Quiros further added (PDI, 2016, p. 20).

This same contradiction was also observed by Professor of History Vicente Rafael in recounting the significance of EDSA celebration. One positive contribution of People Power Revolution is getting rid of Marcos and instituting a new Constitution. On the other hand, according

to Rafael, nothing has changed much in society it only "restored elite democracy." As times passed by this so called "elite democracy" instituted old political dynasties back to power and also provided opportunity to a new economic elite to rise in Philippine society. Professor Rafael will further provide his insight of Edsa in the following:

"It's is understandable that many are wistful for the 'spirit of Edsa.' For a brief moment, there emerged the possibility of social democracy realized in the unreserved generosity and unstinting courage of so many people on the streets. Today, those streets no longer offer spaces of liberation, but only entrapment of traffic and pollution. The memory of People Power is daily dissolved by the reality of masses rushing in disaffection, absorbed in their alienation" (PDI, 2016, p. 10).

4. CONCLUSION/ SUMMARY

Every year the nation celebrates February 25 as a very important national holiday commemorating those who suffered and lost their lives in the name of freedom and democracy. As each year of celebration passed, the event became more remote, more people detached themselves with a feeling of indifference and frustration, and some even question its very relevance and timeliness. More than 30 years after People Power I Revolution, the present generation ponder the significance of the event in their own historical understanding:

"Ex-President Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino was seated in the presidential chair. One day he travelled using a helicopter and when they landed, in Ninoy's few steps, a bang of a gun was

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heard. Ninoy died.... Since Ferdinand Marcos was his vice, Marcos wanted to be president.”

--- high school student.

“Edsa revolution started when Benigno ‘Ninoy’ Aquino Jr. was assassinated... after the goose-bumping happening, Marcos was beaten and Cory Aquino, as the new President, led the Filipinos.”

--- high school student.

“It should still be celebrated because even if nothing good really came out of it for the country, it is not only part of the nation’s history but also of the world. It inspired peaceful upheavals in other countries, particularly in Europe.”

--- Leonard Postrado (a reporter born a year after EDSA).

“The problems of Philippine society then still plague us today. The rich are still the ones on top; the powerful still abuse their authority.”

--- Mary Judith Tan (student Universidad de Manila).

“The people who led the revolution just ended assuming power themselves. Filipinos may be free from dictatorship now but still disrespect each other and the law.”

--- Roxanne Retome (student).

People Power Revolution that took place on February 22-25, 1986 showcase the Filipino pride of a non-violent means of overthrowing a dictator. In assessing the significance of this historical event, protest songs were used as lens in decoding the meaning, expression, and sentiment of the people. Protest songs are associated with a social movement acting as a catalyst for unity, building of identity and as an expression of shared goal and aspiration. Protest song like “Bayan Ko,” “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo,” and “Magkaisa” provided the sincere manifestation of the Filipino people in aspiring a society that is free, just and progressive. As a blueprint of the people’s dream to finish the revolution, such protest songs remained to be a reminder of such success and even failure, a dream that one day it will re-awaken the Filipino spirit of courage and pride that will tell the world--- “never again!”

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