

Spirit of '86: Analyzing People Power Movements for Peaceful Change in the Pacific Rim

Principal Investigators: Prof. Raul Lejano (Social Ecology), rplejano@yahoo.com
Prof. Helen Ingram (Social Ecology), hingram@uci.edu

Project Abstract:

In 1986, millions took to the streets in Metro-Manila to speak out against the fascist rule of Ferdinand Marcos. In what is known as the EDSA¹ revolution, they not only toppled a dictator but reconfigured the global political landscape with a powerful, new model for peaceful democratic change. However, this nonviolent revolution has, to date, not ever been subjected to systematic analysis. This is unfortunate since this singular event promises rich boon to political and social thought, especially social movement theory, and lessons for peace and democracy activists. The proposal concerns assembling faculty from the University of California and the Ateneo de Manila University, two important sites for research on social movements, along with civil society representatives and collectively reflecting on "EDSA" through multiple conceptual lenses. The proposal involves convening a workshop-symposium and planning sessions around reflecting on the EDSA experience. One issue of the journal, *BUDHI*, will be devoted to the symposium proceedings. These will eventually comprise material for a book --the first-ever compilation of theory around EDSA. One symposium panel will also trace how EDSA influenced movements in nearby Pacific Rim countries (especially Burma in 1988). The project has important lessons for how to construct effective movements for peaceful reform. There is an urgent need to refresh the institutional memory while many of the main actors in that movement still survive.

Project Narrative:

Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the EDSA or "people power" revolution in the Philippines that unseated Ferdinand Marcos from power. This was a singular political moment that many think spurred revolutionary changes in the world order --such as the victory of Solidarność in Poland, and the bloody events in Tiananmen Square, three years later. The EDSA event took place over three days in 1986 when more than a million Filipinos did little more than stand on a street and speak the truth about a fascist regime. We will refer to this movement as, simply, "EDSA" for short. The first reason behind this proposal is, simply, that EDSA has been under-conceptualized. The second follows closely, and that it is simply an enormously historic event that should yield us rich insights into the origins and progressions of social movements.

The intellectual project is a three-fold one.

Theory → Movement

First, we see that social movement theory can potentially explain much about the origins career of the EDSA revolution. In some respects, the event appears to be a classic case study that begs for application of social movement theory. For example, the relationship between the hard stance taken by the Marcos regime and the movement seems well explicable by political opportunity theory.

Movement → Theory

On the other hand, there are highly unique, singular elements of EDSA, as well as some counterfactuals that challenge social movement theory --in this regard, we also see EDSA as being the kind of case study that can extend social movement theory and, indeed, give rise to new directions in theory. For example, the complete lack of a formal "organizer" in the events of February 24, 1986 challenges suppositions of social movement theory.

Movement → Other Movements

Lastly, the group will trace how EDSA influenced subsequent movements elsewhere, especially in the neighboring Pacific Rim nation of Burma (now Myanmar) in 1988.

The proposal concerns assembling faculty from the University of California and the Ateneo de Manila University, two important sites for research on social movements, and representatives from civil society

¹ EDSA is an abbreviation of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the site of the stand-off.

to jointly reflect, using multiple theoretical lenses, on the lessons of EDSA. Through multiple analyses from renowned scholars and cross-exchange of ideas between researchers and organizers, we intend to plumb EDSA for new theoretical insights. The research will involve the use of multiple lenses, e.g., frame analysis and political opportunity theory to link the EDSA case study to theories of social movements and collective action. This will result in convening a symposium in Manila and a smaller, follow-up exchange in Irvine, California. One issue of the journal, *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, will be devoted to the symposium proceedings. The symposium proceedings will be, later on, further developed into material for a book --the first-ever compilation of theory around EDSA, its release to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the movement.

The proposal is to commission extended analytical treatments, by various political scientists and representatives of civil society, and jointly reflect on EDSA in two workshops, one to be held in Metro-Manila, Philippines, and another in Irvine, California. The first event will be a workshop-symposium, in which the project collaborators (Lejano, Ingram, David, and Pertierra) will deliver sketches of analyses of EDSA according to differing lenses. Three other speakers will be invited to do similar treatments (honoraria provided in the budget). The papers developed for the workshops, along with summary discussion notes of workshop panels, will be compiled in *Workshop Proceedings*. One issue of the academic journal, *Budhi*, would be devoted to proceedings of this symposium --to which its editor-in-chief, Luis David has committed. The plan is, at the same time, to begin making arrangements to develop these papers eventually into a book (i.e., *The EDSA Papers*). The reflection workshops will be co-organized with civil society, the latter led by the Philippine NGO, Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) --the director, Alan Alegre, is a collaborator on this project. Two Burmese civil society representatives will be invited --the budget covers travel for two of them (from Bangkok, Thailand).

Project Outcomes:

The products of this one-year grant are:

- a collection of scholarly work, to date, and other material on EDSA;
- initial theoretical exchanges that will provide preliminary work around the above theoretical analyses, to be summarized in workshop proceedings;
- panel discussion on the influence of EDSA on the Burmese revolution in 1988;
- papers for an issue of the journal, *BUDHI*, on theorizing EDSA.

The long-term objective, well outside the scope of this grant, of the collaborative is a book on "Theorizing People Power", scheduled for publication on or before the event's 25th anniversary in 2011. The research grant will allow initial, exploratory analyses that will be developed into a number of book chapters.