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„The SMS – Revolution“

The impact of mobile phones on political protest using the  
example of the EDSA II movement in the Philippines in  
2001

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## Abstract

### Abstract (English)

In mass protests new media like internet and mobile phones are increasingly playing a central role. In the past year, this was especially obvious in the protests in Moldavia and in Iran.

The so called EDSA 2 uprising in the Philippines in 2001 was one of the first cases when mobile phones and especially text messages (are said to) have contributed to the mobilization of thousands of protesters. This massive civil protest that blocked one of Manila's main traffic arteries, contributed significantly to the downfall of President Joseph Estrada. The euphoria of such events and the novelty of the use of mobile phones carry with it the danger of an uncritical celebration of technology and of a lacking contextualization of their role in the events. Widespread techno-deterministic views linked to notions of modernity enhance the tendency to assign the technology with agency and thus ignore those that are actually using it.

My thesis thus presents an extensive analysis of the role that mobile phones played in this protest. A pluralist view accounting for social and political contexts allows for the complexity of the involved processes. Drawing on Victor Turner's concepts of *communitas* and *liminality*, I analyze the power attributed to the mobile phone.

### Abstract (German)

Bei Massenprotesten spielen zunehmend neue Medien wie das Internet und das Mobiltelefon eine zentrale Rolle. Im vergangenen Jahr haben das vor allem Proteste in Moldawien und im Iran deutlich gemacht.

Einer der ersten Fälle, in dem Mobiltelefone und besonders SMS zur Mobilisierung von tausenden Protestierenden beigetragen haben (sollen), ist der so genannte EDSA 2 Aufstand auf den Philippinen im Jahr 2001. Der massive zivile Protest, der vier Tage lang eine der Hauptverkehrsadern Manilas blockierte, trug maßgeblich zum Sturz des damaligen Präsidenten Joseph Estrada bei. Die Euphorie solcher Ereignisse und die Neuheit des Einsatzes von Mobiltelefonen bergen die Gefahr eines unkritischen „Hochjubelns“ der Technologie sowie einer fehlenden Kontextualisierung ihrer Rolle bei den Ereignissen. Weitverbreitete techno-deterministische Ansichten verknüpft mit Auffassungen der Moderne verstärken die Tendenz, der Technologie Handlungsmacht zuzuschreiben und die eigentlich Handelnden zu ignorieren.

Meine Diplomarbeit stellt daher eine umfassende Analyse der Rolle, die Mobiltelefone bei diesem Protest gespielt haben, dar. Durch eine pluralistische, existierende soziale und politische Kontexte berücksichtigende Sichtweise wird der Komplexität der involvierten Prozesse Rechnung getragen. Mit Hilfe Victor Turners Konzepten *Communitas* und *Liminalität* wird die dem Mobiltelefon zugeschriebene Macht genauer beleuchtet.



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The first page of my thesis I want to dedicate to all those to whom I want to express my full gratitude for their active support throughout the whole development process of my thesis:

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# 1 Introduction

## The use of cell phones in protest from an anthropological perspective

It is not long ago that a new communication technology has entered the world: the cell phone<sup>1</sup>. A bit more than two decades after its introduction, the number of cell phone owners is more than three times that of fixed line telephone owners. According to the International Telecommunications Union<sup>2</sup> over 4.05 billion people were subscribed to cell phones in 2008, compared to only 1.25 billion fixed line telephone subscribers. This development does not only affect affluent societies. As many less developed countries<sup>3</sup> had a very limited network of fixed telephone lines, cheap and accessible cell phones represented the first occasion to possess this means of communication. (Horst/Miller 2006: 2) This also applies for the Philippines, where information and communication technologies, especially mobile telephony, play an increasing role. In 2008, over three quarters of the population<sup>4</sup> were subscribed to cell phones.

Looking at these numbers it is not surprising that scholars agree on the profound influence of cell phones on today's societies. The discussion of the impact of cell phones on society moves between the two extremes of techno-utopianism and techno-pessimism on the one hand (Rizzo 2008, Dányi/Sükösd 2003), but brings up, on the other hand, classical debates of research on technology, namely, is it the technology that is determining its use and thus society, or are the socio-cultural factors determining the use and meaning of technology? (Klenk 2007: 5)

Observing worldwide political developments in the past years, the increasing use of cell phones in political protest is striking. In 2009, the world witnessed two mass protests – in Moldova in April and in Iran in June – where cell phones and the internet, especially so-called social-

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<sup>1</sup> In this work I will use the terms cell phone, cellular phone and mobile phone interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>, accessed Jan 02, 2010

<sup>3</sup> The term Less Developed Country (LDC), especially the basis of definition, is controversial. Development is often reduced to mere economical data. For examples classifications of the World Bank are still based on the per-capita income that can be very misleading. In its classification the Philippines are classified as Low Middle Income Country (GNI per capita between \$976-\$3,855). The general feature of poverty, however, is distributed unequally within a country, between core and marginal regions, urban and rural areas, social strata and sexes. (see Nuscheler 2004, Nohlen (ed.) 2002)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reports.aspx#>, accessed Dec 18, 2009

networking tools like Twitter<sup>5</sup>, seemed to play a crucial role. Existing analyses of these political uses of new communication technologies stretch between the same extremes of optimistic utopian hopes and techno-phobic skepticism.

### ***1.1 Formulation of the problem***

The overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines in 1986 is one of the best documented successful non-violent movements in which the media, especially radio, and technologies as fax and xerox machines turned out to be decisive. Fifteen years later, technology again played an important role in the replacement of a president. In 2001, the EDSA 2<sup>6</sup> movement – in reference to the place of the two upheavals the Epifania de los Santos Avenue short EDSA, a major highway cutting across Manila – led to the ousting of President Joseph “Erap” Estrada. Mobile telephones, especially text messages, are said to have contributed significantly to its success. This makes the Philippines, as Raul Pertierra, an anthropologist who for years has analyzed the social and cultural impact of mobile phones on Philippine society, points out, “a test case for assessing the political consequences of this technology” (Pertierra 2005: 27). Both revolutions have been characterized by the lack of violence and the central role of the media.

The organizing of protest in these dimensions needs a high degree of communication, especially for the mobilization of participants. This process of communication plays an important role for the success of the protest. Certainly, the recent rise of new information technologies has brought new possibilities and dimensions to these processes. Wireless technologies, like mobile phones, make it much easier to instantly build up networks and also facilitate the access to information. They promote mobility and speed as users are not bound to certain places and are thus restructuring spaces and relations. (Paragas 2003: 260)

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<sup>5</sup> Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) is a less than three year old technology that links Internet and cell phones. On a personalized profile on the homepage the user can post messages in the length of a cell phone text message. Other users can subscribe to these messages. By adding # plus a certain keyword (e.g. #iran) to a message one puts the message in a certain category. It is also possible to read all messages linked to a keyword. The messages can also be sent and received via cell phone.

<sup>6</sup> As both the English word “two” and the Spanish word “dos” are used in this context interchangeably, I will use “2” to refer to both. Besides the native Filipino number set, the Spanish written in the Filipino way is used to express times, dates and prices. The English numbers are also widely used. (Lorenzana 1998: 151)

In the months following the EDSA 2 uprising, many media accounts in newspapers as well as on the internet were hailing the supposed powers of the cell phone. (Pertierra et al. 2002) In the following, these accounts were criticized for their exclusive focus on the cell phone, neglecting not only the people that were using it but the complexity of the events in general.

## ***1.2 State of research***

Research on the social and cultural impact of the mobile phone is in general multidisciplinary. Examples of anthropological contributions are “The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication” by Heather Horst and Daniel Miller (2006) and the work of Mizuko Ito, for example Ito et al. (eds.) (2005) “Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life”. The Filipino scholar Raul Pertierra, both trained as anthropologist and sociologist, works especially on the social and cultural impact of cell phones and internet in the Philippines. Genevieve Bell is one of the examples of anthropologists working for technology corporations, in her case Intel, who also contribute to the scientific discourse. However, there exists nothing like an “anthropology of the cell phone” as such.

Though indicated by multiple examples and in contrast to the internet, there is not much scientific research on the political impact of mobile technology. (Suarez 2005: 5) Within the small amount of existing literature the Philippine EDSA 2 movement presents a prominent example. As there will be an entire chapter on the political implications of mobile phones, I will focus here more specifically on research on the mobile phone use in the Philippines EDSA 2 movement.

In their 2002 volume on cell phone use in the Philippines “Txt-ing Selves. Cellphones and Philippine Modernity”, Pertierra, Ugarte, Pingol, Hernandez and Dacanay dedicate one chapter to the use of cell phones in the 2001 uprising. They note a lack of serious, well-researched studies on the topic as the majority of literature on the cell phone-EDSA 2 linkage is made up by newspaper and internet articles that they criticize for their “uncritical celebration” (2002: 107) of the new technology and their missing contextualization of its role in the events.

One of the accounts where this critique applies is Howard Rheingold’s widely received “Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution: Transforming Cultures and Communities in the Age of Instant Access” (2002), in which the EDSA 2 movement is used to illustrate how cell phones, or rather wireless communication technology in general, allow people to take collective action in

completely new ways, for which he coins the term “smart mobs”. There he states, “On January 20, 2001, President Joseph Estrada of the Philippines became the first head of state to lose power to a smart mob.” (Rheingold 2002: 157) Main critique on Rheingold’s book is its “privileging of technology over the at least equally important contexts in which technologies exist” (Kotamraju 2005: 1766<sup>7</sup>). Similar to Pertierra et al.’s critique of media accounts, this introductory sentence to Rheingold’s account on EDSA 2 already makes apparent the focus on technology assigning it with agency that ignores the people who use it.

An excellent example for a well-contextualized account of the cell phone-EDSA 2 relation presents Vicente Rafael’s “The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines” (2003) which especially highlights class dynamics. Without neglecting the role cell phones played in EDSA 2, Rafael sees the source of the common belief in the cell phone’s decisive role in the events in middle class technological fantasies. These fantasies – Rafael even speaks of a “fetish of technology” (ibid: 400) – are represented in the so called “Generation Txt”<sup>8</sup>, which was less concerned with the critique of existing social relations and authoritarian structures than with seeking access to, and recognition from, authorities.

Analyzing the EDSA 2 uprising in the Philippines as one of several case studies for the use of wireless communication for socio-political mobilization in their volume “The Mobile Communication Society” (2004), Castells, Fernandez-Ardenol, Qiu, and Sey argue against an oversimplification of the cell phone’s role in EDSA 2. They point to the important role of the military, the role of other media like the internet, radio and TV, the counter protest by pro-Estrada forces in April 2001, as well as discursive limitations of text messages, which question the importance placed on the potential of cell phones in mobilizing people. Although acknowledging that cell phones, especially text messages, played a major role in the dissemination of information, the coordination of campaign logistics as well as the political mobilization, Castells et al. see their limited influence in social scope as well as their limited capacity to achieve actual political results.

Two contributions to the volume “Mobile Democracy” (2003) edited by Kristóf Nyíri take the overthrow of Joseph Estrada as an example to analyze the interrelation of democracy and technology. Fernando Paragas, at that time teaching at the Mass Communications Department of

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Rizzo 2008: 136.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 4.3.1.

the University of the Philippines, emphasizes in his article called “Drama-textism” the importance to see the events within the greater context of recent socio-political changes in the Philippines since the overthrow of the Marcos regime in 1986. He thus argues that the popularity of mobile phones is due to the then initiated democratization process in general and, more specifically, to reforms on the telecommunications sector. Analyzing text messages and personal accounts of the mass mobilization as well as insights from related literature, Paragas notes a tension between anecdotal and scholarly assertions on the significance of cell phones in the events; the former hailing the technology as a pivotal factor, the latter reducing it to one of many elements in the rapid mobilization and intense coordination during the events.

The other contribution, Endre Dányi and Miklós Sükösd’s article “Who’s in control? Viral politics and Control Crisis in Mobile Election Campaigns” (2003), discusses potentially democratic uses of mobile communication technologies focussing on mobilization and election campaign. Comparing the use of mobile phones in the overthrow of Joseph Estrada with their use in elections in the United Kingdom and Hungary, they note a tension between centralized, consciously planned campaign designs and decentralized, innovative communication initiatives by autonomous voters. As the use of mobile phones was not centrally planned, EDSA 2 in their eyes presents an example of a bottom-up digital protest.

Similar to critiques mentioned earlier, Sergio Rizzo’s article “The Promise of Cell Phones. From People Power to Technological Nanny” (2008) is aimed at exploring ways to avoid both optimistic techno-utopianism and pessimistic techno-phobia that he sees as the two extremes in the cultural studies technology debate. Along two rather contrasting examples – the use of cell phones in the EDSA 2 uprising in the Philippines and “technological nannyng” in the USA, the use of cell phones to reach ones children at any time and wherever they are – he argues for a more dialectical examination of the new technology’s political impacts, taking into account both positive and negative potentials present at the same time.

### ***1.3 Own research interest***

During my participation in the training course “Gewaltfreiheit – Ausbildung zur Friedensarbeit”<sup>9</sup> of the Austrian branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in 2006, I had the

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<sup>9</sup> Non-violence – Training for peace work. (Translated by the author)

opportunity to deal intensively with the subjects of non-violence and non-violent resistance. As a result, I had the desire to continue my studies of that issue out of the conviction that, especially in times when the media create a picture of a worldwide excess of violence, it is important to show, that resistance and protest without violence are not only possible but a widespread phenomenon. In the course of the seminar “Agency und Widerstand. Handlungsspielräume und deren strukturelle Grenzen”<sup>10</sup>, I was able to make myself familiar with anthropological approaches to the topic.

My regional interest in South East Asia was consolidated during a two-month trip to Thailand and Laos in 2006 and led to particular occupation with non-violent movements and other acts of resistance in this region. The overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines in 1986, also known as People Power or EDSA-movement, is one of the best-documented successful non-violent movements. The EDSA 2 movement, which led to the ousting of President Joseph “Erap” Estrada in 2001, is, as seen above, by far less well documented and analyzed and especially interesting for the role that media played in it.

New information and communication technologies like the internet and mobile telephony are a very young field of research within social and cultural anthropology. Through the focus on such a dynamic and new phenomenon like the increasing impact of mobile phones on political resistance I want to contribute in reference to Horst and Miller (2006: 3) to the understanding of contemporary issues and thus to “debates that take place not only in academic journals but also in newspapers and television as well as the Internet” (ibid). The use of mobile technology in recent mass protests like in Moldova in April and in Iran in June 2009 confirmed the relevance of my research topic and the need of research on these new phenomena.

With my work I also want to contribute to the academic research on the region Southeast Asia yet scarcely represented in Austria.

#### ***1.4 Central research questions***

Based on the above-mentioned thoughts I now want to define the central research questions that I generated from the identified problem.

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<sup>10</sup> Agency and Resistance. Scopes of action and their structural boundaries. (Translation by the author)

In the main part of my work I will take the EDSA 2 – movement in the Philippines to look into the following questions: *What role can mobile phones play in political protest?*

*Do mobile phones play a specific role in the organization of political protest? If yes, what role?*

*What in comparison with earlier research has changed now, eight years after the events and in the light of further political developments, in the people's perception of the role mobile phones played in EDSA 2?*

As mobile phones are part of a communication system, my analysis will also take into consideration the role other media played in these events.

### ***1.5 Assumptions***

I assume that there is an impact of mobile telephony on political protest but that its significance is often exaggerated. Mobile phones facilitate the communication processes necessary to make protest or better resistance successful. It is easier for organizers to extend and keep up their network to form alliances, coordinate actions as well as to mobilize people to take part in the protests. Following existing analyses of the effects of mobile phones on politics, I suppose that mobile phones especially facilitate instant reactions to political events as the distribution of information as well as reaching others is not bound to any place or to time.

Despite all these effects, the importance of other factors should not be neglected.

Taking into consideration the further political developments in the Philippines as well as the fact that some time has passed, I assume that people today see the events and the role mobile phones played in them in a more differentiated light.

### ***1.6 Methodical approach***

For the collection of empirical data as well as for literature research on the spot I conducted a three-month long field research in Manila, Philippines from October to December 2008. Due to the scope of my thesis I decided to concentrate on the area of Metro Manila, where EDSA – Epifania de los Santos Avenue – is located and therefore the main events of the movement took place. Nevertheless, I am aware that EDSA 2 was not solely a Metro Manila movement and that this limitation replicates the Philippine general focus on the central region.



The starting point of my research was the search of literature on the topic in online library catalogs, especially the *Gesamtkatalog des Österreichischen Bibliotheksverbundes*. Soon I figured out that the literature I could have access to from Vienna was very limited. That was one of the reasons why I decided to go “into the field”, to undertake field research in Manila. There the amount of available literature was much larger. Furthermore, the internet constituted an important source for my research. Some articles and essays relevant for my topic were only accessible over the internet. And I also used websites on statistical data, especially because they provided simple access and up-to-datedness.

In the course of my field research, I conducted eleven qualitative interviews focussing on the subject (themenzentriert). An interview guideline served as a point of orientation that I used very flexibly. Qualitative interviews were used primarily to collect expertise as well as to capture and analyze the specific, subjective perspective of the actors. (Hopf 1991: 350) Interviews were taken on the one hand with scientific researchers and analysts from the non-governmental/civil society sector who were either engaged in analyzing the impact of mobile telephony on Philippine society or who were dealing intensively with the EDSA 2 movement. On the other hand, I interviewed organizers of the movement, trying to get a relatively balanced picture by talking with people from different sectors, for example political parties, the church, university representatives, etc. Unfortunately, I had to give up my intention to have women and men equally represented in my interviews as I could not get enough female interviewees. The interviews with activists were aimed in the first place on getting the perspective of the social subjects themselves, the people active in the process, on the way they construct reality and give meaning to the events I was looking at. Thus, I wanted to find out more about how the protests were organized and what role technologies played in this organization process. Interviews with researchers from both scientific backgrounds as well as from the non-governmental area should add a more analytic perspective and provide me with expert knowledge on the subject, the field of research. In the course of my research I realized that this separation was not sustainable as these processes could not be clearly separated as most of the people I interviewed were and often still are politically active.

For the analysis and interpretation of the collected data I used two complementary methods. Already during my field research I applied open coding on the basis of grounded theory to my research material, literature, field notes as well as interview transcripts. This helped me to

organize my material, to decide which topics were relevant and where I needed further information. For the work with my interview transcripts, I used *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse* (qualitative content analysis) according to Mayring<sup>11</sup>. Here I focused on the technique of summary (*Zusammenfassung*) to reduce my material while maintaining the essential content. This method was used to extract the communicator's subjective setting of meaning as well as the political and socio-cultural background of the communication within the frame of a systematic proceeding according to rules.

### ***1.7 Outline of contents***

In the first part of my work I will try to conceptualize the cell phone from an anthropological perspective. Starting with some basic terms and definitions to define the starting points of my work. After establishing the cell phone as part of material culture, I continue with a review of social science research on the social and cultural impact of the cell phone to classify my work within the field of science. After outlining the still prevailing "Standard View of Technology", I want to raise the issue of commercial research that forms a major component in the research on modern technologies.

In the following chapter, I take the debate on the possible political impact of cell phones as a starting point to outline several concepts that will be helpful for the later analysis of the role of cell phones in the Philippine EDSA 2 movement. This debate resonates earlier discussions following the introduction of new technologies, especially that of the internet, and spans from highly euphoric declarations on how cell phones promote democracy by opening a new public space, increasing political participation and thus deepening trust in democratic processes to more critical, less optimistic accounts. Extending my analysis to other examples of the use of this technology in protest, I will further elaborate on the possible political impact of cell phones.

Although the applications of information technology like the internet and mobile phones are often similar, their specific social and cultural impact varies nationally as these technologies are influenced by particular cultural traditions, power structures and economic resources. For the

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<sup>11</sup> Mayring 2008

understanding of the use of cell phones in political events like the EDSA 2 upheaval it is therefore important to explore the specific background of the new communication technologies' use in the Philippines. In the following chapter I will therefore take the Philippine national history of telecommunications as the basis to outline the reasons for the enormous success of mobile telephony in a country like the Philippines. Based on my own observations as well as on my interviews, I will look into existing research to give an insight in the use of mobile phones in the country.

Before I can analyze the role of mobile phones in the EDSA 2 movement, I need to outline what happened in January 2001 and why. In the following, I will thus give an outline of the events before turning to their background to facilitate the understanding of what happened. I will point out the factors that led to the collapse of the Estrada government with mentioning controversial issues.

Based on my empirical data in comparison with existing literature, the central part of my work will be the analysis of the role of mobile phones in the EDSA 2 movement. To avoid a one-dimensional view I examine different aspects of the protest movement where mobile phones played a role but I also point to their limitations as well as to factors that at least equally contributed to its success. On the basis of my own research data, I will analyze the general debate of the political use of cell phones. As my interviews focused on organizers of the protests, I specifically highlight their use of mobile phones but also that of people in general in order to oppose popular tendencies of assigning the cell phone with agency.

In the next chapter, special focus will be given to the argument that the capacity of new information and communication technologies to make people feel more connected and to make them experience several events simultaneously initiates states of simultaneous presentness rarely experienced before except during states of ritual resulting in what Victor Turner calls *communitas*. By looking closer at Turner's concept of *communitas* and at how similar feelings of community are enhanced by new communication technologies like the cell phone, I want to add to discussions of the power attributed to them.

In the concluding part of my work I will summarize my findings by answering my initial and research guiding questions. As the mobile phone distribution has increasingly grown over the past years – not only in the Philippines – and mobile phones have become far more sophisticated, the options for their political use are of course much higher now. I will therefore give a small outlook on what this implies.

## **2 Definitions**

### **Conceptualizing the cell phone from an anthropological perspective**

At the beginning of this work it is important to deal with some basic terms and definitions to build a foundation for what follows. These terms and definitions are based on the question on where to situate research about the cell phone within social and cultural anthropology.

With the cell phone, a technology is in the center of my research. The study of technology and material culture is a field of study that had long been central to social and cultural anthropology before disappearing from sight for several decades. It had been characterized by an “almost obsessive concentration on the minute description of techniques and artifacts”, and by “the tendency to study artifacts without regard for their social and cultural context”. (Pfaffenberger 1992: 491) Only recently, as technology has become a more and more central part to our lives there has been a regained interest in this field of study.

This chapter aims at defining the starting points of my work as well as classifying my work within the field of science. Therefore, I will start by clarifying some important terms and definitions to facilitate the access to this topic before continuing with a review of social science research on the mobile phone. When doing research on material culture and technology the issue of a still prevailing “Standard View of technology” has to be taken into consideration. As commercial research on new information and communication technologies constitutes a major part of research in this field, I will conclude the chapter with pointing to the way of dealing with and making use of it.

#### ***2.1 Definitions***

As my work is focussing on the cell phone, I will start with a reflection of its meaning and definition from an anthropological perspective. To be able to revert in the following to a meaningful terminology, I will first establish some basic terms and definitions. These terms are not to be seen as fixed and generally valid as they serve only as starting points for my work.

### 2.1.1 Artifact

Things surround us and determine our lives in every situation and at every time of the day. Scholars who analyze the influence of things on our lives underscore the pervasive presence of artifacts that form the context of modern life. (Miller 1987: 85) The term *artifact* describes all objects made by humans, therefore, all artificially made things. (Feest 2003: 240) The most obvious characteristic of artifacts is their concrete physical form made for a particular reason. The artifact stands in a clear relationship to the man or woman who creates it, who deals with it, who assigns a certain meaning to it within his or her environment. Therefore, artifacts can also be seen as material manifestations of cultural concepts.

Feest (ibid: 241) distinguishes *exofacts* and *endofacts*. This distinction is based on the ability to produce the artifacts in one's own society or group, which is possible for *endofacts*. Other things can not be produced in a society or group since the necessary knowledge is not existent or can not be used and therefore have to be brought into a group from outside. These are called *exofacts*. In the past the meaning of such objects for anthropological research had been practically ignored as they were not seen as authentic. (ibid) Today an increasing number of anthropologists acknowledge the influence of these objects as, especially in the more and more connected world, they have a tremendous impact on habits and everyday life.

Important criteria for the distinction between endofacts and exofacts are group boundaries which determine if things are seen as coming from within the group or from outside. The relevant context in which artifacts are examined here is the local one. Therefore, cell phones can be considered as exofacts for users in Jamaica since there are no factories or other companies for their fabrication in Jamaica. The device has to be imported from outside. For users in Japan it is far more difficult to make this distinction. For the staff of mobile phone companies the device is clearly an endofact produced within the group. The distinction therefore is dependent on the context and often fluent. (Klenk 2004: 9)

Nevertheless, the term exofact adequately describes the fact that the artifact originates *outside* the group. There is no possibility to influence the produced physical design or shape or functions, in the case of the cell phone provided through software. After the production, the user can only slightly alter or modify the device. (ibid) Only recently, more sophisticated phones like the Apple i-phone integrating various previously separate media like internet and radio allow their users to individually download so called "apps" – short for applications, that is, additional

software – from the internet and install them on their phones. These applications can vary from simple games to language lessons or GPS powered Google maps<sup>12</sup>. The cell phone owner is now able to customize his phone, to adapt it to his or her individual needs.

An exofact also brings ideas and worldviews with it which include certain ideas of use and communication patterns which are either mediated through advertising or the media, or manifested in the artifact itself. Despite these external influences, exofacts are often very well integrated into the local culture. In this process rules of usage are adapted to the new context or newly created. (Klenk 2004: 10)

These distinctions blur in a world with global markets where the components of a product are mostly produced in different parts of the world, especially in the field of technology. To underline the argument that the cell phone is a global good, Agar (2004) smashes up his cell phone to deconstruct it in its component parts which are all produced in different parts of the world and then brought together. In the Philippines, Texas Instruments, for example, produces a hundred per cent of all the chips used in Nokia cell phones and eighty per cent of the chips used in Ericsson cell phones<sup>13</sup>. So, in this case, whereas some parts of cell phones are produced locally, others are produced outside the country.

### **2.1.2 Device and machine**

The cell phone belongs to a certain group of artifacts which are *devices* and *machines*. Again I resort to Feest (2004: 241), who defines *devices* as all things including houses, clothing, etc. used by humans as a part of their culture for a specific reason. This definition points to the process of usage not to that of formation, which is crucial for the definition of artifacts. Certainly, both terms most of the times mean the same things but they have a different focus.

The term *machine* is useful as it broadens the horizon through pointing to the transformation of energy, respectively its usage within the object. (Klenk 2004: 10)

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.apple.com/iphone/apps-for-iphone/>, accessed 12/8/2009

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/philippines/structure-of-economy.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/philippines/structure-of-economy.html), accessed 29/10/09

Looking at these terms and definitions, the cell phone can be seen as an artifact initially developed for the purpose of calling, that means, for talking to someone over a long distance. Therefore, it is important to see it in line with the telegraph and fixed line phone. But it is also a device used in different ways and a machine, as mechanical and electric energy is transformed into, e.g., a radio signal for the transmittance of data. (ibid)

### 2.1.3 Technology

For an anthropological inquiry the *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* offers a good starting point for the definition of technology:

*Technology can be defined as the particular domain of human activity immediately aimed at action on matter. (Lemmonier 2002: 544)*

This is a rather broad definition that emphasizes primarily the human interaction with matter. In other definitions the focus is on the material as technology is seen as “material expression of cultural activity”. (Cronklin 1982: 16 cit. in Klenk 2004: 11)

When looking closer at the term three different aspects come to mind. First, technology means an object that exists as visible material artifact. Second, the term describes an activity, respectively a process, for example moderation techniques. In this sense it means that the use of specific actions is more or less standardized. And finally, technologies are knowledge and skills that are necessary for performing certain technical processes. This includes the knowledge about the production process as well as systematic knowledge and unconscious physical knowledge. The term technology thus contains objects, processes and knowledge. (Klenk 2004: 11)

For Pfaffenberger (1992: 497) these definitions are not satisfactory as long as they do not include the social dimension of technology. He therefore argues for two definitions: *technique* and *sociotechnical system*. The first one points to the three aspects of technology I have just described, the latter to the “distinctive technological activity that stems from the linkage of techniques and material culture to the social coordination of labor” (ibid). Within one society there can coexist several such systems. Pfaffenberger clarifies the term by the example of the South Indian temple irrigation, which highlights the interlocking interaction of cultural institutions, irrigation technologies and social organization. (Pfaffenberger 1992: 499-500) He therefore argues for a “social anthropology of technology” that includes all three: techniques, sociotechnical systems, and material culture. (ibid: 497)



### **2.1.4 Material culture**

Originally the term *material culture* was used in a narrow sense for the products of technical production processes. Today anthropology uses the term for things that are used by humans to intervene in their living space, to modify it according to their needs. Not only is the totality of these objects, their production, their usage, and the connected knowledge identified with material culture but also, in a broader sense, ascribed values and meanings. (Feest 2003: 240) Material culture is, thus, closely linked to consumption and its socio-cultural implications. Consumption begins with “the transformation of objects from impersonal commodities into things with distinctive meaning for the costumer and distinct places in consumers’ lives” (Budka and Kremser 2004: 216).

## ***2.2 The cell phone as a part of material culture***

Considering these aspects, the cell phone is seen as a part of material culture in this work. Important for the exposure to material culture from an anthropological point of view is, as Morphy (1996: 515) points out, to account for its embeddedness in a greater social and cultural context. This means not to see the cell phone as a mere material object, but as a commodity circulating in the global economy, transporting ideas and worldviews, charged with symbolic meaning which is modified according to specific needs and integrated in local culture.

This definition of material culture for the cell phone is summed up by an Indonesian journalist:

*“[Mobile telephones] are not just objects and technology; but also a system of ideas – of family, of intimacy, emergency and work.”*

*(Yanuar 2002 cit. in Bell 2005: 85)*

This citation points to what Genevieve Bell (2005: 70), an anthropologist who works for the mobile company Intel, highlights in her article on mobile technologies in Asia: The cultural aspects of the cell phone. In her view cell phones are “sites of cultural production” as they perform multiple cultural functions. They are not only “objects for communication” but also “manifestations of information”, a “form of identity politics” and the “site of anxiety and control”. (ibid: 71) In line with the definition of material culture, Bell suggests that the cell phone is an object charged with meaning and this meaning is culturally produced. These processes therefore can vary from culture to culture.

The cell phone has thus become a “form of practice”, which speaks for viewing it as material culture rather than technology. (Miller and Slater 2000: 193)

Most of the initial studies on the impact of cell phones focus on affluent regions highlighting the mobility and individuality of the cell phone in contrast to the landline phone. Challenging such claims, in their analysis of cell phone use in Jamaica Horst and Miller (2006) emphasize that in countries like Jamaica – and the Philippines – where the landline telephone was not ubiquitous the situation is very different. Thus, the impact of the cell phone there is rather comparable with that of the telephone. Under such circumstances, as Horst and Miller (2006: 6) therefore underline, the cell phone needs to be considered as telephone in the first place and only secondly in terms of its specific quality as a cell phone. They argue further that therefore, at least in the case of Jamaica, the leading attribute is no so much mobility but the possibility of intensifying connections already in play. Miller and Slater (2000) use a similar argumentation in their assessment of the implementation of the internet in Trinidad. Instead of Trinidadians focussing on unprecedented new possibilities, they note that “[t]he technology is [rather] used initially with reference to desires that are historically established, but remain unfulfilled because of the limitations of previous technologies.” (cited in Horst/Miller 2006: 6)

### ***2.3 Social science research on the cell phone***

The study of material culture and technology had long been central to anthropological research before it got heavily criticized and disappeared from sight for several decades. Main critique was the almost obsessive concentration on the detailed description of techniques and artifacts and the tendency to take them out of their social and cultural context. (Pfaffenberger 1992: 491) As technologies became a more and more visible and significant part of society, there was a regained interest within the social and cultural sciences for technology which was based on new premises. Scientists from other fields like the history of technology and the interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies (STS) had largely started dealing with science, technology and society. In the context of a rising consciousness about the negative effects of nuclear and industrial technologies which led to appropriate-technology movements, this new class of experts started questioning the traditional view on science and technology as independent from

socioeconomic and political contexts. (Klenk 2007: 18, Escobar 1994: 212) These approaches laid the basis for the starting anthropological examination of new communication technologies.

### **2.3.1 Interaction between technology and society**

Before looking more closely at the approaches that were most influential to my research, it is useful to take a few steps back to consider the interaction between technology and society in general. Taking into account the literature on the impact of the cell phone to date, Ling (2004) notes four different approaches: technical determinism, social determinism, the “affordances” approaches, and the domestication approach.

He sees the technical deterministic view as well entrenched in society. Its representatives claim that “in the final analysis it is technologies that form and mold society” (Ling 2004: 23). Thus, they see technical devices at the root of social transformation.

The social deterministic approach claims the opposite: technologies are often reinterpreted by their users and given new, often unexpected, trajectories. Important representatives of this perspective are Bijker and Law (Bijker and Law 1992; Bijker et al. 1989). Ling illustrates this view as follows:

*“Thus, while a mobile telephone is designed primarily as a communication device, it can conceivably function as a type of hammer, a shoehorn, a bottle opener, or even a type of flashlight, depending on the inventiveness of the user.” (Ling 2004: 23-24)*

That is to say the designer intends a certain usage but in the end it is the user who determines the use of a technological object.

Both approaches have their weak points. Technical determinism assumes that technology sprang fully formed out of nowhere. The specific social context of its formation is neglected. The opposite critique applies to social determinism. The logical end of this approach is that technologies have no inherent qualities. Their identity is more or less based on social negotiations. Additionally, both work at such a high level of abstraction that it is impossible to approve or disapprove. In Ling’s eyes, we are left to take them as ideological positions that guide our inquiries. (Ling 2004: 24)

The “affordances” approaches can be positioned somewhere in the middle. This approach stems originally from Gibson (1979) and was further developed by Norman (1990). This approach is concerned with describing how “the physical characteristics of an object interplay with the way

in which we perceive and interpret the use of the object” (Ling 2004: 24). Here it is the properties of objects that determine the possibilities of action. Affordances are characteristics that are more or less directly accessible to the user. Following this approach, it can be examined how a door handle “affords” pulling in the mind of the user. According to Ling (ibid: 25) this approach is insofar useful as it highlights the deficiencies of both the technical and social deterministic views in emphasizing the interaction between the physical and the social in the integration of artifacts into our lives. However, this approach focuses primarily on the design of objects. The culture, age and experience of the user are pushed into the background. Ling underlines further that the “affordances” approach loses much of its analytical power due to its tautological character as its argumentation is circular. (ibid: 26)

Thus remains the domestication approach developed to move beyond arguments between various forms of the above described views. As a more pragmatic approach it recognizes both the technological and the social deterministic position. It acknowledges that technical devices influence our everyday lives, assuming that “we arrange our lives and define ourselves vis-à-vis technical objects” (Ling 2004: 33). On the one hand, it accepts the preexistence of objects and artifacts from the perspective of the individual that is not solely responsible for their interpretation. On the other hand, it also sees social factors as important for the understanding of the use of technology. By looking at both the interaction of the individual and the artifact and the social context in which the artifact is defined and used, the domestication approach also avoids the narrowness of the affordances approach. Domestication focuses on the consumption of artifacts, which is viewed as a complex process that is never completely successful. As a micro-level approach it looks at the everyday life of the individual in a particular context focussing on the acquisition, display, function, and consumption of particular objects or even services.

The above described domestication approach is part of the material culture approaches. Horst and Miller (2006: 7) point out that the basis for these approaches is the dialectical philosophy – introduced under the term “objectification”. Thus, such approaches emphasize that they do not want to study the adoption of objects by subjects as there exists no fixed thing called the cell phone or fixed group called Jamaicans or Filipinos or Austrians. Rather, they see adoption as a two-way process and thus look at what the cell phone has become in the light of its adoption by Jamaicans, Filipinos or Austrians and what Jamaicans, Filipinos or Austrians have become in the light of their use of the cell phone. Taking such a stand it is necessary to accept that there are many types of cell phones and many more differences amongst the inhabitants of a country.

They nevertheless use such terms as Jamaicans and Jamaican as they see them – in the light of their constant use in Jamaica – as “a constant discourse in the voices and aspirations of its people, irrespective of its relationship to any ideology of nationalism.” (Horst/Miller 2006: 7).

### **2.3.2 The Standard View of technology**

Regardless of the critique of techno-deterministic positions and of other approaches that have been developed to move beyond such arguments, according to Pfaffenberger (1992: 493) the techno-deterministic view is still widely shaping our western thinking both scholarly and popularly. He therefore sees the critical questioning of the “Standard View of technology” – as he calls techno-determinism – as a basic requirement for a “social anthropology of technology”. Pfaffenberger sees this view also as a “master narrative of modern culture” (ibid) underlying our western world and technology view. The “Standard View of technology” is based on three main assumptions. First, technology follows a unilinear progression from simple tools to complex machines because technology is cumulative. (ibid: 507) Second, the meaning of an artifact is based on its function, not its style. Form follows function and not the creative liberty of the originator. (ibid: 502) And finally, as there is a reason why artifacts are built, we can conclude that technological devices have one main function for which they are built. In short: “Necessity is the mother of invention” (ibid: 495).

Such a view is also used in development debates. In their work on the social impact of the cell phone in the Philippines, Pertierra et al. (2002) emphasize the popularity of a utopian understanding of technology which they see in line with what D.K. Wagner<sup>14</sup> calls “rhetoric of the technological sublime” (cited in Pertierra et al. 2002: 107). Comparable with the “Standard View of technology”, Wagner describes “discourses of sublime technology” as those embodying “naturalistic, teleological, and utopian conceptions of technology”. Such bodies of writing, when considering the function of information and communication technology in the progress of less-developed countries (LDCs) like the Philippines, emphasize that the implementation of these technologies per se would enhance growth. They thus not only determine the direction of progress towards the capitalistically developed world but also neglect that the implementation of

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<sup>14</sup> Pertierra et al. refer to D.K. Wagner (1999) without giving the details of this citation in the bibliography. For this term see also Leo Marx (1964) and James W. Carey (1989).

technology is an active process of selection that works within a historical context. (Pertierra et al. 2002: 107-108)

It is important to bear such views in mind as they still influence popular debates on technology.

### **2.3.3 Global impact of the cell phone**

There exists a large interdisciplinary body of literature on the impact and specific history of the cell phone. In the following I want to give a short overview of the main topics that are raised.

The main part of research on the social and cultural impact of cell phones looks at the cell phone as a case study for media and technology adoption. Due to the commercial background the research is mostly focussing on affluent regions, that is to say on regions where the fixed telephone is widespread. They highlight the mobility and individuality of the cell phone compared to the landline telephone. Such contributions stress that with the cell phone one calls individuals instead of places and thus is able to reach people any time and anywhere.

Ling (2004: 18) sees the ability to organize activities “on the fly” as perhaps one of the most central advantages of mobile telephony. By introducing terms like “microcoordination”, “midcourse-adjustment”, “iterative coordination”, and “softening of schedules” he illustrates ways in which cell phones can be used to increase flexibility. (ibid: 70-76) Thus, looking at the ways the cell phone changes our way of organizing activities, Ling (ibid: 78) states that the cell phone is starting to challenge the status of time as the basis of social coordination.

Other important contributions look at how the cell phone changes our perception of privacy in the light of the dissolving boundaries between the public and private spheres. (Horst/Miller 2006: 9) These considerations lead to reflections on the etiquette that has developed around mobile phone use.

Another topic raised is the rapid rise of texting. (Ling 2004: 145-167) Looking at the reasons for this phenomenon, Ling emphasizes low costs, speed, convenience, unobtrusiveness and the asynchronous character of text messages. He notes that SMS use is not evenly distributed. He sees Norwegian teens among the heavy users, a fact that corresponds with findings in the Philippines.

This fact relates to another body of literature. The attempt to understand how youth adopt and use cell phones is one of the most common research priorities which partly due to the commercial background of this research. (Ling 2004: 83-121, Ito et al. 2005, Castells et al. 2004)

This focus on youth also tends to converge with debates on fashion, style and the body. Another related theme is the impact of mobile telephony on family relations, including the dynamics of surveillance and freedom between children and parents. (Rizzo 2008)

Another topic raised is the role of cell phones in terrorist attacks like the 9/11 bombings (Lorente 2006) or environmental catastrophes like the tsunami in South East Asia (Robinson/Robison 2006).

Important for this work are also debates about the degree to which social networking has become increasingly based on individual networking. (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998, Rheingold 2001) General claims of such views are challenged by findings like that of Horst and Miller, who demonstrate that in Jamaica “ego-centered networking is rather traditional than a novel consequence of new technology” (2006: 9-10).

We will see later that these general claims about the impact of cell phones on our lives are partly reflected in the debate on their political potential.

#### **2.3.4 Commercial and academic research**

The importance of anthropological knowledge and research methods for commercial research has grown steadily in the past years. Ethnography is increasingly applied not only as a method of marketing and design but also for research on modern technologies, mobile communication and their cultural and social impacts. Several social and cultural anthropologists have been working for big technology corporations, like Telenor (Rich Ling), Nokia (Jan Chipchase) or Intel (Genevieve Bell). Their research is used not only for marketing strategies and design developments but the scientists contribute to an exchange between economy and science by discussing their findings in scientific journals, anthologies, and on international conferences. (Klenk 2007: 19-20)

This has also led to critical voices being raised. Concerns center on the independence and integrity of commercial research. Not only is it seen as characterized by an uncritically positive view of technology but also by the lack of reflection on the commercial quality of research.

This reflects the general debate on the character of research funding. However, research is always moving within a set of dependencies and restrictions. As an indispensable precondition for research, funding will always exert a great influence upon it. Although I can not deny that commercial research is more prone to influence.

The only way to reflect these influences is to be as open as possible as concerns research backgrounds. As there are no clear divisions between commercially and independently financed research projects, I use literature from both areas with pointing to research backgrounds as far as I have information about them.



### **3 The political potential of cell phones**

Many scholars agree that the cell phone is a very important social and cultural phenomenon. McGuigan (2005: 45-46) thus points out that one has to be careful not to exaggerate its importance. The sociologist observes not only a commercial hype which serves economic purposes but also utopian dreams linked to this technology. These tendencies can also be observed within a debate on the political effects of cell phones.

Echoing high expectations concerning the democratic effects of the internet in the early 1990s, the introduction of cell phones set off a debate on their political impact. The discussion spans from highly euphoric evaluations on how mobile phones promote democracy by opening a new public space, increasing political participation and thus deepening trust in democratic processes (Rheingold 2002, Suarez 2005) to more critical, less optimistic accounts. (Dányi/Sükösd 2003: 285)

In this chapter I will take this debate as a starting point to outline several concepts that will be helpful for the later analysis of the role of cell phones in Philippine politics. Extending my analysis to other examples of the use of this technology in protest, I will further elaborate the possible political impact of cell phones.

#### ***3.1 Debate on the political impact of cell phones***

As mentioned above, the introduction of cell phones during the 1980s set off a debate on their political impact which reminds of similar discussions following the launch of new technologies at previous points in history. New technologies often raise high expectations of change in all spheres of life, the political sphere not excluded. In the early 1990s, the democratizing impact of the new information technologies was a much debated issue as the internet started to spread rapidly. Especially for democracies where political participation has been going down the point was made that the internet could counteract this development by bringing about a new kind of political participation. (Suarez 2005: 3-4) According to Suarez (ibid: 4), new research, however, shows that although the internet has become an important tool of global and domestic mobilization and participation, the development has fallen short of expectations as previous

patterns of political participation are simply replicated. The topic remains a point of division in scholarly literature. This shows that one has to be careful with highly euphoric predictions.

Here I come back to an issue already raised in the chapter on definitions: the question what impact technologies can have in general.

In contrast to the internet, the political impact of mobile technology, though indicated by multiple examples, has been noticed only scantily in the scholarly literature. (Suarez 2005: 5) However, there is a small amount of literature – partly consisting of working papers and conference articles – that can be split into highly euphoric accounts proclaiming revolutionary changes and more critical, less enthusiastic ones.

The former expect mobile technologies, including PDAs<sup>15</sup> and hand-held computers, to increase political participation, generate a new public space, revolutionize political organizing and mobilizing, as well as deepen trust in democratic processes. Since more people can afford mobile phones than computers, the impact is expected to be much greater than that of the internet.

The more critical accounts warn of techno-deterministic views that are too optimistic and one-dimensional. As Goldstein (2007: 4) writes in his analysis of the role of digital networked technologies in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution : “[I]n any discussion of technology and political change, one must be careful to avoid ‘cyberutopianism’, the notion that digital technology will necessarily lead to a more inclusive political future.” Similarly Dányi and Sükösd (2003: 285) use the word “techno-utopian”. According to these critics, it is important to account for the complexity of such processes. Often several trends and processes take place simultaneously, a fact that only a pluralistic position can capture. Dányi and Sükösd thus advocate for a realistic exploration of new models of political communication flows. Mobile communication technologies have to be examined in their relevant political and social contexts. (ibid: 288) Dányi and Sükösd phrase it as follows, “New communication technologies do not enter a social, economic, cultural and institutional vacuum, but are used in the context of preexisting social organisations.” (ibid: 285)

In spite of all critique, scholars agree that the new mobile communication technologies not only constitute useful tools for politicians and political activists but are increasingly used to voice discontent.

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<sup>15</sup> Short for Personal Digital Assistant, mobile devices that integrate the features of mobile phones, web browsers and portable media players. Today many PDAs are so-called smart phones.

### ***3.2 Networking logic of communication process***

The networking logic of wireless communication technologies is often highlighted as *the* feature that makes them that powerful. Unlike with fixed line telephones, with mobile phones you generally call individuals not places.<sup>16</sup> Communication therefore is from person to person. Messages generally come from a known source which enhances their credibility.

Over the numbers saved in his or her address book, each person has access to a personal network that can be activated for political purposes. These networks can be formed and reformed instantly. This activation can be on different levels: on the one hand it can be effective by spreading a message to participate in a rally or on a lower level of political activity by discussing events with friends. But in any case the communication remains on a personal level. As Castells et al. put it:

*“The networking logic of the communication process makes it a high volume communication channel, but with a considerable degree of personalization and interactivity.” (2004: 197)*

Often it is a couple of individuals affected by political events that start circulating text messages among their friends. If the message lands on fertile soil and gets to likeminded people, which is very likely among friends, they will forward the message to their friends who forward it to theirs and something like a snowball effect can emerge.

Prior to the Spanish general elections in 2004 - clouded by a large terrorist attack in Spain's capital Madrid that took place just a few days before – this was what happened. The impression that the government was withholding information about the source of the attack, seeking political advantage, outraged a small number of voters so that they sent text messages to their friends urging them to demonstrate against this manipulation. This call was followed by a surprising number of people. What happened the following day is described as follows:

*“On Saturday, SMS traffic increased by 40% over a regular Saturday, reaching a higher volume than on a regular Monday, an all time record for these messages. The critical matter is that while most messages were very similar, the sender for each receiver was someone known, someone that had the receiver's address in his/her cell phone's address book. Thus, the network of diffusion was at that the same time increasing at an*

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<sup>16</sup> Here it is important to emphasize that there is also the shared use of mobile phones. Especially in poorer social contexts mobile phones are shared within families or even within entire communities.

*exponential rate but without losing the proximity of the source, according to the well known 'small world' phenomenon." (Castells et al. 2004: 214)*

To further elaborate this point, I want to outline two theories that often are mentioned in connection with this process: the term *smart mobs* coined by Howard Rheingold and the concept of *viral politics* used by Dányi and Sükösd.

### **3.2.1 Smart mobs**

With his book “Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution” (2002), Howard Rheingold is one prominent representative of the above-mentioned enthusiastic accounts. As a popular science contribution his main concept of smart mobs is widely replicated not only in the popular debate where it has been very en vogue recently, but also in the sciences. But there is also critique of his book in general as to privileging technology over the contexts in which it is used. (Komraju 2005: 1788)

Rheingold’s main argument is that the new mobile communication and computing devices with their increasing possibilities of interconnectedness allow people to cooperate in completely new ways. These new forms of cooperation he calls “smart mobs” which “consist of people that are able to act in concert even without knowing each other.” (Rheingold 2002: xii) This is possible because the new technologies possess both communication and computing capabilities and thus connect people carrying them with other information devices which can be, for example, computer chips located in the environment as well as with other people’s telephones or handheld computers. Groups can thus be formed spontaneously when cooperation enhances the likelihood of reaching a common goal. That way connected groups of people can obtain, generate and distribute information instantaneously. Organizing within this “mobile ad hoc social networks” (ibid: 169) is informal and on the fly. Applying terminology of social network analysis, Rheingold views these “smart mobs” as social networks where every individual constitutes a “node” that has social “links” to other individuals. Those “links” are defined as channels of communication and social bonds. Networks “use many possible paths to distribute information from any link to any other, and are self-regulated through flat governance hierarchies and distributed power.” (ibid: 163) These networks or groups act, in contrast to usual connotations of mobs, intelligently and efficiently because they are connected through an exponentially growing network. For that neither a leader nor hierarchical structures are needed. Group intelligence can

emerge as everybody is interlinked and, thus, can receive or send information to all the other “nodes” in the network.

One of many ways “smart mobs” can precede is called swarming, a word taken from the world of insects, originally used for military tactics based on many small units that are able to “swarm out” very quickly. (ibid: 162) To further explain the character of smart mobs, Rheingold draws on William Morton Wheeler’s term “swarm systems”, which lack imposed centralized control, consist of autonomous subunits that are highly interconnected and are marked by nonlinear causal connections of peers influencing peers.

This new form of organizing is not only used for beneficial purposes. Rheingold mentions “lynch mobs” and “mobocracies” as well as the increased possibilities of surveillance that lead to a so called “universal surveillance economy”. (2002: xviii) Everyone can and does profit from technologies in this way, be it soccer hooligans, rebel groups or terrorists. (ibid: 162)

### **3.2.2 Viral politics and viral political marketing**

Although critical of Howard Rheingold’s work, Dányi and Sükösd (2003: 287) also think that the “(...) basic structure of mobile communication is that of decentralized networks.” In their analysis of the use of mobile communication technologies in democratic mobilization and election campaigns, they take the perspective of political marketing. Thus, their key concepts are *viral politics* and *viral political marketing*, which are based on business marketing concepts. *Viral politics* the authors define as a “key political communication technique, used by motivated citizens spreading messages horizontally in their electronic networks on a voluntary basis.” (ibid: 286) *Viral political marketing* coins “the conscious and professional use of viral politics as a technique used by parties, candidates and other established political actors.” (ibid) The latter shows how political strategists and marketing experts try to form their messages and slogans in such a way that their target groups circulate them on their own. As the word *viral* suggests – referring to the medical term virus – the message is supposed to spread like a virus, a process also called snowball effect, and can thus reach far more individuals than direct marketing. But this process is essentially uncontrollable and can have unintended consequences. These techniques are based on insights of the importance of word-of-mouth and gossip in the decision-making process. New communication technologies are believed to stimulate this person-to-person communication and therefore constitute the ideal means for this form of peer-to-peer

marketing. Additionally, they make it easier, cheaper and quicker for marketing experts to activate such large interpersonal networks. (ibid: 300)

Dányi and Sükösd (ibid: 293) note that in general marketing techniques are increasingly applied in political communication. This development goes along with a growing mediatization of politics. Political actors more and more try to influence their representation in the media. This growing centralization and control by political marketing experts is challenged by the horizontal nature of new media. Thus, the question is raised if decentralized, horizontal mobile networks will lead to autonomous, civic communication “from below”. (ibid: 285)

### ***3.3 Political mobilization***

As the two concepts of smart mobs and viral politics suggest, one of the aspects where mobile communication technologies are increasingly used is political mobilization – be it mobilization of voters to go to election polls and vote for certain candidates like during presidential elections in South Korea in 2002 or urging citizens to take part in demonstrations against the perceived manipulation of information about the terrorist attack in the Spanish capital Madrid in 2004. (Castells et al. 2004) In many cases initiatives for these mobilizations come from active individuals themselves who are independent from political organizations or parties.

Technical features of the mobile phone, especially the possibility of simultaneously sending text messages to multiple recipients, facilitate the access to a large number of people within a short time and “without situational constraints” and thus make it an efficient tool for spontaneous protests and demonstrations, also called “flash mobilizations”. (Suarez 2004: 6) A mobile phone allows its users to start communicating with others any time and anywhere. Neither the sender nor the receiver is restricted in place or time. Many people never turn off their cell phones at any time of the day and therefore can always be reached. In arising political events people owning cell phones thus are able to react instantaneously. As Castells et al. (2004: 206) put it: "Because it allows instant communication at any time, anywhere, it is most suited to assemble large-scale demonstrations immediately after emergent political events (...)."

Castells et al. (2004: 211) further underline the capacity of cell phones to mobilize marginalized groups that are not reached otherwise. Saying so, they especially refer to the large number of tech savvy young voters in South Korea that are feeling excluded from the political process that were urged to go to the polls in the presidential election in 2002 through a spontaneous mobile e-

mail initiative from supporters of Roh Moo-Hyun. This is not the only case where the use of mobile communication technologies especially activated the youth. More precisely, the youth often is involved in the political use of mobile technologies.

### ***3.4 Coordination of protests and campaigns***

Another aspect where mobile communication technologies prove to be useful is the coordination of protests and campaigns. In any form of collective action at least some form of coordination is needed to get individuals to act in concert. Even if people are pouring into the streets spontaneously because they are outraged by a political event, at some point there might be attempts to converge these outraged individuals to one location. Doing so the number of outraged people would get more visible and the so called “power of numbers” would come into play. (Della Porta/Diani 1999: 174) Especially in such cases mobile communication technologies would prove very efficient as people could be reached wherever they are. The widespread diffusion of mobile phones makes them ideal means to spread information on where and when meetings or rallies take place, as well on other aspects like the common wearing of clothes in the same color. Another factor that comes into play is the low cost of mobile communication especially in comparison with other communication forms.

The same technical features which are useful to mobilize support like multiple sending options of messages, the possibility of instant communication, the fact that communication via mobile communication technologies is personal, makes these technologies efficient tools for coordinating collective action. In protests during the U.S. Republican National Convention in 2004 “[w]ireless communication, esp. text messages, featured prominently as a means of coordinating the activities of protesters and sending out alerts about on-going activities such as spontaneous gatherings or police arrests at least from the perspective of news coverage of the protests.” (Castells et al. 2004: 217)

In this case, as various protests took place simultaneously, people used circulating text messages to decide which protest to attend, to avoid “hot spots” of police operations and to stay up to date on what was going on. Also organizations that participate in rallies use mobile communication technologies to coordinate their delegations.

On the other hand, these technologies are also used for the coordination of political campaigns. Decisions on the common goals, on what actions to take as well as the coordination of meetings – either in person or virtually – can be processed via mobile phones.

### ***3.5 Independent information***

New communication technologies in general, mobile phones included, are said to present a challenge to the traditional media system. Broadcasting costs especially over the Internet tend to zero. Thus, the importance of independent bloggers<sup>17</sup> and online journalism is constantly increasing. One reason is that free expression is more difficult to censor on the Internet and on telephone than on other broadcasting media. (Suarez 2004: 5)

An example for that is the Spanish General Election in the year 2004. As mentioned above, the election was taking place shortly after an unprecedented terrorist attack in Madrid, Spain's capital. A small number of voters was outraged by the impression that the government was withholding information on the attack. Via text messages they initiated ad hoc demonstrations on Election Day Eve and were themselves surprised by the number of participants as well as by the spreading of the protests all over Spain. Although traditional media reports suggested that the government was lying about the terrorist attack it was information about the investigations and the protests circulating via text messages that catalyzed the protests. (Suarez 2004)

During the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004, a civil society organization created a network of 150 mobile groups to spread information and coordinate election monitoring. This network comprised over 30,000 participants and the use of mobile phones was an essential means to distribute information. The organization was set up specifically for the aim of creating an alternative "mass media" in which volunteers distribute election-related information "from hand to hand" directly to people throughout the country. In a country with a tightly controlled mainstream media alternative, independent information proved to be essential for bringing about regime change. (Goldstein 2007)

With their high degree of personalization and interactivity, new communication technologies present a widely available means of individually controlled communication that bypasses the mass media system as a source of information and therefore creates a new form of public space.

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<sup>17</sup> A blogger is a person that writes a blog, a type of website with regular entries of commentaries, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphic or video. The word blog is deduced from the term "web log".



(Castells et al. 2004: 197) Cell phone users become broadcasters themselves. Via text message and phone calls they can spread news and gossip, although often mixing them up. (Rafael 2003: 403) However, this has also negative aspects as information about the sender of the message can be disclosed, which facilitates the spreading of misinformation and rumor.

Although this points to a decentralization of information, it is important to emphasize that many cases show that mobile phone communication still constitutes one part of the communication landscape. Other media are not replaced but rather an interaction of different media each serving different purposes takes place. The distribution of information via mobile phones sees certain limitations. With their limited number of characters, text messages are inadequate for the sending of comprehensive accounts. Additionally, calling a multitude of people is time consuming and costly and therefore other communication channels are used for distributing comprehensive communication.

Castells et al. (2004: 206) assert that for actual political consequences a close cooperation of different media is necessary. Thus, it is important to understand the role of mobile phones as closely related to other media.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Scholars agree that mobile communication technologies are increasingly used to voice discontent. Not only their technological features make them useful tools for politicians and political activists, but also the nature of communication that is characteristic to them. In principle, it is about personal communication between persons that know each other. This makes mobile phones ideal tools for activating personal networks. This networking logic is captured in the concepts of *smart mobs* of Howard Rheingold and *viral politics* of Dányi and Sükösd. Following these concepts, mobile communication technologies make possible new ways of coordination between people that do not necessarily have to know each other as well as a rapid spreading of information and thus the activation of a large number of people to support and actively further protests and political campaigns.

Thus, the main fields where scholars see an impact of mobile communication technologies in the political sphere are mobilization, coordination and the provision of a platform for the distribution of independent information. The new communication technologies can help to mobilize citizens to participate in demonstrations as well as to urge voters to go the election polls. The mobile

phone is especially seen as an efficient tool for so-called “flash mobilizations”, spontaneous protests and demonstrations. The personal and instantaneous nature of mobile communication makes them very useful for the organizing and coordination of political campaigns and rallies. However, Pertierra et al. (2002) point to the difficulty of assessing the actual relation between mobilization calls received via text messages and the actual participation in rallies.

It is thus definitely true that mobile phones and the Internet facilitate political activism in a broad sense. Nevertheless, any analysis must be conducted carefully to avoid techno-determinism. Only a pluralistic view, bearing in mind existing political and social contexts, can account for the complexity of the processes involved and thus avoid oversimplification. Since the widespread use of mobile phones is still a recent phenomenon and will definitely increase in the years to come, it is still too early to completely comprehend the actual political effects of the mobile phone distribution. (Suarez 2005: 2)

## 4 Mobile telephony in the Philippines

“It’s really kind of part of the Filipino culture having a cellphone and being able to text.”

Tess Villapando-Ramiro, AKKAPKA – CANV (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)

Although the applications of information technology like the internet and mobile phones are often similar, their specific social and cultural impact varies nationally, as these technologies are influenced by particular cultural traditions, power structures, and economic resources. As Castells et al. (2004: 247) put it: “[E]ach country, each culture, and each social group uses the technology according to their values, habits, traditions, and projects.” Nevertheless, a certain cautiousness is appropriate here as not to fall prey to some kind of stereotyping as there exists no fixed thing called cell phone and no fixed group called Filipinos. Following Horst and Miller (2006), the adoption of objects is a two-way process with effects on both the object and the users. It is thus necessary to accept that there are many types of cell phones and even many more differences amongst the inhabitants of a country.

For the understanding of the use of cell phones in political events like the EDSA 2 upheaval it is therefore important to explore the specific background of the new communication technologies’ use in the Philippines.

The enormous growth rates that the mobile phone services have registered all over the world in the past twenty years since their introduction do not stop short of the Philippines. Since their introduction in 1989, mobile phone services have noted massive growth. In 1996, there were half a million cell phone subscribers, in 2000 already six million. (Castells et al. 2004: 20) According to the National Telecommunications Commission<sup>18</sup> over 68 million Filipinas and Filipinos were subscribed to mobile phones in 2008, which is 75.39 per cent of the total population compared to only 4.51 per cent subscribed to landlines. In 2001, the year of the EDSA 2 uprising, there were 12.2 million cell phone subscriptions which is 15.34 per cent of the population.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reports.aspx#>, accessed Dec 18, 2009. These figures refer to users subscribed “to an automatic public telephone service using cellular technology that provides access to the PSTN”, the public switched telephone network.

Cell phones are ubiquitous in today's Philippine society, especially in the major cities. People talking on the phone or writing text messages can be seen everywhere – in streets, restaurants, on busses, even in cinemas and churches. For Raul Pertierra, a Filipino anthropologist and sociologist who analysis social and cultural impacts of cell phones in the Philippines, and his co-authors “[t]he desire to be constantly connected has become a national obsession.” (2002: 88) With all this enthusiasm about the enormous change cell phones have brought to Philippine society, one has not to forget that for the approximately 40 per cent of Filipinos and Filipinas who have to live from an income of US\$ 1 per day cell phones are far out of reach. (Castells et al. 2004: 124) This new technology is still a major symbol of social status.

Based on the national history of telecommunications, this chapter aims at outlining the converging factors for the enormous success of mobile phones in a low income country like the Philippines as well as giving some insight in research on mobile phone use in the country.

#### ***4.1 The development of telecommunications in the Philippines***

The development of telecommunication technologies in the Philippines reflects the country's colonial history. As Paragas (2002: 3) puts it, the Philippines were an early bird concerning the telecommunication sector. Already in 1872, the first telegraph line was installed connecting Spanish settlements. In 1903, after the annexation of the Philippines by the United States of America, a trans-Pacific cable connection between the Philippines and San Francisco was installed. But the development did not proceed in the same manner. A monopoly granted to the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company PLDT in 1938 turned out to hamper the growth. (ibid: 4) The PLDT turned out to be unable to meet the public demand for telephones as it favored the more profitable urban and economic centers. (Pertierra et al. 2002: 33) Poor urban districts and rural areas thus not only faced economic disadvantages, the access to basic medical and other services was also restricted: “(...) for in the absence of such services from their areas, their ability to avail themselves of these benefits is conditional on their being within reach of telephones” (ibid: 34). As the Philippines is an archipelago with more than 7,000 islands and means of transportation are poorly developed, efficient communication is essential. Thus, the underdevelopment of the national telecommunication network, combined with similar inefficient postal and transportation services, was bad for the country's economic development and added to regional and social inequalities.

Although the Constitution of 1987 saw a “vital role of communications and information in nation-building” (Art. II, Sect. 24, cit. in Paragas 2002: 1), reform attempts of the 1980s did not lead to real improvement. Only in the early 1990s reforms started to be effective. New laws aimed at liberalizing the sector by opening up the market. With the following entry of other telecommunication carriers, the monopoly of PLDT came to an end. (Pertierra et al. 2002: 34) Following global developments, mobile phone services were introduced in 1989 but it was not until the mid-1990s – when the reforms mentioned brought new players in the mobile phone market and the economy saw a period of strong growth – that the mobile phone sector started to really head off. In the period between 1997 and 2000, the number of mobile phone subscribers increased from 1.3 to 6.5 million, which is a growth rate of 500 per cent. (Paragas 2002: 8) By 2008, according to the International Telecommunications Union<sup>19</sup>, there were over 68 million cell phone subscriptions. That means that out of 100 inhabitants over 75 were subscribed to a cell phone. The reforms also aimed at improving the fixed line network as participants in the telecommunications market were required to contribute with a certain number of telephone line installations. (ibid: 34-35) Nevertheless, the cell phone rates have rapidly exceeded those of fixed lines.

#### ***4.2 What makes mobile phones so popular in the Philippines?***

There are various factors that contribute to the popularity of mobile phones in the Philippines. Due to the poor development of the landline telephone network until the 1990s, most Filipinas and Filipinos had to resort to alternative, mostly more time consuming ways of communication like telegrams or letters. According to Paragas (2002: 13), until 1999 only 54% of the country’s municipalities had landline phone services. The quick development of an extensive mobile cell-site network covering even remote rural areas made mobile phones the only available communication possibility for many. Today, mobile phones are easily accessible. A trip to the next business or shopping center suffices to be pride owner of a mobile phone with immediate communicating possibilities. As the mobile phone gets less expensive every year, today even the majority of poor Filipinas and Filipinos can afford this gadget. Mobile phones are of course also important merchandise on the black market, so that cell phones are already available for some

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reports.aspx#>, accessed Dec 18, 2009

hundred Pesos<sup>20</sup>. These phones often are second hand or obtained in an “extraordinary manner”, as Filipinas and Filipinos say “GSM”, short for “galing samag nanakaw”, meaning that it comes from thieves and robbers. (Interview Lourdes Portus, Dec 5, 2008)

Additionally, Bell notes in a comparative study of ways in which cultural practices shape people’s relationship to new information and communication technologies in urban Asia that, although individual mobile phone ownership is dominant, people also share mobile phones. (Bell 2005: 82) Another practice she notes is also mentioned by some of my interviewees: The handing down of devices.

Since the family unit is very important in Philippine society, cell phones are important for keeping in touch with the 8.23 million of Filipinas and Filipinos living and working overseas as a result of the current economic situation.<sup>21</sup> (Handler 2008: 41, Paragas 2002: 13) The term “SMS-mothers” is a common notion in the Philippines describing the phenomenon of mothers working abroad maintaining their role within the family via SMS, for example telling their children to do their homework. As Ellwood-Clayton (2006: 357) states, “texting enables fractured families to maintain social cohesion, despite geographic division.”

The costs are another important factor for the popularity of mobile phones. Pre-paid payment, an option not available for landline phones, is especially attractive for people with low disposable incomes. Three quarters of mobile phone subscribers use this mode of payment where you pay only for calls and text messages that are actually conducted. (Paragas 2002: 12-13) This is the only way mobile phones are affordable for Filipinas and Filipinos with low income with pre-paid cards already available for 15 or 30 pesos, which corresponds to 20 to 50 Euro Cent. Pertierra et al. (2002: 115), however, see the costs still as a major impediment to the mobile phones appeal to the Filipinas and Filipinos. They point to convenience and the liberation from the constraints landline phones presented as main reasons for the cell phones’ popularity.

Paragas (2002: 12) also sees cultural reasons. The possibility of talking to friends and relatives at any time and any place meets the Filipino disposition for “phatic communication” (ibid).

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<sup>20</sup> Currently 100 Pesos are approximately 1,5 Euros. That means that cell phones can be purchased in the Philippines with less than 10 Euros.

<sup>21</sup> This numbers refer to the year 2006. Absolute numbers of Filipinos living and working overseas are difficult since there is a large amount working abroad illegally. (Tan et al 2002:1 in Ellwood-Clayton 2006) According to the current numbers of the Philippine National Statistics Office, With a total population of 88.57 Million (census 2007), this means that 10 % of the Philippine population live abroad with 50.4% women. In addition, approximately one million Filipinos leave their home country every year. (Handler 2008: 41-42)

Similarly, Pertierra (2006a: 316) sees the reason for the enormous success of mobile phones in “a strong cultural orientation for constant and perpetual contact”. The mobile phone also offers many possibilities for Filipinas and Filipinos to express their humor, which is an important element of Filipino culture. Especially text messages, with their limited number of characters, are an ideal means to distribute jokes. In an inherently shameful society like the Philippines, mobile phones, especially texting, make it possible to express oneself without being too direct.

#### **4.2.1 Manila’s mobile mania**

To explain the popularity of cell phone use in the Philippines, especially in the Metro Manila region, Rafael (2003: 404) refers to internet and newspaper articles that use the word “mania”. The mentioned articles are written by a so called Filipino *balikbayan* – one of the many Filipinos and Filipinas who live and work abroad, periodically coming back for a visit – and an American journalist and thus present impressions from outside the Philippines. Referring not only to ubiquity and broad use over all social ranks, the articles point to an attachment to these devices “that surpass the rational and the utilitarian” (ibid: 405). Cell phones have to be always nearby, day and night. “The cell phone gives its owner a sense of being someone even if he or she is only a street vendor or a high school student – someone who can be reached and is thus always in touch.” (ibid) Cell phone owners are mobile. Unlike computer users they are not bound to one place. They are thus outside, right in the middle of the crowd. Hence, with the mobile phone they don’t have to be present as they are able to communicate beyond their physical location. This is what makes them cell phone “maniacs” in the eyes of Vicente Rafael. (2003: 405-406) Br. Bernard Oca also emphasizes this wish to communicate with someone that in his eyes also serves to demonstrate that one is not alone. “[W]hen I walk early in the morning and I see a student alone, the student is most probably texting. More often than not he is texting. What is this telling me? The student is saying: I’m not alone, I am communicating with someone. So even if I am physically alone, I am with someone.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)

Because of their all time closeness cell phones are even seen as converging with the body of their users. As Pertierra (2006a: 327) outlines, “[m]obile phones are literally incorporated and transform the corporeal into a body-machine.” He sees mobile phones as a part of the identity. “Many Filipinos – especially the young – no longer feel complete, fulfilled or empowered without cell phones.” (ibid)

### ***4.3 Filipinas' and Filipinos' love of texting***

Filipinas and Filipinos are famous for their love of texting, as the writing and sending of text messages is called in the country. Filipinas and Filipinos refer to it as “the national pastime” and to themselves as “Generation Txt”. (Bellwood-Clayton 2006: 359)

In the streets and places in Metro Manila the mobile phone is nearly omnipresent. In shopping malls, public transport facilities and even streets the beeping and ringing tones have become an integral part of the sound of the city. One can even find traffic signs warning people of the distracting dangers of mobile phone use: “Don’t Text While Crossing the Street”, “Don’t Text While Driving”. (Batan 2005: 79) Taxis and busses offer the possibility to give feedback on the drivers driving via text messaging. Text messaging is also used to generate opinion and comments from viewers and listeners in broadcast media, both radio and television.

In 1994, mobile communication providers introduced SMS or text messages as free services as they were not believed to be of any interest to the costumers. (Lallana 2004: 3) By 1999, when the two major networks Globe and Smart started offering this service, texting was the preferred mode of cell phone use. (Rafael 2003: 404) As a reaction to the unexpected popularity of this form of communication, the mobile phone companies started charging for this service in 2000 causing a huge uproar among their customers. Although today cell phone companies charge their costumers for text messages and these charges increased progressively over the years, this service is still far cheaper than making phone calls. In the first quarter of 2001, the time Edsa 2 took place, there were approximately 7.2 million cell phone subscribers in the Philippines. During this period the average number of SMS sent each day was about 65.4 million. The absolute number of cell phones was not large compared to the rest of the world, but the number of text messages sent was double the world average. (Pertierra et al. 2002: 88)

However, economic reasons only partly contribute to the preference for texting. Additionally, it is the combination of the features of speech and writing – immediacy, informality and effectiveness on the one hand and reflectiveness, control and anonymity on the other hand – that makes texting so attractive. “People can text what they cannot or do not want to say directly.” (Pertierra 2006a: 329) These forms of communication somewhere between the said and the written are often playful, exploratory and imaginary. The wider interpretative scope allows for the exploration of new identities and of new communicative strategies.



As Batan (2004: 83) notes, “[t]exting seems to emphasize and enhance the cultural character of communications among Filipinos, who love to talk and share stories.” This communication process is “reinvented” through texting, which serves as a new medium for telling stories. (ibid) As already mentioned above, texting serves as an ideal means to stay in constant connectivity with friends and relatives, which is not only used by the youth. Also, older Filipinas and Filipinos profit from the new media to maintain relationships despite increasing bodily restrictions.

### **4.3.1 Generation Txt**

Although the mobile phone is generally used throughout all generations, young people are its most prolific users. These goes as far as young Filipino texters being often referred to as *Generation Txt*. Initially an advertising gimmick by cell phone companies to attract young users, the term was picked up and popularized by journalists. (Castells et al. 2004: 127) There exists no clear definition, but it is possible to see some common characteristics. The term refers to cell phone users with a high intensity SMS usage who, restricted by the limited number of characters, use a shortened form of Taglish, the mixture between Tagalog and English that is quite commonly used especially in the Metro Manila region. Additionally, they are seen especially attached to cell phones and show a certain ease in handling it. (Rafael 2003: 407) Members of the *Generation Txt* are able to master the task of creating 26 letters plus punctuation with only ten buttons easily. The most sophisticated among them are even able to write without looking down on their phone. As text messages are limited in characters, a type of shorthand has developed that is – like e-mail language – not that bound to grammar, spelling and punctuation. (Rafael 2003: 406)

As among the participants of the so called People Power II movement of 2001 there was a high part of young high school and college students, it was especially this mobile savvy generation that was accounted for the high use of mobile phones in the uprising.

#### ***4.4 Representing the way modernity is manifested in the Philippines***

In this chapter we have already seen how a globally introduced technology interacts with local sociocultural conditions. Now I will outline how this interaction represents the way modernity has manifested itself in the Philippines.

The adaptation to the mobile phones in the Philippines goes as far as it has become the major icon of modern Philippine life. (Pertierra 2006a: 324) Pertierra (ibid) even sees it as “the expression of what is quintessentially Filipino”. It has replaced the jeepney – former American military jeeps transformed into small busses that became the main transportation means in the Philippines – as the symbol of the times. Similar to the jeepney, the cell phone has a fundamental impact on the notions mobility and connectivity. The jeepney provided the average Filipino and Filipina with a means to traverse space not available before. With the cell phone Filipinas and Filipinos can traverse space without actually doing it or as Pertierra (2006a: 324) puts it, it is not any more a “mechanically transporting the corporeal self across real space” but across virtual space without actual movement. This allows for new forms of connectivity; a connectivity that is essential in today’s rapidly changing world, a world that is increasingly hard to grasp, much less to control. As David (2004: 347) states in his epilogue on modernity and the Filipino, “By ‘modernity’ we mean the ability to feel at home in a rapidly changing world in which, in the memorable words of Marx, ‘everything that is solid melts in the air’.” In this regard relationships to friends and family gain importance. These relationships do not any more solidly consist of face-to-face interactions and are often “technology-mediated”. (Pertierra 2006a: 322-323) The new technologies, meaning the cell phone and the internet, make it possible that absent others are equally significant in people’s lives. In a society with nearly a quarter of its adult population working abroad this makes a significant difference. With the help of the new technologies the so called Overseas Filipino workers (OFW) are able to stay in close contact with their relatives at home. Additionally, the features of the medium SMS even makes possible an intimacy not known before.

*The facility to communicate intimate feelings via text or voice calls has added a new dimension to family relationships. Exchanges between parents and children and between spouses indicate an emotional familiarity and closeness generally lacking in traditional families.” (Pertierra 2008: 71)*

Interestingly, this new intimacy in family relationships only applies for absent family members. Intimacy and spatial distance are thus intrinsically linked.

Another aspect crucial for many aspects of modernity is a requirement for privacy. In Asia, it is only as societies get more and more affluent that a need for private individualism is developing. This does not that much apply to the Philippines as so far there is no general affluence. (Pertierra 2006a: 320) Nevertheless, mobile phones compensate for the lack of private space to develop private contacts. Especially texting is used to establish intimate and private identities.

These are just some of many examples of how mobile phones represent the way modernity has manifested itself in the Philippines. They mainly help Filipinas and Filipinos to cope with the new challenges. As Pertierra (2006a: 331) puts it,

*“Mobiles do not provide any significant answers to the problems of modernity; they do not anchor us better in this rapidly shifting world. But they give us the means to share our anxieties, uncertainties, trivialities and banalities with others.”*

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be said that mobile phones have a significant effect on the lives of Filipinas and Filipinos. Providing possibilities of communication that had not available to many before, the rapid distribution of mobile phones has reduced, although not removed completely, existing inequalities in the access to infrastructure. Mobile phone users face options of connectivity not known before. This is especially important to keep up close contact with the many Filipinas and Filipinos working abroad.

The preferred mode of mobile phone use, the sending of text messages, known as texting, combines features of the oral with that of the written and thus allows for new communicative strategies. This is used not only to extend and maintain personal networks but also to explore new identities.

Today, the mobile phone has replaced the jeepney as a symbol of the time, especially concerning what is considered modern. It also offers a means to cope with the challenges of the modern globalized world.

The Philippines, as other societies, is adapting to mobile technologies in the following sense:

*„The mobile age is not rendering our society into some new form; it is, rather, enabling the same social patterns that have always been in existence since quite some time to evolve in small but socially significant ways.“*

*(Harper 2003: 187)*

It thus can be said that mobile technologies as artifacts are changing, as does their social significance.

## 5 EDSA 2 – A historical overview

In January 2001 over a million people were drawn to the streets in Manila and other parts of the Philippines to demand the resignation of President Joseph “Erap” Estrada. With reference to the overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos fifteen years earlier the events were called People Power two. Another labeling, EDSA two or dos, refers to the place of both upheavals, a major highway crossing Metro Manila called Epifania de los Santos Avenue, short EDSA or Edsa. By converging at the shrine that had been built in memory of the events in 1986, the protestors deliberately alluded to the successful uprising against the Marcos dictatorship.

As for the understanding of the role of cell phones in this particular uprising, it is important to see things in their greater context. This chapter aims at answering the following questions: What happened in January 2001 in the Philippines? And why? Therefore I start with a narrative of the events and then turn to their context to make it easier to understand what happened. I will point out the factors that led to the collapse of the Estrada government with placing emphasis on controversial issues.

### 5.1 *The Estrada government*

The main aim of the EDSA 2 movement was the removal of President Joseph “Erap” Estrada, an extremely populist politician, who came to power through a landslide victory<sup>22</sup> in the 1998 presidential elections.

Born in an upper-middle class family in Manila, Estrada dropped out of college at the age of 21 to start an acting career. His parents, not happy with this move, forbade him to use his family name, Ejercito. He then adopted his screen name “Estrada”, meaning street in Spanish and the nickname “Erap”<sup>23</sup>. His movie career turned out to be very successful, earning him huge fame. In

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<sup>22</sup> Amando Doronila (2001: 4) qualifies Estrada’s 39, 95% of the national vote as far from a majority mandate, leaving about 60% of the Philippine population who did not support him. For this argument he is nevertheless bound to mention the fact that the era of majority presidencies ended with the advent of a multi-party system established by the 1987 Constitution. In Doronila’s view the “landslide victory” was constructed by his supporters “to build the myth of an indestructible electorate mandate” (ibid: 5).

<sup>23</sup> “Pare” spelt backwards. Short form of *compadre/kumpadre* meaning “friend”. (Morada/Tadem 2006: 187)

1969, he turned to politics and became mayor, then senator and finally vice-president. (Castells et al. 2004: 198)

In his political life he could therefore draw on the popularity of his movies, in which he mostly portrayed the poor underdog who defended the rights of the underprivileged. With slogans like “*Erap para sa mahirap*” (Erap for the poor), his election rhetoric focused on the support of the *Masa* (the poor masses) and the need for pro-poor policies, drawing on this “Robin Hood” movie image. (ibid: 198) Especially in the wake of the 1997/1998 Asian financial crisis in combination with perceived failures of his predecessor Fidel Ramos’ neoliberal program, this campaign earned him a considerable and loyal base of popular support among the poor. (Reid 2001: 781-782) As Doronila (2001: 3), a journalist of the Estrada-critical newspaper *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, puts it: “(...) it tapped the hopes and blind, if not stubborn, loyalty of a Filipino underclass neglected by decades of conservative administrations and social policies.”

Estrada’s ambiguity becomes visible in his open support for the former Marcos dictatorship, also reflected in his business allies. Shortly after his election to presidency, he tried to rebury the remains of Ferdinand Marcos in Manila’s National Heroes Cemetery. (Hedman 2006: 169) One of the three parties of his ruling *Lapian ng Masan Pilipino* (LAMP) coalition, the Nationalist People’s Coalition (NPC) was the main residue of “Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorship-era” *Kilusung Bagong Lipunan*. (Reid 2001: 782) The other two were the *Laban Pilipino Demokratiko* (LPD), which was the main opposition party during the Ramos administration and Estrada’s own *Partido Masang Pilipino*. As Reid (ibid) points out, all of them were “solidly within the boundaries of ‘Trapo’ (traditional politician) politics, which tend to operate on a ‘patron-client’ basis.”

In the first two years of Estrada’s presidency, the initial support from various traditional ‘progressive’ groups and individuals, for example from the NGO and ‘civil’ society sector, who responded to his pro-poor discourse faded rapidly, as the Estrada government would not keep up with its promises. The poverty problem worsened, especially after the Asian financial crisis. There was no evidence of any concrete measures of poverty reduction nor was the government successful in implementing any substantial social reform program. With the opportunistic escalation of the war in Mindanao, the southern part of the Philippines, the unpopularity of President Estrada was growing. (ibid)

Another factor of increasing criticism was Estrada’s personal style of rule.

*“Eating, drinking, and gambling into the wee hours of the morning with a close circle of friends and associates, Estrada tended to neglect official meetings and formal decision-making procedures in favor of his “Midnight Cabinet”. With Estrada’s chief of staff complaining to the press that by the end of these drinking sessions, ‘I am the only sober one in the room,’ most political observers and operatives were deeply unimpressed – and embittered – by the informality and exclusionary quality of the president’s management of government affairs.” (Hedman 2006: 168)*

This criticism was accompanied with allegations of corruption, especially mishandling of public funds, accepting bribery and using illegal income to buy houses for his mistresses. (Castells et al. 2004: 198)

Estrada was increasingly connected to gambling, drinking and womanizing, which offended the Catholic Church leadership<sup>24</sup> and many middle- and upper-class elements. As Msgr. Quitaro, media officer of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, puts it in an interview: “[W]e thought that really then that the moralities of that government Joseph Estrada were hurting a lot of people (...)”. (Msgr. Quitaro, Interview Dec 2, 2008) And also: “Aside from that the Church did not like Estrada from the very start. Why? Because Estrada had so many wives, ok. He had one real one but he had so many mistresses down the line.” (ibid)

Another point of dissatisfaction was the Estrada government’s handling of economic policy, especially in the business sector and the middle-class. Already Estrada’s populist promises during his election campaign alarmed many business men. The economy was not doing very well shortly after the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998. Continuing global financial liberalization and a region-wide recession added to the urgency of the situation. Investments were needed badly. After the years of economic recession under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, economic stabilization and recovery had begun under Aquino and Ramos. Estrada’s failings threatened these positive developments. With the increasing criticism of his presidency, the business confidence sank. (Hedman 2006: 169) The pattern of cronyism “reminiscent of Marcos”, as Hedman points out, that “resurfaced under Estrada” (ibid) added significantly to the dissatisfaction and rejection of Estrada by the traditional business sector.

Estrada’s decisions in the national security and law enforcement sectors added to his increasing unpopularity. Estrada’s role as head of the newly-created Presidential Anti-Crime Commission

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<sup>24</sup> As concerns religion, the Philippines have a special status in South East Asia as a mainly Christian country. 81 per cent of its population are Catholics (number for 2001 according to National Statistics Office, <http://www.apcdfoundation.org/countryprofile/philippines/introduction.html#socio>, last access 26/03/2010) and thus the Catholic Church is very influential.

(PACC) during his time as vice-president under Fidel Ramos brought him the name “anti-crime czar” as well as allegations of being involved in human rights abuses and the protection of certain criminal groups via police general Panfilo “Ping” Lacson. In the light of these accusations the appointment of Lacson as chief superintendent of the Philippine National Police (PNP) didn’t look good. It raised “fears as to the expansion of presidential powers under the guise of promoting ‘law and order’”. (Hedman 2006: 170)

## 5.2 *The government crisis*

In spring 2000, the scandals and revelations of presidential corruption in the media increased, leading to a wave of protest and calls for Estrada to resign. (Hedman 2006: 171-2) But not until October, when Ilocos Sur<sup>25</sup> Gov. Luis ‘Chavit’ Singson, a drinking and gambling fellow of Estrada’s who played an ambivalent role, accused him of receiving P400 million in bribes from illegal lottery (*jueteng*) and P130 million in tobacco tax kickbacks, the crisis became serious. (Doronila 2001: 4, Castells et al. 2004: 198) Teofisto Guingona, the Senate minority leader, quickly picked up the accusations and in a speech later known as “I Accuse” speech he called for Estrada’s resignation. (Doronila 2001: 13) On October 12<sup>th</sup>, Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo<sup>26</sup> resigned from the Cabinet. The scandal was brought to the legislative arena as opposition groups filed an impeachment complaint against the President together with House representatives on October 18<sup>th</sup>. (Castells et al. 2004: 198) This was an unexpected move by the House of Representatives which challenged Estrada’s control of the Congress. (Doronila 2001: 15) From the beginning of the crisis, starting with the so-called *juetengate*<sup>27</sup>, there were almost daily street demonstrations and calls for Estrada to resign. (Labrador 2002: 142) Simultaneously Estrada started to lose the backing within his own party as dozens of officials including the Senate president and House speaker withdrew their support. The same happened in his Cabinet. This constituted the turning point. On December 7, the Senate impeachment trial began officially with Estrada being accused of bribery, culpable violation of the Constitution, graft and corruption as well as betrayal of public trust. (ibid)

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<sup>25</sup> Ilocos Sur is a province in the northern part of the Philippine main island Luzon.

<sup>26</sup> Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s party was part of the opposition. This is possible as president and vice president are elected separately in the Philippines.

<sup>27</sup> A play on „Watergate“. *Jueteng* is an illegal numbers game played by the poor. (Labrador 2002: 142)



In the following six weeks “[m]ultiple investigations took place, revealing more and more evidence to the disadvantage of Estrada.” (Castells et al. 2004: 198) The whole process was accompanied by intensive live media coverage, especially on the radio and on television. Before the whole nation the “drama of Estrada’s disgrace” was unfolded. The whole “’Erap’ soap opera” was followed intently by whole families. (Hedman 2006: 175) As Br. Bernard S. Oca, Vice Chancellor for Lasallian Mission and External Mission of the De La Salle University puts it: “(...) Filipinos were glued to that, it was like a soap opera, so everybody was watching that.” (Br. Bernard S. Oca, Interview Dec 9, 2008)

In the midst of this drama a violent disaster took place in the Philippine capital as five bombs exploded in the city’s crowded public places. Twenty-two people died and 120 were injured. (Castells et al. 2004: 198) Officially the Muslim rebel group Jemaah Islamiyah was connected with the bombings but many suspected a link with the ongoing Estrada impeachment trial. (ibid: 199)

### ***5.3 People Power 2 – January 16-20, 2001***

On January 16, 2001, the crisis reached its climax as in an 11-10 vote the senator judges decided against the opening of an envelope believed to contain important evidence of Estrada’s transactions. This was the trigger that had been missing until now to unleash the retained emotions of the past months. The days before, the tensions had been rising as after several shocking revelations the impeachment trial had come to a point where the opposition feared that Estrada would be acquitted, “as the alignments in the senate appeared to preclude conviction” (Doronila 2001: 156) The vote, which was rather a farce and a show of political power since the contents had already leaked through to the public, more or less confirmed the perceived alignment of the Senate. (ibid: 165-167) People were outraged, the democratic institutions had failed; hopes for a constitutional resolution of the crisis had been disappointed. Although the vote took place at 10 p.m. thousands of people poured into the streets.

*“The vote instantaneously sparked a national political conflagration. It was a spontaneous combustion like a forest fire ignited by a flint in a wilderness that was tinder dry. Within hours from 10 p.m. motorcades took to the streets, and throngs assembled at the EDSA shrine, Jaime Cardinal Sin sounded the call for a midnight Mass, text messages flashed in thousands of cell phones, calling on the people to go to EDSA. Only a month ago, it was hard to initiate a noise barrage. That evening Manila was reverberating with*

*blasts of car horns. In many provincial capitals, noise barrages and the beginnings of another People Power sprang from the streets.” (Doronila 2001: 167)*

The next four days, from January 16 to 20, the massive demonstrations continued with more than one million participants from almost all sections of Philippine society at its height. The core consisted of a very diverse, mixed group, not only the Catholic Church and the business sector but also of a wide range of organizations including labor, peasant and student organizations. Former presidents Cory Aquino and Fidel Ramos were part of the opposition against Joseph Estrada from the beginning. The center of demonstrations was the EDSA shrine, a memorial of the mass demonstrations that led to the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. On January 17, the impeachment trial was suspended indefinitely as the senator-judges resigned. By January 19, after further resignations, in particular from the economic management team, the Estrada Cabinet was no longer able to take care of the country’s affairs. (Castells et al. 2004: 199, Doronila 2001: 6) Reid (2001: 784-785) sees three main processes that finally led to the oath-taking of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo on January 20<sup>th</sup> and therefore to the end of the Estrada presidency. First military and police closed ranks with the opposition as they withdrew their support from President Estrada. Estrada’s reactions to the deepening opposition also played an important role in the unfolding of the events as they showed his growing weakness. He wanted the Senate to reveal the withheld evidence and after subsequent resignation of most of his cabinet members he announced ‘snap’ presidential elections for May. According to Reid, the “final motion for Estrada’s collapse” (ibid: 785) came from Chief Justice Davide, who gave the legal blessing to the inauguration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo by declaring that with the resignation of Estrada’s cabinet there was ‘no legal basis’ not to allow her swearing in.

On January 20, while the leftist and more militant sections of the demonstrators left to march to Malacañang, the presidential palace, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, former vice-president, was sworn in as new president. The pressure on Estrada to leave the palace increased. By 2 p.m. he and his family were escorted from Malacañang by the two highest military officials and Joseph “Erap” Estrada was “forced to accept that he had, at least ‘temporarily’, stepped aside” (Reid 2001: 785).

The second People Power movement was ended with a triumphant note.

#### ***5.4 The aftermath – Consolidation of power***

In the months after her inauguration, Arroyo and her main supporters had to consolidate her power. Arroyo never was very popular. The daughter of former President Diosdado Macapagal, who was in office from 1961 to 1965, was a professor for economy and is known for her neoliberal politics. The opposition against Estrada was aimed mainly at his removal. Arroyos installation as president was only supported by parts of the movement. Her unpopularity is reflected in opinion polls of that time which “place her as even more unpopular than Estrada just before his departure from Malacañang” (Reid 2001: 785), the presidential palace. This changed only slightly after the uprising, which was supported by the majority of Manila residents and, therefore, the support of Arroyo grew correspondingly. (ibid)

Shortly after Arroyos inauguration a huge debate broke out about the legitimacy of her oath-taking as it did not take place within the regular democratic and constitutional processes. The fact that Estrada’s term of office “was terminated by extra-electoral mass action” was taken up by his lawyers to legally challenge the new government’s legitimacy. (Doronila 2001: 8) The Supreme Court was committed to its declarations during the People Power protests and confirmed Arroyo’s swearing in as legal. This decision together with the lacking support in the military reduced Estrada’s chances to regain his presidency. (Reid 2001: 785)

Shortly after her inauguration Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo admitted that talks about political succession had already started in early 2000. Participating in these discussions were not only various factions of the military and police but also former president Ramos and politicians from the Lakas-CMD (Christian Muslim democrats) Party. (Reid 2001: 783) These leads Reid to call EDSA 2 a contradictory movement since it “remained ultimately an elite-controlled process” which never threatened the traditional elite. (ibid: 792)

With the mid-term elections on May 14, 2001 approaching tensions were growing since they were perceived as “de facto referendum on the legitimacy of the Arroyo government” (Labrador 2001: 143). On April 25, Joseph Estrada and his son Jinggoy were arrested under graft and corruption charges. The arrest could be seen by many Filipinos and Filipinas on TV. Labrador (ibid) interprets this move in the light of the mid-term elections at issue as “an apparent attempt to further discredit the Estrada camp prior to elections”. Not only Estrada supporters were enraged that the Estradas’ were being treated like common criminals and by the way the arrest

was displayed on television. Within hours “a crowd of perhaps one hundred thousand formed at EDSA and demanded Estrada’s release and reinstatement.” (Rafael 2003: 422) This time the crowd consisted mostly of urban poor, the *Masa*, the poorest and biggest sector of society. They were soon joined by political allies of Estrada’s, including candidates for the May election, who took up the opportunity to call for votes. In agitating speeches they referred to a “class war” calling the protest “Poor People’s Power”. (Doronila 2001: 222)

This time, as Rafael (2003: 422) puts it,

*“(...) the crowd (...) was trucked in by Estrada’s political operatives from the slums and nearby provinces and provided with money, food, and, on at least certain occasions, alcohol. In place of cell phones, many reportedly were armed with slingshots, homemade guns, knives, and steel pipes. English-language news reports described this crowd as unruly and uncivilized and castigated protestors for strewing garbage on the EDSA Shrine, harassing reporters, and publicly urinating near the giant statue of the Virgin Mary of EDSA.”*

However, Rafael also points to other accounts where these protesters are seen as “poor people with legitimate claims” (ibid) traditionally largely ignored in the Philippines. A country where “about 37% of the country’s population lived below the official poverty threshold” (Banzon Bautista 2001: 1) in 1998, the year of Estrada’s election, and class cleavages had hardly changed since the country’s independence after WW II. In the perception of the poor Estrada was “like a patron who had given them hope by way of occasional hand-outs and who addressed them in their vernacular.” (ibid: 422-423)

At around noon of May 1, after five days of protests, approximately 40 000 to 50 000 Estrada supporters started to march towards the presidential palace, clashing there with riot police. (Doronila 2001: 237) After several hours of fighting, the protesters were defeated by police and military. Six people were dead and 113 injured. (ibid: 280) President Macapagal-Arroyo declared a state of rebellion and had key opposition leaders arrested. (Labrador 2002: 143, Reid 2001: 786)

The elections on May 14 turned out to be very violent with 100 election-related casualties and 141 persons wounded. They brought a victory for Arroyo, although no substantial majority in the Senate. (ibid)

### ***5.5 Controversial issues***

After the events of February 2001, reactions in the media varied from elation over and ambivalence toward Arroyo's new presidential regime in the national context to much cooler, critical international accounts. (Reid 2001: 778) Beside the celebratory spirit, various controversial issues were raised. Critics focused on questions of legitimacy of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's oath taking, the role of the military in the events, as well as class issues. Central to all this was the question if the change in incumbency was conforming to democratic principles and therefore a legal process.

As Hedman (2006:184) mentions in her analysis of mobilizations "in the name of civil society" in the Philippines, "(...) the form and emergence of mobilization in the name of civil society must be understood according to deeper patterns of state and class formation in a given society." Therefore she highlights two main features of Philippine society, on the one hand, a well established oligarchic democracy imposed under American colonial rule in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, on the other hand, the existence of a dominant bloc of social forces, namely the capitalist class, the Catholic Church as well as the U.S. government. In her opinion, this bloc played an important role for the emergence of the People Power movements in the Philippines as they presented efforts to reassert its hegemony. (Hedman 2006: 178) For this view speaks the largely elite and middle class character of the movement. Not only the people in the streets, who were probably a little more heterogeneous, but especially the ones who were actually acting behind the scene on the top level were coming from the elite and middle classes. This caused much critique not only from the pro-Estrada camp, who saw or rather constructed the "ousting" of President Estrada as a direct attack of the elite on the poor, but also from international media, who criticized the "rich people's power" (Reid 2001: 778) as not conforming with democratic principles.

Another point of criticism of EDSA 2 was the role of the military, no "political innocent" in Philippine history (Hernandez 2001: 67). Hopes that this time, contrary to the first "People Power" in February 1986, the military would remain neutral did not come true. (ibid: 62) Whether this was crucial for the success of the movement remains controversial. Throughout the whole crisis, there had always been "some threat of military intervention to resolve the conflict

either in Estrada's favor or otherwise" (Reid 2001: 783). Francisco Nemenzo and Ramon Casiple, both experts on Philippine politics for many years, see the role of the military as crucial:

*"Without a military component the so-called people power is futile. But when the mass movement affects the military that's when the fun begins. That's what happened in January of twenty-o-one. And that's the reason why EDSA 3, although it was much bigger than EDSA 2, didn't affect the power arrangement because the military did not act."* (Francisco Nemenzo, Interview Nov 1, 2008)

*"In ending the whole thing, just as in EDSA 1, the military were the last actors. And in fact if you look at both events the people power was actually directed towards convincing the military to reverse side."* (Ramon Casiple, Interview Nov 26, 2008)

Others see the military only as a supporting actor, as an "additional factor" to the protest of the "nameless masses" who ensured the success of the movement and that it was exactly the popular uprising that averted an earlier military intervention. (Hernandez 2001: 71, Reid 2001: 783)

International media, especially 'Western-liberal' news magazines like *Time* and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, took up this critical issue and criticized the "popularly-supported coup" and characterized the Philippines as "coup-prone". (Reid 2001: 786)

It remains clear that the support of the military, however important their role was, leaves a bad aftertaste to the whole event. As Hernandez (2001: 75) puts it:

*"Had it remained neutral, People Power would have been a singular, unadulterated, and incontrovertible achievement of civil society functioning in a democracy in a situation where constitutional institutions and processes were being undermined by the political leadership."*

It would have left a country with less political influence of the military and many problems the Arroyo government had to face until now – also because of the debt of gratitude that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo felt to the military expressed in material rewards – would have been avoided. (ibid)

## 6 The role of mobile phones in EDSA 2

“But I think one technology which was really very evident and new in EDSA dos was the use of mobile phones in informing people of events, telling them of one’s views, one’s political insights, even jokes and of course in mobilizing people.”  
Teddy Casiño, Congressional Representative of Bayan Muna (Interview Dec 9, 2008)

When I told people I met about my research topic, many times I earned enthusiastic reactions in the sense of “Yes, that was amazing!”<sup>28</sup>. Many went on to tell me that at that particular time they had received many text messages and how they had forwarded them to their friends. Even those who were too young to actively have taken part gave similar accounts. Also in the literature this particular movement is mentioned as one of the examples of the political use of mobile phones (Rheingold 2002, Plant 2001) but there are also more critical views warning of an oversimplified view of the role mobile phones played in that movement (Pertierra et al. 2002, Castells et al. 2004, Paragas 2003, Rafael 2002).

This is more or less reflected in the opinions of my interviewees. Although there is a general agreement that mobile phones and especially text messages played a role in EDSA 2, some emphasize that EDSA 2 would still have happened without this technology. They outlined the fact that there had been uprisings before when mobile phones were not available and that people always found ways using whatever technology served their purpose. Others point to the importance of contextualizing the mobile phone’s role. Thus, Ramon Isberto says:

*“Sometimes (...) there is a tendency to romanticize. The role that mobile phones played I think is best understood when you look at it in the context. In the situation that happened, (...) if you look at it carefully mobile phones was (sic!) one of the elements. Not, certainly not the only element. And it is reason for debate, that’s from my own view, it is the combination of these that really brought this thing about.”* (Interview Dec. 16, 2008)

Anthony Cruz thinks that the role mobile phones played during the crisis was misunderstood. “Some say that it seems like the people were just robots, they just received a message and they went there.” (Interview Nov. 7, 2008) As one of the founders of “Txtpower”<sup>29</sup> he met some

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<sup>28</sup> This is especially striking as my research took place nearly eight years after the events.

<sup>29</sup> “Txtpower” is a consumer advocacy group that represents the rights of mobile phone users. <http://www.txtpower.org/>, last accessed March 26, 2010.

people from the Canadian organization “mobile active”<sup>30</sup>, who were admiring the Filipinos for EDSA 2 and how mobile phones were used in it, “but they have this wrong belief that this was entirely because of mobiles. No. I cannot just text in my mobile right now and tell them to go to EDSA. They wouldn’t go.” (ibid) This reflects Pertierra et al.’s critique of the exclusive focus of media accounts on the technology assigning it with some sort of “mystical force” (2002: 107), thus ignoring the people who use it. (ibid: 103)

In the following chapter I will thus take a detailed look into the role mobile phones played in EDSA 2 drawing on my own research material as well as on existing analyses. By examining different aspects of the protest movement in which mobile phones played a role but also by looking at other factors that were important, I aim at providing a differentiated view of its actual contribution to the events to oppose oversimplified accounts. On the basis of my own research data, I will analyze the general debate on the political use of cell phones. As my interviews focused on organizers of the protests, I specifically highlight their use of mobile phones but also that of people in general in order to oppose popular tendencies of assigning the cell phone with agency.

### ***6.1 Aspects of mobile phone use in EDSA 2***

Before and during EDSA 2 people used mobile phones in many ways. However, the number of cell phone users by that time was not very large. According to the International Telecommunications Union, 8.31 per cent of the population<sup>31</sup> were subscribed by the end of 2000. Thus, cell phones were by far not as widespread as today. Text messages had been implemented as a free service in 1994 and soon became the preferred way of using cell phones. Since 2000 text messages have not been free of charge anymore but this changed little in their popularity. Although the actual number of cell phone users was not very large, the number of SMS sent per day was with about 65.4 million “double the world average” as Pertierra et al.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://mobileactive.org/>, last accessed Jan. 17, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> For 2000 the ITU notes 6.5 mio subscriptions. This comes closer to the actual amount of cell phone subscriptions during EDSA 2 which took place in January 2001 than the numbers for 2001, as the numbers are assessed at the end of each year. For further explanations on how the data is assessed see [http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Indicators/WTI\\_Technotes.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Indicators/WTI_Technotes.pdf), last accessed Jan. 22, 2010. Pertierra (2002: 88) speaks of 7.2 mio cell phone subscribers for the period of EDSA 2.



(2002: 88) points out. It is thus not surprising that a high number of text messages was circulating in the time before and during the EDSA 2 protests. This is, according to Ramon Isberto<sup>32</sup>, a phenomenon generally noticed at large assemblies of people be it sports events, concerts or the university Christmas celebrations. (Interview Dec. 16, 2008) But there are many accounts that people received large amounts of messages encouraging them to join the protests that were then again passed on to friends and family. Pertierra et al. (2002: 119) speak of a popular perception of people receiving “a constant stream of text messages” and of a “city awash in a sea of such messages”.

### 6.1.1 Mobilization

It is thus the most persisting claim concerning the role of cell phones in EDSA 2 that it was due to text messages that thousands of people gathered in the streets of Manila as well as in other parts of the country to protest against the Senate decision not to include important evidence in the impeachment trial on January 16, 2001. Here some examples where this is mentioned in the literature:

*“Text messages imploring people to troop to EDSA, while perhaps limited in coverage, did significantly inspire a number of their recipients to participate in the demonstrations by appealing to their patriotic fervor.” (Paragas 2003: 281)*

*“[I]t was texting that made possible the swift gathering of tens of thousands immediately after the crucial voting result of January 16th.”  
(Castells et al. 2004: 199-200)*

Similarly, one of my interviewees, Lourdes Portus from the Department of Mass Communications of the University of the Philippines, points to the evident role of mobile phones in the mobilization of people.

*“It was really the mobile phone that got (...) these multitudes of people gather at the shrine.”  
(Interview Lourdes Portus, Dec. 5, 2008)*

But with such assumptions one has to be careful. It is nearly impossible to determine the connection between received text messages urging people to go to EDSA and join the protests and their actual decision to do so. Criticizing media accounts of doing so without providing sufficient empirical basis, Pertierra et al. (2002) conducted a survey with seven hundred

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<sup>32</sup> Ramon Isberto is the Public Relations Head of Smart Communications, the largest mobile telecommunications provider in the Philippines.

respondents. Without being representative, this survey suggests that there is a gap between the perceived role of cell phones in EDSA 2 and text messages being the actual reason for participation. Only forty-four percent of the respondents that attended EDSA 2 declared that they had done so because of text messages they had received. However, asked if texting in particular had played a “significant role in EDSA 2” more than three quarters agreed. (Pertierra et al.: 119) They conclude that, alongside a continuing belief in the power of text messages, an ensemble of other reasons actually persuaded people to join the protests.

The opinion that the role of texting in EDSA 2 should not be exaggerated is shared by several of my interviewees. Teodoro Casiño (Interview Dec. 9, 2008) points to the fact that the atmosphere was already very emotional and agitated at that time as people were able to follow revelation after revelation in the impeachment trial closely in the media over more than two months. Br. Bernard Oca’s account highlights this view. He was near the EDSA shrine<sup>33</sup> at the time when he heard the news about the Senate decision on radio.

*“And when I heard this I was feeling just so angry that instead of going straight to the school I went to the shrine.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)*

Being one of the first people at the EDSA shrine, it was not text messages that urged him to go there although he used text messages to tell his La Salle brothers and friends to join him.

Similarly to EDSA 1, the active support of the protests by the Catholic Church also played a role in mobilizing people. Especially the call of the archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, convinced religious groups and also large parts of the unorganized middle classes to take part in the rallies at EDSA. The Church not only was present at EDSA but also held service in the EDSA chapel. This makes clear that there had been many different reasons for people to join the protests and that the loyalties and alliances that are said to usually frame the political actions of most Filipinos and Filipinas are not challenged by the additional information provided by new media. (Pertierra 2006a: 325)

### **6.1.2 Coordination of protests**

Even if the role of text messages in mobilizing people to go to EDSA remains a debated issue, the role of mobile phones in the coordination of the protests is agreed to by all.

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<sup>33</sup> The shrine is a memorial for the 1986 overthrow of the Marcos regime.

The cell phone was useful for the coordination process on several levels. First, representatives of various organizations point to the importance of cell phones to coordinate their delegations among themselves as well as with other organizations, a point I will further outline in the chapter on how organizers used cell phones during EDSA 2.

Second, as the protest on January 16 was not planned in advance and many different groups as well as unaffiliated individuals took part, cell phones helped to coordinate this incoherent crowd. Getting the news of the Senate decision, people descended to the streets and soon different meeting places all over the city emerged. Ramon Casiple underlines the importance of people realizing that if they would not start acting the whole process would end here, a realization that in his opinion was shared with others via texting.

*“That realization started it all, you have to do something. You text, you forward it. And in the middle of it somebody got the bright idea: We should meet. We should express our anger as a group. So they started gatherings in corners, let’s meet at this in order, so there was a spontaneous noise barrage in those places. Of course after going to that, you’d be bored after a while, so the next question was: What do we do after this? So let’s go to EDSA. So, they text again: They are going to EDSA, are you going?” (Ramon Casiple, Interview Nov. 26, 2008)*

His account points to the spontaneity of the decision to go to EDSA, which in his opinion, because of the previous experience in 1986, was “the most logical place to go” (ibid). As more and more people were gathering at the EDSA shrine, other meetings descended there. The decision to go to EDSA was circulating via text message. Similarly, Anthony Cruz, one of the organizers, described how various organizations, contacting each other by mobile phone, decided to gather people in EDSA. (Interview Nov. 7, 2008)

Thus, mobile phones were intensely used among the participants in coordinating the protests. Social coordination is generally seen as one of the aspects of social life that are affected by mobile phones. As mobile phones make it possible to coordinate one’s own movement with that of others while en route – something that was impossible before – we are able to coordinate them now in real time. (Ling 2004: 69) Mobile phones add interactivity and a better gradation to the coordination process that does not any more rely on secondary systems as for example time. (ibid: 80) This facilitated coordination within small groups of people was also evident during EDSA 2. Teodoro Casiño points out that you “couldn’t get lost because you would know in an instant where your other friends were, where your school delegation was. So nobody was lost. People with cell phones never get lost.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008) In the course of EDSA 2,

coordination by mobile phone was thus transformed “into a political activity, imbuing personal and social connections with a political nuance.” (Paragas 2003: 281)

In this coordination process another technology was significant: Manila’s train systems, the MRT (Metro Rail Transit System) and LRT (Light Rail Transit System) that both serve a station near the EDSA shrine, the center of the protests. As the streets were blocked with masses of people, it was really hard to get there, as Ramon Casiple points out. (Interview Nov. 26, 2008) Busses could not get through any more or they were totally overcrowded. And so it was the train that “took up the traffic” (ibid). Anthony Cruz even goes so far as to maintain that because of the existence of the train connection, “the government (...) could not have been successful in preventing people from going to EDSA.” (Interview Nov. 7, 2008)

### **6.1.3 Source of information**

Conforming to analyses of other examples of the political use of cell phones, cell phones as a source of information is a topic that has come up quite frequently in the interviews I conducted.

This reflects the predominant opinion in the general debate on the political use of cell phones.

For Teodoro A. Casiño, one of the organizers of the protests, the fact that communication via text messages is not as official as the traditional media, thus allowing sometimes more efficient emotional information, makes the cell phone an important medium for the spreading of information. This can even be unverified, uncensored insider information, which would not pass editorial standards of the mass media, as well as personal insights. Rather than saying that information via mobile phones bypasses the mass media, as is often claimed, Casiño states that they are complementing each other. In the case of information about events planned by Bayan, short for Bagong Alyansang Makabayan or New Patriotic Alliance, who he at that time worked for, text messages provided the people with details like location, time, program start which were not broadcast via TV or radio. Casiño underlines the interactivity of mobile phones pointing to the fact that it is possible to call or text back. (Interview Dec. 9, 2008) Confirming this view, Paragas (2003: 273) states that, although television remained the primary source of information for the general public during EDSA 2, various accounts point to the significance of mobile phones and text messages “in raising awareness about the unfolding events” (ibid).

The opinion that the quality of information transmitted via mobile phone is different than in the traditional media is shared by Ramon Isberto from Smart Communications but he rather emphasizes its personal character. (Interview Dec. 16, 2008)

People also used text messages to keep up-to-date with what was going on at EDSA. They texted people they knew to be on location if they could not go there themselves as Ramon Casiple highlights,

*“Well, Filipinos are a really curious people. So those who were not there were texting people and asking if they are there and if you are there you would be pestered by continuing text: What’s happening? So, it really became a crucial communication line.”*  
(Interview Nov. 26, 2008)

For political observers like Ramon Casiple, texting proved to be an important way to get more detailed information about the situation on the ground. Through regular text messages from friends, they knew, also when they could not be on site, what was happening.

The fact that with mobile phones everyone can disseminate information has not only the positive effect of furthering free expression but also leads to the spreading of misinformation and rumor. The anonymity of text messages makes it possible to spread gossip or false information without being identified. This can go as far as black propaganda and psychological warfare. This highlights the importance of credibility of the information spread via text message.

Here the question arises why the Estrada government did nothing to prevent the use of mobile phones and internet in this way. On the one hand, Rafael points to the invincibility of new media: “[O]ne could imagine each user becoming his or her own broadcasting station: a node in a wider network of communication that the state could not possibly monitor, much less control.” (2003: 403) This was combined with the existence of a relatively weak state. (Castells et al. 2004: 204, Rafael 2003: 403) Given these facts, “[i]t is doubtful, however, that cell phone surveillance technology was available to the Estrada administration.” (Rafael 2003: 403) Furthermore, Castells et al. (2004: 204) point out that in 2000/2001 such surveillance systems were not sophisticated enough to be used in large-scale political demonstrations like EDSA 2.

#### 6.1.4 The role of other media in EDSA 2

Castells et al. (2004: 205) state that mobile phones were not the only media that was important for EDSA 2. According to them, opposition to Joseph Estrada already started when he was elected president and by the time of EDSA 2 there existed about 200 anti-Estrada websites and 100 e-mail discussion groups. Online protests were used to show discontent with the government. E-Lagda.com was the most famous online forum collecting over 91,000 e-signatures over internet and SMS in support of the impeachment. (ibid: 199) This is supported by Anthony Cruz, who also mentions an online protest collecting people's pictures holding placards saying: "Oust Erap, Good Bye President!" (Interview Nov. 7, 2008) The internet especially was used for critique. (Paragas 2003: 265) Compared to information spread via mobile phones, it provided extensive information while also being interactive. In the organizing process internet and mobile phones complemented each other as the internet was used for more comprehensive statements and reports but also facilitated communication within nationwide organizations. What militates against the role of the internet is its low penetration in the Philippines with only 500,000 subscribers<sup>34</sup> in 2001, which is also due to the costs of personal computers. (Rafael 2003) While the role of the internet was equally highlighted as that of mobile phones in the news coverage of the demonstrations (Castells et al. 2004: 199; see also Pertierra et al. 2002: 104), the role of other media (television, radio and the print media) is often neglected.

As already outlined in the previous chapter, the impeachment trial was extensively covered by the media. TV and radio broadcasted live as far as possible. It was met by a huge level of interest as people were following it like a "soap opera" (Br. Bernard S. Oca, Interview Dec. 9, 2008).

*"Because that was what happened for more than two months. People were tuning in into the proceedings and monitoring. That's why it built up such a huge level of interest. And people would immediately turn on the radio after office hours. They would go to a bar and ask the management to turn on the television."* (Ramon Casiple, Interview Nov. 26, 2008)

Thus, the mass media played an important role in raising the public's awareness of the gravity of the cases against Estrada. Bautista (2001) analyzes the role of TV referring especially to the six hour daily impeachment coverage as follows,

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<sup>34</sup> This figure stems from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). It includes the number of dial up, leased line and fixed broadband Internet subscribers. Based on nationally reported data the ITU also indicates Internet users, which is for the Philippines 2 mio in 2001. They note that in some cases these figures are more precise as they are based on surveys. However, surveys differ across countries with respect to age and frequency of use. ([http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/WTI\\_Technotes.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/WTI_Technotes.pdf), accessed Jan. 17, 2010)

*“Without it, the public would not have fully understood how Estrada violated its trust. Without it, moral outrage would not have erupted when 11 senators voted to dismiss the controversial envelope. Without it, People Power 2 would have been difficult, if not impossible to stage.” (p. 12)*

Also, in the night when the Senate decided not to open the second envelope this was live on TV and radio, so, as Teddy Casiño (Interview Dec. 9, 2008) points out, “everybody knew about it in an instant”. Br. Bernard S. Oca, who heard the news on radio, decided to go to the EDSA shrine to pray. It was important for him to express his outrage in this way. (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)

The traditional media contributed significantly to generate an emotionally charged situation and due to that people were aware of what was going on.

People involved in the organizing process also emphasize the importance of both mobile phones as well as the traditional media for their work. As TV, radio and print media have a broader reach, they are seen as multipliers, as amplifiers of their message or of information and as such they played a crucial role in EDSA 2. Teodoro Casiño, who was at the Senate on January 16, the night of the decision on the second envelope, reports on his reaction:

*“And so you are in the session hall, there’s no phone, there’s no radio. So you rely on your text, to text your leaders: This is what happened, this is what we should do, lets all go to EDSA. And it was a very good means also getting to the media. I immediately texted my media friends that this is it, this is people power, send out to everyone. And that message was relayed to the public. It was very effective.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)*

This is a good example of how cell phones and the media complemented each other.

### **6.1.5 Political humor**

An important amount of the messages circulated in the context of EDSA 2 were political jokes. Nearly all my interviewees as well as the literature point to the importance of jokes and political humor during EDSA 2 in particular and in Philippine politics in general. The Philippine Center of Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) even writes in its “scrapbook” on EDSA 2 – a compendium of jokes, text messages, photos, digital images and more: “To tell the truth, it started with jokes.” (2001) And further:

*“The jokes were passed on largely through the short message service (SMS) provided by mobile phone companies. They were an outlet for the frustrations of an increasing number of citizens exasperated with a president who promised much but delivered little. There was such a deluge of jokes that eventually it became the joke that Filipinos didn’t take to the streets because they were too busy texting.”*

The use of SMS for passing around political jokes is generally affirmed by my interviewees. Text messages with their limited number of characters are seen as an ideal medium for the distribution of jokes.

*“Jokes are usually short. Long jokes lose their impact. So the text<sup>35</sup> is a very appropriate medium for it.” (Francisco Nemenzo, Interview Nov 1, 2008)*

By sending a joke via text message, you do not have to deal with the reaction to it. You don't have to worry if people laugh about it or not.

But what role do such jokes play in a protest movement like EDSA 2? Hart (2007) gives some hints on what role jokes can play in social protest in general. She sees the power of humor in framing<sup>36</sup> political protest, as well as in the furthering of the development of collective identity. (ibid: 1)

The second is definitely true for EDSA 2. Especially in the period between the so-called “jueteng gate” – Ilocos Sur Governor Luis Singson accusing President Estrada of receiving bribes and tax kickbacks – and the momentous Senate vote on the opening of the second envelope containing important evidence in the impeachment trial, political jokes spread via text message helped form a community of politically like-minded people. As Ramon Isberto puts it: “I think the most reasonable way the mobile phone reinforced the sense of community among this group of people who were stating this political position was jokes.” (Interview Dec 16, 2008)

Jokes have a certain advantage over ordinary political news as Hart (2007: 18) points out: “Because of its surprising character, humor is always different, and enjoyable news is always to be preferred to predictable news.” People therefore want to share this amusement. Ramon Isberto underlines the viral character of jokes. (Interview, Dec 16, 2008) Similarly, Dányi and Sükösd (2003: 301) see funny messages as providing positive incentives, which is one way of motivating participants of horizontal communication to forward the message to their network voluntarily. “Forwarding it provokes laughter and creates community experiences with family, friends, colleagues, which is pleasant for the sender as well as the recipient” (ibid).

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<sup>35</sup> Text is short for texting which is the colloquial word used for writing and sending text messages via mobile phones.

<sup>36</sup> Framing is a concept widely used by social movement theorists. It alludes to “how a situation is interpreted by those engaged in social protest” (Hart 2007: 8) Framing means the process of translating ideological beliefs into an existing, practical framework, of defining and articulating the position of the actors involved. (ibid: 9)



It is this feeling of not being alone, of being part of a community of like-minded people as well as the feeling of being an insider.

However, jokes most of the time do not politicize. Pertierra et al.'s (2002) survey on the role of cell phones in EDSA 2 shows that, though affirming that a lot of jokes were passed around via text messages during the impeachment trial, the jokes did not have much impact on most of the respondents.

However, the informal, often offending character of jokes also keeps people from passing them on.

*“Once I read, I just, you know, I don’t pass it around. I, maybe I can laugh about it. Sometimes it’s not Christian. [Laughing] It’s kind of mean. So, I just read it but I don’t pass it.”* (Br. Bernard S. Oca, Dec 9, 2008)

Humor and jokes make it possible to express feelings of discontent in a manner that would be conceived as not according to moral values in a normal context. As mentioned above, below-belt criticism and even black propaganda are even furthered by the use of text messages as they make it possible to anonymously spread such content. Additionally, the sender does not have to deal with the reaction to his message. So even if the joke is bad or not well told it is not that embarrassing. The inhibition threshold to tell jokes via text message is much lower.

Interesting in the case of EDSA 2 is that Joseph Estrada himself used jokes in his campaign for presidency and also used mobile phones to spread them around. Joseph Estrada is known as a very funny person who likes to make fun of himself.

*“There were a lot of jokes about Erap<sup>37</sup>. He himself spread some of that (sic!) jokes. He loves to make fun of himself.”*  
(Francisco Nemenzo, Interview Nov 1, 2008)

According to Anthony Cruz (Interview Nov 7, 2008), a journalist and in 2000 public info officer of Bayan<sup>38</sup>, it made Estrada even more popular that people were laughing at him. As Estrada’s campaign aimed at the poor masses of the Philippine population, these jokes about his bad English, his lack of schooling and his dutiful wife furthered his image of being one of them. But when Estrada kept making fun of himself when being president, this was perceived as

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<sup>37</sup> Erap is Joseph Estrada’s nickname.

<sup>38</sup> Short for Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, meaning New Patriotic Alliance or New Alliance for the People, an alliance composed mainly of workers and peasant organizations. For further information see <http://www.bayan.ph/index.php>, accessed 2009-11-27

unpresidential and delegitimizing. And especially for his critics this was playing right into their hands.

*Opposition groups like Bayan, a leftist political coalition, turned that against him and made use of these jokes for their purposes. (Interview Anthony Cruz, Nov 7, 2008)*

This underlines that “[h]umour never starts just out of the blue.” (Hart 2007: 17) As Francisco Nemenzo (Interview Nov 1, 2008), former president of the University of the Philippines and long time analyst of Philippine politics (mention involvement?), points out, jokes had already been used in the opposition against Ferdinand Marcos and thus are nothing new in Philippine politics.

### **6.1.6 Generation Txt**

It is a widespread claim that the use of mobile phones in EDSA 2 is also to a large part due to the involvement of the technology savvy youth, the so called “Generation Txt”.

Research like that of Castells et al. (2004) show that the youth all over the world is quick in “adopting and appropriating mobile technologies because in general they use these new services with more intensity for all kinds of purposes in their everyday life” (ibid: 193). It is thus not surprising that young people are seen as to be more sophisticated with cell phones. Tessa Villapando-Ramiro from AKKAPKA-CANV (Interview Dec. 9, 2008) was really surprised that her children, highschool students in 2001, were that active in EDSA 2. In her opinion, the broadcast of the impeachment hearings generated curiosity and awareness among the country’s youth. This together with the messages that were circulating increased the knowledge of what was happening which led to the large participation of young people.

Tessa Villapando-Ramiro comes, as most of my interviewees, from the generation that experienced the first EDSA or People Power movement, the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. They also see the wish to experience something similar to these legendary events as one reason why that many young participated in EDSA 2.

*“The participants [of EDSA one] were told to be heroes. The younger ones missed out of that, so they wanted to have that experience.” (Francisco Nemenzo, Interview Nov. 1, 2008)*

Compared to 1986, they see a different political, far more open atmosphere that made the participation in protests far less risky.

Teodoro Casiño, in 2001 secretary general of Bagong Alyangsang Makabayan (short Bayan), thinks that the use of mobile phones especially mobilized the youth. He thus claims, “[I]t was one way to reach out to them and in a language that was very... that really appeals to them.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)

But it was also the universities themselves, almost all of them with exception of the University of the Philippines, which were sending large contingents of their students to participate in the rallies.

### **6.1.7 Class dichotomies**

The supposed role mobile phones played in EDSA 2 was also used to support the argument that the protests were solely an elite and middle class affair. Mobile phones are, at least they were in 2001, identified with the country’s affluent. “The logic goes that if mobile phones were pivotal in the demonstrations, it is because its participants could afford them.” (Paragas 2003: 277)

According to the International Telecommunications Union, there were 12.2 million cell phone subscriptions in the Philippines in 2001, which is 15.34 per cent of the country’s population.

In the opinion of my interviewees, the participants of EDSA 2 were largely from elite and middle class backgrounds. That they were the ones owning cell phones and having access to the internet is seen as one reason why it was especially these societal strata that were mobilized. But not all agree to the assumption that EDSA 2 was solely an elite and middle class event. The sociologist Maria Cynthia Rose Banzon Bautista (2001) asserts a more heterogeneous class composition. (p. 7) Although acknowledging the predominance of the middle class, she sees the organized lower classes significantly present. (Banzon Bautista 2001: 10) Lourdes Portus’ from the Department of Mass Communication of the University of the Philippines conducted research on cell phone use among urban poor that suggests, in urban poor communities it is exactly these members of political organizations or community leaders that more often possess cell phones and use them for political purposes. (Interview Dec. 5, 2008)

Ramon Casiple from the Institute for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER) also states that although the middle class was predominant, reducing the whole thing to a class war is an oversimplification:

*“But that’s an oversimplification if you say it’s really a class war because there were many poor people in EDSA two. In fact it’s a multisectoral gathering. It’s really like*

*EDSA one, where the middle class was also predominant, but there were basically the poor, everybody was there. (...) So the class war there is more in the configuration and in the propaganda, not really in the substance of what happened.” (Ramon Casiple, Interview Nov. 26, 2008)*

The dichotomy between those having cell phones and those without was, as Paragas puts it, “an effective propaganda statement” (2003: 277).

Similar to the claims concerning the class distribution of the participants of EDSA 2, cell phones are seen as not having played any role in the mass protests following the arrest of Joseph Estrada and his son in April 2001. As the participants of that movement were largely from poor backgrounds, there were not many cell phone users. As the mobilization was similarly quick as in EDSA 2, the fact that it happened without cell phones – the “Poor People Power” – questions the claimed importance of new media. (Castells et al. 2004: 202) However, Pertierra et al.’s research suggests that cell phones were used in both events in much the same way. (2002: 8) Although the evidence of the volume of text messaging is greater for EDSA 2, nearly 70 per cent of the respondents of EDSA 3 declared that they had received messages encouraging them to take part in the event. (ibid: 119-120) The authors are especially surprised by the results on the respondents’ views on the impact and role of mobile phones and text messages as a greater percentage of the respondents who participated in EDSA 3 “admitted to having been persuaded to take part by text messaging” (ibid: 121).

## ***6.2 The use of mobile phones in the organization of protests***

“Indeed, it was in the organization of demonstrations in EDSA 2 that cellphones played their greatest role.” (Pertierra et al. 2002: 116)

My interviews specifically aimed at assessing the perspective of those who were actively organizing the EDSA 2 protests and how they made use of mobile phones. The decision for my approach was, on the one hand, the thought that people who had been active in the organizing process would be easier to access. On the other hand, by showing that there was a huge amount of organization behind these protests, I want to counter impressions that mobile phones only enhance spontaneous, unorganized forms of protest emanating from individuals unaffiliated with any organization.

One important factor for the success of EDSA 2 was the fact that it brought together very diverse groups of Philippine society, “a rainbow mix of crowd”. This crowd was not only made up of the whole spectrum of civil society groups including the Catholic Church, peasant and labor groups, trade unions, students, representatives of the Muslim population, but also of business associations and in the end the military and police. (Bazon Bautista 2001: 7, Carroll 2001: 248)

Following Singson’s revelations in October 2000, various civil society forces formed two multi-sectoral networks both mobilizing huge support during the impeachment trial. The Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino II (Kompil II) was a pluralist coalition of NGO-networks, church-based organizations, political blocs from the Left, party list groups (e.g. Akbayan) and individuals. The Erap Resign Movement was composed of organizations and movements of the national democratic Left, anti-Estrada politicians and known progressive individuals. Other organized players emerged as well. (Bazon Bautista 2001: 5-6)

Looking at the way these organizers used cell phones, not only gives insights in the possibilities these devices provide but also adds to the argument that circulating text messages were largely produced by these organizations and not as often made believed by “nameless, ordinary citizens (...) unaffiliated with any (...) civil society group” (Pertierra et al. 2002: 107).

An attentive reader may have already noticed that until now I was most of the time talking about the sending of text messages, short texting, and not of calling. As outlined in the chapter on the mobile phone use in the Philippines, texting is general the preferred mode of communication via mobile phone. When asked why texting was more important during EDSA 2 for them than calling, my interviewees pointed to smaller costs, speed and to the possibility of sending one message to a multitude of receivers in a very short time. These features are especially useful for political activists.

*“Because voice takes time to reach thirty people but in one click of text you can send out a message to thirty hundred people. So, I am talking more about text messages. And calls are expensive for Filipinos.” (Teodoro Casiño, Interview Dec. 9, 2008)*

For Casiño, in 2001 working for Bayan (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan – New Patriotic Alliance), the advantage of cell phones is that they provide an around-the-clock connection with people at a mass basis as people are carrying them around all the time and often do not turn them off at all. Pertierra et al. (2002), thus, underline that “[a]ctivists – from both the Left and the

Right – thus found their cell phones especially helpful when having to transmit information promptly to many people, as in the arrangement of protest actions.” (p. 116)

Another point that makes cell phones very efficient for organizations like Bayan is that their target compared to media like TV or radio is not random.

*“You text people who you know and people who you think can actually come to a rally or who share your views or you probably could convince. So it’s a selective kind of media which makes it more efficient.” (ibid)*

Perci Centaña, Akbayan Representative Risa Hortivero’s chief of staff, points out that mobile phones are also used to contact the media. Compared to the traditional way of contacting the media via fax, which is still used for more comprehensive statements, text messages are used to send quick notes to raise the attention of the media on special events. (Interview Nov. 25, 2008)

As outlined above, organizers used cell phones for the coordination of their delegations as well as for coordination with other organizations. Anthony Cruz, in 2001 working for Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, known for its acronym Bayan, a large umbrella group of people’s organizations, points to the fact that, as most campaign organizers already had cell phones in 2001, this facilitated and speeded up the coordination of meetings in reaction to political developments. (Interview Nov. 9, 2008)

*“If there was a big development in the political scene, we would just be able to text everyone and we would have a meeting. And it’s also the same thing for other organizations, so we could – there were various coalitions at that time – it was very easy to contact them, to exchange thoughts, to call them up.” (ibid)*

Perci Centaña, working for Akbayan in 2001, emphasizes the efficiency of mobile phones in the coordination process during EDSA 2. Text messages were intensively used for instructions. Members were directed where to go, where to find the Akbayan delegation, when the events would take place and how best to get there. Cell phones were also important means for the area coordinators that were Akbayan installed. Since the protest site was that vast, they were positioned to overlook the area, to help people getting to the events as well as to help coordinate the different Akbayan delegations. (Interview Nov. 25, 2008) Similarly, Teodoro Casiño states that for Bayan cell phones were used as tools for security and coordination during the mass mobilizations and that they especially facilitated the organization of their delegations. (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)

Organizations used text messages to keep their members up-to-date on special events they planned as well as on the developments of the mass actions in general. Text messages provided a

platform for detailed information about place and time of rallies, about the time of the program start as well as possibilities of assembling before the rally.

Finally, the cell phone gave activists, as Pertierra et al. (2002) point out, “greater flexibility” (117) as they used the mobile phone to obtain information to facilitate their decisions. Teodoro Casiño’s following account highlights this claim:

*“Even as the troops were starting coming in (...) nobody knew what it was. It was just a convergence of people. So the more organized groups wanted confirmation: What kind of gathering is this? Even the media was asking: Is this People Power? Should we go to EDSA? Is it safe to go to EDSA? Should we now start mobilizing our chapters? And that kind of information you don’t get that from the media. This is internal information that has to be processed. And that’s where texting came in. It made the process a lot faster because you immediately got in touch with people who were part of the prayer rally, you learned what it was. And so [I] confirmed it. And so [I] told our organization that it’s ok, let’s all go, let’s mobilize.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008)*

Casiño highlights the immediacy of text messages as it is possible to reach others wherever they are so that he was able to get information about the situation on site.

These accounts show that those involved in the organizing process of EDSA 2 highly profited from their mobile phones. But as Teodoro Casiño further highlights,

*“It was only at that time that the ordinary person thought of mobile phones as an instrument for social change. But we’ve been here for a long time [in the] organizing work and mobilizing movements. The cell phone has been important since it was, probably since it was introduced.” (ibid)*

### **6.3 Discussing concepts on political mobile phone use**

I now turn to analyzing if concepts used in the general debate on the political potential of mobile phones apply to my material.

In the debate on the political impact of wireless communication technologies their networking logic is highlighted as the feature that makes them that powerful. This means that through these technologies each user can easily activate his personal network for political purposes. The basis for this is the fact that communication via cell phone is basically personal, which is also highlighted by my interviewees. The sender usually knows the person he is calling or sending a text message to. Messages thus come from a known source which enhances their credibility.

*“That’s where the power of mobile phones comes in, it’s because the message is personal. Personal in the sense it’s your friend asking you, not some political leader whom you may know. No, no. It’s your neighbor, it’s your classmate, it’s your officemate, it’s your*

*girlfriend, it's your boyfriend, and they are telling you: Oh guys, you better come."*  
(Ramon Isberto, Interview Dec. 16, 2008)

*"[M]ost of the political text messages succeed because they come from or they're exchanged among friends. (...) For example, if I received an invitation for a rally and I pass it on to my best friends, there'll be a higher possibility that they will attend the rally."*  
(Anthony "Tonyo" Cruz, Interview Nov. 7, 2008)

There is not only a higher possibility that they will attend, but also that they will pass on the message to their network of friends who forward it to their friends and thus something like a snowball effect can emerge. How this works is highlighted by Ramon Casiple:

*"But with a cell phone, when somebody you know texts you (...) and usually you pass it on, that's the first thing you do, you forward it to your friends and your friends would forward it to their friends, sometimes back to you. So, I mean, (...) that can be done in a span of let's say fifteen minutes, the news would have reached more than five hundred already. They just forward and forward and forward."* (Interview Nov. 26, 2008)

Dányi and Sükösd (2003) call this effect, purposely used for marketing strategies, viral. New communication technologies, believed to stimulate this person-to-person communication, are seen as ideal means for this form of peer-to-peer marketing. (ibid: 300) Political activists increasingly make use of new communication technologies to set off these processes. For them they provide a means that makes it comparably cheap, easy and very quick to reach thousands of people. But the important point here is, as several of my interviewees point out, to be able to find the right message, a message that appeals to many people and that fits the particular moment. In EDSA 2 this was the fact. Looking at the moment in EDSA 2 that is seen as the trigger for the following protests, the decision in the Senate impeachment trial not to open the second envelope, Ramon Casiple (Interview Nov. 26, 2008) states that the news as well as the message that people were going to the streets to show their outrage were very important at that time. People were waiting for something to do. After two months of the impeachment "drama" with revelation following revelation there was suddenly this unsatisfying ending. „And then suddenly there's the wall. I mean, it would end here if you don't do anything. That realization started it all, you have to do something." (ibid)

So people started distributing the message that there is a need to start acting, to take to the streets and show one's anger and as the message was widely supported it started to circulate.

Rizzo, however, points out that the fact that communication over cell phones takes place basically within personal networks presents also a limiting factor for mobilization. (Rizzo 2008: 103-104) Yet, Ramon Isberto from Smart Communications is convinced that with the new



technologies individuals can expand their reach. As example he mentions the election campaign of Barack Obama in the US.

Another concept that is based on the networking logic of mobile communication technologies is that of “smart mobs” (Rheingold 2002). Connected through mobile communication technologies people are able to cooperate in new ways. Groups of people that collaborate for a common goal can be built within instants. Such “mobile ad hoc social networks” (ibid: 169) are more and more used for political activism as they can act more flexibly, quickly adjusting to new situations. Rheingold claims that this concept applies to EDSA 2:

*“On January 20, 2001, President Joseph Estrada became the first head of state in history to lose his power to a smart mob. More than 1 million Manila residents, mobilized and coordinated by waves of text messages, assembled at the site of the 1986 “People Power” peaceful demonstrations that had toppled the Marcos regime.” (ibid: 157-158)*

For this claim speaks the following account of Ramon Casiple on the way things were proceeding just after the crucial senate vote on January 16:

*“And then suddenly there’s the wall. I mean, it would end if you don’t do anything. That realization started it all, you have to do something. You text, you forward it. And in the middle of it somebody got the bright idea: We should meet. We should express our anger as a group. So they started gathering in corners, let’s meet at this in order, so there was a spontaneous noise barrage in those places. Of course after going to that, you’d be bored after a while, so the next question was: What do we do after this? So let’s go to EDSA. So they text again: They are going to EDSA, are you doing? And I think the answer would be: Yes, yes, yes, yes. So everybody went there.” (Interview Nov. 26, 2008)*

Several of my interviewees underline that the protests following the senate vote were spontaneous. Br. Bernard Oca spontaneously decided to go to the Shrine at EDSA. Others mention how they were surprised by those spontaneous outbursts of discontent. Anthony Cruz, at that time working for Bayan, narrates that they had announced a big rally for the next day immediately in reaction to the senate vote but in the light of the developments they changed plans and took to the street to join in the protests. (Interview Nov. 7, 2008) The information about the unfolding events he got via mobile phones that connected him with people in the streets.

What further characterizes smart mobs is their ability to regulate themselves without a leader or a hierarchical structure. Teodoro Casiño underlines the decentralized character of the EDSA 2 protests, “It wasn’t as centralized, monolithic, everything was flat. And no one took direct order from anyone.” (Interview Dec. 9, 2008) Many different groups were part of the protests but

somehow they managed to converge at one place. The concept of smart mobs thus provides clues on how the events proceeded in the first hours after the crucial senate decision. But the amount of Filipinos and Filipinas actually possessing cell phones or having internet access at that time was not very large, so the concept of “smart mobs” can not explain everything. And it is definitely not enough to explain why Joseph Estrada eventually had to render his position.

Looking closer now at accounts of how the events went on exactly after the crucial vote in the senate impeachment trial, I will look at another aspect that is discussed in the general literature on political mobile phone use: Was it a mobilization from below where “amateur citizens” (Dányi/Sükösd 2003: 285) with their mobile phones “share their information and opinion” as is often claimed to be one of the important changes mobile phones bring to political activity? Dányi and Sükösd claim that the EDSA 2 presents an example of “bottom-up digital protest” (ibid: 313) as the use of mobile phones was not centrally planned. However, Pertierra et al. (2002: 107) argue counter the false conclusion early media accounts suggested that nameless, ordinary citizens unaffiliated with any civil society group produced the text messages that were circulating prior to and during EDSA 2. Their research shows that activists were fundamentally involved in the creation and dissemination of these text messages. (ibid: 106) Based on my interviews with activists I can support this claim. Various organizations used text messages to invite their members, or those who had given them their mobile phone number at previous events, to join mass actions. But my research also shows that it was also unaffiliated individuals, like for example Br. Bernard Oca, who were sending out text messages. I thus suggest that it was both autonomous individuals sharing their wish to get active with their friends and families as well as organizations that consciously made use of text messages to mobilize their members.

#### ***6.4 Conclusion***

EDSA 2 was a complex process. Several processes, some already starting years before, took place parallel. For the success of the uprising many factors came into play, the use of mobile phones being one of them and thus it is definitely wrong and oversimplified to say that it was due to this technology that Joseph Estrada was unseated as repeatedly claimed. It is thus definitely wrong to say that EDSA 2 could not have happened without cell phones.

The media in general played an important role. But it is not possible to emphasize one media or technology as different media and technologies were complementing each other: TV, radio, the print media, the internet, cell phones and also the transport system played decisive roles. Furthermore, the role of emotions should not be downplayed. The media created a very emotional atmosphere.

The use of mobile phones to voice discontent was a novel experience for large number of ordinary Filipinos and Filipinas. Given the euphoria of such events it is understandable that they were consequently perceived as instrument of change.

What is often neglected is the huge amount of organization behind such protests. For many political activists the cell phone had already proved a useful tool for their work since its introduction. Thus, unlike what many media accounts make believe they were fundamentally involved in the creation and dissemination of text messages before and during EDSA 2. This speaks counter repeated claims that mobile phones solely enhance spontaneous unorganized forms of protest emanating from individuals unaffiliated with any organization.

Concepts discussed in the literature on the political possibilities of mobile phones like “viral politics” and “smart mobs” emphasize the specific features of communication via mobile phones. Thus, they can give us clues on the dynamics in play, especially on what happened in the very hours after the crucial Senate decision.

## 7 States of *communitas* in protest

“The power of spectacle and simulacra has been greatly enhanced by these new communicative technologies. With their capacity to simulate connectedness and simultaneity they constitute states of simultaneous presentness rarely achieved before, except during states of ritual resulting in *communitas*.” (Pertierra 2005: 28)

Participants of protest actions often experience a sense of belonging together, a certain feeling of solidarity often without knowing each other personally. The common goal, the wish to change something or at least to express discontent and the sentiment of acting not alone are reasons for these feelings. Similar group feelings are produced within rituals. Cell phones enhance this sense of belonging together and feeling of solidarity because they simulate<sup>39</sup> connectedness and simultaneity. Non-participants are able to stay up to date on what happens during a rally and thus participants are able to share their experience with an even bigger number of people who don't have to be on site any more. People located at different places within the rally can communicate and simultaneously experience what is going on in these different places.

As Pertierra (2005: 28) points out, the capacity of new information and communication technologies to make people feel more connected and to make them experience several events simultaneously initiates a state of simultaneous presence rarely achieved before except during states of ritual resulting in what Victor Turner calls *communitas*.

Looking closer at Turner's concept of *communitas* and how similar feelings of community are enhanced by new communication technologies like the cell phone might add to explaining the “power” attributed to them. In reference to Krohn-Hansen (2003), who emphasizes the potential of classic symbolic anthropology<sup>40</sup> in order to analyze and understand the interconnected world at present, I think Turner's concepts can give us important insights in the use of new communication technologies in protest.

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<sup>39</sup> Simulation or simulacra is used here in the sense of Jean Baudrillard. In the past decades, mass media has increasingly taken the role to “stage” reality and to establish a regime of “simulation”. In using this terminology I want to point out that these feelings might be rather simulated than real. See also Belliger/Krieger 1998: 14.

<sup>40</sup> Krohn-Hansen (2003: 94) uses this term as equivalent of “mainstream twentieth-century symbolic anthropology” meaning “a strong intellectual tradition”, an anthropology “considerably devoted to studies of ideas about kinship and locality, classification systems and meanings”. He does not specifically associate this term with a late twentieth-century American school led by Clifford Geertz and perhaps Marshall Sahlins.

### ***7.1 The power attributed to the cell phone***

Various scholars treating the EDSA 2-cell phone relation note a popular tendency to attribute the cell phone with powers. Pertierra et al. (2002: 402) assert that a large part of the available internet and newspaper articles on this topic published in the year following the events focus more on the allegedly magical powers of the technology than on the ways in which Filipinos and Filipinas employed it in specific contexts. The cell phone is assigned with an “almost mystical force” (ibid: 107), in some contexts called “Text Power” (ibid: 104), that enables it to entice people to come to the EDSA shrine. The technology is thus invested with agency while the people who use it are stripped of theirs as the accounts fail to give information on them. They neither specify who the authors and initial disseminators of the text messages were nor who the people were behind the overthrow of President Estrada. And they also ignore the importance of other media in the events. (ibid: 105) Similarly, Rafael (2003: 401-402) points out that nearly all accounts of People Power 2 highlight the importance of cell phones in the events, especially in the rapid mobilization of demonstrators. Looking at the exact phrasing of these accounts, he states: “A technological thing was thus idealized as an agent of change, invested with the power to bring forth new forms of sociality.” (ibid: 402)

According to Castells et al. (2004: 203) – and as I have also made clear in the previous chapters of this paper – the power of new media in these events was clearly over-celebrated. The above-cited authors agree to this assessment. When looking more closely at the presumptions made concerning the EDSA 2-cell phone relation, “one soon discovers that they rest on anecdotes, grand but unproven assertions, and clichés.” (Pertierra et al. 2002: 102) But what are the reasons for this idealization?

As to accounts published in the wake of the events, it can be partly explained by the still reigning collective euphoria that made, combined with the lacking analytical distance, deficiencies unavoidable. (ibid: 107) However, Pertierra et al. see them also as a result of a utopian understanding of technology that enjoys great popularity. This utopian understanding they see in line with a “rhetoric of the technological sublime”. Here they refer to D. K. Wagner<sup>41</sup> (cited in Pertierra et al. 2002: 107), who describes “‘discourses of sublime technology’ as those that embody ‘naturalistic, teleological, and utopian conceptions of technology’”. Considering the

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<sup>41</sup> Pertierra et al. refer to D.K. Wagner (1999) without giving the details of this citation in the bibliography. For this term see also Leo Marx (1964) and James W. Carey (1989).

function of information and communication technology in the progress of less-developed countries (LDCs)<sup>42</sup> like the Philippines, such bodies of writing emphasize that the implementation of information and communication technologies per se would enhance growth. (Pertierra et al. 2002: 107-108) This mode of thinking determines the direction of progress: the capitalistically developed world. It lies in the nature of computers, telecommunication and markets itself to lead “inescapably” toward this end. (ibid: 108) Thus, this mindset concentrates on what new technology can do, neglecting the issues “how, and toward what end, technology will be selected and implemented within an historical context subject to contingencies of both historical accidents and strategic action” (ibid). As outlined above, this thinking corresponds with what Pfaffenberger (1992) calls the “Standard View of technology”.

Another explanation for this idealization comes from Rafael (2003), who in his analysis links telecommunication technologies with the politics of belief based on Jacques Derrida. He sees the belief in the power of telecommunication technologies as mere fantasies of the middle classes as nearly all the media accounts published on the subject come from middle class writers or by way of middle-class controlled media. The cell phone was believed to have the power to transmit messages at a distance and the middle classes believed to possess this power. Thus, they thought to be able to control the relation to the masses and use the power of the crowd to serve their own interests and communicate with the state.

*“Thus they imagined themselves able to communicate beyond the crowd, but also with it, transcending the sheer physical density of the masses through technology, while at the same time ordering its movements and using its energy to transmit middle-class demands.”*  
(Rafael 2003: 399-400)

Rafael even speaks of a “fetish of communication” (ibid: 400). These fantasies were represented in the so-called “Generation Txt” primary concerned with seeking access to, and recognition from, authorities. However, these claims to define the proper practice of politics turned out to be “fragile” as they were based on the assumption of the “voicelessness” of the masses. (ibid: 400)

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## 7.2 *Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and communitas*

The theories of the British anthropologist Victor Turner, one of the main exponents of the Manchester School of Anthropology, are classics of ritual theories. One of his most influential concepts is that of *communitas*. This concept, together with that of liminality, is based on Arnold van Gennep's analyzes of *rites de passage* (passage rites) that accompany every change in social position or certain points of age. (Turner 1974: 231- 232) Following the French anthropologist van Gennep, Turner divides these rites into three phases: separation, liminality and reintegration. In these ritual processes Turner regards the liminal phase as crucial. In this phase of transition in between rituals the individual concerned is stripped of former cultural constraints and social classifications. It is a phase characterized by ambiguity and indefiniteness. The individual concerned stands to some extent outside society, “betwixt and between all fixed points of classification” (ibid: 232). Persons in a liminal phase have lost all attributes that are characteristic for the time before and after this phase. They are “structurally, if not physically invisible in terms of [their] culture’s standard definitions and classifications.” (Turner 1974: 232) As beings in transition they are reduced to an anonymous condition, sometimes also characterized by a minimization of sexual differences. With the disappearance of secular differences liminal persons tend to develop intensive companionship and egalitarianism among each other and it is in this phase that *communitas* can emerge. *Communitas* is, thus, characterized as a “unstrukturierte oder rudimentär strukturierte und relativ unstrukturierte Gemeinschaft” (Turner 2005: 96) that means an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated community, a “Gemeinschaft Gleicher” (ibid), thus a community of equals in opposition to social structure, *societas*, or the informal as opposed to the formal. It is in this interplay between these different forms of social integration that the individuals pass from one state to the other. In general, Turner sees *communitas* where there is no structure. As the concept is hard to grab, he resorts to Buber’s description of community as not being any more a side by side but a plurality of people being with each other who always experience a dynamic counterpart where boundaries between the “I” and the “you” are blurred. “Gemeinschaft ist, wo Gemeinschaft geschieht.” (Turner 2005 [1969]: 124) Community is where community takes place. This sort of community is characterized by immediacy and spontaneity and it makes visible a general connection between humans, a sense of “human connectedness”. *Communitas* is accompanied by the experience of an unprecedented force. Through the experience of

communitas, this condition of indefiniteness and potentiality, transformation, reconciliation, and growing together as a group are possible. (Belliger/Krieger 1998: 13)

Communitas is, however, not limited to this liminal phase. There are also other manifestations of it. What they have in common are such notions and symbols like the “power of the weak” or temporary sacral attributions of the lower status.

Although Victor Turner developed these concepts of liminality and communitas in the context of discussing traditional pre-industrial societies, he also saw them as relevant in contemporary cultures.

### 7.3 *Applying Turner’s concepts to EDSA 2*

There was solidarity among people. We didn’t know each other but we could easily talk with each other. We knew that (...) we were part of something bigger than us.  
 Anthony Cruz, political activist, journalist, one of the founders of Txtpower (Interview Nov. 7, 2008)

As the citation shows, participants in the EDSA 2 protests experienced a group feeling similar to Turner’s concept of *communitas*. As Elias Canetti showed in “Masse und Macht<sup>43</sup>” (1992 [1960]), crowds like that in EDSA in January 2001 are generally characterized by equality as differences dissolve. Differences especially those imposed from outside, like rank, status, property, but also sex, are generally experienced as constraints. As in the anonymity of the crowd these constraints seem to disappear and personal boundaries are transcended, one feels freed and relieved. This relief of being in a crowd is also based on the overcoming of the fear of contact that characterizes our life. This is only possible in the density of the crowd. The moment when all feel equal, when the crowd “discharges” (ibid: 15), is a very happy moment. Now that nobody is more than the other, that nobody is better than the other, the people become a crowd. But all this, of course, remains an illusion. The equality is not real and will not last.

It is thus in a protest like EDSA 2 that a feeling of solidarity can emerge, a feeling of being in a “community of equals”, all driven by “the anger over the corrupt regime of President Estrada and by their wish to replace him with a more honest leader” (Rafael 2003: 410). As “[t]he anonymity proper to crowds makes it difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate individuals by precise social categories” (ibid: 414), those differences dissolve. This is increased by attempts to make

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<sup>43</sup> First published in English as „Crowds and Power“ in 1962.



all wear the same colored clothes – although maybe rather aimed at making a statement – as one of the text messages that circulated at that time suggests:

*Lets wear black tom. 2 mourn the death of truth n justice in r country. Pls. Pass dis 2 10 others 4 d love of ur country.*

(Let's wear black tomorrow to mourn the death of truth and justice in our country. Please pass this to 10 others for the love of our country.)

*(Paragas 2003: 268)*

The feeling of joy to be immersed in a crowd is enhanced by the common wish to change things. Cell phones even heighten this sense of belonging and feeling of solidarity as they simulate connectedness and simultaneity. Thus, Rafael (2003: 403) states that cell phones not only allow one to escape the crowd, they, with their capacity to mobilize, “also open up the possibility of finding oneself moving in concert with it, filled with its desire and consumed by its energy.” In this sense, cell phones were seen “to bring about a new kind of crowd that was thoroughly conscious of itself as a movement headed toward a common goal” (ibid).

Furthermore, cell phones make it possible for people who don't participate to stay up to date on events. The people gathering in EDSA were pestered with text messages and calls from curious friends and family members who wanted to know what was going on. By sharing their experience, people felt connected even with a much greater number of people than were on the site. The pull of the crowd was extended beyond physical constraints as people could be part of it without being actually on site. Carrying around their cell phones, people carried with them the possibility to reach all those people whose numbers they had in their address book wherever and whenever they wanted.

Cell phones were also used to coordinate with others located at some other point in the vast area of protests, for example, in front of one of the stages that were built for holding speeches and for rock concerts to jolly along the masses. They thus made possible the experience of several events simultaneously.

Additionally, EDSA 2, similar to EDSA 1 in 1986, was with its four days of rock concerts, agitated speeches and similar events a huge mass celebration and a grand spectacle. With the help of the media in general it comprised primarily of simulacra and spectacle. (Pertierra 2006: 42) Hedman (2006: 182) describes it as “spectacle for the performative display of civil society”. For Pertierra (2006: 42), new communication technologies have greatly enhanced the power of spectacle and simulacra as they create new realities and intensify older ones.

Processes of a political crisis as in the Philippines when EDSA 2 occurred can be seen as phases of transition and as such they show many of the characteristics of the liminal phase.

It is important to note here that Turner sees society not as a harmonically integrated system but as a “conflict-ridden process”. (Schomberg-Scherff 2005: 198) For him society is a dynamic and dramatic process. The concept of liminality, as a social anti-structure, is a theoretically necessary construct for its understanding. As structures break open in such phases of political crisis, the changing of these structures seems possible. Similarly to ritual participants who in the liminal break are allowed to think about their own desires and of how it may or might be, in EDSA 2 people started to reflect upon Philippine society, its structures and the possibilities of changing them. The possibility for change and the undermining of official structures is also inherent in the crowd. (Rafael 2003:415). Resisting any restrictions and regulations, the crowd channels its way.

*“Its authority rests on an ability to promote restlessness and movement, thereby undermining pressure from state technocrats, church authorities, and corporate interests to regulate and contain such movements.” (ibid)*

The constant closeness of anonymous others produces a stream of expectations, “of something that might arrive, of events that might happen” (ibid). Rafael (ibid) thus writes about the crowd: “As a site of potential happenings, it is a kind of place for the generation of the unknown and the unexpected.”

It is this feature of making an evaluation of society possible – its ambiguity - that can make liminality a threat to social order.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

In his article on an anthropology of political life in the era of globalization, Christian Krohn-Hansen (2003: 80) emphasizes a need for central ideas of mainstream twentieth-century symbolic anthropology in order to analyze contemporary social life as it unfolds in a transnational world. However, in doing so these ideas need to be seen critically. Referring to this statement, what can Victor Turner’s concepts of *communitas* and liminality thus contribute to explaining the power attributed to the cell phone?

The processes described by Victor Turner that take place within rituals give insights in what might go on in similar phases of transformation. Within protests like that in EDSA in January 2001 group feelings arise similar to *communitas*. Within the anonymity of the crowd – the hundred thousands of people that assembled in EDSA – differences seemed to dissolve. United

in the common goal to unseat a corrupt president people could experience the exhilarating power of the crowd. At once changes seemed possible. The cell phone enhanced this sense of belonging and feeling of solidarity with its capacity to simulate connectedness and simultaneity. Thus, it is the experience of this phase of transition, thus of liminality, and of these powerful feelings of belonging and of potentiality that might lead to the impression of the cell phone as a powerful agent itself. However, looking at writings about the processes going on within crowds, one questions the importance of cell phones for these feelings to emerge.

## 8 Conclusion

Although my research clearly shows that mobile phones can play a role in protests like EDSA 2, this role is often both exaggerated and different from what is generally claimed. The euphoria of such events – especially when they are successful – and the novelty of the use of mobile phones for such purposes carry the inherent danger of an uncritical celebration of technologies and of a lacking contextualization of their role in the events. Widespread techno-deterministic views linked to notions of modernity enhance tendencies to assign technologies like the mobile phone with agency and power. Such views ignore the people that are actually using the technology stripping them of their agency.

It is thus all the more important to acknowledge that protests like that in the Philippines in February 2001 are complex processes. For any analysis it is thus necessary to account for this complexity.

With the help of my research data and through thorough literature analysis I was able to show that for the success of EDSA 2 many factors came into play, that the use of mobile phones was one of them and thus repeated claims that it was due to this technology that President Estrada was unseated are definitely wrong and oversimplified.

Contrary to the intense use of mobile phones in the coordination of protests and as a source of information, the impact of mobile phones on the mobilization of protesters or voters – one of the most persisting claims – remains a debated issue. Even if – like in EDSA 2 – it is evident that a large amount of text messages circulated, it is nearly impossible to determine the actual connection between received text messages and the actual decision to join protests or to go to the polls.

Although often neglected, the media in general played an important role. But it is not possible to emphasize one media or technology as different media and technologies were complementing each other: TV, radio, the print media, the internet, cell phones and also the transport system

played decisive roles. The role of emotions in the events should not be downplayed. And it was the media that significantly contributed to a very emotional atmosphere.

That many young people took part in the protests in February 2001 supports arguments that the youth are especially quick in adopting and appropriating mobile technologies.

The intensive use of text messages in these protests reflects general tendencies of mobile phone use in the Philippines. This shows that for adequately understanding the use of technologies like the mobile phone in protest movements, it is necessary to look at the specific background of their use in the specific society in general and the particular cultural traditions, power structures and economic resources influencing them.

The fact that there was a huge amount of organization behind these protests speaks counter impressions that mobile phones solely enhance spontaneous unorganized forms of protest emanating from individuals unaffiliated with any organization. Unlike what media accounts often make believe, political activists and their organizations were fundamentally involved in the creation and dissemination of text messages.

Victor Turner's concepts of *communitas* and *liminality*, taken from his ritual theories, give insights in what might go on in similar phases of transition like EDSA 2. They show that in such protest movements a sense of belonging together and a feeling of solidarity arise. These feelings are enhanced by the cell phone with its capacity to simulate connectedness and simultaneity. Thus, it is the experience of this phase of transition – thus of liminality – and of these powerful feelings of belonging together and of potentiality that might create the impression of the cell phone being a powerful agent itself. However, looking at writings about the processes going on within crowds, one questions the importance of cell phones for these feelings to emerge.

## 8.1 *Disillusionment*

[U]ntil now there's a battle over how to correctly remember the past. What happened? What happened at EDSA dos? Was it a mistake? Because there is so much frustration and disappointment over Arroyo.

Anthony Cruz, political activist, journalist, one of the founders of "Txtpower" (Interview Nov. 7, 2008)

Utopias, of course, do not last, even if their occasional and unexpected happenings are never the last.

Vicente Rafael (2003: 422)

What has changed – in comparison with earlier research – now, eight years after the events, and in the light of further political developments, in the people's perception of the role mobile phones played in EDSA 2?

As I noticed a widespread discontent with the current administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the one that came to power in 2001, answers to the question why this does not result in another EDSA sequel give further insights into the political system in the Philippines as well as into my research topic.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, whose inauguration – although "re-elected" in 2004 – was the end of EDSA 2 was never able to build strong support in the Philippine population. Her nine years in office were shaped by political instability and numerous corruption scandals. (Hicken 2008: 75) In the following, I want to name only a few of the reasons. Due to the circumstances of her inauguration, her first years in office were shaped by critiques of a lack of democratic legitimacy. The violent protests of Estrada's supporters that lead to a "state of rebellion" – a pre-stage of martial law – and an attempted military coup in July 2003 were signs of resistance against a president without a clear political mandate. (Loewen 2007: 1-2) Although re-elected in 2004, these elections were shaped by the so-called "Hello Garci" scandal. Audio recordings of telephone conversations of President Arroyo with then Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano allegedly talking about the rigging of election results were made public. Although the following request for an impeachment trial was overruled, her confession to have made these phone calls brought her under massive pressure. Another factor for her unpopularity was the state of emergency that she declared after indications for a planned overthrow of military members and left extremists from February 24 to March 3, 2006. Although conforming to the

constitution, this led to fears that the state of emergency would consequently become the last instrument weak administrations would resort to for staying in power. (ibid: 3)

Although primarily aiming at getting rid of President Estrada, EDSA 2 to some extent was a fight for better governance. It was a false hope that the mere replacement of the president would make a difference. There seems to be no change in Philippine politics as they are still dominated by oligarchic interests. The ruling elite implements its material interests by all means.

Former president Joseph “Erap” Estrada was found guilty on plunder on September 12, 2007. Sentenced to life in prison, he was the first Philippine president who was impeached and convicted.<sup>44</sup> “The verdict was hailed a major milestone for the rule of law in the Philippines and as a victory for government prosecutors.” (Hicken 2008: 77) Thus, President Arroyos pardon of Estrada just a month after the verdict was surprising. Her argument was a need for the country’s reconciliation but her critics saw merely political motives. (ibid) Thus, it is now possible despite his conviction that Joseph Estrada is running again for president in the 2010 elections scheduled for May 10.

To answer my research question, all my interviewees have a far more differentiated view on the role of mobile phones in EDSA 2 than what is claimed in many media accounts. It is hard to tell whether this is due to the increased distance and the following political developments, their insider position as politically very sensitive people or due to the fact that mobile phones always have been an integral part of their work even before EDSA 2. Given the political developments, it is not surprising that many of those who participated in EDSA 2 ask if the ousting of Joseph Estrada was not a mistake and that, today, especially the young participants are very much averse to another uprising.

## **8.2 Outlook**

By today, internet and mobile phones are far more widespread in Philippine society. The International Telecommunications Union notes that over three quarters of the Filipinas and Filipinos have been subscribed to cell phones by the end of 2008. Compared to the number of internet users, which is 6.2 per cent, this is enormous.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/60117/Erap-guilty-of-plunder-sentenced-to-reclusion-perpetua>, last accessed March 24, 2010.

Thus, the means of communication available to Filipinos and Filipinas are much more extensive than in 2001. Furthermore, today the technological possibilities of these technologies are far more sophisticated. Important for their use in political protest is the increasing combination of different technologies in one device. Radio and camera are by now nearly standard features of mobile phones. Increasingly, the possibility to connect to the internet and to watch television over the mobile phone is becoming more and more common. Thus, presenting a data terminal in the hands of people such devices are becoming more and more useful in voicing discontent. People now increasingly have the means to use different media to inform themselves and to connect with others within instants. The possibility to use the in the mobile phone integrated camera to make films and take pictures gives an instrument that makes it easy to document what is happening around in the hands of people. As with mobile internet there exists an easy connection to the web pictures and videos can now easily reach the world public within instants or to stress a popular term within “real time”. Together with developments on the internet where platforms like “You Tube” emerge where it is possible for everyone to publish such videos there are many novel instruments that have already proven to be very powerful to voice discontent.

Today the audience that can be reached via mobile phones and via the internet is – not only in the Philippines – far larger. Additionally, compared to 2001 this audience more and more reflects the Philippine social structure. This leads to the conclusion that today many politically heterogeneous groups can use the mobile phone to organize protests to voice their discontent.

Mobile phones are far more and in a more structured way integrated into the work of political activists. Mobile phone numbers are specifically asked for in membership forms of political organizations. Due to low costs and their speed, text messages have proved very helpful tools for the coordination of members, especially for nationwide organizations.

However, at the same time the means of authorities to control and monitor media is equally developing. New media is similarly used by states to constrain citizen rights and to interfere in their lives. Furthermore, it is important to stress that technologies can be used for both good and bad purposes. A worldwide terrorist organization like Al Qaeda, for example, working on the basis of small networks highly profits from new technologies. Attacks like that in Madrid in March 2004 show that mobile phones can also be used as detonator for bombs.

But despite the specific features of each media concerning access, possibilities for control through state institutions or private companies and target audience, the example of the Philippines also shows that as a result of their novelty and due to the slowness of state structures



new media often have the potential to open up new uncontrolled fields. This is especially increasingly true if these structures are weak as is the case in the Philippines.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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VERA SANTNER

Vera Santner was born in Hallein, Austria, on November 24, 1984.

In 2003, she began her studies of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the *University of Vienna*, Austria. Her research interests include Human Rights and Peace and Conflict Studies, International Organizations, Anthropology of Violence, especially Gender related topics, as well as Gender Studies in general. In 2006, she participated in training in non-violent peace work of the Austrian Branch International Fellowship of Reconciliation and in the following cooperated in several of their projects.

In 2008, she spent a semester as a visiting research fellow at the Third World Studies Center of the *University of the Philippines, Diliman* in Quezon City, Philippines. Her research on the use of mobile phones in the Philippines and EDSA 2 was followed by two weeks of travelling around the Philippines.

Due to her regional interest in South-East Asia, she is an active member of the Society of South-East Asian studies. Besides other projects, she was part of the team that organized the youth photo competition *ViennAsian* for which youngsters were sent on a search of Asian traces in Vienna.

During her studies, she volunteered in the peer project *Young Team Europe* of the Austrian Youth Information Centers on mobility for several years.

Besides her mother-tongue German, Vera Santner speaks English and French fluently. She also studied Spanish, Italian and Russian on a basic level.

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