



## A Tale of Two Decades: Typhoons and Floods, Manila and the Provinces, and the Marcos Years 台風と水害、マニラと地方～ マルコス政権二〇年の物語

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### Background: Meteorology

In the second half of the twentieth century, typhoon-triggered floods affected all sectors of society in the Philippines, but none more so than the urban poor, particularly the *esteros*-dwellers or shanty-town inhabitants, residing in the low-lying locales of Manila and a number of other cities on Luzon and the Visayas. The growing number of post-war urban poor in Manila, Cebu City and elsewhere, was largely due to the policy repercussions of rapid economic growth and impoverishment under the military-led Marcos regime.<sup>1</sup> At this time in the early 1970s, rural poverty and environmental devastation increased rapidly, and on a hitherto unknown scale in the Philippines. Widespread corruption, crony capitalism and deforesting the archipelago caused large-scale forced migration, homelessness and a radically skewed distribution of income and assets that continued to favour elite interests.<sup>2</sup>

The *tai fung*, the great wind or typhoon, has also been the scourge of Japan for centuries. Traditionally, typhoons, along with floods and famines, have played a major role in Japanese statecraft as signs of the gods' displeasure with current political leadership, and sometimes resulting in sudden political change and upheaval. From the end of the nineteenth century the cost of damage caused by these tropical storms escalated as Japanese development and industrialisation increased.

The typhoons and floods that occurred in the Marcos years were labelled 'natural disasters' by the authorities in Manila. But in fact, it would have been more appropriate to label them un-natural, or man-made disasters because of the nature of politics in those unsettling years. The typhoons and floods of the 1970s and 1980s, which took a huge toll in lives and left behind an enormous trail of physical destruction and other impacts after the waters receded, were caused as much by the interactive nature of politics with the environment, as by geography and the typhoons per se, as the principal cause of natural calamity. The increasingly variable nature of the weather and climate was a catalyst, but not the sole determinant of the destruction and hidden hazards that could linger for years in the aftermath of the typhoons and floods in the Marcos years.<sup>3</sup> Habibur Haque Khondker notes in his examination of the relationship between the great November cyclone of 1970, in the Bangladesh case, and the subsequent political crisis, that the political environment and a natural disaster can, and often do, interact with one another.<sup>4</sup>

Nowhere was this link between politics and calamity more evident than in flood-stricken Manila throughout the 1970s and early 1980s when Imelda Marcos, in her capacity as Metro Manila Governor, was in charge. It was against a background of physical devastation and flooding in July 1972 caused by Typhoon Gloring, that a 500 million pesos Calamity Fund Bill was eventually passed through the Philippine House of Representatives and Senate. No one knew exactly when the next extreme typhoon or flood would hit the capital and create a national disaster on economic and humanitarian grounds. But once the Calamity Fund Bill was law, the President, his First lady and their party would control and manipulate the use of the 500 million pesos relief fund primarily for their political purposes and personal self interest. The bloated emergency relief fund would enable them not only to pay serious attention to the handling of future typhoon crises but also to win political support and elections in the process too. Indeed, from a purely political standpoint, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos and their political backers were the prime beneficiaries of the Calamity Fund measure.

### Background: The Marcos Years

This paper examines the impact of typhoons, which cause floods resulting in widespread death and damage, as a key political aspect in the thinking and administration of the Marcos government. The impact of a typhoon-related natural disaster on Philippine society and politics in the 1970s depended upon two sets of factors: namely, the political and material capacity of the government to react to the disaster and the relevant aspects of the political culture. These include: the extent to which the responsibility of preparing for and dealing with a disaster is specific and understood; the citizen's previous perceptions of the government and the degree to which they change their perceptions; and the extent to which a natural disaster is considered to have a legitimate political value.

On 21 September 1972, several months after the enormous tragedy called Typhoon Gloring had swept across the archipelago, President Marcos, who had been elected in 1965, and re-elected in 1969, declared martial law. He acted not specifically because of the typhoon, but rather because of widespread economic uncertainty, the threat of rebellion in the countryside and possible succession in Mindanao. Marcos launched a radical new social agenda under the provisions of martial law. He established new government structures and agencies, abolished others previously responsible for planning and execution of economic functions, and implemented a revolutionary social welfare programme aimed at restructuring society. In 1972, he also introduced a strategy of balanced economic growth and a genuine agrarian reform programme. His 'new society' was to be based on an innovative system of government that would respond to the needs of ordinary people, which he called 'constitutional authoritarianism'.<sup>5</sup>

Marcos, however, was unsuccessful in curbing the widespread political influence and activity of the old economic oligarchs, who skilfully survived Marcos' onslaught to reform 'the sick old society'.<sup>6</sup> The new society was meant to redistribute wealth and property, but the old oligarchs soon joined forces with others who had gained access to the levers of economic power as a direct consequence of the new society. By the mid-1970s, the politics of the transition from the old to the new society was to prove far more difficult and complex than Ferdinand Marcos had anticipated and his authoritarian rule served to both intensify 'the increasingly negative impact of clientelism'<sup>7</sup> and constrain the 'beneficial effects of foreign loans and aid on the community'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Cheng-tian Kuo suggests that 'foreign loans have been regarded by political leaders as easy money for rewarding their clients'.<sup>9</sup>

As 'the overcentralised government under military rule began to atrophy,' David Timbermann explains that 'favouritism and veniality became rampant' and the economy was adversely affected by 'mounting corruption and mismanagement'.<sup>10</sup> Amelia P. Varela claims that both 'graft and corruption reached its all time high [and] permeated most aspects of bureaucratic life and institutions which saw the start of the systematic plunder of the country'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, under Marcos, both corruption and money laundering formed a 'symbiotic relationship',<sup>12</sup> that was reliant on the Marcos government retaining power. Typhoon-based disasters gave his administration ample opportunity to both tout for political supremacy at the expense of the opposition and to add to his mounting personal wealth.

In the post-war period, the Philippines experienced high rates of population growth and a level of rural-urban migration of five per cent persisted throughout the 1960s. The reluctance and/or inability of the landed elite to remedy serious social and economic problems in the provinces, so evident in the failure of agrarian reform, led to ever-higher levels of rural-urban migration, especially to Manila. The population of the archipelago grew from eleven million in 1948 to 27 million in 1960 and to almost 37 million by 1970; by then one third of the population, which had almost doubled in less than a quarter of a century, was concentrated



Figure 1. Famous photograph of the late Philippine President Marcos declaring martial law (21 September 1972).

Source. Robert JA Basilio Jr, 'Five things Donald Draper and Ferdinand Marcos have in common,' *Jack The Scribbler* (9 September 2012), online: <http://jackthescribbler.com/2010/01/five-things-donald-draper-and-ferdinand-marcos-have-in-common/>, accessed 14 August 2013.

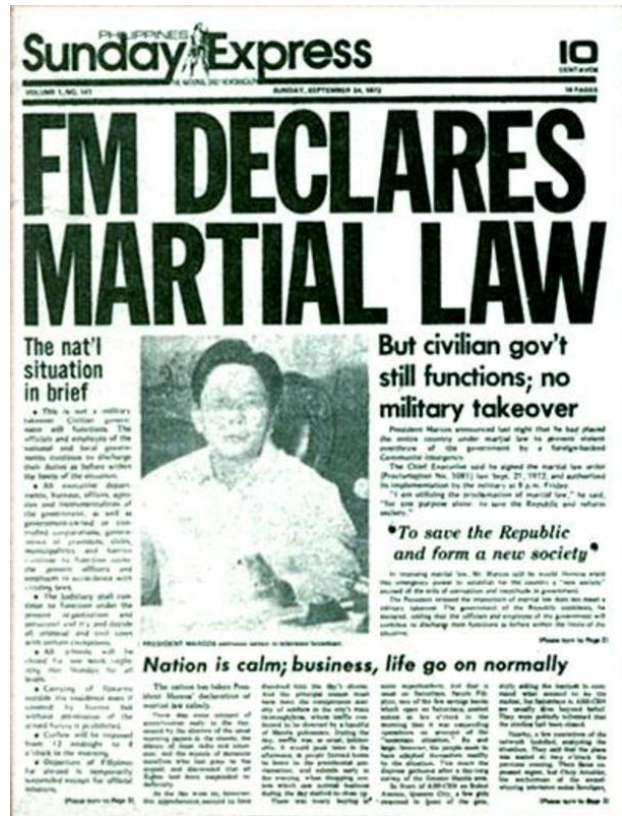


Figure 2. *Sunday Express* front page after Marcos declared martial law (September 1972).

Source. Maytapa, 'A Childhood in the Time of Martial Law,' *Society Magazine* (22 September 2011), online: <http://en.paperblog.com/a-childhood-in-the-time-of-martial-law-69557/>, accessed 14 August 2012.

Manila and nine adjoining provinces on Luzon.<sup>13</sup> This exacerbated the already long-standing socio-economic marginalisation of the masses.

In Manila, migrants were largely absorbed into various low-income service occupations. The majority of these new urbanites in the early 1970s belonged to Manila's lower class, or slum society. They generally lacked technical skills and took up occupations as domestic servants, labourers, hawkers, jeepney drivers, entertainers, or prostitutes and they filled minor clerical positions and owned virtually no residential property in the city.<sup>14</sup>

The exponential growth of the population and the rate of rural-urban migration exerted added pressure upon an already inadequate public sanitation system and thereby increased health hazards, especially the possible outbreak of diarrheal diseases due to storm-related flooding. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos would attempt to establish local programs for public sanitation and health (refuse, litter, water and sewage pollution) to transform Manila into a clean and beautiful city that would attract tourism and trans-national capital. Besides construction of world-class hotels, convention and cultural centres, they established some well-equipped hospitals and clinics staffed with skilled physicians and nurses. Chain drug stores were also located in strategic places near the hospitals, schools, shopping malls and heavy-commuting areas. But, the nameless and faceless urban poor, who lived in their thousands in squatter communities along the *esteros*, were not part of the Marcos campaign and programs to embellish the face of Manila.

There was a cruel contradiction, albeit irony, between the generally clean, quiet and orderly atmosphere proclaimed in travel guides, tour advertisements and billboards, depicting Manila as a global city where economic progress went hand in hand with the developing social reality of a burgeoning rural-urban migrant population. Many of the globe-trotting tourists and overseas executives visiting the city's business district were not fully aware of the scope and rate of the adverse changes that were taking place in Manila, as the metropolis rapidly grew and poor people struggled to cope with its consequences. But the government-sponsored promotion of the remarkable transformation of the city, from a previously alarming and deteriorating place to a vibrant, expanding metropole proved a cruel illusion—a false dream—for the tens of thousands of squatters confronting the problem of a lack of housing and related health impacts, in one of the third world's fastest growing cities. Most of the comfortably-housed wealthy locals and foreign visitors rarely went anywhere near the burgeoning slum quarters of the city. But Makati's tree-lined avenues and glass-lined skyscrapers cast shadows across the makeshift houses of squatters from rural areas living at overcrowded addresses that did not appear in information provided on recommended tours and general guide maps. The migrants from the provinces threatened with homelessness dwelled out of sight of the path of the capital's crushing progress, but they lived within its interstices and in vulnerable areas; low-lying neighbourhoods often sited directly in the path of typhoons and prone to flooding.

### Storms: A Chronology: 1970s–1980s

Here, I want to examine the interactive relationship between the spate of typhoons and floods in the 1970s and early 1980s—particularly Typhoon Gloring—and the nature of politics and the subsequent political crises, and, how the political environment and a natural disaster can interact with one another.<sup>15</sup> The typhoons of the 1970s caused chaos across the archipelago, cutting power lines, disrupting trade and transport and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. In the early 1970s, the Philippines received its strongest warning yet that shifts in climate and weather patterns were creating the likelihood of a turbulent future of more intense storms and devastating floods with mass destruction and displacement. The warnings began when Typhoon Meding crossed Luzon on Monday morning, 31 August 1970. It rained for almost a week after which greater Manila, and central and southern Luzon were under water for weeks. Less than three months later, Typhoon Yoling hit Manila on 19 November 1970. However, when Typhoon Gloring devastated Luzon between 10 and 25 July 1972, the entire nation was struck by the tragedy. Typhoon Norning, struck between 15 and 16 August 1974, and Typhoon Didang, came along between 16 and 27 May 1976 and yet again Manila was flooded. Typhoon Yaning hit central Luzon on 9 October 1978 (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of typhoons in the 1970s and 1980s that caused chaos across the archipelago during the presidency of Marcos.

By the early 1980s, the economic and social impacts of typhoons added to the mounting political pressure against the increasingly beleaguered government of



**Figure 3. Marginal urban enclave of Siteo Baseco, Tondo.**

Source: [http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2611/3738095867\\_81ec1e7611.jpg](http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2611/3738095867_81ec1e7611.jpg), accessed 14 August 2013; cited in Doracie B. Zoleta-Nantes, 'Disasters and megacities: critical geographies of flood hazards & social inequities in the case of Metro Manila,' seminar paper 716.pdf (Canberra: Crawford School, College of Asia and the Pacific, the Australian National University, n.d.).

Online:

Year	Date	Typhoon
1970	31 August	Meding
1970	19 November	Yoling
1972	10–25 July	Gloring
1974	15–16 August	Norming
1976	16–27 May	Didang
1978	9 October	Yaning
1984	August	June
1984	September	Ike

Ferdinand Marcos. Two typhoons, in August and September 1984, unleashed the worst calamities to hit the archipelago in fourteen years. Typhoon June, which hit the northern Philippines in late August, and Typhoon Ike, which lashed a wide area of the central and southern Philippines a few days later, killed 1556 people, injured more than one thousand and left more than 1500 missing.<sup>16</sup> In its rampage across the southern Philippines, Typhoon Ike left 200,000 homeless as houses were either flattened or blown away by high winds or destroyed by floods. Schools were similarly affected. Although the officially confirmed death toll on 4 September was 332, the Mayor of Surigao, Constantino Navarro, stated that one thousand people

had been killed in his city alone. He told reporters that the city had run out of coffins and embalming fluid and had to bury the dead in mass graves in an effort to prevent the spread of disease.<sup>17</sup>

It is set against this background of President Marcos attempting to radically transform the political system after 1972 that Filipinos could not afford to think about the climate and recent weather phenomena as necessarily unchanging or 'normal'. The weather, like politics, was susceptible to change. Marcos and the personnel of the Philippine Weather Bureau, particularly Dr. Ramon Kintanar, its youthful, articulate director, were to painfully learn that the weather of the 1970s was not typical of the previous fifty years—and its patterns were even less typical of the previous several centuries. In fact, climate and weather throughout the 1970s proved to be more variable and unpredictable than that of the decades just prior to 1970, to further complicate matters.

Weather services had been neglected by a succession of post-war governments so the Bureau could not initiate development projects, purchase new equipment or hire more trained personnel.<sup>18</sup> However, on 8 December 1972, President Marcos, now all too painfully aware of the tremendous importance of the weather services and allied seismological and astronomical activities to national development, passed an act abolishing the Weather Bureau and in its place, established the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services and Administration (PAGASA). The PAGASA was entrusted with 'providing environmental protection and utilising scientific knowledge as an effective instrument to ensure the safety, well-being and economic security of all the people, and for the promotion of national progress.'<sup>19</sup> Most importantly, administrative control of the agency was transferred from the Department of Commerce and Industry to the Department of National Defence.

Both Kintanar and Marcos hoped that the coming years would prove truly remarkable for the scientific and technological development of meteorology and reliable operational forecasting across the islands. As part of the Marcos government's high modernist project, PAGASA had gone digital and meteorological scientists would use satellite transmissions and sophisticated computer models to study and 'tame' the typhoon. PAGASA began to undertake a broad-risk mapping of typhoons and flood-prone areas began to be identified—based on topography and historical rainfall patterns.<sup>20</sup>

### Storms and Floods: Impact

The typhoons and floods of the 1970s brought the national 'quick-fix' relief aid syndrome to Manila and right to the sometime-flooded doorsteps of the seat of power at Malacanang Palace. The Marcos regime, from a purely political standpoint, could only think about short-term effects, rather than thinking and operating on longer-term environmental scales in dealing with urban flooding as a serious and growing development challenge for Manila.

At the height of Typhoon Gloring, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos blamed a particular sector of the urban poor for not having a basic human asset, namely shelter and a bit of land to till. They had failed to solve the long and troubled history of agrarian land reform and in their attempts remake society from the bottom up blamed some of the desperate peasants arriving in Manila, seeking a safe roof over their heads and good fortune. The massive influx of landless, destitute migrants to Manila and the proliferation of shanty-town developments had led to canals and water-catchment areas being swallowed up and built on by the urban poor. Marcos blamed the incessant storm-related flooding on garbage in the choked *esteros* and swollen creeks blocking the city's sewers. He appealed to the urban poor not to clog up the canals and sewage systems with their refuse. But, in reality, the social and environmental impacts of the Typhoon Gloring floods in Manila were a microcosm of a much larger national problem. There was not adequate affordable housing and employment for the displaced migrant poor from the provinces. Hence, they built their houses and shacks out of necessity in a pell-mell manner without concern for degrading the surrounding environment—an environment where regulation had been equally ignored by the kingpins of the construction industry, the principal real-estate speculators and the industrial strongmen who ran the local factories with complete disregard for Metro Manila's environment, but especially for the Pasig River, irrigated rice paddies and water catchment areas. These economically powerful groups, far more so than the poor migrants from rural areas, were creating ever larger 'ecological footprints' around Manila which were not, in the long run, sustainable. Marcos certainly was serious about introducing an ethic of environmental responsibility but primarily for political reasons. In a pragmatic attempt to direct attention away from the developing impacts of his cronies' 'ecological footprints' in Manila and beyond, he calculatingly blamed the *esteros* dwellers and urban poor.

Centuries earlier, when floods washed over Manila, the water would ordinarily subside within a few days. Now, in the 1970s, with so much of the capital under asphalt, the sewers crumbling and developers having built over vital soak ways, the water was trapped. During these years, as with the Filipino public at large, Manila's citizens were not given the opportunity to be directly involved in the planning and redistribution of typhoon and flood relief aid that would drastically affect the future of their lives for better or worse.

The urban congestion caused by the post-war migration as livelihoods and natural resources disappeared in the islands, had led to the development of squatter communities on marshy lowlands, vacant lots or unused agricultural land close to Manila. The shanty housing was highly individual, substandard and often constructed from salvaged materials, including scrap metal, discarded timber and cardboard. Water for cooking and drinking had to be hauled from distant standpipes, and kerosene was generally used for lighting and fuel. Garbage and human waste were often disposed of in drainage ditches, nearby bays or rivers close to where the makeshift structures had been erected.<sup>21</sup>

Every year during the typhoon season (July to November) President Marcos controlled a city that swam in filth. Large areas of Manila were sited on low-lying

land, generally below sea level, and the fetid streets were prone to flooding. At the same time, some firms and factories were simply dumping untreated waste into nearby water systems; the very same systems that were being used to sustain the mushrooming migrant population. Unlike the nineteenth century when the water drained away unimpeded, the typhoon-driven floods from the 1970s onwards not only inundated the many new slum and squatter communities but also many middle-class residential complexes and the lingering polluted waters could take weeks to subside.

Delays in the implementation of a flood-control project in Metro Manila in the aftermath of Typhoon Gloring had driven the project cost up from the original estimate of 236 million pesos to nearly one billion pesos. This estimate covered only the infrastructure aspect of an envisaged three-billion-pesos flood-control project. Various sources besides the congress had been tapped to raise the necessary funds for a flood-control system, including a 0.25 peso tax on cinema goers, a proposed one-eighth of one per cent real estate tax, a floating casino and the sale of one billion pesos worth of reclaimed land in the Manila Bay area. The movie tax had generated over 50 million pesos since December 1972, but Metro Manila residents did not reap its benefits. The floods got worse year by year. But from the standpoint of political economy, flood-control was essential for Metro Manila which accounted for almost half the country's Gross National Product (GNP).<sup>22</sup>

By 1976, workers had started to remove obstacles which blocked the flow of floodwater along the *esteros*, drainage mains and other outlets into the Pasig River and Manila Bay. Unfortunately, the floods triggered by Typhoon Didang in May 1976 came before the completion of work on three pumping stations for the Metro Manila area, which would serve as major outlets for waters coming from the areas of Quiapo, Sampaloc, San Miguel and nearby places. The city's only other pumping station (the fourth one), recently inaugurated, was temporarily rendered useless by water lilies that clogged its outlet to the Pasig River. Typhoon Didang's impact highlighted the lack of drainage, operational pumping stations and the dire necessity of establishing a new fund for the flood-control system.<sup>23</sup>

### **General Government Responses: Ferdinand Marcos**

Greg Bankoff, in his exploration of the politics of recent natural disasters in the Philippines, has investigated the correlation between natural disasters and the way power and wealth are articulated in the Philippines.<sup>24</sup> Under Marcos the convergence of interests and activities leading to control of the pattern and personnel involved in the administration of available disaster relief was a blatant, albeit complex, political issue and problem, which involved bureaucrats, military personnel, entire communities, trans-national donors and market interests. Bankoff notes in his discussion of the way some people profited at the expense of others from the impacts of a natural disaster, that extreme typhoons, like Gloring, provided an ideal opportunity for Marcos supporters to politically grandstand and financially profit from the situation. They personally redistributed relief materials to their constituencies while taking full advantage of the widespread devastation and deprivation to attack political opponents in similarly threatened communities for their seeming lack of assistance. The manipulation of disaster-relief funds by the Marcos politicians, and their ability to reap political and social capital from their risk management of floods, depended to a certain extent on the control and manipulation of the media. As Bankoff notes, in such states of emergency, 'Political concern with the victims of natural disasters tends to follow the same ebb and flow as that of the media: much concern and many promises during the first days of rescue and relief but waning political support during the hard years of reconstruction and rehabilitation that follow.'<sup>25</sup>

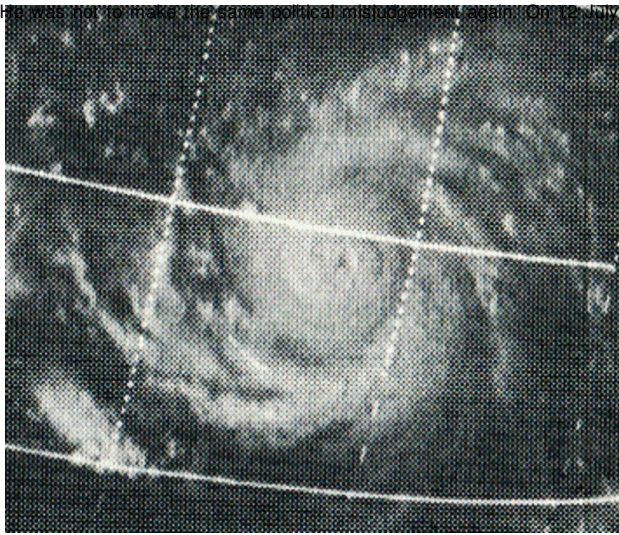
A typhoon or flood disaster could turn an impoverished region characterised by scarcity into a 'disaster boom economy'.<sup>26</sup> A classic case in point was Typhoon Meding. Marcos' handling of this typhoon and the associated floods helped revive his flagging political fortunes prior to the declaration of martial law. The winds of Typhoon Meding were comparatively mild, but unrelenting rain for five days caused damaging floods. On 2 September 1970, greater Manila and central Luzon suffered widespread devastation, economic damage and loss of human lives due to the torrential rains. In the thick of it all President Marcos could be seen appearing on television, announcing a state of emergency and mobilising government rescue and relief efforts, promising flood-control projects to the people, and ordering the release of 300,000 pesos to the social welfare administration to finance relief operations. The First Lady and Bong Bong Marcos went on the road, personally distributing relief goods. At the same time, Manila's Mayor Villegas was desperately asking the municipal boards for power to borrow funds so he could implement a flood-control project to protect his own city.<sup>27</sup>

Scores of people were stricken with influenza, gastro-enteritis, pneumonia, diphtheria and diarrhoea, with a 60 per cent increase in hospital admissions. Government agencies and the departments of National Defence, Health and Public Works and Communication were mobilised by the President. Marcos looked decisive and sympathetic as he provided rapid, albeit selective, operational assistance. The President was reported as stating that his government would look into ways and means of finding immediate remedial measures to alleviate the appalling living conditions of many rural and urban people, particularly those displaced by the floods.<sup>28</sup> Politically this rhetoric and grandstanding seemed convincing. It signified not only firm leadership, but also the fact that he was taking a strategic approach in dealing with the unfolding crisis. In addition, he involved the full range of key stakeholders in the disaster mediation and relief process. The armed forces were mobilised at the President's behest. In central Luzon, 10,000 military men were alerted for relief and rescue operations. Army trucks evacuated flood-bound residents, navy divers scoured the flood waters for the missing, government relief agencies were placed on high alert and the Red Cross and civic organisations established relief centres all over Manila—but the overseas donated and government funds did not always reach the intended recipients. Instead, against this background of a proclaimed state of calamity, the conservative-run Marcos administration was the prime beneficiary both economically and politically.

People candidly pointed out that the calamity had favoured the conservative moneyed candidates for the impending Constitutional Convention. As one commentator suggested, 'Indeed some candidates and their spouses, never known for their social conscience, were suddenly flapping all over the stricken areas with the solicitousness of vultures.'<sup>29</sup> Charges also flew back and forth that certain vested political interests were hoarding relief goods for release at the approach of elections, for very obvious reasons. For a month, the dire state of Luzon and the Philippine economy, the dominant theme of the impending election in the aftermath of Typhoon Meding, was constantly discussed by the media in regard to the President's decisive role in mounting relief operations to manage the risk of floods. Marcos took pains to ensure that his 'political' intervention caused by Meding's impacts lasted until the elections. But the President's operational actions and selective assistance over urban flooding were not appreciated by his weakened political opponents.

A confident Marcos, consequently was not so concerned or solicitous several months later when Typhoon Yoling (Patsy) struck on a cold grey November day in 1970 (see Figures 4 and 5). As the weather worsened, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos took the Burmese General Ne Win and Madame Ne Win to Baguio by train because the approaching typhoon did not permit them to fly. While Yoling was rampaging across Manila, Marcos and the General played golf on the Mansion house course.<sup>30</sup> It became apparent that the President, First Lady and their guests were to remain ignorant and, at times, seemingly unconcerned about the plight of the people of Manila and the outlying provinces, as the typhoon took a terrible toll in lives and property. In the aftermath of the disaster, the government would be harshly criticised for its callous attitude and failure to act rapidly and decisively, and one of the least successful emergency-rescue efforts ever mounted in the Marcos years must be counted as a major political blunder.

Rather than oversee immediate management of the disaster himself, the President put the Executive Secretary and Assistant Executive Secretary in charge of the operation on this occasion. Only after his round of golf with Ne Win had been completed, did Marcos belatedly issue a proclamation declaring a state of calamity in Manila, Caloocan, Quezon City and Pasay. This delay was to prove costly. Thousands of government employees and other citizens were stranded in Quiapo and Santa Cruz because the government had not declared a no-work day. Repeated appeals for army trucks to ferry the stranded employees away from the flood-affected areas went unheeded. The association of private contractors who had offered to help Defence Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile coordinate the relief effort was left facing no decision. Meanwhile, Marcos was finally advised about the scale of the death and destruction left by the extreme typhoon. He arrived back in Manila on 20 November and called an emergency meeting of key officials at the headquarters of the National Defense Coordinating Council (NDCC) at Camp Aguinaldo at noon. After being briefed he signed the proclamation, declaring a state of calamity and allocated 100,000 pesos for calamity relief.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 4. Category 4 super typhoon Yoling, 14 November–22 November 1970, peak intensity, 250 km/h (155 mph) (Saffir–Simpson hurricane wind scale, SSHS).**

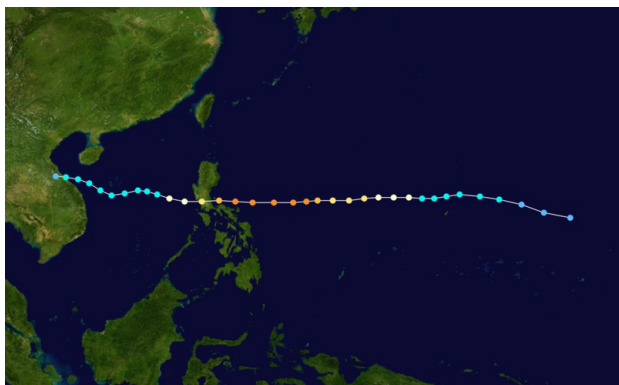
Source. 'Typhoon Patsy (Yoling),' *Wikipedia*, online: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970\\_Pacific\\_typhoon\\_season#Typhoon\\_Patsy\\_28Yoling\\_29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970_Pacific_typhoon_season#Typhoon_Patsy_28Yoling_29), accessed 14 August 2013.

1972, when Typhoon Gloring struck, President Marcos immediately declared a state of calamity in the entire Luzon region and recommended to Congress the urgent passage of a 250-million pesos calamity fund measure. But his recommendations fell on deaf ears. However, both the deafening silence and indifference in Congress to the proposed 250-million peso calamity fund lasted only five days, when Typhoon Gloring re-entered the islands with a vengeance. Over the next seven days President Marcos personally directed the massive relief and rehabilitation efforts that were undertaken by the national government. The swift decisions made by Marcos beginning on 19 July 1972 included:

- ordering the immediate release of 3 million pesos representing the unspent balance of the Presidential Calamity Fund in the previous year's budget and taking full responsibility of this apparently illegal act, as there was no budget yet to sanction any release of public funds during the current fiscal year;
- seeking help of foreign governments to provide additional relief goods;
- conducting several aerial surveys of the disaster areas;
- ordering the commandeering of all available food supplies and private transport facilities in certain locations as emergency measures to help government relief agencies;
- warning greater Manila that if food prices continued to increase, he would take the same drastic measures as in Luzon;
- converting the Maharlika Hall of Malacanang into an emergency hospital for ailing flood victims;
- temporarily transferring the seat of government to Pangasinan.<sup>32</sup>

Marcos had also ordered the suspension of the distribution of relief in Pampanga and the diversion of these goods to Pangasinan flood sufferers. These relief operations had been no more than a trickle, squeezed out of the province's own meagre and fast-dwindling supplies, before Marcos abruptly shifted relief operations away from Pampanga. On Saturday night, 23 July 1972, the navy transport, *RPS Surigao del Norte* and its cargo of clothes, foodstuffs and medicines was the first to cast anchor off Lingayen. The arrival of the first relief ship sparked squabbles over the disposition of the cargo of rice amongst the province's incumbent and aspiring political leaders. On Tuesday 2 August, two more transport ships, British and American, docked with 110,000 pounds of relief goods, securing Pangasinan's relief supplies. By then the President had flown in with a team of national officials; a tent was set up near the Lingayen airstrip and with it came more promises of funds for Pangasinan.<sup>33</sup> The politically grateful loyal supporters of Pangasinan began a miraculously fast recovery from their misery under the watchful eye of their President who made sure

they received relief funds and food aid that neighbouring Pampanga—further south on the road to Manila—was denied.



**Caption: Figure 5. Track of Typhoon Yoling, showing proximity to Manila.**

Source. 'Typhoon Patsy (Yoling),' *Wikipedia*, online: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Patsy\\_1970\\_track.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Patsy_1970_track.png), accessed 14 August 2013.

Furthermore, Marcos activated four government departments to bring help to the victims of Typhoon Gloring: the departments of National Defence, Health, Social Welfare and Public Works. Threats of an El Tor epidemic in Pangasinan confronted Marcos,<sup>34</sup> who, on 24 July 1972, immediately took steps to avert the spread of the disease. He ordered station hospitals to be established in various towns—just one of a series of measures adopted to prevent the spread of El Tor, gastro-enteritis and bronchial diseases that usually follow in the wake of floods and typhoons.<sup>35</sup> The Health Department carried out mass inoculation against El Tor, other strains of cholera and typhoid in central Luzon. At the same time Marcos ordered a physical inventory of rice and other food stored in private warehouses. He directed the seizure of rice and food stocks in private warehouses if the owners refused to sell to flood victims at prices fixed by the Price Control Council.

In addition, the President quickly moved to tap foreign loans for the repair of major public works projects. He directed the Finance Secretary to prepare an estimate of the necessary matching funds for a \$300 million loan from a consortium of world bankers. The President stated in an interview that the counterpart fund could be as much as 1.8 billion pesos under the usual requirement that it should be at least 60 per cent of the proposed loan. The loan, when secured, would be repaid over a number of years. Marcos explained, 'The situation is so desperate

and explosive and the reason I say this is because we have not yet seen the end of the rainy and typhoon season, and there may yet be deficiencies this year in food, medicines and services.'<sup>36</sup>

Four years later, on 20 May 1976, four days after Typhoon Didang had struck, Marcos proclaimed a state of calamity in Metro Manila, Quezon Province and the Bicol region, in order to ensure rapid selective distribution of relief goods and assistance and maintain stable prices of prime commodities. The President made the announcement at an emergency meeting of top government officials and military officers. He reassured the Filipino people that everything in their power was being done to assist them. He advised flood victims to stay indoors unless performing essential functions or relief work. The First Lady, as Metro Manila Governor, said there was enough food in the greater metropolitan area and that government agencies were doing their best to prevent hoarding.<sup>37</sup> She also asked Manila mayors and her action staff on infrastructure and flood control to submit a rapid assessment of the extent of the flooding and damage, so immediate recovery steps could be formulated and taken. Orders were given to remove all illegal constructions, such as fish ponds, along riverbanks and *esteros* and prosecute those responsible for water obstruction and drainage problems. As in the case of Typhoon Gloring, the President and First Lady looked

decisive and sympathetic—both on the spot and on television.<sup>38</sup>

The Philippines experienced severe storms and flooding throughout the 1970s that led to hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage in Manila and the neighbouring islands to the south. In 1978, President Marcos took a cold hard look at the national recovery effort, or lack of it. The promulgation of Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1566 that year created the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) which provided for 'Strengthening the Philippine Disaster Control Capability and Establishing the National Program on Community Disaster Preparedness.'<sup>39</sup> The NDCC, under Marcos' rule, automatically became the highest policy-making, decision-making and coordinating body for disaster management in the Philippines.

Typhoons June (August 1984) and Ike (September 1984), which lashed a wide area of the central and southern Philippines, unleashed the worst calamities to hit the archipelago in fourteen years. In a delivered broadcast on Tuesday 5 September 1984, President Marcos asked his nation, to forget its differences and concentrate fully on rescue efforts. He said, Typhoon Ike was 'one of the most severe that the nation has experienced in decades...the total toll at this time is hundreds, I hope not thousands dead.'<sup>40</sup> The First Lady flew to stricken areas in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. The Presidential Palace announced that she surveyed the destruction and directed distribution of relief goods. A week after Marcos' television speech, the eruption of the Mayon Volcano, 250 miles southeast of Manila, which forced the evacuation of 20,000 people, added to the pressures on the Marcos regime and Manila. Ash fallout and mud flows from rain caused extensive damage to crops in the area and the displacement of a rural populace on a large scale.

The besieged government called for international assistance. Again, several million dollars in foreign relief aid poured into the Philippines to help the estimated 2.4 million people affected by the typhoons and volcanic eruption. But the Marcos administration requested even more international assistance in order to cope with the scope and magnitude of the crisis. Diplomatic sources in Manila, however, publicly stated that given the unstable economic environment in the Philippines, there was a possibility that relief aid would be diverted and not reach the victims. Marcos officials denied this could happen and several countries immediately responded to the desperate call for assistance.

### Specific Government Responses: Imelda Marcos

Many long-term root causes were to blame in part for the calamitous circumstances surrounding the succession of disastrous cyclonic storms of the 1970s and early 1980s. However, the rapid population growth and urbanisation of Manila in the Marcos years outstripped the paltry amounts that had been earmarked in the annual budget to assist policy makers and technical specialists deal with flood control in a rapidly expanding city. The money available covered only a limited amount of dredging of the Pasig River and some improvements to the drainage system and infrastructure that linked the polluted river, flowing at a snail's pace through the heart of the capital, to Manila Bay.

Imelda Marcos was constantly in the public eye throughout these years making relief visits to storm- and flood-affected areas and to the NDCC at Camp Aguinaldo. Flooded sites were checked, as were emergency centres being readied for the relief and rehabilitation of typhoon and flood victims. Relief goods were constantly solicited from the private sector. During Typhoon Norming, 15–16 August 1974, Mrs Marcos went personally to the NDCC to oversee operations in neighbouring affected provinces. She ordered the distribution of seeds for planting be speeded up, particularly in central Luzon. She also inquired into the implementation of drainage and flood-control measures. She asked staff at Camp Aguinaldo to send medical teams immediately to the flooded areas in greater Manila and central Luzon.<sup>41</sup> While the First Lady occasionally received a chilly welcome from residents suffering from hunger and disease, generally flood victims in the worst-affected places welcomed her with open arms, as if she was their saviour. The repeated relief operations and measures she personally mounted to resolve the flood crises in Manila, primarily caused by typhoon-related rains and poor drainage, suggested there was a powerful political imposition of will and concern on her part to pragmatically act, and as quickly as possible, to resolve particular local crises.

In May 1976, when Typhoon Didang was fast approaching, Imelda Marcos rallied the private sector and citizenry to help alleviate the suffering of those who would be badly affected by the floods. She also expressed hope that the emergency would 'give every citizen, rich or poor, a sense of responsibility so that we may not aggravate natural flood handicaps by unwitting action.'<sup>42</sup> She then spent most of that night and the following morning monitoring reports from the NDCC and emergency relief operations mobilised by *barangay* units in the Metro Manila area.<sup>43</sup>

In the years following Didang, when typhoons raked Manila, Mrs Marcos would personally direct the relief work in afflicted areas. For the thousands annually rendered homeless by waist-level contaminated flood waters, the figure of the First Lady organising medicine, food and other relief goods for distribution in Metro Manila's social welfare and evacuation centres became a common sight. Hence, when Typhoon Yaning hit central Luzon on 9 October 1978, Imelda Marcos mobilised all *barangay*-based disaster brigades to assist. She asked the *barangay* captains to coordinate all their activities with their respective mayors. Metro Manila officials and other action officers were in constant touch with various *barangay* coordinators and the mayors from the Metro Manila Coordinating Operations Center, to ensure that the Governor's orders were carried out fully.<sup>44</sup>

This vertical integration of the Marcos administration of the relief process and distribution of relief goods was built on politics and dyadic ties, namely party loyalty and grass-roots communal affiliation and responsibility. Such personal loyalties in the context of disaster relief efforts were translated into the political process in the Marcos years through what Carl Lande called 'vertical chains of dyadic patron-client relationships,' extending from the provincial elite and administrators down to lesser figures in the towns and *barangays*, the smallest administrative unit, and thence to the citizens.<sup>45</sup> It was this indispendible culturally configured informal system of relationships based on mutual-assistance and responsibility that constituted the real basis of political strength of the relief work and partisan politics during the Marcos years.<sup>46</sup>

However, all was not as it seemed on the surface. Marcos stressed that Malacanang and the Department of Social Services were taking the lead role in the distribution of relief goods until conditions returned to normal. But suspicions about political misuse of the disaster aid arose over reports that Australian food parcels had been relabelled as a 'gift from the President and First Lady,' when handed out to storm and volcano victims. The Minister of Social Services, Sylvia Montes, quickly countered the accusation stating that there had been a misunderstanding because of the fact that the Philippine government had been using surplus Australian boxes to distribute its own food in a separate project and had relabelled them. The Minister of Social Services denied any political misappropriation of the disaster aid and said, 'We can hold our heads high that there is no pillage.'<sup>47</sup> She also denied reports that starvation was spreading among the victims in some evacuation camps.

When their 'political credit' waned, if their manipulation of relief funds failed to produce the desired political result, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos were apt to invoke the language of miracles and the wrath of God, as a powerful cultural-symbolic idiom for the retention of power and to excuse the state's abrogation of social responsibility. In this way, the President and First Lady could shift the focus of attention away from the charges of the political misuse of relief funds and the accusations of unbridled development by calling upon the powerful idea of *deus maquina* (divine intervention), which they translated into a culturally familiar religious message with a political twist. Instead of implementing proper mitigation policies to reduce the risk of typhoon and flood disasters, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos cunningly focussed on nature itself, in the guise of the wrath of God. They took advantage of certain religious beliefs about sin and punishment, and, the godhead, and anthropomorphised nature's fury in terms of divine intervention. The President and his First Lady did not find it difficult or hypocritical to think and talk about typhoon- and flood-related mass death and destruction in terms of the religious rhetoric of divine punishment and miracles in the Philippine context. Indeed, by the 1980s, newspaper findings suggest that Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos attempted to impose the notion of the wrath of God on storm-ravaged people and flood victims in order to justify the failure of relief efforts and circumvent the new pressures put on their politically beleaguered government by repeated typhoon strikes.

As well as invoking the wrath of God, Mrs Marcos turned the oft-times perilous plight of the squatters and *esteros*-dwellers to her own political advantage. In the aftermath of the disastrous impact of Typhoon Didang, she appeared on television and observed that the squatters—human and industrial—on the *esteros* were the primary cause of the floods and she called for a firm hand by the government when dealing with them. 'Illegally built structures block the natural passage ways of the rains to the Pasig River and Manila Bay,' she said.<sup>48</sup> She also stated that the 'Government must learn from its mistakes and short

sightedness in undertaking major construction without constant regard for drainage facilities.<sup>49</sup> But, because of the ongoing environmental destruction based on building office sky scrapers and opulent housing estates, and the unrelenting pace of rural-urban migration, in reality the only way to make the capital flood-free was to build more canals, reservoirs and water catchment areas.

It is against this background of an emerging housing and environmental crisis and frequent typhoon disasters that I now turn my attention to Imelda Marcos' grand vision, to showcase Manila to the world. The rise of commercial jet travel and the rise of Imelda's Manila in an age of trans-national capital and investment went hand-in-hand. The First Lady wanted to make the capital a recognised destination for both the jet-age traveller and the globe-trotting business executive. She understood that although the Philippines appeared to offer a large and growing consumer market with a range of possibilities for international development schemes, macro-investments and global capital manoeuvring, its population was not affluent, and much of it was still rural. In late 1975, the First Lady was declared Governor of the new administration system of Manila.<sup>50</sup> The stage-managed development of Manila from this time onward presented Imelda Marcos and her municipal administration with a unique opportunity to construct a major series of iconic buildings and landscape settings, as both an aesthetic lure of capital and market networks and a visible, albeit iconic, sign of 'progress' under new society rule, signalling a city moving towards the future. But the First Lady's aspirational vision to make Metro Manila one of the great cities of the world, in fact, gave birth to a programme of urban renewal, whose fundamental social and economic interests did not correspond with the greater good.<sup>51</sup>

She considered, with the urban planners, that the top priority of the newly established Metropolitan Manila Commission was the modernisation of Manila. This goal was to be accomplished through the city's management system and integrated development programmes. Endorsed to head the city-wide commission, Imelda Marcos with her staff of planners conceived and implemented three programmes 'as a matter of survival,' namely: selective flood control for the protection of parts of the city from the 'decay of death'; public cleanliness and beautification. But there was a flipside to the modern skyscrapers now beginning to define the development of Manila as a great modern urban centre: the gritty transport system, the fetid streets and laneways of the down- and-out districts, teeming poverty, and the ubiquitous *esteros*. And, Imelda Marcos' team had no real answers to transform the impoverished essence of Manila that now sat alongside the emergent Potemkin-like gloss and glamour of the city. In the meantime, typhoons and floods continued to play havoc with an under-resourced maintenance and flood-prevention program in large parts of the diverse and multi-faceted capital.

## Conclusion

Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos did not only use the productive character of 'power' to restrict social and individual possibilities. They produced new strategies and techniques of social control, through the development of their vice-like regulation and management of disaster relief and, correspondingly, new social and political capacities in the individuals threatened by the typhoons and floods.<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Hewitt argues in interpreting the role of hazards in third-world societies that if the main purpose of government and scholars is to bring aid to the needy after calamity has struck then it is clear that these disaster-mitigation responses were not working properly, and they were making matters worse in the Philippines of the 1970s and mid-1980s. These failings were generated by preoccupations of the Marcos government that were political-economic, agency centred and selectively, communal-centric. There was no need to question whether this was a deliberate moral or technical choice; rather it was a simple but necessary side effect of partisan political and institutional arrangements. It is the meaning and implication of these arrangements as they bear upon the interpretation of risk and responsibility for damages and disaster relief—but also, more importantly, in relation to 'who eats and who does not'—with which Hewitt is concerned.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, the Marcos administration derived a dual benefit from the destruction and deprivation wrought by the typhoons and floods: the value of the resources they controlled became inflated in a political and material sense, and they also controlled the force necessary to either expand and protect, or deny, the support of redistributable resources and aid.<sup>54</sup>

It is difficult to imagine what the Philippines would have been like today if its particular post-1960s environmental history under Marcos had been different—one that had not resulted in the creation of an asset stripped, disaster-prone, debris-strewn landscape in many parts of the country. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos believed that creating a safer environment in the face of typhoons and floods was basically a political rather than an ethical concern and one directed to those in power. The deadly risks entailed in their self-seeking model of disaster relief with its short-term pragmatic political goals made explicitly clear one of the most frightening tradeoffs in Philippine history. Loyal local governments and supporters would readily receive financial and material support in order to save infrastructure, agricultural crops and as many lives as possible, but individuals, communities and areas opposed to the Marcos regime would be sacrificed.

The Marcos regime did not suffer much politically from the adverse effects of typhoons and their opposition did not gain much. The government had political ingenuity and substantial resources for relief and rescue operations at their disposal. Filipinos who were positive about the Marcos government before the typhoons of the early 1970s remained positive afterwards. Supporters and recipients of relief aid had a consistently high opinion of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. They would not inflict their hostility and life-threatening concerns upon the couple when natural disaster struck. But, in fact, the Marcos regime's political culture, which was increasingly violent and moving towards yet another more-devastating war of counter-insurgency on the flimsiest of cold-war pretexts, was rapidly destroying the environment of which Filipinos had been custodians for hundreds of years. The economic and environmental politics of the government reduced increasing numbers of people to a state of impoverishment and chronic anxiety. At the same time, a few politically well-connected families and individuals became richer and richer. They and the government violated their social and ethical obligations towards the victims of typhoons and floods and repeatedly created wealth out of other people's misfortune.

Hence, at the height of the political 'water games' damning presidential rhetoric was directed at the anonymous population of outcast Manila—the alleged dangerous slum-dwelling rural migrants—who had swelled the ranks of the city. As late as 1985, as floods and heavy storms lashed the Philippines, Marcos would continue to blame the migrant poor for the floods that tarnished Manila's international image, claiming Filipinos who clogged up the canals and sewers with their garbage were committing an 'unpatriotic and selfish act.'<sup>55</sup> But, such floods and typhoon disasters had real political utility and provided a silver lining for the Marcos regime; one need only to look over the decade spanning the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, at the enormous extent of direct involvement of the First Lady in controlling the regulation and distribution of relief aid in the aftermath of the storms and floods, following Typhoon Gloring. Indeed, huge sums of money that had led to little or no success with respect to effective flood control had changed hands without direct accountability or proper risk management measures in place.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, these so-called natural disasters, which required mobilisation of nation-wide relief efforts, emerged out of a particular institutional and cultural setting in the Philippine context. Ferdinand Marcos' economic reforms had brought about dramatic socio-economic and ecological changes that increased the risks of man-made rather than natural disasters. But the President and First Lady steadfastly refused to acknowledge the link between crony capitalism, unsustainable economic development and natural disasters in an increasingly unstable archipelago. They deliberately remained in a state of denial, except to encourage big business, overseas governments and aid agencies to provide massive injections of capital and material support for relief efforts, rather than encouraging them to support appropriate disaster-mitigation strategies.

During the Marcos years in the 1970s and early 1980s, the loss of thousands of lives, as well as the extensive damage caused by typhoons was partially a consequence of settlement patterns located in high-risk areas; namely, the sub-standard low-lying locale and condition of settlement patterns in many of these areas; the sub-standard condition of many homes and public buildings, and the poor design of roads, bridges, under-passes and drainage canals.<sup>56</sup> Hence, the storms and floods affected the entire urban community in Manila, but none more so than the poor—in particular, the squatters and shanty-town dwellers of Tondo. Ironically, the growing number of urban poor in Manila was largely attributable to the uncontrolled sky's-the-limit policies of rapid economic growth under the martial law-lead Marcos regime from the late 1960s to 1986.

Crony Capitalism and the loss of livelihoods and natural resources were the key causes for understanding the basis of the increasing social and environmental degradation in the city, not the alleged dangerous lifestyle of the squatters and aspiring migrants from the provinces. Imelda Marcos was to rapidly instigate sanitation and beautification projects with considerable fanfare, but she certainly was not prepared to condone the social tightening and political reform and regulation of the market economy, that was required to improve the lot of Manila's squatters and migrants living along the *esteros* and in places like Tondo.

In the political environment of the Marcos years, the government had sometimes blocked aid for typhoon and flood victims. In the 1970s and early 1980s, there is evidence of the abrogation of international humanitarian relief norms and international legal frameworks for disaster relief under the Marcos regime in the Philippines. During those years, wilful acts of misappropriation and mismanagement of relief funds, and theft and the improper sale of relief supplies in the name of politics occurred on a regular basis in the Philippines. Consequently, adequate food, shelter and medical care for thousands of people on the other side of the political divide in the Marcos years, who were adversely affected by typhoons and floods, was never provided.

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## Notes

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<sup>46</sup> Area Handbook for the Philippines, 213.

<sup>47</sup> Abby Tan, 'Typhoons, volcanos add pressure to Marcos.'

<sup>48</sup> 'FL asks for aid to victims'; 'Mrs Marcos surveys damage, airs appeal,' *Philippine Daily Express*, 21 May 1976.

<sup>49</sup> 'FL asks for aid to victims.'

<sup>50</sup> Manuel A. Caoili, *The Origins of Metropolitan Manila: A Political and Social Analysis* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 157–59.

<sup>51</sup> David Goldblatt, *Social Theory and the Environment* (London: Polity Press, 1996), 195.

<sup>52</sup> George Caffentzis, 'On the notion of a crisis of social reproduction: a theoretical review,' *The Commoner*, no. 5 (Autumn 2002): 1–22; 2.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Hewitt, *Interpretations of Calamity* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 123–25.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Dirks, 'Social responses during severe food shortages and famine,' *Current Anthropology*, vol. 21, no. 1 (February 1980): 21–44; 27.

<sup>55</sup> '28 dead in floods and landslide as heavy rains lash Philippines,' *The Seattle Times*, 28 June 1985.

<sup>56</sup> Benson, *The Economic Impact of Natural Disasters in the Philippines*, 103–04.