they were paraded around the little grid of streets wearing 'confessional' placards around their necks, made to dig their own graves and executed. It shocked the province and has not been forgotten to this day. Yet neither has the friendly and religious Captain Takimori, the Japanese provincial commander who, for too short an incumbency in the capital town, took an interest in local customs and beliefs and made his officers return all the religious statues and little treasures they had looted from churches and houses.

The point is that it is precisely this bewildering conflict of emotions that has left its indelible mark on an entire population. Had Filipino history been one long catalogue of monstrous and unrelieved tyranny it might arguably have been less muddling and complex in its psychic legacy. As it is, though, a largely non-literate people with an array of animist and other beliefs was suddenly subjected to waves of foreigners preaching a God of Love even as they whipped and garrotted, announcing democracy and liberty even as they reneged on a pact and declared war, and claiming Asian blood-brotherhood even as they turned the country into a prison camp. Nevertheless, this tends not to be spoken about as constituting a national problem, even though, if this were the case-history of an individual, a reasonable modern person would think it unlikely that any child could have undergone such a background of betrayal and rejection and still have grown up at ease with itself and its position in the world.

Ferdinand Marcos makes a good start

After such a necessarily crude overview of Philippine history, it might be useful at this point to have an even bolder biographical outline of the man who became President in 1965 – Ferdinand Edralin Marcos.

Born 1917, law graduate with top Bar honours 1940, briefly interned by the Japanese 1942, subsequently getting by until 1945. Congressman 1949, Senator 1959, President of the Philippines 1965–86. His first term of office was marked by a 'technocratic' style of government that concentrated on building roads, schools, hospitals and other neglected areas of the infrastructure. Re-elected 1969. In 1972, in response to leftist dissent much influenced by Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966–8) as well as to more general lawlessness, he declared martial law with the full support of Washington. At first this probably had the support of a majority of Filipinos as well. The law and order situation improved dramatically for a while even though Marcos's martial law regime, despite its brutalities, was a good deal more liberal than other Asian equivalents. This period also saw the launch of his new political party, the KBL, which embodied his ideological vision of a New Society. But as martial law wore on for almost nine years, becoming increasingly unpopular, the New Society seemed to most people more and more to resemble the old. Marcos's Constitutional Convention, which effectively rewrote the Constitution to give Marcos virtually unlimited power
and tenure, aroused deep hostility and scepticism. By 1980 he had been secretly diagnosed as fatally ill. From now on, albeit with remissions, his health would steadily decline and with it his grip on events which he had once controlled with consummate ease. In 1983 the Philippines was in grave economic crisis, the same year that saw the assassination of his only credible political opponent, Benigno Aquino, on his return from exile in the United States. This event, provoking widespread condemnation both at home and abroad, can be seen as having sealed Marcos’s political fate. In 1985 he called for a snap election to justify his claims of legitimacy for continuing as President. The prospect of yet another Marcos term of office precipitated the 1986 coup d’etat by Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel Ramos (respectively his personal lawyer and cousin) popularly known as the ‘EDSA Revolution’. The Marcos family were banished to Hawaii by President Ronald Reagan, whose support had continued until Ferdinand’s last day in office. He died in exile, 1989

The future President Marcos was born in 1917 in Sarrat, Ilocos Norte. Seventy-nine years later I was given a guided tour of the area by an old friend who is himself an Ilocano, although one staunchly opposed to Marcos from at least his declaration of martial law in 1972 until the end of his presidency. He is endlessly critical about the dead President. He is also endlessly proud of being Ilocano, a cultural solidarity which now and then spills over unintentionally to include the man whose embalmed body we are about to visit in Batac, a town only about ten miles from Sarrat. On the long drive up from Manila this friend was a fund of scandalous stories and observations, but the real enthusiastic flow began only once we had crossed the Agno River in the north of Ilocos province. Before that we passed the Aquino family’s Hacienda Luisita which Cory, when she succeeded Marcos as President, had in a fit of absent-mindedness committed herself to including in the nation’s pressing land reform scheme. This was a lapse she later and firmly corrected by retaining every last square metre of the enormous estate. ‘Trouble here recently,’ my friend observed glumly. ‘It was in the papers, did you see? Some of her wretched tenants were complaining they were kept so poor they’d been forced into prostitution.’ His scepticism about Marcos extends firmly to Ferdinand’s successor.

An hour or so later we crossed the Agno. My friend expanded visibly. ‘Ah,’ he said with a sigh of satisfaction. ‘We are now in the Ilocos. I smell my home.’

‘I thought this was still Ilocos?’

‘Oh, forget lines on the map. The point is, these people round here – he waved a hand at the window towards the knots of labourers in the fields – they’re Ilocanos. You look, in a few miles you’ll soon see the difference. Now, there – you see those houses? They’re just nipa huts, aren’t they? Regular bahay kubo. But see how neat they are? Everything tidy, the yard swept, the fences mended. You’ll never see that down in Manila or in your province. The Tagalog are basically sluts and slovenes. Go on, admit it: you’ve never seen Tagalogos live like this, have you? Oh, the old one maybe, the one-in-a-million. But never a whole village. Look at this . . . And look at the fields, too. Everything neat, the crops well-tended, every last square metre in use, everyone busy. No fields lying fallow because nobody can be bothered to plough them. Nobody goofing off in the shade like the Tagalogos. We’re a different race up here. That’s the whole point about Marcos. You must get that straight. He was an Ilocano to the bone. That’s why he appointed all those Ilocanos to the armed forces. Of course he knew he could trust them. You know what they used to say in those days when a military man was passed over for promotion? ‘He comes from the wrong side of the Agno.’

He breaks off to observe of the bus we are stuck behind. ‘You see that name? That fleet’s owned by a provincial governor. He’s a famous drug addict and a sex pervert. He beats and torments his women. He is a sadist. It’s all in the newspapers.’

After a while we reach Pangasinan province where my friend was born and he explains how his family had been part of the late-nineteenth century migratory wave of Ilocanos who had flooded southwards. Land had always been a problem for Ilocanos; the twin provinces of Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur are crowded between the sea and the mountains of the Cordillera Central. Many of those migrating south were actually headed east to the green and under-populated Cagayan Valley but had to go the long way around because the intervening mountains were impassable to their wagons. ‘My God, they were poor in those days. Buffalo carts with wood wheels. Barefoot . . .’ At this point my friend confesses to
having a mild shoe fetish because he himself had been sent barefoot to school (in the early thirties when a pair of child’s shoes cost P1.50) where he was once humiliated by having to receive a prize, clumping up to the stage in wooden clogs amid titters. Here he admits himself sympathetic to Imelda Marcos’s own obsession with shoes, which has similar origins. The world mocks without knowing the injury of a childhood shame. In nearly every culture, it seems, shoes become a rather obvious symbol of economic status, and one frequently notices Filipinos looking at feet almost before they look at faces. They can spot real leather at a glance. Evidence of class stigma lingers on in different vocabularies. Not for nothing did the French version of such wooden clogs or sabots give the word sabotage. Today the word for clogs, bakya, has become a downcast, unreverential adjective meaning ‘low-rent’, ‘tacky’, ‘poor’ or ‘old-fashioned’.

My friend had indeed been bakya, but as an intellectual and a socialist he is now proud of it. As an Ilocano he evidently feels the solidarity for his people’s history of one who has for years been living exiled from Arcadia down in that Tagalog stronghold, Manila. We stop at Agoo, just over the La Union border, where he eats hugely of some blackish food he says was a favourite of Ferdinand’s. When we are under way again I have to admit that the atmosphere up here is different. It is not like the Philippines I am familiar with. The roads are good (thanks, of course, to Marcos), the fields are indeed well worked and neat. Motor scooters abound, a rare enough sight back in Manila for their presence up here to be noteworthy. My friend explains that they’re smuggled. The capital of Ilocos Norte, Laoag, is only about as far from Taiwan as we have just driven from Manila. ‘Chinese genes,’ he says, ‘lots of them here, we’re so close. Smuggling, ancient trade links, ties of blood and character. That’s the secret. Ilocanos are like the Scots, frugal, hard-working, hard-headed...’

The heat beats inward through the window glass onto my right cheek. It is that dozy, early-afternoon moment for siestas and an absence of strenuous reflection. My friend goes on dreamily singing the praises of all things Ilocano, plainly happy to be home, as proud of this landscape as he is sad that his cradle tongue, Ilokano, has become rusty. ‘You look at the houses of the poor down south,’ he keeps saying, ‘I’ve never been to that village of yours — what is it, Kansulay? — but I’ll bet it’s slovenly. Southern Tagalog, right? Bound to be filthy and demoralized. Look at these houses. Up here it’s not demoralizing to be poor, you see. There were never any big haciendas like in Pangasinan and Tarlac. People could own their little plot of land and work it for themselves. You look when we get to Laoag. On the covered market they put up a notice, I expect it’s still there. “Bawal sa Tamad sa Laoag.” “Laziness Forbidden in Laoag.” Imagine, in the Philippines! You can see we Ilocanos are a race apart. I am too sleepy to protest that this civic gesture — a Tagalog phrase, at that — can be seen nowadays all over the Philippines. It doesn’t seem to matter; I have got the underlying Ilocano message loud and clear. We are different.

We stop in a succession of towns along the coast to look at old Spanish churches. Some have had the original stucco stripped off their exteriors to expose thin bricks laid horizontally as well as patches of rubble and bodge, which is why they were rendered in the first place. This rare sight of bricks in a largely brickless country reminds me of Italian churches that have lost their stone facings and show how their original builders had been evenly rough and ready. I wonder aloud whether there is stonework missing which someone has incorporated into his own home, like a house in Cairo in which I once stayed whose foundations were largely built of facing slabs from the Great Pyramid. My friend sets me straight: at least, I presume him to be correct when he says:

‘It wasn’t stone, it was plaster. It was Imelda Marcos who had it done. It was an idea from her later phase, in the early eighties. She’d abandoned her Filipino nationalist period and had caught a sort of Euro-Renaissance snobbery from her arty American friends like Van Cliburn and the Italian-bred Cristina Ford. She started collecting lots of paintings — not wisely and not well. Unfortunately, she was badly advised. She also began changing views and buildings that didn’t match her fantasies. She set-dressed quite a lot of the Ilocos, you’ll see. She just got this urge to antique, never mind how inauthentic the results. You wait till we get to Vigan — she whitewashed the entire town! I’m not kidding. I guess she thought it looked more Spanish that way. A Hollywood version of the Mediterranean, you know? So with this church she took off the plaster and exposed the brickwork. Did you know she also decided that all Manila should be re-roofed in tile? Imagine — there’s
scarcely been a single tiled roof in Manila since the Second World
War, when every last one was smashed. When she was Governor of
Metro Manila she passed a law instituting compulsory tiling.
Nothing came of it, of course. She'd overlooked the total lack of tile
factories'.

We soon come on Vigan which, the hand of Imelda Marcos
notwithstanding, cannot fail to give a European a small frisson of
homesickness in this land of cement block construction mostly
dating from the last fifty years. It is a largely intact Spanish town,
prettified here and there and inevitably with the faint whiff of the
museum about it. However, there is at least one genuine museum
that really does evoke the Spanish period since it has not yet fallen
into the hands of the heritage industry. This is the birthplace of
Father Burgos, who, in the company of two other priests, was execu-
ced in 1872 by the Spanish at the urging of the friars as the
alleged instigators of the Cavite Uprising. The three priests –
Gomez, Burgos and Zamora – are known collectively as Gombuza.
A typically Filipino contraction, this, 'Gombuza' became the secret
password of Bonifacio's Katipunan, for the priests' martyrdom was
a harbinger of the 1896 Revolution. They were radical only to
the extent that they were urging the Filipinization of the Church, and
were thus initiators of the Filipinos' first proper reform move-
ment. Fr. Gomez was seventy-three; Fr. Burgos was thirty-five; Fr.
Zamora was thirty-seven. Jose Rizal's elder brother, Paciano, had
studied with Fr. Burgos at Manila's Dominican college, San Jose,
and became his favorite pupil. When Burgos and his two com-
panions were led out to the garrote at Bagumbayan, the very same
place where Jose Rizal was to be shot twenty-four years later, it
represented a turning-point in the lives of youths like Paciano, as it did
in Philippine history. It was an extraordinary thing that the Holy
Church could publicly strangle three of its own ordained priests,
one of them a venerable old man, by means of an iron collar and
screw. A black cloth was thrown over their heads and, beneath it,
their necks were broken one by one. A dark and violent thing,
Spanish catholicism as Rizal himself once remarked sarcastically
of Spain: 'The land of Goya'.

We wander through Fr. Burgos's birthplace past a series of horrid
but fascinating oil paintings of the Basí Rebellión of 1807, an Ilocano
uprising provoked by the Spanish government's prohibiting the
locals from brewing their own traditional drink, basi, and obliging
them instead to buy it from government stores. The crude paintings
were done by an amateur some twenty years later, but his detailing
of what had happened to the revolt's ringleaders suggests he may
have been an eyewitness. The heads of the executed men are
depicted being sawn off and put in iron parrot cages for, presum-
ably, exhibition. The parrot cages remind me of the cloth thrown
over Burgos's head in Bagumbayan in 1872. By a mental leap no
doubt suggested by all this mediaevalism I suddenly recall the case
of the Catholic priest mentioned by the anthropologist Michael
Taussig. This man, in the early part of the twentieth century, burned
a woman alive in northern Peru because she was accused of being a
witch.

The house in which the future martyr was born is charming,
random, rambling, airy and genuinely old, full of beguiling odds and
ends in no particular order. Downstairs there is a gallery of
famous sons and daughters of Ilocos, including Ferdinand Marcos.
His portrait is that jaunty photograph taken of him looking very
young, wearing a Second World War glengarry and beaming cock-
ily. Beneath this is printed the whole official martial-law-era
biography, including the story of his being the most decorated
Filipino of the war. Thus is Marcos in the old, unreconstructed ver-
sion. It has escaped the Cory-era restorer's blue pencil that
striped him of his medals and reduced him to the barest historical
necessity of having been 'the country's Sixth President (1965–86)'.
The censorship practices of free societies are always more interest-
ing than those of totalitarian regimes. So far as the Burgos Museum
is concerned the last fifteen years might never have happened. I
like its dusty unwillingness to bring itself up to date. But then, up
here in Ilocos political correctness has local implications of its own
where a famous Ilocano is concerned.

Eventually we reach the town of Batac, an orderly-looking place
This is the heartland of Marcos country. The name Marcos is not
especially obtrusive but, like the elephants somebody was once
absolutely forbidden to think about, lurks constantly just beneath
the mind's horizon. Outside the town hall is a vast banner that
reads 'Home of Great Leaders'. My friend dusts off his Ilokano to
good effect and we are directed to a couple of colonial-looking
brick houses with capiz shell windows on the river bank. Either
they have been beautifully restored or else — as my friend suggests — entirely invented by Imelda, as were dozens of ‘ancestral homes’ during the Marcos incumbency. It was a rich period for the instant dynasty. Again, there are no notices other than a small sign saying only ‘No Cameras and Hard Objects inside the Mausoleum’. This discreetness is in conformity with the widow’s wishes that her husband’s body should not become a tourist attraction. For twenty pesos, merienda money we find someone to fetch the key. Quite suddenly my friend refuses to come in and goes back to sit in the car. Too many painful memories too difficult to explain.

When the door to the mausoleum is unlocked I am met by a gust of Mozart’s Requiem, specifically the Rex tremendae majestatis. Inside it is gloomy and chill, an igloo made of tufa blocks, domed and with a polished marble floor like black ice. This circular chamber might be far underground, a lost cavern like that of King Arthur or the Seven Sleepers. It is the temporary resting-place, or unresting-place, of Marcos. He is lying in state in a glass case lit by subdued spots. An inscription at his feet reads only ‘Ferdinand Edralin Marcos — Filipino’, this time not for reasons of censorship but because it is the correct modest mode for a national hero. Above his head hangs a large embossed presidential seal. Batac’s once and future king is wearing a white barong, black trousers and shiny black pumps, and lying on a thin white-sheeted pallet and pillow as though on a hospital trolley. Across his chest is a red sash with a large star, as well as a lot of medals (which no doubt stubbornly include all the ones he was accused of having awarded himself. This is a highly contentious corpse). His face is very pink, with the texture of a Barbie doll’s, the outcome of the embalmer’s art. The Marcos family is said to have engaged the same Russian experts who are responsible for maintaining Lenin’s incorruptible state. There is something touching about how small he is. It is in the Grim Reaper’s normal repertoire of tricks to leave the lifeless, notably shrunken, but Ferdinand was a small man to begin with, and one is reminded of Renato Constantino’s acute, if merciless, observation: ‘Imelda’s statuesque figure is responsible for the remark: “President’s elevator shoes and pompadour hair-do.”

The Mozart goes on and on; we are looped into eternity, momentarily. The restraint of the place is impressive. A member of the Marcos family was later to tell me that when Ferdinand’s body was finally allowed back from Hawaii in September 1993 Imelda was ‘too strapped for cash’ to build something to rival St Peter’s Basilica in Rome and was obliged to settle for this modest simplicity. As a matter of fact it works well, being both dignified and touching, even as it begs the question of why this dead man can’t be buried but must go on lying here in the cold and the dark (no luz perpetua in here: the dim lighting goes off when the door is closed, like that of a fridge, along with Mozart. The refrigerator stays on. Currently there are problems about unpaid electricity bills). The answer, as to everything in this country, is politics. The Marcos family quite reasonably wants him buried in Manila alongside other Philippine presidents. Cory Aquino, herself widowed by the dead man’s regime if not by Ferdinand himself, was vindictively adamant that not even his dead body should be allowed back into the country. Even her successor Fidel Ramos, who is Ferdinand’s own cousin, fellow Ilocano and ex-head of his Philippine Constabulary in the martial law years, relented only after his friend’s body had already been lying in its Hawaiian refrigerator for four years, and then merely to the extent of allowing it to nearer Manila than Batac. The theory was that the sort of funeral his widow would give him could pose a threat to national security. It probably would have done, too, since after a few years of Cory Aquino many Filipinos had begun to look back with unexpected nostalgia. In any case, here the corpse goes on lying, not like Edward I’s wife Eleanor of Castile who lay for a night at Charing Cross as the last stage of her funeral cortège before being buried in Westminster Abbey, but in a kind of necropolitical limbo. Whatever else, it shows this small neat man to be definitely one of the undead.

Outside it seems excessively hot and bright. There is a woman with a careworn, peasant’s face standing there, demure in a white dress. She asks me if I have come to see Ape, the Chief. I say I have: ‘We often speak with him. He is in heaven. Si Kristo po at siya ay isa [Christ and he are one]’. I later discover this calm lady is a member of the Alpha Omega sect to whom Ferdinand appears, sometimes during trances and sometimes in dreams, to tell them to love one another and wait for his return. She produces a small coloured picture of Marcos-as-Christ, his hands — complete with
the stigmata — pointing to the Bleeding Heart radiating beams of light from the middle of his breast. In a spiritually eclectic culture it is nearly impossible to be blasphemous. Behind me the thick wooden door of the tomb gives off nothing but silence as it awaits either Mary Magdalene or the electricity company’s bailiffs.

Da Apo, then, was born just up the road in 1917, and was destined to be contentious even in so involuntary an act. His father, Mariano Marcos, was taught as a child by the Thomasites in the first classes they held in Ilocos Norte and grew up bilingual in Ilokano, Spanish — and English, which might seem the perfect metaphor for a Filipino’s divided loyalties. He became a teacher before graduating in law and was then elected Congressman for the Second District of Ilocos Norte. Ferdinand’s mother, Josefa Edrain, came of an ilustrado, landowning family and had likewise been a Thomasite pupil in the same little primary school as Mariano. In due time she graduated from the University of the Philippines. Thus there was nothing really of rags-to-riches about young Ferdinand. Both his parents were of reasonable status socially, and by prevailing provincial standards well-to-do.

It is not easy now to sort out the historical from the hagiographical where the Marcos family is concerned. A background that in anybody else would have been deemed fairly unremarkable for a bright, ambitious boy from the provinces was glossed and reworked, even from before his 1965 election victory, by commissioned writers, ex-boyhood companions, college friends and fellow Ilocanos with an eye to immortality, not to say a job in Malacañang Palace. As his Presidency wore on and he awarded himself the extraordinary powers of martial law these accounts began to take on the retrospective trappings of destiny, such that the infant Ferdinand was born immediately after a thunderstorm, that wise old women predicted greatness from the shape of his skull, that the boy soon began demonstrating superhuman intellectual precociousness as well as feats of endurance and marksmanship, while exhibiting from the first a moral character that would have shamed Baden-Powell.

All this may safely be ignored, except for the marksmanship. Of far more consequence are the simple facts of where and when he was born. It was only nineteen years after the uncompleted Revolution, when the Spanish had finally gone and the Americans had taken their place. Every adult in Sarrat and Batac whom young Ferdinand knew when growing up would have had vivid memories of Rizal’s execution in 1898 and the momentous events that followed. Most of the men would have had combatants — if not in the Revolution itself then in the Philippine-American war that followed. Batac had at least two illustrious sons: General Artemio Rizal, an important figure in the Katipunan revolutionary movement, and Gregorio Aglipay, a revolutionary priest. Aglipay was an interesting man whose childhood, like that of José Rizal, had been indelibly marked by the executions of Fathers Gomez, Burgos and Zamora back in 1872. His conscience had turned him into something of a guerrilla, fighting first against the Spanish and then the Americans. In a sense his spiritual nationalism was the logical outcome of ‘Gombuza’s’ campaign for a Filipinized clergy, for in 1902 he went on to found the Aglipayan Church, more generally known as the Aglipayan Church. This organisation, which still exists today all over the Philippines but especially in Ilocos Norte, aimed for a home-grown Filipino — as opposed to Roman — Catholicism. The infant Ferdinand was baptized by Bishop Aglipay himself, which made him an Aglipayan almost from birth (he was only baptized a Roman Catholic when three years old). In small towns like Sarrat and Batac everyone knew everybody else: Aglipay was a friend of Ferdinand’s father — Mariano, and took a particular interest in the boy. Moreover, the maternal grandfather, Fructuoso Edrain, was a cousin of another distinguished warrior, Antonio Luna, Commander-in-Chief of the Army at the time of his death in 1899. Both men fiercely resisted the American invasion. Consequently, little Ferdinand must have grown up in a pungent emotional climate. For one thing, the rugged landscape abounded with tales of heroism and resistance, of the Ilocano’s independent fighting spirit. A scant eighteen years before he was born most of Sarrat’s able-bodied menfolk had marched off to attack the American forces who had taken the local capital, Laoag. Armed only with bolas and sharpened bamboo staves they succeeded in breaking through a palisade before being largely wiped out by gunfire. Their leader was Jose Yes, almost certainly a relative of the man Ferdinand would one day appoint his security chief and head of the armed forces. In 1936 a large
monument to the heroes of Sarrat would be built in front of the town hall, but in Ferdinand’s childhood Bishop Aglipay’s imposing church in Batac exemplified this same nationalistic tradition in spiritual guise.

That was one half of the picture. The other was that by the 1920s a certain pragmatism had long since supervened at a civic level. The Americans were clearly there to stay for the foreseeable future. The best had to be made of a bad job, which to many Ilocanos came to seem less bad than they had at first thought. In the early part of the century Ferdinand’s grandfather, Fabian Marcos, was appointed Mayor of Batac. He had been giving Spanish lessons to the American occupation forces, and once in power used his influence to negotiate a deal with them for that first batch of Thomasites who taught his son Mariano and his future daughter-in-law Josefa. Thus the boy would have grown up in an atmosphere whose degree of overt tension is now hard to assess, but which contained two apparently conflicting strands which must have found an echo in his character: as it were, the heroes of Sarrat and Hiawatha. It is quite possible there never was a seamless synthesis between the two, only a sort of emulsion whose constituents would separate out from time to time throughout his life and political career. Of course this kind of dichotomy was not peculiar to Marcos but can be seen everywhere in Filipino culture, which generally makes far less strenuous attempts than Western culture does to resolve such intellectual conflict. Most Filipinos can hold conflicting views without evident discomfort, switching from one to the other as the need arises (nowhere more obviously than in religious matters). If it is a behaviour learned from a bitter history then it has served Filipinos well; but it is equally an Eastern way of dealing with the world. The Mayor of Batac did a deal with the Americans. He would have been a lousy mayor if he hadn’t, given the circumstances; and if it led to a future of Hiawatha and Green Cards it was still a lot better than anything the Spanish friars had provided in 500 years.

To say that Marcos as President never forgot his roots would be merely to understare the obvious, even though the hypothetical direct question ‘Do you consider yourself an Ilocano first or a Filipino?’ would have elicited from him a diplomatic response that depended on the circumstances, on the questioner and the expected reply. In a sense he answered it in his actions – at least, at a domestic level. He not only built in his home province the best roads in the country, he stocked the armed forces of the Philippines with Ilocanos. Many of the people closest to him throughout his administration were relatives and family friends: sons and daughters of the Ilocos. At this point it is essential to note some peculiarities of the Filipino social system. To base one’s patronage and appointments on familial relationships has obvious advantages in terms of trust, loyalty and predictability. One has an expectation that people from one’s own extended family will think and behave in a certain way, unlike those from outside the clan who may well have hidden agendas (such as advancing their own families). Besides, the concept of nepotism loses much of its force if applied to a kinship system that is cognatic, or bilateral, and recognizes relationships far more distant than the grandson implied by the word’s origin.

The family has long been at the centre of Filipino society. As in most parts of Southeast Asia kinship is essentially bilateral; that is, ancestry is traced through both the mother’s and the father’s line. Effective kinship ties are maintained with relatives of both parents. A bilateral system gives a potentially huge number of living kin, especially as five to ten children are not uncommon even today in each nuclear family of each generation. The only effective limitation on recognized kin is the number of relatives with whom an individual can sustain close interpersonal relations; ‘kin’ is a network of dyadic ties.

It might be added that kin can be still further expanded to include the fictive kin who are acquired through the compadre system of sponsors at weddings and baptisms. Through one’s kum- pare and kumare one gains access to, and a relationship with, still other extended family networks. A mere bungay captain might easily have thirty ‘godchildren’, a professional politician might acquire hundreds, to all of whose families he has a duty, just as they would have the reciprocal duty of voting for him. This is above all a social system that depends on the notion of the padrino, the apo, the godfather; the boss to whom people are bonded by blood ties and debts of obligation. O D. Corpuz put the matter succinctly, if
regretfully, when he observed 'it may be said that in every Filipino president beats the heart of a tribal chief." Such alliances that can undercut broader ideological and political affiliations in the Philippines, and Ferdinand would have grown up assimilating them with Doña Josefa’s milk. In addition he would have learned another important social concept, the so-called of indebtedness. The phrase translates literally as ‘inner debt,’ and it indeed contains something of the English-language concept of 'indebtedness', with the intensifier that a person’s load is more than just ‘inner’ and can take on the attributes of both heart and soul. This implied distinction between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ person is extremely important to Filipinos who, unlike most Anglosaxons, seem to feel under no pressure to reconcile differences between their ‘inner’ selves (which may not be compromised) and their public selves. Once again, the notion of synthesis is alien. This may be the reason for one of the more impressive of Filipino attributes, which is the ability to sell oneself without any sense of personal loss. The load remains unassailable.

The way in which and indebtedness goes beyond an English sense of non-repayable debts is in its implication that the debt can never be fully discharged. Most debts are not cruelly financial, of course, and their very unquantifiability makes them all the more unrepayable. Thus a cycle of mutual indebtedness builds up throughout the vast family network, not onerous, precisely, but unignorable. The only way out would be to renage, refuse, walk away. That leads to the gravest charge one Filipino can level at another, that of being or inner sell, is to become an outcast so far as that network of relationships is concerned. Here we are emphatically not being sidetracked by anthropological niceties into some academic backwater. This intricate social system has large-scale political consequences that can lead to complete misunderstanding when the Western press comes charging out of its corner, swinging. A Filipino acquaintance puts it well:

Filipino politicians utilize political patronage in exchange for votes at election time, thus introducing the Filipino and indebtedness into a Western political system put into operation in the Philippines by the Americans. The political system, from high to low, is the national machinery, functions blissfully, largely on and indebtedness, despite ingraining contradictions from theoretical principles and tenets of the Western political model. This model expects the political system to be determined by ‘issues’, but and indebtedness have a stronger pull [The] ambivalence between and indebtedness and the tenets of democratic elections marks the volatile and footloose Philippine political system.

It has even been suggested that the strange relationship which successive post-war Filipino governments have had with Washington owes much to a national, collective sense of and indebtedness towards the United States for having brought the Japanese occupation to an end. The idea of Uncle Sam as padrino might also explain the anger Filipinos have frequently felt when the US has appeared to renage on obligations of its own towards a country with which it has so many blood ties. The great padrino, going his own sweet international way, has appeared to his little brown brothers as .

Ferdinand Marcos, then, was destined to be contentious even at birth. This is because of an old rumour taken up by the American author Sterling Seagrave in his 1988 book, The Marcos Dynasty. Fans of Mr Seagrave no doubt recognized that research for his earlier book, The Soong Dynasty, overlapped that for the later. The central hypothesis of both books is of an immense Chinese conspiracy whose tentacles almost outreach even the author’s imagination. This is not precisely the ‘yellow peril’, that conspiracy-by-copulation or Malthusian nightmare in which the West of the 1890s had foreseen itself swamped by Eastern hordes; nor yet is it the conspiracy of Fu Manchu, the wily and inscrutable Oriental created by the British novelist Sax Rohmer in 1913 as a sort of Mandarin Moriarty. Rather, Seagrave’s is a theory that has tight, family-based triads and secret societies of pronounced right-wing leanings amassing vast fortunes, largely through crime syndicates, while using their power to infiltrate the criminal and governmental circles of an expanding empire of Southeast Asian countries - including, of course, the Philippines. On second thoughts we
may be dealing with Fu Manchu in his final, 1959, version. In *Emperor Fu Manchu* (1959) Rohmer, who by then had decamped to the United States, turned his hero-villain into a villain-hero and, in deference to the prevailing post-McCarthy ethos, made him a dedicated anti-Communist.

At all events, in order to make Ferdinand Marcos an important part of this web and, by so doing, explain his entire career as having been in the service of Chinese masters, Seagrave simply says categorically that Mariano Marcos was not his father. The real father, we are told, was a young Chinese law student at the University of the Philippines (UP) named Ferdinand Chua who impregnated Josefa Edralin. On discovering this, Chua's family sent him packing to Fukien to look for a proper Chinese wife, while Josefa's family hurriedly arranged a marriage to her classmate Mariano Marcos. Chua duly returned from Amoy with a Fukienese wife, graduated from UP and rose to become a municipal judge in Laog. Seagrave notes that the Chuaos were the wealthiest Chinese family in Ilocos Norte, 'part of the great Chua clan, the sixth richest and most powerful clan in the Philippines, numbering among its members many millionaires and several billionaires.' After the Second World War this clan became a prominent supporter of Chiang Kai-shek in his losing struggle with Mao Zedong and, joining similar KMT loyalists in Manila, the Chuaos helped form a new Federation of Chinese Chambers of Commerce, thereby concentrating the business and trading links of the most influential Filipino Chinese under one umbrella organization. Of Ferdinand Marcos's putative Chinese father, Seagrave has this to say:

If this version is accurate, and the essential details have been confirmed repeatedly by various independent sources, it would help to explain many peculiarities and inconsistencies in the official Marcos story. Such as the fact that Josefa was seven years older than Mariano, the fact that he spent little time with her and the children over the years, that he mistreated and abused Ferdinand as a boy, but was affectionate toward her second son Pacifilo, and that Mariano's career advanced in ways that can only be explained by the intervention of a powerful but invisible patron. This would also explain why Ferdinand Marcos seriously considered himself to be a direct descendant of the Chinese pirate Li Ma-hong. There was no Chinese blood in Mariano's family, and only a little in Josefa's.

The point one would make is not that this is stupid, because it isn't, but that ten years later it still remains unconfirmed. Either it is correct or it is not. One can detect no radical shift in thinking among Filipino politicians and intellectuals brought about by Mr. Seagrave's theory, as might have been expected had it broken over their heads with the force of revelation. In the aftermath of the EDRA Revolution, no holds were barred when it came to denigrating the Marcoses. It is likely that a good many Filipinos would willingly have embraced the idea that Ferdinand maybe hadn't been so completely one of them after all but a Chinese—if not full-blooded then blood-debted. (There is, of course, a good deal of latent anti-Chinese feeling on the part of Malay Filipinos, the Jews of Asia being one of those recurrent whispered phrases.) Furthermore, those who knew the family well assert that his brother Pacifilo and his sister Elizabeth both looked exactly like him, which is unlikely had they not shared the same father. If one declines to spend much time in trying to refute Mr. Seagrave's hypothesis it is simply because it is not the interesting part about either Ferdinand Marcos or the Philippines.

Instead, we can move on to 1935 when Ferdinand was eighteen. He had just finished his first semester at UP when he found himself under suspicion of murder. This is where the question of his mother's ancestry comes in. The background to these melodramatic circumstances was that his father—or maybe stepfather—Mariano had been defeated in 1931 when he ran for a third term in Congress. Worse, he had even lost in his home town Batac to a young upstart named Julio Nalundasan. Suddenly Mariano was out of a job. He was so depressed he was not even able to manage the family law firm but instead took a job down south in Davao, Mindanao, which is about as far from Ilocos Norte as it is possible to get in the Philippines. But in 1935 he returned home to run for Congress once more. In the interim there had been some interesting changes at national political level. His old nemesis Julio Nalundasan was now running on Manuel Quezon's Nacionalista ticket. Quezon, after almost twenty years as Senate President, was about to become the first President of the newly created...
Commonwealth of the Philippines. In terms of political power in the two pre-war decades, Quezon was second only to the American Governor-General. Clearly, Mariano’s prospects of success against a candidate backed by Quezon were slender, and were made slenderer still since he was running for the Republican Party, headed by none other than Bishop Aglipay. By now Aglipay was an old man, and had lost much of his appeal. In the event Nalundasan won handomely. Provincial politics being what they are, his supporters were not content with victory but decided to rub Mariano’s nose in it. In the back of a car they rigged up a coffin in which sat two effigies labelled ‘Marcos’ and ‘Aglipay’. The car then roared triumphantly around the little streets of Batac tooting its horn to the applause of the crowds. It made a special discourtesy call outside the shuttered Marcos house where the mockery reached a new pitch. Inside the house a bleak decision may or may not have been taken.

Three nights later, while cleaning his teeth on the verandah of his house, Julio Nalundasan was shot in the back with a 22 bullet. He died within minutes. Two days after that Ferdinand returned to his studies in Manila. He was already known as one of the best pistol shots in the university, and since the defeated Mariano had been in Laog at the time of the murder suspicion naturally fell on his son. Yet mysteriously he was not arrested for another three years, just five months before he was due to graduate from law school. By then, like several of his classmates, he had enrolled in the reserves of the Philippine Constabulary and was a third lieutenant. He was jailed, then bailed, finally tried and found guilty ‘beyond any reasonable doubt’, and given a minimum sentence of ten years. Then, within a few days of beginning his sentence, he was informed that President Quezon was willing to offer him a pardon – a decision that to this day has not been explained except by Sterling Seagrave, who hazards that Quezon had long since been advised of the special relationship that existed between Ferdinand [Marcos] and Judge Chua, and that a deal had been cut.7 Seagrave’s theory is that Quezon’s presidential term would be ending in less than two years and, if he decided to run again, the Chua clan’s support could be critical.

In any case Ferdinand now did something quite extraordinary. He turned down the presidential pardon and voluntarily returned to Laog jail where he spent six months playing table tennis in between writing his own appeal brief, a mammoth document over 800 pages long. In the months following its submission he took his Bar finals, also from jail. He not only passed these but came top, with the highest score on record. Perhaps inevitably he was accused of cheating, whereupon he insisted on a viva voce re-examination to clear his name, which only confirmed the original result. Not long afterwards Associate Justice Jose F. Laurel (who oddly enough had also been convicted of murder at the age of eighteen and acquitted on grounds of self-defense) handed down a verdict of acquittal on the brilliant young graduate. The next day a triumphant Ferdinand Marcos returned to the Supreme Court to take his oath as a fully fledged lawyer.

So – did he or didn’t he kill Nalundasan? Was the young Ferdinand a murderer or not? The case has never been satisfactorily resolved. By the time he was the President in Malacañang Palace the official line was that since he had been acquitted, he was clearly innocent. But no great effort was ever made to quash the rumours, no doubt because he realized that in a nation which sets great store by a macho image the lingering suspension would do him more good than harm at the polls. Beyond question he had made an auspicious start to his career. The affair had earned him much publicity as had President Quezon’s own interest in the case. The rejected pardon, the top scholar who wrote his own successful appeal from jail, his sensational acquittal – all these had gained Ferdinand national recognition. The dark rumours that refused to go away only added spice.

It certainly seems like astonishing good fortune that an ex-Congressman’s son from the sticks should have acquired the support of the President himself. In lieu of a better explanation, Sterling Seagrave’s theory that this is explained by Ferdinand’s true paternity undeniably has a certain plausibility, though it does leave one pertinent question unanswered. If Mariano was not Ferdinand’s real father, why would the boy have committed murder to avenge his honour? Macho codes demand that a man settle his own scores rather than let a teenager step on (whom he allegedly never much liked) do the dirty work. It should be added that my Ilocano friend who drove me up to Batac had been at college with Nalundasan’s son José, who used to say that never for
one moment did he doubt that Marcos was his father’s killer. On the other hand, there is a picture extant showing a smiling José being warmly folded in a Marcos embrace somewhere in Malacañang Palace. Both men look relaxed and happy and Ferdinand, in particular, is beaming expansively in a way he seldom did in public. And there we shall let the matter rest.

Retrospectively, it can now be seen how these pre-war dramas presaged much that was to come, both in substance and in tone. So often there would be an equivocal event from whose murk Ferdinand would emerge not merely victorious but having substantially advanced his interests. And nearly always his success can be traced to an adroit use of the law. In this he was certainly not unusual, although better at it than most. In a country that has always had an extraordinary preponderance of lawyers among its ruling elite the law is constantly invoked to muddy and obfuscate. Thanks no doubt to Mariano Marcos’s own legal practice, his son learned young that both law and religion provide suitable forests for the Filipino where he may skulk and slither and shine in constant fluidity. Even more satisfactorily, these were forests planted by foreigners, by Westerners who had brought with them Latin, the peculiar dialect reserved for God and the law. This was a gift to Filipinos, who were already masters of camouflage and evasion. Now, whenever danger threatened, they could take cover in thickets of Latin, buying time, misleading, joking, mocking, turning things to their advantage; rewriting events until they took place in some never-never land, a jurisprudential Oz. Just as uncomprehended phrases of the Latin Mass were garbled by peasants into spells, love potions, curses and mystical flummery, so even today the solemn remnants of Roman law still serve to bewilder or strike fear. Threatened officials bluster about ‘certiorari writs’. A police chief does not sack a useless subordinate, he files a petition for mandamus against him to make him do his duty — in other words an enforcement by law to compel law enforcement. It is brilliantly Filipino. And of course practically no one of any social or political clout ever comes close to going to jail. Even the most appalling crimes arousing public outcry disappear into that enchanted land where judgements and appeals are bounced back and forth between one court and another like a tennis ball in a stupefying rally, until the defendant dies of natural causes or runs out of money, and the public’s outrage has long been superseded by fresher protest at grosser crimes.

With the suppleness that characterizes Filipinos taking up residence in strange terrain Ferdinand Marcos grew up to be a consummate woodsman in this foreign forest. His 800-page appeal brief was one demonstration of his mastery at an early age. Another was the way in which so many of his actions now seem to us cloaked in indeterminacy. About him there was always, finally, something that was not quite clear. One now suspects that this may also have been his own experience of himself.
The Second World War came to the Philippines, as it did to Hawaii, Hong Kong and Malaya, on 7 December 1941. Ten hours after they had attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii the Japanese bombed Clark Field, the US Army Air Force base in Pampanga, fifty-odd miles north of Manila. Despite the warning the Americans were caught napping. Of their entire air force in the Far Eastern theatre, over half the bombers and one-third of the fighters were destroyed on the ground at Clark in a matter of minutes.

And yet three years before, none other than the Communist Party of the Philippines had issued a manifesto warning the country that a Japanese invasion was imminent. At a more general level the likelihood of war had been openly gossiped about since 1940. Officially, however, the attitude on the Allies’ part seems to have been one of sublime complacency. As one Manila resident, Marcial Lichauch, put it at the time: ‘The people residing in the Philippines — Americans, British, Dutch, Swiss, Spaniards, Chinese and the Filipinos themselves — were not ready for this war. They simply could not conceive that Japan would dare face the combined forces of America and Great Britain.’ Eighteen days later the Japanese flag was flying over the US High Commissioner’s Manila mansion and martial law had been declared.

The fall of Manila in so short a time, preceded as it has been by Hongkong, is a terrible blow to the white man’s prestige in Asia and the Far East. There can be no excuses. Troops, planes, tanks, guns and supplies began pouring into Manila many months before war began. That Japan could occupy Luzon is not exactly a surprise — the island is not a fortress like England is today; but that the Sons of Nippon should have accomplished this feat in twenty-five days while, at the same time, they are engaged in an all-out offensive against British Malaya and China seems unbelievable. It is but another instance of over-confidence and unpreparedness on the part of the democracies.

The diarist was all the more shocked for knowing the United States well. In 1923 he had been the first-ever Filipino to graduate from Harvard. He and his American-born wife were to survive the war in Manila, and he lived to be the Philippine Ambassador to the United Kingdom at the time when Marcos first became President in the mid-1960s. In those early days of 1942, and from the depths of gloom and bitter surprise at the straits in which it seemed ‘the white man’s’ arrogance had landed them, ordinary Manilaños like Lichauch could only observe the visible evidence of military unpreparedness on the Americans’ part. They were not to know that US secret service agencies such as the Counter Intelligence Corps were much better prepared and had already installed ‘sleeper’ agents against just such a Japanese invasion. Prominent among these were two ‘Nisei’, American citizens from Japanese families, Richard Sakakida and Arthur Komori. Sakakida was destined to have a charmed life, managing after months of the most brutal interrogation to convince the Japanese that he was one of them and had no connection whatsoever with the US military. Thereafter he spent the remainder of the war smuggling out crucial information from the heart of the Japanese High Command in Manila. The particular significance of Sakakida and others like him to this present account of Marcos’s war will become apparent in due course.

Even before they reached Manila the Japanese had bombarded towns and cities throughout Luzon with tons of leaflets that read: ‘In order to advance their imperialistic cause, America seized your country forty years ago and, since then, you have been abused,
exploited, neglected and, what is worse, have been treated as an inferior race. It was the start of an attempt to win Filipinos' hearts and minds as fellow brown-skinned Asians, an attempt that did have a limited degree of success in certain quarters. Those who seemed most susceptible were petty officials and local politicians as well as members of the rural elite, particularly owners of great agricultural estates and haciendas such as those in Central Luzon. Obviously, these were precisely the kinds of people whose cooperation the Japanese were going to need to run their regime at local level. It would probably not be unduly cynical to attribute a degree of pragmatism and self-interest to the motives of many such converts to the New Asianism, and when after the war the time of reckoning arrived for those who had been 'collaborators' there was no lack of accusers. Yet for true Filipino nationalists who were only waiting with impatience for the United States to grant full independence, the issue must have presented them with a difficult dilemma in those early days of the war. When the Japanese Propaganda Office in Manila trumpeted the fall of Singapore it must have seemed to many that independence would either have to be postponed indefinitely or else accepted from non-American hands:

'You, Filipinos, Burmese, Indians, Indonesians and Malayans,' reads the proclamation, 'must stand up and face without fear the sacred duty of grasping without hesitation this God-given opportunity which may never come again. Stand up and cooperate in the creation of a new Asia for the Asians.'

But it was not long before the true nature of the Japanese attitude towards their fellow Asians became painfully apparent, what with the public slappings, beatings and kickings, and the circulated diagrams on the correct way to bow to a Japanese officer. When the Japanese political police, the Kempei Tai, began their atrocious interrogations in the old Spanish dungeons of Fort Santiago, most intelligent Filipinos have been left with few illusions. Any lingering notions of racial solidarity had also gone by the board on the Filipino side, and the physical peculiarities of the invaders were soon noted and parodied. For the duration of the war one of the slang names for a Japanese soldier was komang, which has no

English equivalent but by analogy would mean 'bow-armed'. Outside Manila, especially in the fields and villages of Central Luzon, resistance was already beginning:

Independence for the sake of independence [...] was not the key issue for most people in [the] resistance. They wanted the Japanese out because of what the new regime had done to their lives - the fear, death, destruction and repression were worse than anything people had known before. The Japanese and Filipino authorities were their own worst enemy, for they did little to win popular support but did much to turn people against them.

While all this was taking shape in the first few weeks of the occupation, things on the military front were going from bad to desperate from the Fil-American point of view. The Japanese landings had bottled up the entire Philippine Army in the Bataan peninsula on the far side of Manila Bay, with the American and Filipino top brass in still further retreat off the peninsula's tip on the fortress-island of Corregidor. It was clear from the start that the 95,000 Filipino and American USAPFE (United States Armed Forces in the Far East) troops would wait in vain for the relief they expected daily. The formerly invincible Allies were being routed all over Southeast Asia and were in no position to send help to anyone. General Douglas MacArthur had been obliged by the Japanese destruction of his air and naval forces to fall back on War Plan Orange-3, which originally dated from 1904, the time of the Russo-Japanese War. WPO-3 had envisaged American forces defending only Luzon, as a last resort retiring to Bataan for a protracted defence of Manila Bay and allowing the US fleet in Hawaii a generous six months to come to their rescue. In that sense one could say things were now going according to plan; but the General's extraordinary failure to ensure the strategy was properly provisioned in advance had led to an almost complete lack of supplies and equipment. By early April USAPFE men were down to an average daily ration of 800 calories if they were lucky. Ninety percent of the Philippine Army was without boots. Three months of bitter and unrelenting combat had left the survivors exhausted and ill. On 9 April Bataan fell in what was then the single greatest mil-
itary defeat in American history, and some 76,000 Filipino and American survivors were force-marched north and east to internment camps in the Death March that killed roughly half their number. Somewhere among these rag-tag columns of defeated men was the future President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos. They left behind them the beleaguered island of Corregidor from which the current President, MacArthur’s friend Manuel Quezon, had been smuggled away to exile in the United States even as the General and his staff were evacuated to Australia. The fort was clearly doomed, and MacArthur had left his deputy, General Jonathan Wainwright, to shift for himself as best he could while uttering his immortal farewell, ‘I shall return.’ One of those captured when Corregidor fell was the CIC agent, Richard Sakakida, who had been acting as MacArthur’s personal interpreter and translator, although of course the General had no idea of his true identity.

How MacArthur had explained to his friend the President the ease with which Japan invaded his country is anybody’s guess. They had spent some weeks together in close proximity, hunkered down in the command post buried deep in the tunnels of Corregidor Island as worsening news from the Bataan peninsula across the strait came in a steady stream. MacArthur could later claim with some justification that in hanging on for those desperate four months his ‘battling bastards of Bataan’ had fought a more heroic defense and inflicted more damage on the Japanese invaders than had any comparable Allied army in the Pacific region at the time. That was true; but it rather overlooks the strategic disaster that had put them in such a hopeless position in the first place. For this MacArthur must take the blame, as he also must for issuing a proclamation that help was on the way when it wasn’t, thereby falsely raising the men’s hopes and causing a slump in morale later on. In fact it was not merely Roosevelt who had doubts about MacArthur’s character as a man. It turns out that his generalship and military competence were being privately doubted even as the Japanese were landing in the Philippines. In the cause of Allied solidarity, fellow officers like Dwight D. Eisenhower tended to confine their criticisms to their diaries, which in Eisenhower’s case were only published in 1981. In January 1942 Eisenhower, who was about to take command of US troops in Europe on his way to becoming Supreme Commander of Allied Forces and eventually President of the United States, wrote in his diary that MacArthur was ‘as big a baby as ever. But we’ve got to keep him fighting.‘ Eisenhower was himself a good enough soldier to know that the men’s assessments of their officers seldom erred. MacArthur was known to his men as ‘Dugout Doug’ (during the entire battle for Bataan he visited the front only once) and a widely circulated couplet went into a little more detail: 'Dugout Doug’s not timid, he’s just cautious, not afraid; He’s protecting carefully the stars that Franklin made."

Even as the under-supplied USAFFE forces in Bataan were falling to the combined onslaughts of the Japanese, malaria, dysentery and malnutrition, MacArthur had talked President Quezon into reappointing him Field Marshal of the Philippines, with full perks and back pay, once the war was over.11 Even more extraordinarily, Quezon presented him with a cash honorarium of half a million dollars.12 Not long afterwards a US submarine was summoned to Corregidor, loaded with twenty tons of gold and despatched to Australia. It seems never to have been established whose gold this was. It presumably belonged to the Philippine Treasury, the remaining contents of which was sunk in Manila Bay to prevent the Japanese from getting their hands on it. On the other hand the gold might have been more in the nature of a private nest-egg sent ahead of MacArthur, who sailed from Corregidor on 11 March for a Del Monte plantation in Mindanao and thence flew to Australia. With him were President Quezon and Vice-President Osmeña, whose joint duty in exile was to represent the Philippines’ legitimate government, a stipulation of Roosevelt’s. Left on Corregidor with the luckless General Wainwright and the others was Manuel Roxas, the man both MacArthur and Quezon fancied as Quezon’s presidential successor. Roxas, though now wearing a brigadier-general’s uniform, had been appointed Quezon’s Secretary of Finance back in 1938. A lawyer by profession, he was always torn between the twin careers of politics and the law. In the latter capacity he was in practice as the partner of Marcial Lichauco, whose journal entries open this chapter. Before the war ended Quezon died of TB in his American
exile and Roxas did indeed succeed him in 1946 as the first President of the fully independent Republic.

A month after MacArthur’s departure Eisenhower made a diary entry on 10 April: ‘Corregidor surrendered last night Poor Wainwright! He did the fighting in the Philippine Islands, another got such glory as the public could find in the operations’ [13] Douglas MacArthur’s most remarkable achievement was to turn this whole unpromising series of events into a mammoth public relations triumph such that he ended the war a national hero, receiving the Congressional Medal of Honour for his defence of Bataan and Corregidor. Part of this was done to some resonant communiqués he had issued on the outbreak of the Pacific War, and part to the often fanciful but always carefully crafted broadcasts from Bataan and Corregidor by his faithful propagandist, Carlos P. Romulo. (Romulo was arguably the Philippines’ leading journalist at the war’s outbreak, when his friend MacArthur commissioned him a major and later an aide-de-camp. On Corregidor he was a broadcaster with the USAFFE radio station until he left for Australia with his mentor. Later still, he was to become the Philippines’ Ambassador to the UN, President of the University of the Philippines, and finally Ferdinand Marcos’s Secretary of Foreign Affairs.) Most of all, though, MacArthur’s triumphant reputation — which became increasingly tatterly from his death in 1964 until the publication in 1981 of Carol Petillo’s devastating biography — was due to an overwhelming desire on the part of the American and British publics for a hero at a critical time of defeat. MacArthur played the part to perfection, rounding it off in 1944 with bullish photo-op pictures of himself wading ashore à la John Wayne from a landing craft on Leyte, complete with the well-rehearsed and wholly predictable quotation, ‘I have returned!’ (As Margot Asquith remarked in not wholly dissimilar circumstances, ‘If Kitchener was not a great man, he was, at least, a great poster.’) In addition to being given the Medal of Honour and referred to as the ‘Lion of Luzon’, he was named ‘Number One Father of 1942’ — a title curiously reminiscent of similar accolades which the Soviet Union and, later, Communist China liked to bestow on their own favoured citizens.

MacArthur’s history cited here offers an uncanny parallel with Ferdinand Marcos, not least for the motif of surreptitious gold.

Marcos wound up at the end of the Death March a PoW in Camp O’Donnell, Tarlac, as ill and exhausted as anybody else. Somehow in the next three years he, too, managed to become a hero of almost MacArthurian proportions with a heroism that, like the number of his medals, went on increasing long after the war had ended. This was likewise due to a skilful sculpting of facts, the tossing of a judicious smoke grenade here and there, and outright lies. At an ordinary human level this is not hard to understand. When a fledgling politician is crafting his public image in a nation about to receive its full independence, it is even less surprising.

Sunday, June 28, 1942:

Out of approximately 40,000 Filipino prisoners in camp O’Donnell, 18,000 have already died and many are so weak that they cannot be moved. The Japanese Military Authorities have, therefore, announced that, to show their friendship to the Filipino people, they will release the sick prisoners who are strong enough to walk. The names of about 3,000 men have been published in the newspapers and they will be allowed to leave a few hundred at a time. One relative or friend of each prisoner will be permitted to go to the camp for that purpose.

The significance of this announcement was that it enabled Marcos to get out of the PoW camp in which he was languishing. As the sick prisoners were released their names were listed throughout that summer in the Manila Tribune. The name of Ferdinand E. Marcos appeared nowhere, however. Maybe he was not sick but fell instead into a second category of prisoners the Japanese were releasing but which Lichauco does not mention: those whose families had co-operated with the Japanese military authorities. Ferdinand’s mother, Josefina, collected him from Tarlac on 4 August and took him at once by train to Manila. On the way, she is supposed to have told him that his father Mariano was under house arrest back home in Batac ‘for refusal to join the Japanese civilian government in Ilocos Norte’. However, according to a US Army intelligence report in the files of MacArthur’s command, Mariano Marcos, far from rebuffing the Japanese, had actually taken part in a ceremony welcoming them to the provincial capital, Laoag, early that year. Then on 17 July, barely a fortnight before Ferdinand’s
release, Mariano had spoken eloquently at a pro-Japanese rally in Batac. This being so, the conclusion seems unavoidable that the Japanese released the son from the PoW camp because the father was co-operating. From that moment, the story of Ferdinand’s war ceases to be a single intelligible, sequential account. Instead, it splits into two versions so different they often barely even touch: that of the myth-makers and that of the debunkers. Chief among the myth-makers was Ferdinand himself, who, when planning to run for President in 1965, commissioned an American writer named Hartzell Spence to write the sort of biography likely to appeal to the Philippine electorate. Painstakingly brief and endowed with a vivid if predictable imagination, Ferdinand’s post-war Boswell sketched a widescreen canvas of practically non-stop derring-do. This takes place in an anecdotal terrain somewhere between the windy plains of Troy and the Hollywood lots of MGM. We are in the ‘with one bound he was free’ school of adventure, in which our hero single-handedly wipes out nests of Japanese machine-gunners, carries out daring rescue missions though mortally wounded, organizes a resistance of plucky guerrillas in the hills into an elite fighting force he names Ang Maharlika (‘The Aristocrats’), who but you get the picture. Not a cliché of the genre is overlooked. There is even the obligatory sweetheart (a Filipino-American female guerrilla named Evelyn who saves Ferdinand’s life by stopping a Japanese bullet meant for him) and the obligatory torture scene. The whole thing is more like a ‘B’ movie script than a serious account of one man’s odyssey through three years of brutal and divisive history that brought his country to ruin; and in 1969 he did indeed have it turned into the jungle epic Maharlika, timed to coincide with his bid for re-election that year. The torture scene, in Hartzell Spence’s expert hands, is worth quoting. It follows directly on from Ferdinand’s and Josefa’s arrival by train in Manila after his release, where he was re-arrested by the Kempei Tai and taken to Fort Santiago for interrogation — ostensibly about what he might know of the plans some classmates of his had hatched to form a guerrilla band and escape to join MacArthur in Australia.

His interrogator, who was revealed as a secret-police colonel, lost his affability finally. The three soldiers who attended him, at a signal, threw Ferdinand to the pallet that was raised off the floor, and jammed a rubber tube into his mouth. Water was pumped slowly into his body until he thought he must surely burst. Now the colonel jumped on him with both knees. Water, bile, blood, excreta from stomach, kidneys and bowels spurted from every orifice of his body. He knew that he was about to die. Who could survive such torture? Stubbornly he decided to go bravely. He refused to speak.

This exasperated the Kempei Tai colonel, who gave him another round of the water cure. Then another. During the pumping, Ferdinand’s bulging eyes saw the electric light bulb over his head grow larger and hotter, and seemingly come closer until it was in his face. Then the colonel would jump on his stomach, and the light would redden. The pain of the water pressure was too fierce to be borne. After a while, Marcos became numb to it, and no longer felt the variations of its intensity. Covered by the filth from his body and the emissions of the torture, he lay in a pool of vileness. He had no idea how many times the ordeal was repeated — over and over, until he lost consciousness at last.

It is hard to guess how much of this was supplied by Ferdinand himself and how much came from Spence embellishing what he was told. What is noticeable in the above account is a complete absence of private detail, some oddity that might have burned itself into the victim’s memory. Instead, for all the blood, sweat and excrement it reads like hearsay. There is nothing here we have not read before somewhere, and which we do not expect. Possibly this was merely a failure of Spence’s inflammatory style. Spence was not just any old hired hack, however. He was originally a United Press man who during the war founded and edited Yank, the US Army weekly. He then went on to edit the US Armed Forces’ journal Stars and Stripes. His credibility in the Pentagon was very high, so his version of Marcos’s war gave a semi-official imprimatur to the story and the book itself was freely distributed to US embassies and government agencies worldwide, as well as to the American press. Spence’s summing-up of Ferdinand’s war was unequivocal:

Before he was twenty-five he had won more medals for bravery than anyone else in Philippine history, had suffered the heroic...
Battle of Bataan and its aftermath, the infamous Death March, and the mediaeval tortures of the Japanese secret police.

This was the official version, which from the time of Marcos's first presidency (it was published in 1964) had the status of gospel both in the Philippines and the United States. A 1966 cover story in *Time* magazine took its cue from Spence:

[ Marcos's ] idea of intelligence duty was to prowl behind the Japanese lines, often in his personal Oldsmobile sedan, probing for weak spots. He found one on Bataan's Mount Natib, a Japanese military battery that was lobbing 70mm shells into US General Jonathan Wainwright's beleaguered defenders. Marcos and three privates scouted the battery, trailing two near-dead Japanese artillerymen to it, then cut loose. They killed more than 50 Japanese, spiked the guns and escaped with only one casualty.

Marcos won the first of a brace of Silver Stars for the operation, and a few weeks later was recommended for the US Medal of Honour for his part in the Defence of the Sallan River. But the recommendation was never filed with Washington, and Marcos failed in becoming the only Filipino to win America's highest military award.

The debunkers' version of Ferdinand's war started precisely because this barrage of myth-making left a good few Filipinos quite unconvincéed, even outraged. Among these was an association of those who had survived Fort Santiago and the Japanese interrogations. They hotly disputed his claim that he was ever tortured there and refused to accept him as a member of their group. After he had become President of the Philippines in 1965 such voices became judiciously muted in public, at least, if not at reunion dinners. It was only after martial law had become oppressive enough in the late seventies to have driven his opponents exiled in the US into organizing the Movement for a Free Philippines that Marcos's incredible war record began to be subjected to serious scrutiny.

The original work was done by Bonifacio Gillego, who wrote an article about his 'fake medals' in the Filipino newspaper *We Forum* in 1982. Boni Gillego is today a Congressman on the verge of retirement, an ex-soldier of the old and most honourable school. His asset was that as a retired military man (with, it must be said, good friends in the CIA) he was in touch with all sorts of men of the same generation who had served in the war. Some came to his attention when they wrote to check a story while busy on their own memoirs of famous engagements such as Mt. Natib, the Sallan River and Bessang Pass. Others simply met at reunions and swapped stories. Boni Gillego was the first to examine systematically and critically the anomalies in each one of Marcos's supposed exploits and awards, although much of the credit that was due went, predictably, to the foreign journalists who developed it.

His *We Forum* article (which earned the news-sheet closure) was widely disseminated in the US by the Movement for a Free Philippines and the information taken up by American investigative journalists such as John Sharkey of the *Washington Post*, whose access to US military archives was perhaps better and more practised than Boni Gillego's. By now it was 1983, and in the wake of Ninoy Aquino's assassination that August a kind of open season had been declared on Marcos by the American press. The *Washington Post* 's 'Outlook' section led with Sharkey's demolition of Ferdinand's claims to war honours:


A Philippine government publicity brochure describes Marcos as 'his country's most decorated soldier,' with more awards (32) than the 27 credited to American World War II hero Audie Murphy. Allegedly included in these decorations are two US Silver Stars and a Distinguished Service Cross.

However, an 18-month effort to verify Marcos's claims to high American decorations raises serious doubts about whether he actually was awarded them. Nor could any independent,
outside corroboration be found to buttress a claim made in Philippine government brochures that he was recommended for the US Medal of Honour because of his bravery on Bataan, as a document in his US military file suggests. The open season on Marcos continued. The darling of Time magazine, vintage 1966, had quite suddenly become an ogre, being compared with the late President Somoza of Nicaragua. This media campaign was to intensify up to, and even beyond, the moment Ferdinand left office in 1986. Early that year, a bare fortnight before the snap election on 7 February, the Washington Post and the New York Times both ran front-page stories saying US Army investigations had concluded that Marcos’s ‘Maharlika’ guerrilla unit was a fiction and that ‘no such unit ever existed as a guerrilla organization during the war.’ Worse was to come. It was alleged that not only had he never been tortured by the Japanese, but he had, like his father, sided with them.

What was interesting about these revelations (apart from the way they conveniently overlooked that the sole printed source for the tales of Ferdinand’s heroism had been Hartzell Spence’s Time-endorsed version on which the Philippine government brochures had drawn) was their timing. Still more interesting was what that implied about the preceding twenty years’ silence on both sides of the Pacific, when Marcos’s US Army files were ‘mislaid’ Sterling Seagrave (whose chapter on Ferdinand’s war provides a good general, if one-sided, overview of the whole dismal episode) noted that ‘subsequent congressional investigation determined that the Pentagon, after miscalculating burying the records for decades in a Midwestern vault, had just as miscalculated slipp’d them back into the archives where they belonged, to await McCoy’s serendipitous discovery.’ (The reference is to the investigative scholar Alfred McCoy, whose research formed the basis of the new revelations about Marcos having collaborated with the Japanese.)

An uneasiness still lingers around most public discourse about the Second World War in the Philippines, and has its origins in an issue of far more general weight than that of one man and his medals—that of collaboration. This collaboration is, of course, primarily that of certain Filipinos with the Japanese. But in Ferdinand’s case it is not just that, although as we shall shortly see it gave him the political base on which he constructed his future career. It is also the connivance of the United States with his myth-making, the endorsement of a story that the US Army had known to be untrue as early as 1948 after he had twice applied to have his ‘Maharlika’ unit officially recognized and his claims had been rejected as ‘distorted, exaggerated, fraudulent, contradictory and absurd.’

This is where the CIC agent mentioned earlier, Richard Sakakida, comes in, together with many others like him. When a war ends in almost unlimited bloodshed, chaos and destruction, as the Second World War did in the Philippines, it is perhaps easy to imagine that nothing remains of what has gone before: no coherent memories, no evidence, nothing but a clean sheet and a fresh start. Certain characters can, as it were, stagger from the smoking ruins believing themselves free to invent a new past, thinking that amid the general anarchy and turmoil their recent activities will have gone unnoticed and therefore unjudged. But of course a great many people did survive, including Richard Sakakida himself, with their memories not only intact but vivid. Once having managed to convince his Japanese captors that he was loyal to Japan, Sakakida had lived for three years on the constant edge of discovery. His very life depended on having an intimate knowledge of the anti-Japanese resistance in general and guerrilla activity in particular. He was, after all, scanning the Japanese Army’s own top secret files on an almost daily basis. It is therefore beyond believing that he would never have encountered the name of Ferdinand Marcos or that of the ‘Maharlika’ unit had even a tenth of their stirring exploits been genuine. But this is a consistent theme: Marcos’s name goes practically unmentioned in all contemporary accounts. The man who claimed that General MacArthur had personally told him after the war that but for him Bataan would have fallen three months earlier does not appear even in the General’s own reminiscences. In 1986 the former USAFFE Army captain who had directed a guerrilla unit in Pangasinan province, Ray C. Hunt, was tracked down and asked his opinion. It turned out that he did remember Marcos since he had once arrested him on suspicion of collaboration with the Japanese and for engaging in buy-and-sell activities. For this, Marcos had actually faced a death sentence for the second time in his life, and on this occasion was saved only by the personal intervention of
Manuel Roxas, another future Philippine President, as to Ferdinand having led his own band of guerrillas, Ray Hunt said: 'Marcos was never the leader of a large guerrilla organization, no way. Nothing like that could have happened without my knowledge... This is not true, no. Holy cow! All of this is a complete fabrication. It's a cock-and-bull story.'

It is a very strange thing that successive administrations of the world's most powerful nation should have accepted and publicly praised one man's self-assessment, and with little more authority than that individual's own assurances. The reason can be summed up in one word: Vietnam. Since this word explains so much of the twenty years' relationship between Washington and Marcos it is perhaps not very surprising; yet the sheer effrontery of the cynicism still has the power to shock. Even the radical Filipino historian (and sometime Benedictine monk) Ambeth Ocampo admitted to being astonished when he recently unearthed some further evidence:

While browsing through declassified US State Department documents, I read many confidential telegrams exchanged between the US Embassy in Manila and Washington. In one telegram concerning pointers for the [forthcoming] Marcos state visit to Washington in September 1966, Marcos was described as: 'A genuine war hero, a very attractive personality and a great public speaker. We have in this visit a large amount of capital, centring around the image he can project about Vietnam and, as President Johnson has said, about the vitality of the new Asia.'

What I did not realize before was that the US ambassador insisted on the awarding of two medals to Marcos. In a confidential telegram dated September 6, 1966, he said that Marcos: 'Had never received the Distinguished Service Cross. Accordingly, I suggest Washington may wish consider giving decoration to Marcos during visit, perhaps in White House ceremony. Gesture would be much appreciated here and would help point up for American public fact of Marcos' wartime heroism under US flag...'.

Allied to foregoing, I would hope when Marcos introduced to Congress for joint session speech that mention will be made of his distinguished war record with US forces and decorations awarded him.'

When the State Department brought the matter up with the Defence Department it was discovered that there was no record of Marcos being awarded any medals. The alarm bells should have been ringing, but the US needed Philippine support for the Vietnam War and kept silent. On September 8, 1966 a confidential telegram sent to the US ambassador in Manila said: 'We have determined that Army ready and willing to go ahead with presentation Distinguished Service Cross and Silver medals on basis that Marcos' US Army records do not, repeat, not show he ever received them...'

Washington knew Marcos was sporting medals he had not officially received but they played along. Eventually, Marcos himself was asked about the medals because a Time correspondent said he admitted not having them: '...Marcos told me that Zich of Time magazine had been mistaken and that he, Marcos, had received both the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star. There is, therefore, no reason for any presentation in Washington.'

From the documents cited above and many others, the Marcos war records could have been shot down as early as September 1966, but it took 20 years to expose the fraud...'

In actual fact it took nearer forty years, since the deception could have been exposed back in 1948, had the military authorities not had their hands full of vastly more important matters. Some time later, of course, the relevant file 'disappeared' at whim of the Pentagon. In the exchange of telegrams quoted above, therefore, one suspects there may be confusion about the ambiguity of the word 'received'. The 8 September message from Washington to their ambassador in Manila could—and probably should—be read as having meant that according to Army records Marcos had never been physically presented with the DSC, not that he had never been awarded it. Still, since we now know from his Army file that the status of the citation itself was dubious, to say the least, there must have been some fudging going on in Washington. Maybe his file had already been 'mislaid'. The clear overall impression remains of an official determination to play up the Marcos war record for all it was worth, since 'We have in this visit a large amount of capital, centring around the image he can project about Vietnam...'. This
simply confirms what has long been apparent: that Ferdinand Marcos was no less than the Filipino people was little more than a hostage to yet another piece of American overseas adventuring. It remains for us to determine how much freedom he actually had.

All this takes us prematurely into the future, far ahead of the years 1942-5 when the issue of collaboration often boiled down to a question of day-to-day survival. Not surprisingly, the Philippine population ran the gamut between the Huks' outright opposition to the Japanese and active support for their presence. In between were a hundred agonizing shades of pakikisanan (that Filipino virtue which sets a high premium on smooth social relations regardless of circumstances), of grudging cohabitation, of resignation, of dumb resistance and surreptitious civil disobedience. Edging towards the 'active support' end of the scale were those who decided to profit from the Japanese and their war needs.

At the extreme of active support, of course, were those Filipino politicians who headed the so-called puppet government while President Quezon and Vice-President Osmeña in the United States represented the legitimate Philippine Government in exile. The Japanese, having abolished all existing political parties, had instituted a single party known as the Kalibapi (Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas – the Association for Service to the New Philippines). In October 1943 the Japanese granted the Philippines its independence and in grand open-air ceremonies the Second Philippine Republic was inaugurated with Jose P. Laurel as President. (This was the same Justice Laurel who, a few years earlier, had acquitted Marcos of the Nalundasan murder.) Also prominent in the new administration were Jorge Vargas, lately President Quezon's executive secretary, and Benigno Aquino. The Aquino family, in particular, appeared to represent an extreme case of fractured loyalties. As head of this wealthy cacique clan, Benigno's father, General Servillano Aquino, had been a celebrated patriot who in 1899 had opposed the American occupation by choosing 'to continue the strike by individual action.' 25 Forty-four years later his son Benigno took a different view of a foreign occupation. (And his son, Benigno Jr or 'Ninoy', was of course destined to die on the tarmac of Manila International Airport in 1983 in opposition to the current political status quo.)

After liberation in 1945 no opprobrium was too great to heap on the heads of 'active collaborators' and 'puppets' like Laurel, Aquino and Vargas, whom the Japanese had flown out to Japan to escape capture by MacArthur's forces. But at the time, thoughtful and informed Filipinos like Marcial Lichauco saw their behaviour – and especially Laurel's – in a much more complex and sympathetic light. As every page of his diary shows, Lichauco was no friend of the Japanese occupying forces. But he had been close friends for years with men like Laurel (another lawyer) and Roxas (his own legal partner) and saw them as people of considerable integrity whose conscience and patriotism obliged them to be pragmatic. Laurel had just survived serious wounding in an assassination attempt while playing golf a few months earlier, an attempt that ironically did much to convince the Japanese of his pro-Japanese bona fides, when in September 1943 Lichauco wrote in occupied Manila:

To his most intimate friends Laurel has explained his attitude. He has no doubt in his mind that the United Allies will win the war but he fears it may take between five to ten years before Japan can be brought to her knees. Meanwhile, the problem facing the Filipino people is that of survival and he therefore considers it his duty to do what he can to appease the Japanese militarists and help alleviate the sufferings of the Filipinos and the further privations which, no doubt, are in store for them in the future. In the second place, Laurel believes that no matter how thoroughly beaten Japan may be at the end of this war, the Japanese nation can never be obliterated and, sooner or later, the Japanese people will rise again and become a power in this corner of the world. Consequently, he does not think it advisable for the Filipino people to permanently incur the hatred of the one hundred million Japanese who are such close neighbours of ours. He realizes that in accepting the Presidency of the puppet Republic, some of his countrymen will get the impression that he is collaborating with the enemy, but Laurel is willing to run that risk because he is convinced that someone must head the government which the Japanese are determined to set up here. One thing, he is determined to accomplish, and that is to prevent the Japanese from conscripting Filipino soldiers to fight against the Americans.
'I prefer to be shot,' he said, 'rather than agree to such a proposal and I believe I can stall the Japanese long enough to save our young men from fighting their friends.'

To us at the century's end Laurel's attitude might appear eminently reasonable and, in the circumstances, morally courageous. He also seems to have been commendably far-sighted in what he has to say about Japan's certain defeat and equally inevitable resurgence in East Asia. Understandably, the Americans were obliged to take a rather different view. Little more than a week after Laurel's inauguration as unwilling President, Roosevelt replied to his request that the United States recognize the Philippines' independence with a resounding 'No'; on which Lichauco, beleaguered in Manila, comments tartly:

It is all very well for President Roosevelt to discredit the Filipinos heading the puppet government that has been set up here. It is easy to be brave when the enemy is 10,000 miles away. It is easy to say that the only true officials of the Filipino Government are temporarily in Washington. But how can 18,000,000 Filipino people live in these islands without some form of government? Someone must head the government here unless, of course, it is to be substituted by an organization run entirely by Japanese officials and such irresponsible and discredited Filipinos of the past who would be only too glad to jump at the opportunity to assume positions of power.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the moral discomfort of the position in which the majority of Filipinos now find themselves, with old questions of national identity and allegiance again predominant. Once the war was over, of course, and Japan defeated, it was as though nobody had ever really doubted the outcome or where their loyalties had always lain. But at the time things were a good deal more equivocal, not least because of the constant fear of informers, spies, torture and reprisals.

Up in the hills and on the plains of central Luzon, the Huk resistance guerrillas had fought an unrelenting war which would have been quite impossible without massive local support. As it was, they became well enough organized to constitute an independent regional government of sorts with its own elected officials, legal system, communications network and even newspaper. Their engagements with the Japanese tended to be well planned and efficient, employing disciplined strategy rather than the hit-and-run 'freebooting' tactics favoured by other irregular units (such as Marcos's putative 'Malabili' group). Indeed, the Hukas tended rather to look down on other guerrillas, especially those in the so-called 'USAFF squadrorns'. These were composed chiefly of USAFF men who had either avoided being captured in Bataan or had subsequently escaped from a PoW camp. Some squadrons were commanded by Americans - a handful of the several thousand stragglers hiding in the hills all over the archipelago. The Hukas were often scornful of these units, which they accused of self-interest and shirking. They said the USAFF men were mainly interested in avoiding contact with the Japanese, being content to skulk and sit out the war in order to receive their back-pay and pensions once it was over, meanwhile subsisting on common thievery from local peasants. They referred to them dismissively (with typical linguistic felicity) as 'tulisan', a punning combination of USAFF and tulisan, the historically loaded word for a common bandit. It should be noted in passing that the Huk guerrillas were confined to central Luzon (Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac and Laguna provinces, to be precise). Outside that area, both northward in the Ilocos and southward through the bulk of the archipelago, there was an array of groups largely operating on a local basis. These ranged from scattered fighting outfits to 'lost commands' of misfits, the disaffected, and the frankly criminal more interested in turning the presence of the Japanese to their private advantage by enriching themselves and settling old scores.

The Hukas' main hatred, like that of most resistance groups, was directed less at the Japanese than at those Filipinos they saw as collaborating. These included local politicians and petty officials as well as members of pro-Japanese associations such as the Kalibapi, which gave the Japanese political support, and the Makapili, whose network of informers helped the military. Above all, though, the Hukas loathed the newly reconstituted Philippine Constabulary, whom they viewed as nothing more than the puppets' mercenaries. Such people, when they fell into guerrilla hands, seldom made
quick or easy deaths. The claim that Ferdinand Marcos—and therefore Spence—had made about his father Mariano gallantly resisting the Japanese in Ilocos Norte was embellished with an account of Mariano's death as a guerrilla late in the war. "Failing to break him, the Japanese bayoneted him and suspended his body from a tree. Two days later, Ferdinand visited the scene, but his father's remains were gone. They were never found." Reality, however, was rather different, as Sterling Seagrave later established by talking to an eye-witness, Mariano, who had publicly sung the Japanese forces' praises in Batac, had actually fallen into the hands of a guerrilla unit commanded by an American, Major George Barnett. Even more unfortunately for him, Barnett's unit included several friends and relatives of the late Julio Naundasan, the man who had beaten Mariano in the 1935 election and whom Ferdinand was convicted of having shot. Under interrogation, Mariano confessed that it was Ferdinand who had put his name forward to the Kempei Tai, the secret police. (This probably explains how Ferdinand had obtained his release from Camp O'Donnell.) After a month or two as the unwilling guest of Major Barnett, Mariano was tried for war crimes and sentenced to death for having worked for the Japanese from start to finish (it was now early 1945). The wretched Mariano might well have wished for a simple bayoneting. The man whose custom it had been in his middle twenties at six each evening to put on a tan military uniform with a Sam Browne belt, holstered sidewise, riding breeches and boots, and strut around Sarrat village square cracking a riding crop on his thigh made a very unmilitary death, though a traditional one. He was hitched to four water buffaloes and torn apart, his shredded limbs and torso then being hung, dripping, on a tree. A similar fate would probably have awaited his son had not Roxas intervened in the nick of time.

What did Ferdinand Marcos really do in the war, then? Briefly, once he was out of Camp O'Donnell he took his chances, like many another young Filipino. Much of his autobiographical war record might be fiction but there is little doubt he did move about, his life inevitably structured by the events going on around him to the extent that he was occasionally caught up in guerrilla activity. His character was opportunistic rather than passive. He would never have elected to stay at home either in Ilocos Norte or in Manila, docilely building a legal practice on the foundations of his Bar examination triumph, unless there had been nothing better in the offering.

But there was something better, in a sense. There was the radical disruption offered by the war and the Japanese occupation, and social disruption makes for social mobility. His Ilocano blood and his family's political background equally led him to where profit might be made and power found. As regards the first tendency, his overriding need as a rolling stone would have been survival, a way of getting by. Ray Hunt's accusation that Ferdinand had been condemned to death for his involvement in buy-and-sell rackets not only makes sense in the circumstances, it is borne out by other documentary references. By 'buy and sell' Hunt did not mean ordinary wheeler-dealing. After all, anyone in wartime might be reduced to the survival tactic of dabbling in the black market. The accusation specifically meant dealing directly with the Japanese, selling them things which, as the war dragged on, were strategically vital and in increasingly short supply. (One such thing was iron, and towards the end iron bars were treated more like gold. It seems that the need for iron often justified demolishing perfectly good buildings simply to steal the reinforcing rods buried in the walls and ceilings.)

Many Filipinos bitterly resented their fellow countrymen's buy-and-sell activities with the Japanese, and those involved were prime candidates for charges of collaboration once the war was over. Marcial Lichauco himself refers with scorn to those who dealt with the Japanese; but for oratorical thunder one has to turn to another lawyer, Francisco A Delgado, who followed up the cessation of hostilities in 1945 with a blistering memorandum to Tomas Contes, the new Secretary of the Interior, on how the briefly reinstated Commonwealth government ought to deal with those who had collaborated with the Japanese. For him, these 'buy and sell tycoons' merited a special category of their own:

During the three years of Japanese occupation, a number of our countrymen, and many resident aliens, tempted by the ease with which they could sell practically anything to the Japanese Army and dazzled by the numerical enormity of the sums which they amassed, plunged headlong into the ugly racket commonly known as buying and selling. The goods bought by the Japanese...
were of course those which they could use in the pursuit of their military campaign. Hundreds became millionaires overnight. Many, on the other hand, were forced into this business because that was the only way whereby they could save their families from starvation.

While a number of Filipinos engaged in this racket, most of the 'big shots' were the alien residents in the Philippines. While the Filipino 'buy and sell' addicts scampered pell mell for pickings, the foreigners conducted their manoeuvres in a more organized, systematic and astute manner. The East Indians, who, before the war, 'salaamed' to Britain and the United States, discovered the 'Open Sesame' to fabulous riches. They raised the banner of the 'Assad Hind'; hailed Subhas Chandra Bose as their leader and protector; and shouted 'On to Delhi!' from their princely carriages and their stores overflowing with goods. The Chinese saw their chance, and so they waved the banner Wang Ching Wei* as the Japanese waved back with newly printed military notes. The Jews, who took refuge in this country because they were ostracized and driven out of Germany, suddenly reassumed their German nationality and stuck 'Swastika' banners on their cars while they stuck fat bundles of money into their pockets.

From the general tone it can readily be appreciated that Ferdinand would have known his activities could prove fatal if he were ever caught — which, as we have seen, he was. The near-miraculous intervention to save his life by Manuel Roxas who, as soon as the war was over in 1945, became the last President of the Commonwealth and then the first of the Republic, brings us to the second of Ferdinand's natural inclinations: that of gravitating towards political power. Here again his Ilocano inheritance sheds some light. Mention has already been made in the previous chapter of that celebrated son of Batac, the revolutionary General Artemio Ricarte, the stories of whose exploits against the Americans Ferdinand would have heard at Josefa's knee. In 1901 the defeated

Ricarte had categorically refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, so the Americans banished him to Guam and later to Hong Kong. However, he chose finally to live in Yokohama, only returning to the Philippines during the Japanese occupation. Once there, he became a co-founder in 1944 of the Makapili, whose informers guerrilla groups like the Huks held in special contempt.

It is not obvious why this aspect of Ferdinand’s background is not accorded greater weight by historians. He had grown up in a province a long way from Manila, in an atmosphere whose attitude towards the still-recent American occupation was ambiguous, to say the least. Ricarte was only the most locally celebrated example of many Ilocanos whose inability to square their patriotism with swearing allegiance to the United States had driven them into outright exile, into smouldering acquiescence, or into close alliances with the Chinese and the Japanese — who in any case had always had strong connections with these northern provinces. As a Filipino, Ferdinand would instinctively put family, friends and region before his country, which is what any civilized person does (‘If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country,’ as E. M. Forster rather too piously said). When Ferdinand’s war record came to be critically investigated in the 1980s, though, the task fell largely to Americans, most of whom had conceivably never read E. M. Forster. More to the point, they not only had been on the winning side in the war against the Japanese but, like the British, had the extraordinary good fortune never to have suffered the agonizing moral test of having their own country brutally occupied by the armed forces of a foreign power. The lenses through which they scrutinized this terrible and confusing period of Filipino history, therefore, had an inbuilt polarization. In this clear and slanted light it appeared to them that the majority of Filipinos had felt a deep loyalty to the Americans and had variously fought for, or longed for, their return. Those who hadn’t were traitors: puppets and collaborators who cynically chose to side with the enemy for personal gain.

Yet although this was presented as a truism, it was not entirely true. The majority of Filipinos undoubtedly did support the Americans, but not necessarily from any deep sense of loyalty. They wanted the Americans back in order to drive the Japanese out. After
all, life for most Filipinos before 1941 had not been especially rosy. (What Kansulay’s old people remember – without much emotion – is great hardship, agricultural wages held at bare subsistence level, unremitting labour and virtually no medical facilities. To that extent their lives had changed hardly at all since the time of the Spanish.)

In this context, the American regime had not been popular so much as the known devil that is broadly tolerated, much as the British in India were, an assessment that was not invalidated by thousands of personal friendships between individuals on both sides. As the war went on, though, and Japanese rule became more oppressive, the Americans’ lengthening absence undoubtedly made Filipinos’ hearts grow fonder. There was no question but that the Americans had been in all respects more agreeable than the Japanese; but as Quezon had famously said, ‘Better a government run like hell by Filipinos than one run like heaven by Americans.’ In addition to which, the image of the United States had taken a severe beating even before the Fall of Bataan. It was not just that the Americans had been militarily defeated; they also seemed thereafter to have abandoned the Philippines to its fate a little too easily. One day, when President Quezon was impotently holed up on Corregidor, he turned bitterly to Charles Willoughby, one of MacArthur’s aides, and exclaimed: ‘America withies in anguish at the fate of a distant cousin, Europe, while a daughter, the Filipinos, is being raped in the back room.’ This was certainly what he himself felt, but whether he spoke for the entire nation is less sure. A year later, though, Marcial Lichauro recorded a brilliant assessment by a Japanese officer of how things stood – brilliant because it showed an unusual understanding of the Filipino gift for dissembling. The occasion was a parade in Manila on the first anniversary of the Fall of Bataan:

Among those in the grandstand was a fairly well-known [Filipino puppet] government underling who had helped organize the show. In his eagerness to court the friendship and favour of the Japanese official who sat beside him he turned to the latter and said: ‘I think there is little doubt now that the great majority of our people are pro-Japanese. I should say that ninety percent of them at least understand Japan’s true objectives in fighting for the unification of Greater East Asia.’

But the officer turned to him rather deprecatingly and replied:

‘You are mistaken. I am afraid that forty-five percent of the population continues to be pro-American, five percent are pro-Japanese, while the remaining fifty percent are comedians.’

By the mid-eighties, with American journalists taking their cue from the State Department and feting Marcos for a black hat even as President Reagan was stubbornly insisting on his white one, such niceties of history went by the board. By then they all knew what to think about the Pacific War and alleged wartime collaborators like Marcos. The effect of their sweeping, though unconscious, judgemental attitude was to assess Ferdinand’s war as an open and shut case of the most simplistic kind of self-interest, seen against an implied background of heroism and sacrifice on the part of his compatriots. The reality, as we can imagine, had been a good deal less clean-cut and infinitely more painful.

If, as seems likely, Ferdinand did recommend his father to the Japanese as being favourable to their cause, how might we assess his motives? If Mariano had already made his welcoming speech in Batac, surely recommending him would have been superfluous? On the other hand, if Mariano had already made his new allegiance clear, his son was presumably wise to take advantage of a fait accompli and thereby get himself out of the POW camp. This was surely where the politics came in. He was, after all, well connected thanks to the Naurusan case and his Bar exam triumph. Barely two years earlier President Quezon himself had offered him a pardon in his murder conviction. Now, of course, Quezon was in exile in America. But there was still the judge who had pleaded so eloquently and successfully to the Supreme Court to uphold his appeal, Jose Laurel, his semblable if not his frère, who had also been acquitted of murder when he was eighteen.

Laurel was himself an interesting and complex man, as Lichauro’s assessment indicated. Like Ricarte, he was a convinced nationalist who had always been fundamentally opposed to the American presence in the Philippines. (It should be remembered that theirs was not some local piece of hard-headed intransigence; in most of colonized Asia at the time – in India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, China and Indochina – there were strong anti-imperialist movements, all of which would achieve their goal of independence.
in the next few decades.) For a Filipino to have been anti-American until 1942 (and even after) was by no means as outre as American authors saw it in the 1980s. Well before the outbreak of war Laurel, who in 1938 was awarded an honorary doctorate of Jurisprudence by Tokyo Imperial University, had been legal consultant to several Japanese industrial companies with large investments in the Philippines. It is known that Ferdinand was hospitalized in Manila in June 1943 with what his brother Pac indirect, as a gastric ulcer and fever; it is also known that his hospitalization coincided with that of Laurel following the assassination attempt on Wack-Wack golf course. It is too much to suppose that the two cooperating men did not spend time together. Each had something the other wanted. As far as Ferdinand was concerned Laurel—who was about to become puppet President—necessitated a useful close links with the Kempei Tais as well as friendships with high-ranking Japanese that pre-dated the war. And from Laurel's point of view, Marcos had by then all sorts of contacts with guerrilla groups from Ilocos to Leyte that could provide information about the purely criminal outfits the Japanese (and therefore Laurel himself) had an interest in breaking up. Ferdinand was, additionally, deep in Laurel's debt for his pre-war acqital. It was an utang na loob he could not have ignored without dishonour.

When, after the end of the war, Laurel and the others were brought back from their refuge in Tokyo and tried as collaborators, Laurel was acquitted under President Roxas's Proclamation no. 51, which granted a blanket amnesty to most of those accused of collaboration. Many Filipinos have since expressed satirical views about what they saw as a lot of collaborators being exonerated by another collaborator. Ferdinand Marcos, whose reputation as a war hero was by then under intensive construction, was doing his utmost to avoid being publicly lumped in with those who needed amnesty. Yet his wartime dealings with both Laurel and Roxas (who until he pleaded the heart condition that was to kill him a few years later had been the preferred choice of the Japanese as puppet president) must have enmeshed him in a complex web. They had all of them squeaked through into this strange climate of exoneration, if not of forgiveness. In the new moral and political status quo it was in their interest to connive at the sanitizing of each other's past. That Ferdinand's powerful wartime friend Roxas was back in political business with a clean slate and running a new Republic undoubtedly gave him a good base from which to operate, for he was already thinking ahead.

In that sense Ferdinand's war was something of a personal triumph even without all the comic-strip heroics he was to add as a top-dressing. In the next four years until he was first elected to Congress there must have been some awkward moments when he was unsure whether the persona he had invented for himself would be exploded. But as time went by and his ties with the men the Americans had anointed as the new regime grew closer, he must have felt himself increasingly safe. What effect his war had had on him at a psychological level is another matter. One would have thought he was surely left with at least two sources of profound guilt, the first of which being a bogus war record. This secret, which of course both he and the Americans shared, would acquire the status of mutual blackmail when he came to be President, a complicity he and Washington could each hold over the other's head. What might have started out as nothing but youthful braggadocio—a little embellishment here, some dramatic details there—slipped out of control and gradually hardened into a fiction that, by the time he was briefing Hartzell Spence for the definitive version, was brazenly bolstered by alleged quotations from MacArthur himself (recently, and safely, dead in 1964). Since their history's sordid betrayals and lies have rendered most Filipinos sublime cynics, all politics in the Philippines are pure pathos, sheer spectacle, into which Ferdinand's fanciful skill with the greasepaint fitted without difficulty as an adroit and original gambit. The people who felt most deeply about the issue were the authentic scariest survivors of Fort Santiago's underground torture chamber, as also the genuine battle heroes. They never forgave him. (What was more, such people never had been deceived. Frank Sionil José, the renowned writer and proprietor of Manila's La Solidaridad bookshop—which throughout the Marcos martial law era was a refuge for dissenting intellectuals—offered the following vignette: 'One of Marcos's closest old friends was Commodore Nuval. Each year, at the time of Ferdinand's birthday, Nuval would come to the bookshop to choose three books as gifts for him. One year it happened to coincide with a ceremony commemorating the Battle of Bessang Pass, in which Ferdinand the "war hero" had claimed he was very
much to the fore. Nuval was in my shop and we were gossiping about this and he laughed and said: "Ferdy was never at Bessang Pass." This would have been in 1966 or 1967. It was made doubly absurd because that same September a girl came to the shop, the daughter of Major Conrado B. Rigor, who was the true hero of Bessang Pass, as every Ilocano knew. She was in tears because of the way Marcos had usurped her father's heroism."

The other source of guilt Ferdinand may have had difficulty dealing with was his father's death. Had Mariano, that perennially unsuccessful man, brought about his own downfall? Or had his son directly contributed to it by recommending him to the Japanese as a man they could deal with? Either way, Mariano had died for having dealings with the Japanese, while the equally guilty Ferdinand had not. The mere fact of his death, and in so spectacularly unpleasant a manner, might surely have been reason enough for Ferdinand to insist with increasing vehemence on a far more palatable version of events. His father had been a hero; he himself had been a hero. Who was counting? (And by them, who dares count?)

And what, finally, of that other hero, the mighty champion of the free world, General Douglas MacArthur? There was an extraordinary outcome of his return to the Philippines, one that Roosevelt could never have imagined when he had thankfully sent him off to be Quezon's military advisor in 1935. It depended on the United States, in 1945, being almost entirely preoccupied with Europe in the wake of the Nazi defeat and in the quick resettling of the Western world into fresh alliances. To put it bluntly: Japan had been nuked into submission and the Eastern Pacific would have to take care of itself for a while. The carving up of Europe into Eastern and Western blocs, with ex-allies swiftly turning into Communist enemies, more or less monopolized American attention. Almost by default, therefore, MacArthur was given a free hand to arrange his own fiefdom according to his taste. His personal support was crucial to getting his old friend Roxas approved by Washington and elected. So also was his capricious withholding of US aid for the reconstruction of the Philippines until after the election, thereby making the aid virtually contingent on Roxas becoming President. Thereafter, the $2 billion in aid was fought over by various groups of vultures who had good links with the new ruling elite of MacArthur and Roxas. Only very little of this fabulous sum (at mid-1940s value, too) actually went into rebuilding the Philippines' shattered infrastructure and economy. To illustrate just how bad things were, it is perhaps better to rely on an American author for a final description, beginning with what happened to the $2 billion:

Instead of revitalizing the economy, much of it ($150 million by one estimate) went to rehabilitate a few privileged American-owned businesses and import-export companies. Six million dollars went to rehabilitate the fabulously rich Benguet gold mines, in which MacArthur held stock. Beer baron Andres Soriano, MacArthur's wartime aide-de-camp, was a Spanish citizen, but quickly took Philippine citizenship as the war approached. Then, one day after Pearl Harbor, MacArthur made him a colonel in the US Army and arranged to get him instant American citizenship. In 1946, when Soriano's San Miguel brewery urgently needed bottle caps, MacArthur had the War Department fly 20 tons of caps across the Pacific. So things were.

Everybody was on the make. Millions of dollars' worth of consumer goods flowed into Manila just for the maintenance of the US Army. One quarter of these goods ended up on the black market. GI's working with civilians sidetracked trucks, powdered milk, pistols, stockings, typewriters, and cigarettes. Two months after Yamashita's surrender, over $1 million in US Government-owned goods were seized when police broke up a Manila ring. After that it became serious.

"It may well be," journalist Robert Shaplen observed, "that in no other city in the world there was as much graft and conniving after the war. The Surplus Property Commission, intended to dispose of excess US military property, became the preserve of Roxas backers. Washington industrial lobbyists contrived to make it illegal to bring surplus war goods home. Thousands of jeeps, tanks, planes and munitions went on the market in every former combat zone. President Roxas offered Washington 1 peso for 90,000 tons of surplus ammunition stored on Luzon. The State Department fumed, but turned the munitions over. Tons of US Army scrap metal in the Philippines were sold to an American concern through various fronts for a mere $355,000. The deal was
arranged by MacArthur’s associate, former High Commissioner Paul McNutt, whom Filipinos called the ‘Hoofer Hitler.’

While politicians and businessmen grew wealthy, Manila’s balance of payments deficit with the United States jumped to over $1 billion. ‘The future of the islands is not bright,’ commented an American magazine. ‘The United States is responsible for the situation and should do what it can to rectify it.’

Today, many Filipinos date the tacit acceptance of theft and corruption at government level from this period, as well as the final demoralization of a people who had suffered so much. From then on, they claim, no public figure was likely to be taken seriously or believed, no official expected to be trustworthy, no politics to be viewed as anything more than the spectacle of a corrupt elite playing musical chairs among itself. It may indeed suit diehard nationalists to view the corruption surrounding the Americans’ administering post-war aid as the root of much subsequent social and political evil in the Philippines, but the truth is less conveniently simplistic.

The fact is that Filipinos themselves needed no lessons from Americans on political intrigue and corruption. In the old days the Spanish had made frequent references to Filipinos’ blithe ruthlessness when given petty ascendency over their fellow countrymen, and visiting Americans from the turn of the century onwards had recorded their own amazement at the unashamed corruption and brutality often displayed by local functionaries. It could be argued that these were simply the disdainful observations of foreign colonials with a vested interest in portraying benighted brown people incapable of governing themselves, but the weight of evidence is against such a view. Certainly a writer like Katherine Mayo was acting more as a sceptical journalist than as an American apostle when she visited the Philippines in the early twenties. Her resultant book, ‘The Isles of Fear – The Truth about the Philippines’ (1925), frequently shows her sympathies to have lain with the wretched indios as they laboured not so much beneath the American yoke as beneath that of their own kind: local headmen, small landowners, politicians and bigwigs. If at the end of the Second World War the battered Philippine people were often more sceptical than optimistic about their newly independent country’s political future, it was surely because they recognized that an all-Filipino political process was unlikely to be other than corrupt. They would have realized that the opportunities the recent war had offered for unscrupulous self-advantage on the part of so many people with political ambitions could only have made the outlook gloomy. In the event, their cynicism was amply justified.

It may well be that this immediate post-war period did in some way further polarize the electorate into those who ran for office and those who grew the rice (to caricature it somewhat). It was the moment when, in recognition of the way in which the war had weighed equally heavily on all levels of Filipino society, something like a true democratic spirit might have taken shape. But as will be seen in Chapter 7, such attempts as Juan de la Cruz made to vote his own representatives into government (in this case Democratic Alliance candidates in Central Luzon in 1946) were thwarted and crushed with the utmost crudeness. It is hardly surprising that ordinary folk, finding themselves rebuffed by their own newly independent nation’s policy, were driven back into taking shelter behind the peasant defences that had always proved so powerful a refuge in the past: all manner of superstitious beliefs and charismatic religious practices, which here and there became allied to grassroots revolutionary movements. It was a liminal world the fledgling politician Ferdinand Marcos would reveal that he understood perfectly.
about his provincialism when he first took office as President. I suspect it was this that the villagers glimpsed just often enough to respond to his wily appeals for their votes.

One morning shortly after my conversation with Dorcas I mention the cave that is supposed to lie beneath Mt. Malindig to my godson. He is now nearly thirty, but when he was a teenager he and I had once climbed the mountain without, as I recall, hearing anything about a cave. "Sabi," he says non-committally. "They say they say the cave exists but that it is only a part of what. Of the underground truth, apparently, which is that the whole interior of this island province is hollow. Somewhere beneath us there is also a fabulous treasure: *a gintong baka*. A gold cow, no less. My godson tells me that the activities of the copper-mining company that has dominated this province's economy for the last quarter century have gradually eaten away two of the cow's legs. In early 1996 thousands of tons of slurry from the mine's tailings pit poured out through an illegally constructed tunnel and smothered the province's main river system, killing it stone dead. The ecological damage caused a state of emergency to be declared and led to the shutdown of the company's operations. "People say it was punishment for having hacked off the *baka*'s legs," my godson says. "Sabi," Maybe it was also just deserts for disturbing the province's subterranean aquifer system which might or might not be the reason for Kansulay's river drying up. Since this same company was for years secretly owned by Marcos himself via a series of holding companies, one suspects the golden cow is actually The Golden Calf.

I ask him if the 'beautiful white lady' whom Até Susi's daughters had seen was the same person as the alluring woman in the cave who had given miraculous food and drink to the anti-Japanese guerrillas during the war. 'I expect so,' he said. 'Maria Malindig is everywhere. She is the spirit of this province. *Sabi*. I am touched to see he is still wearing the little gold cross I gave him for a birthday years ago.

*Imelda Romualdez, too, makes a good start*

If Ferdinand Marcos came to power in 1965 as a partly invented person (and he once said he believed Spence's *For Every Tear a Victory* had been crucial to his winning that first election), his wife was almost as much a public creation in that she, too, was to have her biography face-lifted until it was worthy of her. About Ferdinand himself there is always something that remains uncertain, hidden, enigmatic. There is a tradition in the Philippines of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, at least in public, and maybe his current reputation also benefits slightly from this: It is bad luck as well as bad taste to attack the dead, who cannot defend themselves. But his widow, being very much alive, is not yet accorded the advantages of such reticence and *delicada*. There is surely no other living soul who has held such power, who hobnobbed with and charmed so many world leaders, who was once fawned upon by five American presidents as well as by journalists and gossip-columnists far and wide, and whose image is now so widely mocked and mud-spattered.

The reasons for this are many and not always simple. Among them, undoubtedly, is that Imelda Marcos was all too perfectly herself, too brimful of the entire range of Filipino faults and Filipino virtues; so that the nation, at last feeling free to view her through the Western press's eyes, turned on her latterly with 'the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass', in Oscar Wilde's
phrase. For it is undeniable that a good deal of the behaviour that has earned her the virtuous ridicule of Filipinos themselves is quite normal by local standards. The extravagance, the queenly capriciousness, the empty-headed partying with showbiz personalities, and the jetting around on international brand-name shopping sprees of the most vulgar kind—all of these are exemplified (or aspired to) daily by Manila's arrant socialites. The difference is that Mrs Marcos had, and has, real substance beneath the glitz. She has never been as empty-headed as she sometimes seemed, and still less was she empty-hearted. Glaring faults, certainly; but glaring virtues, too, among which a perverse simplicity. It is impossible to meet her à deux without carrying away an impression of naïve sincerity. This is all the stranger since she is a consummate politician and has appropriate (and well-attested) gifts, such as never forgetting names and faces, which nobodies like myself are apt to find flattering. But as the years go by one is less easily flattered as well as better at spotting such tricks of the trade. In Mrs Marcos's case, though, I do not believe they are false. She actually does like people and finds them interesting; it is touching that she so patently believes what she says, especially when not a little of it is distinctly dotty. Certainly, the one thing I had never expected was to find myself touched. She is a very complex lady indeed.

In Kansaluy, any anti-Imelda feeling tended to follow a conventional sexist line, viewing her as the quintessential scheming woman who, for her own purposes, had warped her way into a good man's heart and taken advantage of his illness. Dr Alma Fernandez of the University of the Philippines told me she had been in New York in 1990 at the time of Mrs Marcos's acquittal on all RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) charges that had been brought against her. There and then Dr Fernandez had written an article for the Filipino newspaper Malaya that was something of a feminist reading of Imelda's career, her arraignment and general fall from grace. She said it had proved quite easy to do since Mrs Marcos was such a classic victim of a male-dominated society. I took her to refer to life in the upper echelons of global politics rather than in the Philippines, where machismo is over-valued but powerful women are a recognized type, until I reminded myself of Imelda Marcos's awful childhood as well as the ruthless way in which she was wooed, won, and subsequently moulded by her much older husband.

Imelda Remedios Visitation Romualdez was born in Manila in 1920. Her father, Vicente Orestes, was a lawyer who worked in the family law firm (Romualdez, Romualdez y Romualdez) with his two older and far more successful brothers. By most accounts he was an easy-going man, somewhat artistic (he played the piano and sang), who favoured a quiet life. Unfortunately his first wife,juanita Acedo—like himself, descended from a Spanish priest—died leaving him with five children to bring up. He married again, this time to a girl he selected from a convent, Remedios Trinidad. At this point all hopes of a quiet life ceased because his children much resented their new stepmother, whom they considered not only an intruder but déclassée since she was brown-skinned. Imelda was Vicente Orestes's first child by Remedios Trinidad, and four more were to follow. Long before then, open family warfare had broken out between the two sets of children to the extent that Remedios Trinidad moved out of her husband's big house and went with the children to live in the garage, sharing it with her husband's hire-purchased car, an Essex Super 6. At night the children slept on boards propped up on milk crates while their mother bedded down on a table. The last of Vicente Orestes's children, Consiglia, was conceived in this garage. Half a century later Imelda's own niece, Beatriz Romualdez Francia, was to describe the position thus:

The vacillating and enigmatic Vicente Orestes commuted between the big house with his first set of children, and the garage with his second wife and their children together. He would drop by at the garage before going to work, and then at night before retiring.

[Remedios] sent her daughter Imelda to the big house early each morning to get their daily allowance—a modest sum. In this way Imelda began at an early age to learn the rules of a painful

*For the detailed outline of Mrs Marcos's biography in this chapter I am deeply indebted to three main sources: authors Kerima Polotan Tuvera, Carmen Navarro Pedrosa and Beatriz Romualdez Francia.
game and negotiate between two worlds. She learned to mediate between a father who identified himself with the Caucasian and subjugated, indigenous Filipinos.

It is perhaps worth noting that this old stone house of Vicente Orestes’ was on General Solano Street, practically on the Pasig River and only yards from Malacañang Palace where Imelda was to get all sorts of sweet revenge only a couple of decades later. This was an ancestral home she did not restore. On the contrary, she bought it together with the two adjacent lots, bulldozed the entire site, and turned it into a garden. All mention of a childhood spent partly in a garage as the outpost of her step-family was excised from the record until 1970, when the journalist Carmen Navarro Pedrosa dug up the unwelcome facts and published them in her remarkably brave book, *The Untold Story of Imelda Marcos*.

Since it is the lot of thousands of ordinary Filipinos to be conceived, born and to live their lives in garages and shanties, the conventionally heartless might say it was excellent training for a future First Lady, a salutary taste of how the other half lives. That, of course, is precisely how a child cannot see her own life, especially when she is not yet ten years old. This experience, and the even worse poverty that awaited her and her siblings in Leyte, must have set up within little Imelda the sorts of splits and fissures anyone might inherit from childhood stress, but which only extreme power and wealth can later magnify into the behavioural chasms that throw up on either side the monster and the angel.

In 1937 Remedios gave birth to Conchita, her sixth and last child. Feeling the onset of labour the ex-convent girl stoically took herself off in a taxi without a word to her husband in the big house and checked into the free (i.e. paupers’) ward of the Philippine General Hospital. Three days later she tottered back into the garage on General Solano carrying her new baby. Her husband took it as a deliberate slight that she had vanished without telling him, and even more so that she had gone to a paupers’ ward. (Beatriz Romualdez Francia says that, forty years later, Imelda Marcos took steps to cover up the fact that her youngest sister had been born in a free ward by having a Dr Reginaldo Villanueva at the General Hospital prepare an affidavit stating that Conchita Romualdez was born in the pay ward. Villanueva was told to cooperate and to lie with the veiled threat that his children abroad would be safer if he acceded to this request.) (To set against this, however, is the fact that the rebuilding of the hospital, which arguably still offers Manila’s best medical services for those Filipinos too poor to pay, was one of Imelda’s major projects when she eventually came to power.) Four months after Conchita’s birth, Remedios died of double pneumonia and the eight-year-old Imelda watched her mother laid to rest in La Loma cemetery. From descriptions by Mrs Francia and others, the shadowy Remedios reminds me of almost anyone from Kansulay, which makes me warm to her memory. The melancholy, the stubbornness, the almost romantically proud acceptance of a garage floor instead of a marriage bed: all these are recognizable indigenous traits far distant from those of an ideal mate for the aloofly Hispanic Vicente Orestes.

By September of that year, 1938, this dreamiest of the three Romualdez brothers decided to quit Manila, where financial success had constantly eluded him. The big house on General Solano, which was anyway mortgaged, was sold. The Essex Super 6, no longer functioning and also overdue in its instalment payments, was sold out of the garage and back to the dealers. The selling up of his Manila assets barely paid his debts. His plan was to retreat to the province of Leyte where his Spanish grandfather had been a priest, where the Romualdez dynasty had effectively been founded in 1873 and where his illustrious and scholarly brother Norberto was an Assemblyman. There he intended to retire from the law and administer the estates of his more prosperous Romualdez relatives, meanwhile living off whatever income could be derived from their coconut plantations. The truth was, he had little interest in money. The double widower wanted to get well away from the city in which he had conspicuously failed to prosper and sit beside the blue, blue sea of a distant province, dipping into books and humming tunes to himself. Sixty years on this seems entirely sympathetic, although with a large family to keep it might be considered irresponsible by bourgeois standards. It certainly had undreamt-of consequences.
game and negotiate between two worlds. She learned to mediate between a father who identified himself with the Spanish and Caucasian class — who had enjoyed such privileges only a few decades before and still continued to do so under the American colonial government — and a mother who was classified with the subjugated, indigenous Filipinos.  

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The move sealed the fate of his branch of the family and cast them forever as poor relations to the rich Romualdez family of Manila. This change in family status would be critical to Imelda's development and would set her ambitions even more firmly.

In the ten years that followed, which of course included the three years of Japanese occupation, Vicente Orestes and his family moved about Leyte's little capital town of Tacloban, finally coming to rest in a Quonset hut on Calle Real. Such was Imelda's home in her formative early teens. Her father largely read the war away. When General MacArthur finally returned, landing in Leyte, Vicente Orestes took Imelda up to the local US Army camp to beg surplus materials in order to spruce up their hut. They also begged for food. They were not alone, of course. Their living conditions and diet were no doubt much like that of Tacloban's other citizens even before the war it had never been a place of full bellies and flush toilets. In later years Imelda quite often spoke of the hunger and poverty of those days, although she only ever did so to other family members.

She described how her mouth would water when she saw neighbours who had margarine with their bread for breakfast. In her home breakfast was limited to a native roll and black coffee. The roll would not wait for late wakers, either. Food was strictly rationed, and any child who wanted more was reprimanded with 'only those who work get fed.' She remembers that her father used to save his coins in a bamboo pole so he could afford a leg of ham when Christmas came. 'If we had a slice of ham, then it was a feast.'

The 'bamboo pole' might have been a doot jamb, still occasionally used even today in Kansulay as the family's piggy-bank, while the yearning for margarine was to manifest itself years later in a slightly different guise. This I learned about from a friend who acted as a NAMFREL (National Movement for Free Elections) observer during the snap election in 1986. She told me that after the Marcoses had fled Malacañang Palace she had gone poking about the many outhouses and storerooms in the Palace grounds and had come upon a modest, nondescript little house tucked away among the trees. Once inside, she had found it impossible to explore further because it turned out that every room and even the hallway was stacked ceiling-high with cartons of Heinz sandwich spread in catering-sized jars. Only then did she recall having heard that Imelda had once confessed to a craving for sandwich spread because in her childhood it had seemed the very epitome of luxury and elegance and had practically symbolized the unattainable. In its pathos there is a certain 'Rosebud' quality about this forgotten house of sandwich spread that is somehow lacking in other extravagances and oddities which had come to light and were then attracting greater attention in the newly vacated Palace, such as the galloon bottles of Dior and Guerlain scent and the bulletproof brac.

By the time General MacArthur's troops waded ashore in Leyte Imelda was sixteen and already acknowledged as the prettiest girl in Tacloban. She was much in demand for adding glamour to civic functions and she often went, heavily chaperoned, to sing for the GIs at the camp. She had a good voice and her confidence - so different from the usual probinsiya bashfulness - showed the pleasure she took in an audience. One day by special request she found herself singing to a huge assembly of troops that included MacArthur himself as well as living Berlin, who was on tour with the USO (United Service Organizations). She was asked to sing Berlin's own song, 'God Bless America,' and obliged, but on her own initiative changed the wording to 'God Bless the Philippines.' She reported the composer as being 'aghast at my impertinence' until she explained that the Philippines and America were really one world. According to her, Berlin promptly wrote another song which Imelda equally promptly sang: 'Heaven watch the Philippines/Keep her safe from harm... Friendly with America/Let her always be.' Anyone might feel free to wonder a little at the self-possession and temerity of a sixteen-year-old Filipina correcting a famous American composer's song for him, as at her suspiciously well-developed nationalism at the very moment of the US landings. Possibly the account itself underwent, like Berlin's original song, some judicious minor adjustment.

Certainly the handwritten fragments of Imedina that survive from this period show no trace of such feisty individualism. On the contrary, they are touchy in their ordinary schoolgirlishness. One
is a list of the sort of biographical details teenagers think define them. She gives her nickname as ‘Meldy’, her motto as ‘I try to succeed!’; her ambition as ‘any desk work or to be a – - - - Ehem!’ (for which four-spaced blank Carmen Pedrosa proposes the word ‘wife’). Otherwise we learn that Meldy’s hobbies were ‘singing, reading, going to movies, letter writing’, that her favourite subject was ‘lovenmaking, hal’, that her favourite dish was ‘fried chicken and ice cream’, that her favourite actress was Ingrid Bergman and her favourite expressions ‘Nuts!’ and ‘Hubba! Hubba!’ (‘Hubba-hubba’ was a classic piece of Second World War US military slang, defined as ‘an exclamation of delight, relish, etc. esp. at the sight of a woman’, which no doubt commended it to young Meldy who, in common with everyone else, liked to be appreciated.) Perhaps more revealing was an entry in a schoolmate’s autograph book which reads: ‘Dearest Polly. Keep that smile on your lips, But always put that [sic] tears in your heart. Love; Meldy.’ This is accompanied by a competent little sketch of a girl with a weeping heart. It would be silly to read too much into conventional things of this sort, but the idea of hiding one’s grief and presenting a smiling face to the world is indeed very Filipino (as is her English), and the Mrs Marcos of later years showed she had fully mastered this trick of Asian stoicism, which does not preclude shedding tears for effect.

Well before she became a local beauty queen (‘The Rose of Tacloban’) Imelda was attracting suitors, and like many a pretty girl before or after might well have settled for a prosperous husband and lived out the rest of her life in the province where her family name had distinction. But two things combined to take her back to Manila. One was the unwanted attention of a particularly insistent admirer and the other her genuine musical talent. Two Romualdez cousins in Manila, struck equally by her looks and her ability, offered to arrange singing lessons and a helping hand in the big city. In 1952, at the age of twenty-three, she left for Manila with her cousin Daniel as escort. It was a moment perfectly designed for the ‘little-could-they-have-guessed’ school of biography.

Thus did Imelda leave Tacloban, the small town that made her queen, that helped her bury the memory that she was Remedios’s deprived child. It was time to go. Leyte had nothing more to offer Imelda. Little did Danieling realize that the trembling country cousin accompanied on the fateful journey to Manila, with five pesos in her purse and a dirty tampipi (a poor native suitcase), carrying only a few skirts and blouses, held the formula for one of the most remarkable success stories in Philippine political history.

In order to avoid a misleading impression (of country hick and earnest mentor) we need to recall that Daniel Romualdez was by then Congressman for Tacloban, that his trembling cousin was a famously beautiful woman of considerable interior poise, and that they did not take a steerage passage on an inter-island ferry but flew on Philippine Airlines’ afternoon flight to Manila.

Once there, Imelda roomed in her Congressman cousin’s house and soon became familiar with the daily ebb and flow of political grandees as well as with the general tenor of life in power-broking circles. She herself was treated more indulgently than inclusively by her cousins, who found her a job in a music store on Escolta, the old Spanish main street of downtown Manila that nowadays forms part of Chinatown. In this shop she sang to buyers of sheet music or else demonstrated pianos by playing them to prospective customers. (Forty-five years later I asked the redoubtable Lucrecia ‘King’ Kasig, herself a noted composer and doyenne of the Cultural Centre’s musical activities, about Mrs Marcos’s actual musical ability. Was she, I wondered, what one would call a good pianist? Mrs Kasig, a staunch Imelista, frowned at a filing cabinet: ‘Not necessarily,’ she said at length.)

Imelda served in the music shop until Vicente Orestes unexpectedly turned up one day. He wanted to see how his daughter was getting along in the big bad city and found her singing to some customers. Outraged, he accused Danieling of ‘selling’ Imelda and insisted she be moved to a job commensurate with the dignity of a decent girl. One was promptly found for her as a clerk in the Intelligence Division of the Central Bank, an institution where any decent girl might pick up a trick or two. It did, however, fulfill the teenage Meldy’s ambition of ‘any desk work’. After work each day she took singing lessons at the Philippine Women’s University Conservatory of Music. Then, after an editor of the Manila Chronicle had spotted her by chance on the street, she appeared on the cover
of This Week (the 15 February 1953 Valentine issue) as 'the lass from Leyte – Imelda Romualdez.' It was essentially from that moment that Imelda became a public figure, a role she has since filled for almost half a century. Deciding to run as Miss Manila in a beauty contest that was itself a preliminary stage in the quest for a new Miss Philippines, she found her own family implacably opposed to sponsoring her. Beauty contests were vulgar affairs and Romualdezes did not demean themselves with such things.

So Imelda obtained the backing of the president of the Philippine Women's University, Mrs Benitez, as well as of Mrs Kasiblan, the head of the university's Department of Music. Against all predictions the title of Miss Manila went to a Norma Jimenez. Imelda was disbeliefing, then angry. Where anyone else might have accepted fate and consoled herself with the thought that, well, it was only a beauty contest, she went directly to the Mayor of Manila, Arsenio Lacson, and charged that the contest had been fixed. She must have been a formidable presence: tall, beautiful, furious and judiciously tearful. Two days after the original press release of Jimenez's victory the following announcement went into all Manila's major newspapers:

Mayor Lacson yesterday disowned the choice of the International Fair Board and named Imelda Romualdez of Philippine Women's University as Manila's official candidate for Miss Philippines.

In a letter to the director of the International Fair, Lacson charged violation of certain rules of the International Fair contest that as Mayor of Manila he would nominate the only candidate of the City of Manila for the beauty contest.

The beauty contest committee named by Mayor Lacson adjudged Miss Romualdez winner of the Miss Manila title with 655 points. Norma Jimenez and Amparo Manuel tied for second place with 453 points each.

This was a splendidly Filipino piece of in-fighting in a culture where everything is negotiable, even retrospectively, and competition winners – like examination or election results – can be almost indefinitely reconsidered in the light of 'delayed information' in the form of write, threats or plain family connections. As it turned out, Imelda was not on her way to becoming Miss Philippines, for Mayor Lacson's overruling was itself promptly overruled. The International Fair sponsoring the contest decided that the Mayor of Manila was not eligible to choose the candidate for Manila, and reinstated Norma Jimenez. By then it no longer mattered to Imelda what counted was what she had learned about her own will. 'To try is to succeed,' indeed. For students of her later history, some significant names had entered her life as a consequence of this episode: Mrs Kasiblan, Mrs Benitez and Mayor Lacson. And the girl who went on to win the 1955 title of Miss Philippines was Cristina Galang, who, as Cristina Caedo, eventually became one of Imelda Marcos's famous band of private aides – somewhere between gofers and groupies – known collectively as the 'Blue Ladies.'

After this came a brief affair with an eligible young man, Ariston 'Titong' Nakpil, who was cultured (a Harvard-trained architect) and of excellent family. He had one drawback, however, in that he was already married. This marriage was in the process of being annulled (which it eventually was) but the situation produced only delay and uncertainty as well as the furious opposition of Imelda's father. It cannot have been an easy time for her. Mixing with Ariston's family, who incidentally took to her and showed her great kindness, made her aware of how much of a provincial she was among Manila's elite. Her accent gave her away, while her social manners – natural and spontaneous though they were – lacked the requisite polish. She was now twenty-four, by provincial standards old enough to be aware of a clock ticking somewhere in the background, certainly old enough to marry anyone she chose, regardless of what her father thought. On the evening of 6 April 1954 she went to Congress with the wife of her distinguished cousin Danieling, who was then acting Speaker of the House. When she arrived, a Congressman named Ferdinand E. Marcos was sounding off about something on the floor of the house, but politics of that sort bored Imelda and she and her friend went off to the cafeteria to wait for the session to end. When it did, Marcos himself came into the cafeteria, took one look at her and demanded an introduction.

There followed a famous eleven-day courtship that was to become a significant ingredient in the Marcos dyad's mythology since it not only exemplified that old heart-warmer, love at first
sight, but more importantly, fate. According to this, Ferdinand and Imelda were made for each other but they had anyway been destined to meet because fate itself had plans for them as well as for the Philippines, and the two strands, the private and the national, were indissolubly intertwined. (As President, Ferdinand was to ‘write’ the first four volumes of a projected multi-volume complete history of the Philippines called Tadhana, or ‘Destiny’, which was actually ghosted by a committee of scholars, mostly from the University of the Philippines. Apart from an inevitable unevenness in style, the series starts not badly; but it is hard to see how, had they reached the twentieth century, a certain slant in events could have been avoided. Presidents do not commission histories of their nation by accident. As we shall see, Imelda also commissioned a book, Si Malakas at Si Maganda, which makes explicit the predestined nature of her and her husband’s relationship, as also that of the First Couple as Mother and Father to their country. But this is to leap ahead.)

We left Ferdinand Marcos in the late 1940s having had a good war. In 1949 he was elected Congressman for Ilocos Norte in his father Mariano’s old district, running on a platform that included a promise to obtain benefits from the US government for all Filipino veterans of the recent war. By 1954 he was a millionaire, commuting between Congress and his leafy suburban home in San Juan in a shiny white convertible. During his first term as a Congressman, the Senate President was Jose Avelino, who had himself made half a million dollars during his own first congressional term. A casual remark of Avelino’s became the most famous thing he ever said. Referring to his fellow politicians, he exclaimed: ‘We are not angels!’

What are we in power for? When Jesus Christ died on the cross he made the distinction between a good crook and the bad crooks. We can prepare to be good crooks.’

By the time Ferdinand met Imelda, then, he was an excellent crook in Avelino’s sense, and conceivably in other senses as well. Like any Filipino politician he was making money by using his influence, by being a fixer, by ‘facilitating’ import licences and so forth, and by involvement in sundry business ventures that included tobacco-growing and cigarette-importing. In this area he had dealings with a carpetbagger named Harry Stonehill, a GI who had stayed on after the war’s end and taken advantage of the carve-up of Washington’s generous $2 billion in aid. Stonehill, a gifted entrepreneur, unwisely kept a ‘blue book’ listing people he had dealt with. Inevitably it was found and in 1962 he was to be deported from the Philippines to the sound of trumpets on the orders of President Macapagal. Among other things the blue book revealed was that Macapagal had used Stonehill’s funds for his presidential campaign. Another name that cropped up in it was that of Ferdinand Marcos. Apart from Ferdinand’s expected activities as a wheeler-dealer in Congress there was another possible source of his sudden private wealth. It has long been assumed that he and some comrades from his alleged wartime guerrilla band, ‘Maharlika’, had used their links with the Japanese to find at least part of the fortune the occupiers had buried as the Yamashita treasure. This is what Mrs Marcos said to me on the subject in 1997:

My husband’s war comrades sold the remains of the Yamashita treasure while he was briefly in the US. [Ferdinand had gone to Washington in May 1947 as a member of a team sent by the Philippine Veterans Commission to negotiate the payment of $160 million in benefits and back pay] He didn’t get rich on that, but it introduced him to precious metals trading. By 1949 he already had 4,000 tons of gold.’

Four thousand tons? That is what she said, making me feel an unworlly naif who still thinks gold is reckoned in tonn oounces. Be that as it may, the Yamashita treasure has certainly been taken very seriously for the last half-century. Its relevance to Marcos-watchers is that many Filipinos, including people who worked with Ferdinand, are convinced that he found some – but probably not all – of the loot. (It is the remainder that continues to lure ex-Green Berets like Charles McDougald, ex-CIA men like Singlea and sundry Filipinos.) It is widely believed that in the last weeks of the war Ferdinand became privy to information about the hiding places of several caches of treasure, dug them up, and once the war was over, sold them. ‘To have become privy’ to this sort of knowledge might seem to suggest excellent connections with the Japanese, or else an extraordinary amount of dumb luck. In any
case, this allegedly formed the basis of his prodigious wealth, which was thus acquired before he went into politics. Once he was President, the theory proceeds, he used his Ilocano-dominated military to track down other caches of treasure and added those to his private hoard. And it was for this reason, it is said, that he commissioned a gold refinery in Manila: ostensibly so that the Philippines could at last refine its own gold from mines such as Benguet, but in reality so that bars of Japanese and other gold could be re-smelted into untraceable bullion before being spirited away to Swiss banks.

The counter-theory runs that this whole Yamashita treasure story is pure hokum, but has been most carefully played up by the Marcoses as a way of explaining Ferdinand's private wealth, which in fact came from far more disreputable dealings, cheating and carptbagging in the aftermath of war. That is why (they say) Imelda Marcos so cheerfully bandies these huge tonnages of gold about in conversations on the subject of her husband's wealth: it is all a smokescreen. That is why (according to them) Imelda Marcos keeps harping on the notion that her husband's astuteness as one of the world's biggest private dealers in precious metals supported rather than undermined the Philippine economy. Tarcino Olivier, the son of Laurence Olivier, set up the Thomas de la Rue refinery here in Manila to refine gold. It was Ferdinand's private money that went to the Government and its projects. The PCH [Philippine General Hospital] and the LRT [Light Rail Transit] were both built without a single cent of Government funds,' she says.

The observation of a Filipino with a lifelong connection with the gold industry may be appended as a final comment:

In the 1960s and until 1974 the Philippines was the free world's second largest producer of gold after South Africa - superior even to the US and Canada. It was a major product, with six or seven gold mines. The Johnson Matthey (de la Rue) refinery was set up in 1975 and enabled the Philippines to do its own refining to world standards. By law the gold had to be sold to the Central Bank. Theoretically, between about 1977 and 1982 Marcos was in a position to 'buy' all the gold mined and refined in the Philippines at a discount. Practically, he could steal the lot.

That Ferdinand Marcos was already astonishingly wealthy by 1954 can hardly be left out of the equation when it comes to considering the 'whirlwind romance' that ensued from his chance meeting with Imelda Romualdez in the House cafeteria. Decorum is usually preserved by presenting him as making all the running: the ambitious young Congressman swept off her feet by the ingénue ex-beauty queen. Certainly his eleven-day wooing of her now seems less of a courtship (which implies a degree of old-fashioned etiquette) than an amorous bulldozing. On the day of their first meeting Imelda was still thinking of herself as the all-but-fiancée of Ariston Nakpil. In less than a fortnight she found herself married to a rich, handsome and youngish Congressman. She agreed to join Ferdinand and a reporter friend of his. Jose Guevara, on a five-hour car trip to the northern mountain resort of Baguio. They left Manila on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday Imelda signed the marriage certificate. I do not know whether Ferdinand had told her that as a matter of fact he was already engaged and had been living with his fiancée, Carmen Ortega, for some years in his large villa in San Juan, Manila, and had four children by her. Presumably he must have, for that engagement had been publicly announced not long before, and the same villa to which he was bringing Imelda as his new bride would surely have shown traces of its former occupant and her children, now hastily re-accommodated elsewhere. In any case Imelda apparently returned from Baguio flashing a ring set with eleven diamonds, one for each day of their courtship. In terms of pure practicality it would surely have been hard to have had an expensive ring made to order within hours over the Easter holiday in a provincial town. Had he planned the whole thing in advance and driven up with the ring already made in his pocket, the number of diamonds privately significant to him for numerical reasons? There is something missing from this myth, just as there is from the story I was told by a fellow Ilocano of Marcos's, the Congressman Roquito Ablan. He said Ferdinand's father, Mariano, told him before the war that he had named all his children sequentially after a sentence in a school history text: 'Ferdinand Magellan was sent on the orders of Queen Elizabeth across the Pacific to seek fortune': thus, in order, Ferdinand and his siblings Elizabeth, Pacifico and Fortuna. Unless Mariano was gifted
with uncanny prescience—and his failure to avoid a revolting
death suggests he was not—it is improbable that he can have
known in advance the genders of his yet-unborn children, but
myths have their own narrative conventions.

How is Imelda's sudden capture to be interpreted? That a
provincial innocent was swept aloft by the glitter and determina-
tion of a rich public figure twelve years her senior and simply
overwhelmed? But that hardly squares with the girl who had the
erg in her to go alone to the Mayor of Manila and talk him into over-
turning the result of a beauty contest. Clearly, a determined
character was not restricted to Ferdinand. One might guess that the

ticking of Imelda's inner clock had been getting louder and the
Nakpil affair seemed set to drag on indefinitely. Here, by contrast,
was this rich and ambitious man whom people were already
tipping as a future presidential candidate, with a famous Bar repu-
tation and an increasingly famous war record. It must have seemed
like an opportunity for putting memories of garage floors, earth
closets and singing to GIs behind her for good, as well as a way
of showing that her father's run of bad luck was not irreversibly
the lot of that particular branch of the otherwise distinguished
Romualdez family.

And as for Ferdinand, what did he have to gain by marriage at
this point? He was already well known as a philanderer, which
had never yet done any harm to a male politician's career in the
Philippines. His recent engagement to Carmen Ortega presum-
ably meant that at the age of thirty-seven he, too, had begun to feel
the clock was ticking for him. And maybe he was plain bored with
his common-law family, wanted a break and chose a beauty queen.
Other men have done the same. Or there again, maybe it really
was a matter of true love on both sides. We shall probably never
know. In any case, the church wedding that followed their hasty
civil union was lavish indeed and was treated by the newspapers
as a glamorous social event of public note. Some of the more
overwrought copy was similar to that produced at the time of Prince
Charles and Lady Diana's wedding in 1981, at least in terms of the
'fairy tale' imagery. Imelda and Ferdinand made, after all, an
exceptionally glittering and handsome couple.

The ensuing eleven years, during which the Marcoses lived in
the well-appointed villa in San Juan, saw the birth of two daughters

and a son. They also marked Imelda's transformation from a
housewife into a politician's wife, a rite of passage that cost her
dear. This painful moulding process was surely an instance of what
would prompt Dr. Alma Fernandez to a 'feminist' reading of
Imelda's life in 1990, at a time when most of the Western world's
press had declared open season on Marcos's widow.

When she first moved into the house in San Juan her new hus-
band would not allow her to change anything, so presumably she
found herself living with furniture and decor chosen by her hus-
band's live-in fiancee. Most days she would travel down to
Divisoria market in downtown Manila (near what was then the
city's main railway terminus, Tutuban station) where she did the
catering. She also bought material for her own dresses in Divisoria,
suddenly finding herself having to live a remarkably social life. She
was asked to model clothes for charity shows and was constantly
invited to be a sponsor at weddings, baptisms and celebrations.
She had the support of her own clan in that her favourite younger
brother Benjamin ('Kokoy') came to live with them and was eventu-
ally followed to Manila by her other siblings. (At this time
Kokoy's girlfriend was Ninoy Aquino's sister, Mauro. Young
Benigno Aquino Jr. had recently made a name for himself as an
intrepid reporter in the Korean War, and this early link between the
Romualdez and Aquino clans may, in the light of Ninoy's assas-
ination twenty-eight years later, have represented the high spot in
their relations.) Then in 1955 Vicente Orestes, now aged seventy
and gaunt with lung cancer, died in Manila. At her father's death
Imelda might have felt partially vindicated, for he had at least
lived to see his branch of the family back on the road to social
rehabilitation, thanks to his daughter's brilliant marriage. She her-
self was pregnant at the time. One of her nephews, watching her
during the funeral, reported that she was so upset when her
father's coffin was lowered into the grave she lost her footing and
fell into the hole on top of it.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for Imelda to cope with was
living a life in which she was expected simultaneously to be a
housewife, a young mother concerned with running a family
home, and a hostess to the constant stream of people who
tramped through it at all hours of day and night, needing to be
fed. These were her husband's political allies, ward leaders
and supporters, many of them uncouth by her standards and some of them frankly goons. She found herself

... repelled by his kind of life, a life in which absolute strangers descended on her house and left it messed up, torn up, rent apart. They walked right into her bedroom, and political schedules began to be sheer physical torture. Crowning fiesta queens, she waited on one stage after another, in heat or in cold, in wind or in rain, from dusk to the small hours, until she was ready to drop. The crowds that surged through her house made all peace impossible, and one had to have a smile and a coin for every outstretched hand. The horror is epitomized in the story that, one day, handing a coin to a woman with a babe in arms, she had lifted the swaddling cloth and seen that the baby was dead.11

This new life also required an abrupt shift in her attitude to money. The Rose of Ilocos, who until recently had had to scrimp on meals in order to be able to afford a new pair of shoes to wear in her office at the Central Bank, later told Mrs. Francia’s Auntie Loring that as a young bride

she was taken aback when one evening a stranger deposited a dirty sack in the middle of her living room. She quickly told the servant to take the sack to the kitchen, but before the fellow could carry out her order, Ferdinand smilingly instructed him to take it instead to the master bedroom. Pulling his wife aside, Ferdinand informed her that the sack contained money; he also made it clear to her that this would not be the last of its kind.

On seeing the puzzlement and scepticism on Auntie Loring’s face, Imelda went over to lift the cover from her bed. There lay a dirty-looking sack under it. She pulled it out and showed Auntie Loring how it was stuffed with money.12

(By 1960, the year after Ferdinand’s election to the Senate, Imelda had already become accustomed to such things, even complacent, confessing to Auntie Loring: “Money doesn’t mean much to me any more. Our money comes in sacks. I’m tired of counting money.”13)

Once again, to keep this culturally in proportion, it has to be remembered that Philippine politics was, and at election time still is, conducted in cash; and the nearer to the grass roots, the truer this becomes. Campaigns in particular call for prodigious quantities of ready cash, mainly in low-denomination notes. (This was why, when in 1986 the Marcoses were forced to flee the country, so many million Philippine pesos were found in their luggage by US officials who flew them out. The discovery readily lent itself to yet more stories about their having cleaned out the nation’s coffers before going into exile, when in fact the money comprised KBF [the Marcos political party] cash left over from the recent snap election campaign that Ferdinand was taking home to Ilocos Norte – which he had been told was his destination. By the time the Marcoses were informed they were actually going to Hawaii, it was too late. Had they known this in advance, it seems inconceivable they would have bothered to take masses of Philippine peso banknotes to the United States, where the exchange rate at the time of the crisis – assuming they could even have found someone willing to change it – was absurdly unfavourable.)

Imelda’s intense dislike of so many aspects of her new circumstances can scarcely have been made more bearable by her husband’s determination to turn her into an urban sophisticate. This involved not only his giving her improving books to read with the significant passages marked in pencil on which he later quizzed her, but extended to an obsession with her tendency to over-eat (a remark was later attributed to him to the effect that he hadn’t married Cinderella to see her turn into the pumpkin.) His own interest in gastronomy was virtually nil, and such pleasure as he did take in the table extended little further than plain Ilocano vegetable dishes like pinakbet. His young wife, though, had many years of penury to make up for, together with all sorts of unassuaged cravings. Imelda had always known that, given the chance, she was going to be a champagne-and-fine-gras sort of girl; and this apparently led to a period when on Ferdinand’s instruction a pair of scales was placed on the table by her at mealtimes and her allowance of food weighed out.

At the same time she began to realize that she was increasingly the butt of snobbish remarks and jokes on the part of Manila’s social elite. ‘Old’ society, in particular, made satirical remarks about her
habit of handing out identical little bottles of Jean Patou’s ‘Joy’ to Congressmen’s wives. She must also have known there were plenty of disparaging rumours circulating about her husband, too; but maybe she assumed that, as a man and as someone older, richer and more powerful than she was, his position made him feel invulnerable enough to ignore them. She herself was cut to the quick. She had, after all, lately been part of high society in Tacloban and now she was being made to feel like a parvenu straight off the ferry.

She began having severe migraine headaches for the first time in her life, alternating with bouts of lassitude and comfort-eating when Ferdinand was safely out of the house. She would lock the bedroom door and spend the day in bed, listening to soap operas on the radio and gorging on sweets. The double vision which her headaches produced began to acquire a metaphorical force – brought up to value honour, order, sobriety, manners and niceties, she could not abide the tumult and the disorder, the house that was not a home but a public arena.  

The crisis came towards the end of the decade with a full-blown nervous breakdown. One night Imelda lay as though dead, ‘cold, pale, motionless and hardly breathing’. Alarmed, Ferdinand took her to New York for three months where she saw a psychiatrist in the Presbyterian Hospital who diagnosed manic depression and told her that only she could get herself out of the state she was in. The cure, he said, lay in her changing her attitude: not merely to accept her new life but to embrace it completely, to revel in it, even if that entailed renouncing all sorts of preferences of her own. It seems that Ferdinand did offer to give up politics if she really wanted him to, but by then the doctor’s course of auto-suggestion (a sort of Coudism which in those days pretty much represented psychiatry’s sole armament against mental illness of the non-chronic kind) seemed to be having an effect. To what must have been her husband’s profound relief she told him he mustn’t dream of doing such a thing. It was up to her to change, not him.

In a way this breakdown was Imelda’s revelation on the road to Damascus in that thereafter everything changed, although it is less certain in Imelda’s case whether the experience resulted in a more saintly person. It undoubtedly helped her come to terms with matters of money. Mrs Francia’s mother recounted how, as godmother to the Marcoses’ first child, Imee, she had often visited the house in San Juan in those days, for she took seriously her role as the child’s spiritual guardian in a milieu that struck her as perilously worldly. On one occasion Imelda took her up to her bedroom and laid out all her jewellery for her inspection, saying, ‘You see, Amy, whenever I’m depressed I spread my jewels out on my bed; it cheers me up quickly.’ This was the person who within the next twenty-five years would amass what was estimated to be the world’s most valuable private collection of jewellery. On another day, rightly sensing that Mrs Francia’s mother was wondering about the source of all this extraordinary wealth, Imelda said in a sudden burst of self-justification, ‘You’ve been secure all your life. You don’t know what it’s like to be insecure. You don’t know what it feels like to have toothache and not to be able to afford going to a dentist.’

Mrs Francia published her book in 1988: Kerima Polotan wrote hers in 1969, only a decade after Imelda had cured herself of her breakdown and when the Marcoses were riding high, just completing Ferdinand’s first presidential term of office. In those days the question of their wealth was not yet an issue biographers dared address (although it was much discussed by Manila’s chattering classes). Thus Kerima Polotan could see the First Lady (as Imelda liked to be called) in a less complicated – or contaminated – light, more as the good wife who had overcome personal difficulties the better to be a model consort:

Having accepted the terms of her kind of life, she never again flinched or took a step backward. Explaining it afterwards, she attempted a metaphor: ‘[I] was like a butterfly breaking out of its cocoon.’ The headaches stopped for ever, the vague pains disappeared, and the double vision fused to become a single, concentrated look on the possible heights her husband’s career might take.

If this sounds too glibly like a woman deciding to sacrifice herself for her man and finding the process liberating, we should remember not only when Mrs Polotan Tuvera wrote her book but the period she is describing. By the time Cory Aquino had succeeded the Marcoses and Mrs Francia’s book was published, people had long been saying that Kerima Polotan’s had been propaganda, mere hagiography and whitewash; that after all both she
and her husband Johnny Tuvera had served Marcos — albeit most honourably — for years. But once again, this was to let vindictiveness get the better of a sense of history. The modern women's movement did not emerge in the United States until the 1960s; Manila in the 1950s was completely devoid of any such popular liberationist notions, just as it was devoid of reliable psychiatrists. (Here one must make an exception for certain of the essays by one of the very best post-war writers, Ariston Nakpil's relative by marriage, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. For that day, these were astonishingly advanced. Collected in one volume, Woman Enough (1963), they made a considerable impact; the essay on divorce, in particular, dated from the late forties and was in its way far more radical than much of the polemic the Women's Liberation Movement was producing in the US long after Woman Enough was published. Eugene Burdick, co-author of The Ugly American, paid Mrs Nakpil the ultimate compliment by lifting her entire essay 'The Filipino Woman', title and all, for a chapter in his book on Asia. He wisely died before he could be sued.) Such rare writing aside, the dominant ethos in Manila, so far as young middle-class mothers were concerned, was of stifling Spanish Catholic proprieties weirdly allied to the sort of American aspirations exemplified in Luella Ball sitcoms: a world of feisty but ultimately submissive housewives with narrow waists and frilled aprons who coveted 'miracle' kitchens and were wonderful mothers to lovably freckled, tow-haired kids whose archetype was Jay North as Dennis the Menace. Mrs Polotan, these days a widow in her seventies, was of Imelda's own generation or even slightly older. The description she gave of Imelda's change of heart following her agonizing breakdown whitewashed nothing; it was simply of its time. (Hers remains the best-written of all the Imelda books.)

Later writers such as Mrs Francia developed their own theories as to what had 'really caused' Imelda's breakdown, the principal one being that she had been deeply disturbed by the discovery that the position, and at least part of the wealth, of the man she had married had been ill-gotten. In other words, she had been morally outraged and disillusioned as much as she was repelled by the lifestyle of the upwardly mobile politician she happened to have married. It is hard to know what to think about this so many years after the event, but it is a plausible enough theory. Certainly the scene in the Marcos household, with its constant crowds and cook-outs and uncouth strangers wandering about with sacks of money (that is, when they were not cutting the upholstery of her new sofa by sitting down while wearing their 'bolsos') must have contrasted strangely with the decorous scene in her eminent cousin's house where she had until recently been living. Speaker of the House pro tempore, Danieling, was a practising politician of a very different and patrician kind.

I should like to propose a slightly different hypothesis, which is that part at least of Imelda Marcos's upset was caused by the paradoxical discovery that her new position did not vindicate Imelda Romualdez to quite the extent she had supposed. Her husband's ambitions, his manifest engagement in all sorts of ancillary business activities, some of which were clearly dubious, marked him out in Manila as a type. For all his wealth and growing power, he was revealed as indelibly provincial, the exemplar of rough-and-ready Ilocano politics of the variety she must have heard a lifetime of Romualdezians openly disclaiming. Her own uncle Norberto, Vicente Orestes' brother, was not only a politician himself but a scholar who had been a delegate at the 1935 Constitutional Convention and who wound up as a Supreme Court judge. When he died in 1941 President Quezon called him 'truly a great man' while a Spanish language newspaper said, 'A saint has died; a just man and a perfect gentleman.' Her family, in short, were part of the old elite. It must suddenly have seemed to Imelda that the new life she had contracted with a man who was not by their definition a perfect gentleman was doomed to exclude her for ever from that particular kind of manly distinction. She may even have wondered whether before he died her father had guessed as much. Her 'step up', far from restoring her branch of the family to public esteem, looked like guaranteeing its enduring status as faintly patrician.

If this is correct, her recovery was absolutely characteristic and iron-willed, though arguably only the most important in a long line of decisions (both before and after she married) that exemplified a determined, 'go-for-broke' spirit. If the snobs didn't like it, they could lump it. And if they thought her husband shady then she could think of a way of rubbing their noses in it. For it does not quite do to place too much emphasis on a notion like 'before and after'. Imelda, of innocence suddenly corrupted, Common sense, as
well as a sense of place and history, makes it obvious that she cannot have been wholly innocent even in her Rose of Tacloban days, if by ‘innocent’ one means ignorant of the ways of the world. She must shrewdly have observed first-hand all there was to know about accommodation, even corruption. Apart from her own family’s dominant position in Leyte’s politics (and provincial politics were seldom conducted even with Manila’s pretence of decorousness, tending towards dirty tricks, pay-offs, and not infrequently murder), she had watched her father and the rest of Tacloban’s inhabitants adjust to living under the Japanese occupation. She would have known the scams by which certain Leyteños had profited from the Japanese, just as she would people who profited by the presence of the GIs she later sang to. No doubt a few nice girls from Tacloban’s convent schools had opted for dollars and romance over penurious virtue. The stakes had always been clear. Apart from which there was an old tradition that stemmed as much from Asia as from Spain, that one could lose one’s heart in romance provided one did not lose one’s head. A good marriage need not necessarily imply a grand passion. I do not believe a girl of Imelda’s intelligence and beauteur was innocent of such knowledge; any Kansulay teenager today knows as much. Yet that does not mean that acting on it might not cause all kinds of stress. Any optimistic youngster might experience sadness on perceiving the essential starkness of the deal.

Susie Abadilla, who accompanied Imelda at her PWU [Philippine Women’s University] voice lessons, asked her, right after her marriage to Marcos, if she had loved this man deeply enough to marry him after a brisk 11-day courtship. She merely shrugged her shoulders enigmatically and said, ‘Well’.

By the time I met Mrs Marcos, of course, her story of a great romance had become immovably fossilized. Everything, from the beribboned bronze bust of her late husband in the apartment to her affectation and even reverential references to him, made it clear that the status of their mutual love was non-negotiable. Not only was it a historical given, so was the yin-yang (Imelda’s own phrase) nature of their political functioning together: ‘It was like a sex act all the time, a love act. He thought of it, I implemented it.’

The first requirement for a career in politics in the Philippines is money, and as we have seen Ferdinand had evidently taken care to lay the foundations of his future presidency sometime during the Second World War. The second requirement is contacts; and perhaps the most important of the contacts Ferdinand made soon after the war, that with the CIA, is the subject of this chapter. The implication of this chapter is that, to become President right after the war, from before the war, from student days at UP, from boyhood up, Care was taken in describing the Marcos career retrospectively so that the terms used did not infringe those much-prized, Horatio Alger qualities of ambition or determination. Instead, Ferdinand was described as having been ‘single-minded’ (always a suspicious thing to be, with its overtones of narrow fanaticism); he was ‘wily’ rather than clever; he had not aspired to become President but conspired. Nor had he ever planned anything; he had always plotted.

The truth was more unexceptional. There is nothing unusual about a bright and ambitious university graduate boasting to his close friends that one day he will be President, although when a former fellow student and comrade like Leonilo Ocampo recalls this today it sounds uncannily like prophecy. Furthermore, when a
Filipino with a Law degree was ambitious in those days it virtually presupposed a career in politics. A country about to become independent offered a young man excellent opportunities for preeminence as well as the prospect of having a hand in the making of a new society (and how ironic that sounds after Marcos’s New Society!). What is more, anyone entering politics anywhere harbours a wishful dream of getting to the top, of becoming President or Prime Minister, even if their realistic selves know better. Given the political system of his day, then, there was nothing about Ferdinand’s rise to power that was particularly extraordinary. He played the same system as did everyone else; he simply did it better than most, perhaps more ruthlessly, making some astute connections and having a lot of luck on the way. Still, thanks to his strange war and what he must have known about the skeletons in the cupboards of most of the members of the post-war Philippine government, he had an ace up his sleeve that many of his potential rivals did not have: the United States.

In 1950 a fortyish politician named Ramon Magaysay, who had only been appointed as President Quirino’s Defence Secretary a mere two months earlier, oversaw a superbly planned operation of military intelligence that resulted in the arrest of the Communist Party of the Philippines’ entire Manila-based politburo. Newly elected to Congress, Ferdinand watched shrewdly. When in due course Magaysay succeeded Quirino as President and managed to be popular simultaneously with the Filipino grass roots as ‘a country boy’ and with Washington as ‘America’s boy’, Marcos must have become doubly attentive. He knew that the CIA’s Edward Lansdale (the Walt Disney of covert action), in Sterling Seagrave’s felicitous phrase) had been responsible for Magaysay’s appointment as Defence Minister. Thereafter, Ferdinand could see ever more clearly the American hands pulling on the strings of Filipino politics. He realized that, independent nation or no and free electoral system regardless, the Philippines would never in the foreseeable future have a President who did not first have Washington’s approval and backing. From an ambitious politician’s point of view it became a matter of discovering how to play both the nationalist card and the anti-Communist card. Ferdinand Marcos thought he knew how he could become America’s boy.

We need to backtrack slightly in order to acquire a perspective on the significance of Communism to America. The United States had emerged from the Second World War as the most industrially powerful nation on earth. From a European viewpoint America had hardly won the war by herself, having joined the fray rather late, but she had been on the side that could not possibly have won without her. It is true she had taken her time to recognize the global pretensions of the Nazi threat in Europe, and had very nearly been too late to save beleaguered Britain. But once Pearl Harbor had been attacked and Japan had made alliance with Germany, America’s involvement became inevitable and – given Hitler’s foolishness in invading Russia – the long-term outcome was not much in doubt. Wars are often portrayed as struggles between God and the infidel, or good and evil, or right versus might, but seldom so plausibly as in the case of the Second World War. Insofar as the notion of ‘evil’ had much meaning left in it, Nazism as revealed by the death camps seemed to redefine it. Consequently the Allies, unlike most victors of major wars, had a good claim to have won the moral high ground as well. This claim had been severely – many still think irreparably – damaged by America’s dropping not one but two nuclear bombs on Japan in quick succession. It was pragmatic: the war was ended; the world promptly split into new power blocs separated by an ‘Iron Curtain’, as Churchill described it.

The Allies’ notion of having had right on their side in the struggle against the Axis powers now carried over to their Cold War stance against the USSR and her satellites. (When forty years later President Ronald Reagan referred to the ‘Evil Empire’ he really meant it.) The Cold War, as a strategic stand-off based on the doctrine of MAD (mutually assured destruction) was undeniably dangerous and nervous. As a European whose lifetime has encompassed the whole of the Cold War my private, largely adolescent, memory is of a military affair conducted for ‘our’ side by NATO, interspersed with famous incidents (the downing of Gary Powers’ U-2 spy plane, the Cuba missile crisis) and stories of espionage and competitive weaponry.

What I do not recall, because nothing like it occurred in Europe, was anti-Communist hysteria, which seemed to be peculiar to the United States. Stalin had long since stopped being ‘Uncle Joe’ of the
war years and had been revealed as a genuine totalitarian monster, both brutal and sinister. The English writer George Orwell had satirized Communism generally in his 1945 novel *Animal Farm*, but by 1949 events in Soviet Russia had prompted him to the far more chilling predictions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This later book embodied many of the phobias current throughout the Western bloc at that time, most particularly of police state suppression of democratic freedom so vividly exemplified in the real world by Stalin’s gulags and the rigid controls that beset every aspect of public and even private life in the USSR. (Faced with ‘crimes of opinion’, not only did ordinary Russians need to censor their own speech, but even faces in the same official photograph might change from one day to the next.) If at public level in Western Europe such absurdities led to uneasy mockery, in NATO’s corridors a much grimmer attitude prevailed that sometimes came close to reflecting the paranoia of Stalin’s own state security apparatus. By the time Russia, and then China, exploded their own nuclear devices, there was unquestionably a genuine degree of psychosis on both sides in the Cold War. In the United States, anti-Communist sentiment toppled over into an outright witch-hunt. This had loud echoes in the Philippines as well as profound long-term political consequences.

The high summer of this hunt is usually seen as falling in 1953-4 with the hearings chaired by Joseph McCarthy. The Republican senator from Wisconsin claimed to have lists of the names of State Department officials and even of high-ranking US Army officers who ‘in reality’ were Communist infiltrators. After a lengthy and notorious series of televised hearings, the charges remained unproved and McCarthy’s career collapsed with a Senate censure. The effect of this debacle was not to discredit anti-Communism so much as the Republican Party, since it had appeared too loud and unseemly in the face of what was seen as a desperate menace. It is not easy today to think oneself back to the attitude of, for example, the founders of the MPA (Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals) in 1944 when they were opposing ‘not only Communism, but the New Deal, labour unions, and civil rights organizations at a time when others connected with those causes were pulling together for the war effort, postponing their differences for the duration’. The actor John Wayne, who eventually became the MPA’s president, looked back in an interview to those days as having been a time when ‘Roosevelt was giving the world Communism’. This was the same FDR whose heroic determination to come to Britain’s aid had finally prevailed over a widespread opinion that events in Europe were none of America’s business. A future US President, the film actor Ronald Reagan, also played a considerable role in that period of Hollywood ‘purges’ and gave information regularly enough to the FBI to merit an informer’s code number: T-10.

Between 1946 and 1948 such attitudes were central toHUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee), which was Republican-led at a time when that party controlled the House of Representatives. The controversial lawyer Roy Cohn, who was described (after his death from AIDS) as ‘a native fascist, Joe McCarthy’s brains [and] the legal executioner of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg’ recalled the period vividly, since it was the making of his subsequent career.

HUAC was rampaging against everything American as apple pie, particularly the movie industry. Ten screenwriters, called The Hollywood Ten, had been cited for contempt and accused of fostering Russian propaganda in movies during the forties. President Truman denounced this stuff as a ‘witch-hunt’ and when HUAC (led by Richard Nixon) went after Alger Hiss, Truman called it a ‘red herring’.

The point Cohn was making was that, contrary to the assertions of liberal historians, the Democrat Truman was just as rabidly anti-Communist as the Republicans of HUAC. In 1947 that President had written an executive order which instituted the first loyalty-security programme in US history, thereby allowing the FBI to probe the background and ‘Americanism’ of every government employee. The ability to see ‘reds under the bed’ easily transcended party boundaries.

The Korean War between 1950 and 1953 was crucial to the hardening of the United States’ anti-Communist stance, not least because the outcome was so indecisive and seemed to Washington to be a test of unfinished business (The war ended with matters standing largely as they had in 1948, with Korea still divided into
MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief, and his forces were the main focus of the United States' military efforts. His relationship with the South Korean Government and their leader, Syngman Rhee, was often strained due to their differing visions of the war strategy. The United States sought to support South Korea in its fight against the Communist North, while Rhee's government was more focused on securing his own political position.

The United Nations Security Council authorized the formation of the United Nations Command (UNC), which was led by MacArthur. The UNC's mission was to repel the North Korean invasion and stabilize the region. The United States provided the bulk of the combat forces under MacArthur's command, along with forces from other UN member states.

The United States' intervention in Korea was not without controversy. Some criticized MacArthur for his aggressive tactics and for overestimating the strength of the UN forces. The South Korean government, too, was criticized for its poor handling of the war and for the high number of civilian casualties.

Despite these challenges, the United States ultimately succeeded in driving the North Koreans back and establishing a ceasefire in 1953. The war ended with a truce, meaning that the border between North and South Korea remains a significant political and humanitarian issue to this day.

The United States' involvement in Korea was a significant commitment of resources and was a major factor in its Cold War strategy against the Soviet Union and China. The war also led to significant political changes in the region, including the rise of Japan as a significant economic power and the establishment of new nations in Asia.
now eighteen and a veteran war correspondent, reported brilliantly from this engagement. Not long afterwards he left Korea when the war ground to a halt and turned from military stalemate to negotiations which dragged on until 1953. He was greeted as a hero back in Manila for his fearless coverage of the war, and in particular for his reports on the Philippine battalion. To help him recover, the Manila Times rewarded him with a roving commission which he used on an extensive grand tour of Southeast Asia.

Not surprisingly, Aquino left Korea convinced of China's military might and tactical skill, which had come as a complete surprise to everybody, not least to General MacArthur. Consequently he started his journey in 1952 with his ears still ringing with China American forebodings & a Time magazine article about the domino theory which foresaw Communism, unchecked, toppling state after state in Asia. Indeed, when visiting Vietnam, one of his early stops, he portentously noted 'should this state fall into the hands of the Communists the Free World might as well write off Southeast Asia as LOST.' By the end of his tour, though, he had substantially changed his mind:

[He had found out that Communism was not uniformly a bogey to Asians, quite a number of whom equated it with liberation, and that the region in general was cool to the idea of an Asian part against the Communists. What he had discovered was an Asia that feared not the Red but the West, an Asia that wanted no involvement in the East-West cold war nor in the crusades of the 'Free World', and that therefore abstained from the proposed Pacific Pact as one more plot to align it with the Americans in their battles against a rival power.]

Said a wiser Ninoy at the end of his travels:

'To the Asian, the Western argument that 'If Communism wins, Asians stand to lose their civil liberties' is meaningless. To the Asian, now jaded by the French in the numerous prisons of Vietnam, for being 'too nationalistic', civil liberties have no meaning. To the Asian, jaded by the French in Singapore for possessing intelligence and nationalistic spirit above the average, civil liberties are likewise meaningless. The Filipino is aware of, and has enjoyed, America's benevolence; but to the rest of Asia the American looks like the Frenchman, the Britishers and

the Dutchmen. To Asians, these people are the symbols of oppression. And many Asians would prefer Communism to Western oppression.'

The West—particularly the United States—made a crucial error by allowing the 'domino theory' of Communism to obscure the nationalist realities being played out in the ex-colonies of Southeast Asia. The British spent heavily in terms of lives, money, and political repercussions in order to suppress the Communist uprising in Malaya. Then in 1954 General Giap famously defeated the French army at Dien Bien Phu. Arguably the twentieth century's greatest military tactician, Vo Nguyen Giap was later to mastermind the American defeat in Vietnam together with Ho Chi Minh. The strange thing is that from 1945 onwards the Office of Strategic Services' files clearly revealed as much as anyone needed to know about these two men: how for thirty-four years Ho Chi Minh had wondered the world as an exile seeking support for the independence of a country known centuries earlier as Vietnam. The head of the US State Department's Division of South-East Asian Affairs between 1945-7, Abbé Low Moïfai, had been in Hanoi and knew Ho Chi Minh. He later testified to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 'I have never met an American, be he military, OSS, diplomat, or journalist, who had ever met Ho Chi Minh and who did not reach the same belief: that Ho Chi Minh was first and foremost a Vietnamese nationalist.' Giap was of the same mould. At the age of fourteen he had joined an anti-colonial party, was jailed by the French at eighteen, went underground at twenty-four after organizing student strikes, and at thirty-one was already a widower because his young wife had died in a French jail while serving a life sentence for 'conspiracy.' None of this had much to do with the head, and everything to do with the heart. It was not Karl Marx whom the French, and later the Americans, were up against in Indochina but sheer grief and rage and an ancient patriotism. Even a twenty-year-old Filipino journalist could see as much in 1952. It was an extraordinary mistake for the West to have made, and doubly unforgivable in that they already had in their files all the evidence they needed to correct it. But that is how hysteria is.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this period for the ensuing decades of Philippine politics and the extent to which
those politics were crucially influenced by the American fear of Communism in Southeast Asia. In the first place the Philippines dutifully—if not slavishly—cloned HUAC and came up with CAFA (Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities) which bizarrely began its own Red-baiting and witch-hunting activities just at the moment when HUAC itself was discredited in the US. Its chairman, Martin Dies, jailed for fraud, and Senator McCarthy had been hounded back into the decent obscurity of Wisconsin.

Secondly, the Vietnam War, which effectively began fewer than ten years after the Korean War ended, seems in many respects like a re-run of Korea but on a far larger and more tragic scale. This time the Philippines was involved to an extent well beyond merely supplying the 'Philcar' non-combatant unit which Marcos sent in response to President Johnson's urging. Vietnam, in fact, had a profound effect on domestic Philippine politics and on Marcos's career, but in ways which only became fully apparent afterwards.

And thirdly, it is important to realize that the old colonial-era idea of Asia for the Asians—that of Rizal, Gandhi and Sun Yat Sen—was very far from dead, and there were plenty of Filipinos like Ninoy Aquino who found inspiration in it 'To the Asian,' he wrote, 'democracy and oppression are synonymous. Democracy in Asia is almost on the 13th step of the gallows.' The irony was that in the next thirty years he was to become Marcos's only plausible political rival, to be labelled as a Communist, to be jailed under martial law and finally topple down those thirteen steps onto the tarmac at Marilla International Airport with a bullet in his brain, the victim of Marcos-era democacy.

What, then, was the nature of the Communist threat in the Philippines before 1950? The answer, with nearly half a century's hindsight, is 'negligible', if by Communism is meant classical Marxist-Leninism dedicated to the overthrow of the state and capable of mustering enough popular backing to succeed. The CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines) was founded in 1930, and from then until the sixties drew the vast majority of its support from landless tenant farmers, chiefly those of Central Luzon. These were exactly the same people who formed the bulk of the Hukbalahap guerrilla resistance to the Japanese in 1942-5, and were very far from being atheist hotheads weaned on Muscovite dogma. They were for the most part devout Catholics, dirt-poor peasants who had inherited from their parents' generation a profoundly patriotic sense that the 'real' revolution of 1898 (that of Andres Bonifacio, the true anak pwers or 'son of sweat') had still to be won. At the core of their motivation was the knowledge that they were still as landless, and hence as impotent, as they had been in the time of the Spanish. At the level of bare subsistence, remarkably little had changed for them. In 1969, the year of Marcos’s re-election as President, the writer Alfredo Saulo—who during the war had taken part in the Huks’ provisional government—had this to say about Communism in the Philippines:
perfectly well that some sort of land reform lay at the heart of any solution. He would go and cajole landowners to treat their farm workers better, then address peasant rallies in areas where there had been unrest and exhort them to patience. ("I beseech you to have more patience! I ask you to desist from resorting to the worst — by burning the sugar-cane fields and harvesting the palay [rice] at your will and then seizing all, including that which does not belong to you. You must not do that! It takes time to help you improve your condition." )

Shortly after the war intervened and the more actively motivated of these peasants joined the Huk. The land reform issue was shelved, effectively remaining unaddressed until 1954. In that year President Magsaysay passed his Agricultural Tenancy Act, which increased rice and corn tenants’ share of the crop to 70 percent but otherwise achieved little. (In 1963 President Macapagal enacted proposals for a far more sweeping series of reforms that gave the government greater powers to expropriate landed estates. But the programme was hopelessly underfunded, and dawdled until Marcos himself initiated a genuine if incomplete land reform programme that earned him a good deal of popularity at the grassroots level of Kantsulay’s folk.) At the end of the war the Huk’s betrayal by the liberating American forces was nothing short of grotesque. American commanders, having used the Huk guerrillas to mop up the Japanese in Central Luzon while complimenting them on their organization and fighting skills, promptly turned around and ordered them disarmed. The Huk could not believe their ears. Their leaders were rounded up by the same CIC (Counter Intelligence Corps) to which the brilliant agent Richard Sakakida had belonged. Part of the CIC’s brief was to ‘detect and investigate all matters pertaining to espionage, sabotage, treason, sedition, disaffection and subversive activity’. They arrested, jailed and interrogated men who, a few weeks earlier, had been their bravest allies, accusing them of being Communists and rebels. Their orders might not have come directly from MacArthur, but he no doubt applauded the motivation; his own wealthy patrician’s horror of Communism was notorious.

The CPP had kept a low ideological profile during the war in order not to complicate the straightforward issue of organizing the Huk resistance. The Party’s reaction to the Huk’s sudden betrayal by its American allies – who to compound the insult were rearming and commissioning the very USAFFE guerrillas the Huk had disdained as ‘tulay’une – was to form the PNM (Pambansang Kasarinang ng mga Magbubukid, or National Peasants’ Union) which absorbed nearly all those former Huk guerrillas who in civilian garb were ordinary landless sharecroppers. It was hardly a typically Communist act when the PNM urged its members to take part in the post-war democratic process and support the Democratic Alliance and Nacionalista parties in the 1946 elections. Six peasant-backed DA Congressmen were duly voted into Central Luzon seats, but the Liberal Party which won the election refused to allow them to take their seats in Congress and eventually had them disbarred on trumped-up charges of ‘fraud and terrorism’ at the polls. Nothing could have more stupidly guaranteed trouble from that moment on, the peasants’ faith and confidence in the democratic process evaporated. Despite President Roxas’s hasty and inept attempts at pacification, agrarian unrest became more and more widespread in Central Luzon.

What finally drove the CPP out of reformism and into active struggle were the elections of 1949 in which Marcos first won a seat. These were widely acknowledged as the bloodiest and most corrupt in Philippine history. Hundreds of people were done to death in inventive, headline-grabbing ways. The CPP and the Huk were obliged to support the candidacy of Senator Jose Laurel, ironically the ex-President of the wartime Second Republic whom MacArthur had later jailed in Japan for collaboration. This gave his rival, Vice-President Elpidio Quirino, all the excuse he needed to send in the military. Armed troops terrorized the polling stations, but even so Quirino only won by a small margin. The defeated Laurel angrily cried fraud. The entire election’s grotesque nature so enraged the electorate that there were open demands for armed revolt. Laurel only called off his own plans for an uprising after a stern warning from the US Embassy. Quirino was currently their ‘boy’ and Laurel might as well accept it with as good grace as he could muster. In 1950 the CPP leadership foolishly decided that a ‘revolutionary situation’ now existed, and formulated a two-year plan for seizing power. They were able to field some 15,000 guerrillas and believed they had at least another million sympathizers. As a show of strength and in the hopes of
winning over more peasants to their cause, several thousand Huk

carried out damaging raids on towns all over Luzon. Some towns

actually did fall into Huk control for several days at a stretch, but

nothing was consolidated because nobody had worked out in

advance what to do next. Another series of raids was planned for

targets in Manila, but in the meantime the new Defence Secretary,

Magaysay, intervened. With the intelligence resources of Edward

Lansdale’s CIA as well as his own network of informers, he

learned enough to carry out pre-emptive raids himself and arrest

105 Communist and Huk suspects, including the CPP’s entire

Politburo.

Such, in brief, is the story of how landless peasants were driven

further and further into marginalization and finally into outright

rebellion and subversion. Leaving aside questions of social justice,

does seem immensely stupid and recalcitrant of Presidents Roxas

and Quirino to have allowed things to degenerate to this extent. Yet

there was probably nothing men like that could have done.

Themselves members of the élite, they were in the grip of a histori-

cal reluctance to side with anyone other than rich landowners and

their own American ‘advisers’ This was as much an ingrained

social reaction as a conscious defence of business and property (so

much of the Philippines’ business was American owned). It was a

pattern that would be repeated endlessly all over the ‘Free World’

in the next decades, both elsewhere in Asia (Indonesia, for exam-

ple) and in practically the whole of Latin and Central America.

Beneath it lay a kind of insane logic that grew out of the United

States’ hysteria about a global Communist conspiracy. According to

this logic it was easier to drive masses of marginalized peasants

into the black-hatted ranks of ‘international Communism’ than it

was to grant their elementary demands for a reasonable living.

That way, none of the unpalatable and difficult social questions

needed to be addressed and the issue simply became a crusade.

That way, too, it could all be subsumed under the general heading

of the Cold War. It became hugely profitable for American arm-

aments industries which, in addition to supplying their domestic

armed forces, were supplying those of a dozen or more ‘friendly’

foreign countries. This specialized economy lay at the heart of the

rapidly growing ‘military-industrial complex’ which so alarmed

President Eisenhower (himself, of course, a distinguished ex-soldier)

that he took to referring to it in speeches in the late fifties and most

notably in his Farewell Address in January 1961, warning that its

rapidly growing power could reach the point when, and not the

President, determined the United States’ foreign policy. His

prophetic misgivings were amply confirmed within a few years as

men, weapons and matériel were poured into South Vietnam in

ever-increasing quantities after the CIA itself had concluded the

war was probably unwinnable. Thus in the Philippines, the needs

of America’s domestic economy led in a straight line to numberless

bloody encounters between the US-armed and -trained Philippine

Constabulary and peasant guerrillas.

However, it would be naïve and wrong to give the impression

that the United States’ strategy in Asia was based on a malevolent

self-interest, that it was simply acting quite cynically to acquire a

network of new colonies to satisfy the capitalists of Wall Street.

This, of course, was the interpretation that Communists and

Socialists favoured and which, by the time of serious student

protests against the Vietnam war, even radical Americans found all

too plausible. Such an interpretation did indeed seem obvious, but

only if one ignored the status which Communism held in the

American psyche. To successive US administrations Communism

was not a joke or just one of those quaint foreign beliefs that a

sophisticate might shrug off as autre pays, autres mœurs. It was a vir-

ulent political and moral cancer that so threatened the world as to

make necessary heroic surgery even if some of that surgery’s local

effects were regrettable. These ‘local effects’ in the Philippines, in

Vietnam and in a dozen Latin American countries were frequently

so abominable that it is hard to recount them without becoming

pomological. One has to cling manfully to the idea that American

intentions were never in origin wicked, and it is this alone that

gives the subsequent events their status of genuine tragedy. Neill

Sheehan, the Vietnam war correspondent who won the Pulitzer

Prize for bringing the Pentagon Papers to light, gives a balanced

reading of his country’s strategic thinking:

The men who ran the American imperial system – men like Dean

Acheson, who had been Truman’s principal secretary of state,

and the Dulles brothers in the Eisenhower administration, John

Foster at the State Department and Allen at the CIA – were not
naive enough to think they could export democracy to every nation on earth. The United States had established democratic governments in occupied West Germany and Japan and in its former colony of the Philippines. If American statesmen saw a choice and high strategy did not rule otherwise, they favoured a democratic state or a reformist-minded dictatorship. Their high strategy was to organize the entire non-Communist world into a network of countries allied with or dependent on the United States. They wanted a tranquil array of nations protected by American military power, recognizing American leadership in international affairs, and integrated into an economic order where the dollar was the main currency of exchange and American business was pre-eminent.

The United States did not seek colonies as such. Having overt colonies was not acceptable to the American political conscience. Americans were convinced that their imperial system did not victimize foreign peoples ‘Enlightened self-interest’ was the sole national egotism to which Americans would admit. The fashionable political commentators of the day intended more than a mere harking back to the imperial grandeur of Britain and Rome when they minted the term ‘Fag Americana’. Americans perceived their order as a new and benevolent form of international guidance. It was thought to be neither exploitative, like the nineteenth-century-style colonialism of the European empires, nor destructive of personal freedom and other worthy human values, like the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and China and their Communist allies. Instead of formal colonies, the United States sought local governments amenable to American wishes and, where possible, subject to indirect control from behind the scenes. Washington wanted native regimes that would act as surrogates for American power. The goal was to achieve the sway over allies and dependencies which every imperial nation needs to work its will in world affairs without the structure of old-fashioned colonialism.

One of the fatal flaws in this ambition is, of course, that it is quite impossible from a dependency’s point of view to tell the difference between enlightened self-interest and old-style colonialism. It is also naïve not to foresee how, with the borrowed strength of this American imperium behind them, local élites would hasten to increase their own power and upset delicate social equilibria by pursuing ancient tribal agendas: all manner of revenge, land-grabbing and victimization. But an imperium does not bother itself with such native trivia — not, that is, until brought face to face with their untrivial consequences as the United States was in Vietnam. That war may be long over, but its fall-out of unrest continues to this day all over what used to be Indochina, and with particular virulence in Cambodia.

The Philippines was the obvious place in which to base efforts to win over Asia to the American fold after the Second World War. The United States had done at least two important deals with the Philippines in exchange for its long-promised independence: a trade pact (the Bell Act and the Parity Agreement that gave American businesses huge trading advantages) and the ninety-nine-year lease on twenty-three military bases on Philippine soil, including Clark Air Base and the immense naval dockyard of Subic Bay. These bases were not yet even nominally under the control of Filipino officers, and there was never the slightest question that the United States ran them, just as it ran the Philippines’ military and intelligence services.

With all this in place and with the CIA’s limitless support behind him, the charismatic Edward Lansdale took Magsaysay under his wing to show him how to break the Huks and the Communist menace. Together they made a remarkable team. With Lansdale’s coaching Magsaysay did achieve some notable reforms. He reorganized the military and turned the Philippine Constabulary into a paramilitary service, firing the lazy and corrupt and promoting men with a sense of mission. Yet he also understood Lansdale’s insistence that no matter how efficient the armed forces were, it would never be possible to win hearts and minds unless the men in uniform were firmly disciplined. Filipinos needed to break the distrust of centuries (like that for the old guardia civil, for instance) before they could look on the military as their allies rather than as the enemy.

The eminent good sense of the theory behind this reformism has lent Magsaysay’s rule an air of radical achievement. It is largely for this that some older Filipinos still look back to his time with respect and a certain longing, as at a golden age when the old...
American-Filipino alliance really worked and the anarchy left over from the end of the Second World War was at last brought under control. After all, by 1953 the Communist ‘insurgency’ had dwindled to practically nothing and the time when Huk guerrillas could take over entire towns was long gone. What could be a greater testament to Magsaysay’s bona fides and sincerity than the Huk supremo, Luis Taruc, coming down from the hills in voluntary surrender to the President? This particular incident was a tribute to Magsaysay’s quite genuine nationalism that existed independently of his usefulness to the United States. Magsaysay’s championing of agrarian reform reflected his conviction that things would never improve for ordinary Filipinos until they were liberated from that feudal and sterile cycle of oppression, armed struggle and more repression. Even so, to cite his nobler motivations is to side with the optimists. Others, including hard-headed people like Ferdinand Marcos, had very different memories of Magsaysay’s reign.

Among the things they remembered were the so-called ‘Nenita’ death squads organized by Colonel Napoleon Valeriano of the Philippine Constabulary. Valeriano’s ruthless efficiency confirmed Lansdale’s observations and the CIA man took a fatherly interest in this handsome young killer. Valeriano and Marcos went all the way back to high school, where they had been classmates. Like Ferdinand, he had been interned by the Japanese after the Fall of Bataan, but unlike his friend he had escaped from the camp. He managed to reach Australia and join up with MacArthur’s command, where he fell under the spell of the General’s rabid anti-Communism. Half a dozen years later his ‘Nenita’ squads specialized in meting out to suspected Communists the sort of memorable deaths calculated to encourage others to desert the ideological fold. With the Philippine Constabulary’s CIA-supported intelligence they terrorized much of Central Luzon and were frequently dispatched to other parts of the archipelago to pacify trouble-spots and instil some righteous fear. On Lansdale’s advice these death squads were upgraded to death battalions, trained by JUSMAG (Joint US Military Advisory Group) and given a virtually free hand to wage whatever war they felt like against whomever they wished. In Central Luzon, especially, Valeriano’s ‘Nenita’ battalions held peasants in the grip of a terror they had not known even under the Japanese. This was one prong of the Lansdale-Magsaysay strategy.

The other prong was image-building the Quiroga regime for the benefit of all those outside the Philippines who knew nothing of terror in remote provinces. The CIA was determined to ensure that the 1951 congressional elections would not be a repeat of 1949, which had been widely seen as a complete travesty of the democratic process. This led to the importing of an early version of a professional spin-doctor in the person of a New York lawyer and PR man named Gabe Kaplan. Under the cover of such CIA fronts as the Asia Foundation, and aided by a team of young Filipino CIA recruits, Kaplan went around the nation’s Rotary Clubs preaching the absolute necessity for free and fair elections. Like Lansdale, he was a character straight out of a novel: a likely model for one of those sixties’ Ross Thomas heroes like Clinton Shartelle in The Searchers Whitapr who were always being sent off by ‘Langley’ to some steamy country to ‘pull a shitty’ in the presidential election. (Thomas had served in the Philippines during the war and retained a keen interest in the country, as his later novel Out on the Rim showed.) Certainly Kaplan was good at his job, and with the middle-class support he was building up all over the Philippines Lansdale and the CIA set up NAMFREL (National Movement for Free Elections), the organization that was to play such a vital role in the snap election of 1986 and the ousting of the Marcoses. Colonel Valeriano himself was in command of one of the NAMFREL detachments sent to watch the polling in 1951. The outcome was, as intended, adjudged a masterpiece of democratic fair play and was prominently billed as such by the US press. The whole election with its appearance of scrupulousness had the equally calculated effect of winning over people of centrist and middle-class politics who had recently been wavering leftwards in sympathy for the Hukas and peasants on the receiving end of ‘Nenita’ tactics.

By 1953 the CIA–Magsaysay alliance was such that the outcome of the November presidential election was guaranteed. The Magsaysay-for-President Movement had been bolstered by the traditional official US blessing of laudatory articles in Time, Collier’s Magazine and Reader’s Digest about the one man who could maintain American-style democracy in the Philippines. Raul Manglapus (who went on to become Magsaysay’s Foreign Secretary and, more
than three decades later, Cory Aquino's too) composed a hugely popular 'Magsaysay Mambo' to whose catchy beat voters might dance to the polls. (It was to be resurrected as one of the anthems of the 1986 'EDSA Revolution'.) The CIA, meanwhile, had a fallback position in case Quirino's liberals resorted to their 1949 tactics of murder and mayhem. They arranged for military compounds and radio stations throughout the country to be occupied by teams of Lansdale's Filipinos. In addition, a few days before polling began some US destroyers and a small aircraft carrier casually hove up over the horizon and dropped anchor in Manila Bay as a reminder of what might happen unless things went the way Lansdale had organized. It was pure Ross Thomas. Magsaysay won in a landslide.

The CIA's ability to ensure the election of their anointed candidate in a strategically vital 'independent' Asian country was impressive. More revealing, though, was the way they tailored their aims to coincide uncannily with those of the most powerful families in the country. The old ilustrado class, for the most part, saw absolutely eye to eye with these new Americans, as so many of them had back in 1898. It was perfectly predictable that Lansdale, like MacArthur before him, should have used a Del Monte pineapple estate as one of the retreats where he formulated his various plans and carried out briefing sessions. One of the journalists who had been co-opted onto the Magsaysay campaign had been Ninoy Aquino himself, who was currently dating the Cojuangco family's daughter Corazon, whom he had known since they were both nine years old. (They married a year later in October 1954, the same year the Marcoses were wed.) Soon after the election Ninoy proposed to Magsaysay that he could do with a publicity boost to cement his victory and show that it had not been founded entirely on skilfully manipulated (and foreign-backed) hot air, as some cynics were suggesting. Aquino volunteered to track down the legendary Huk leader, Luis Taruc, and talk him into coming down from his hills, and publicly surrender to Magsaysay in person. If it could out of hiding and surrendering to Magsaysay in person. If it could, he thought it would be a great propaganda victory for the President, be done it would be a great propaganda victory for the President, and greatly help his personal credentials as the man who had so courageously reported on the Philippine battalion in Korea and become an Asian nationalist, Ninoy made contact with Taruc. The Huk leader's dignified response to the proposition proved as nothing else that he was a Filipino to the core, a constitutionalist second, and a Communist a very long way third: 'I am a Filipino first and last,' he said, while admitting he hadn't supported Magsaysay's candidacy because he thought the man was 'dangerously inclined to the American imperialists'. But since the people had voted for him, no pupils had to be respected. 'It is for us to accept their verdict.'

After elaborate arrangements, Taruc agreed to surrender to Magsaysay. At the last moment, though, Ninoy's personal coup was thwarted when Colonel Valeriano popped up out of the undergrowth and arrested Taruc so that for publicity purposes this much-wanted man could be brought in by the Armed Forces of the Philippines instead of by a cocky young journalist. Ninoy was understandably mollified. He went home, wrote his scoop and burst into tears. He need not have worried. Everybody of any consequence knew that Taruc's surrender had been all his work.

If this interweaving of American post-war global strategy with Philippine domestic politics makes for a complicated story, it does explain how by 1953 it could have brought together such disparate elements as Edward Lansdale, Ramon Magsaysay, Napoleon Valeriano, Ferdinand Marcos and Ninoy Aquino. This is not to imply that a single conspiracy connected them, nor even that they necessarily liked one another. The unifying factor was the American cause, which was broad enough for each to maintain a private agenda on the side. Whatever else, it hints at a feature of Filipino society that remains as significant today as it was in 1953: the sheer interconnectedness of the comparatively small circle of oligarchs who ran -- and still run -- the Philippines. Through marriage, through contiguity of business and social interests and through the unspoken knowledge that they swim or sink together, they have everything in common.

It is quite possible that Marcos already knew Lansdale before Jose Laurel (who before the war had acquitted Ferdinand of the Nalundasan murder) called in the debt and asked him to represent his old schoolmate Valeriano. This came about because of some temporary rejigging of alliances during the 1949 elections
Valeriano had found himself in Negros Province trying to oppose Governor Rafael Lacson’s private army. The Governor was using his forces to ensure victory for the Lopez-Quirino faction in his province, and Valeriano’s men had agreed to a midnight meeting with an opponent of the Governor’s. Unprepared for trouble, the Nenita squad was jumped by the Governor’s men and trounced. Although Valeriano himself was not in personal command of the squad, he was held responsible, considerably embarrassing the Nacionalista cause when he was charged with sedition. The Nacionalista party chief, Jose Laurel, called on Ferdinand Marcos to defend Valeriano against the charges. Marcos won the case.16

From that moment there is no question that Ferdinand had a first-hand link with Asia’s most powerful CIA officer. As we know, he had already been to Washington in 1947 to negotiate the veterans’ back-pay, and through his wartime alliances would have had serviceable contacts with both the Pentagon and the State Department. Adding the CIA to this would have made him a man with connections to the highest places in the US Government. In the next dozen or so years he took good care to cement these relationships and to ensure he put the right people in his debt. This led to his tacit endorsement as ‘America’s boy’ in the 1965 election. And that, in turn, produced an interesting dilemma for Marcos when President Lyndon Johnson called on him to send a token fighting force to help the US cause in Vietnam. The demands of Philippine nationalism reunited him to distance himself from all appearance of being the White House’s lap dog; on the other hand he owed his presidency at least indirectly to the White House and now these debts, too, were being called in. Apart from that, he was close to the two men who had probably done more than anyone else to shape the present strategic entity of South Vietnam: Edward Lansdale and Napoleon Valeriano. For this pair had gone on to greater things.

To describe Lansdale as a character out of a book was strictly correct. Well before the sixties Edward G. Lansdale had become a myth, having appeared in Graham Greene’s 1955 Saigon novel, The Quiet American and then (perfunctorily disguised as ‘Edwin B. Hillandale’) in the best-selling novel The Ugly American.17 This last was essentially a political tract designed to convince Americans that they could wrest Asia from Communism if only they could find a way of getting Asians to co-operate. Asians were only superficially

wily; they were highly susceptible through the Achilles’ heel of their hopeless superstitionism. To bend Asians to the American will, therefore, would require learning their local language well enough to convince the natives that Americans were essentially decent and their intentions honourable. This rapport could then be followed up with some harmless deception here and there, accompanied by judicious handouts of candy. Forty years on, the book still makes fascinating reading with the tragic retrospective light of Vietnam flickering across its pages. For in its study of Hillandale/Lansdale it emphasizes precisely those ‘psy-war’ tactics that were the real man’s trademark. Having just helped Magayon overcome Huk Communism in the Philippines and install Pax Americana in the form of a paragon of Asian democracy, Hillandale is posted to Sarkhan (clearly Vietnam). He has a diploma from the ‘Chungking School of Occult Sciences’ – referred to now and then as the ‘Occult Sciences School’, whose initials ought to have struck any reader. Once in Sarkhan he discerns how political decisions there depend to a large extent on augury and superstition. He uses his own skills in fortune-telling to convince the Prime Minister that he is the world’s greatest astrologer, duly influencing him in day-to-day decisions and thereby imperceptibly taking charge of the country’s political direction.

This, in essence, is what actually happened. As soon as Magayon was safely installed in Malacañang, Lansdale returned to Washington to a hero’s welcome in acknowledgement of the mystique that now surrounded him. He was seen as having single-handedly turned back the tide of Communism in an Asian country and brought an ally firmly back into the fold One down and a long list to go; but it was a splendid start. As the CIA’s expert on counter-terrorism and guerrilla warfare, Lansdale was next dispatched hurriedly to Vietnam in 1954 when the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu had set ‘alarm bells ringing all over Washington’, as he himself put it. Historians like Neil Sheehan believe that South Vietnam was really Lansdale’s own creation, since the action he took in his first two years in Saigon prevented Ho Chi Minh from following up the French collapse with a sweeping victory throughout the country. By any standards Lansdale was a remarkable man, extremely likeable and warm. (He is remembered fondly by a celebrated Filipino leftist and Marcos opponent who, as a child, lived
near Lansdale’s compound in Quezon City. This man recalls Lansdale’s generosity with lemonade and the sort of American delicacies that brightened up the lean post-war years: Babe Ruths and all-day suckers.) Lansdale was also oddly free of Foggy Bottom theory and dogma in that he artlessly and sincerely believed that Communism was doomed in Asia as long as it was opposed by a mixture of counter-intelligence and enlightened government—dirty tricks and Babe Ruths, in other words. Once he had decided that America should back the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, Lansdale flew to Manila and talked Magsaysay into letting him have Colonel Valeriano as his security adviser in Vietnam. In this way Valeriano began his international career as a killer.

Through Lansdale, Valeriano became a favourite of CIA covert operations specialists William Colby and Theodore Shackley, moved on from Saigon to train Shackley’s Cuban Brigade for the Bay of Pigs, then back to Indochina as chief ‘gook-zapper’ in Colby’s Operation Phoenix. The Phoenix Programme was set up in 1969 in South Vietnam as an instrument of terror. The programme in effect eliminated the cumbersome category of "civilian"; It gave the GVN [Government of South Vietnam], and initially the American troops as well, licence and justification for the arrest, torture or killing of anyone in the country, whether or not the person was carrying a gun. It was simply an extension of the old ‘Nenita’ tactics. By then, what was seen as the magic formula Lansdale had invented and pioneered in the Philippines had become the CIA’s standard operating procedure elsewhere in the Third World—not merely in Vietnam but in Indonesia, Cuba and Chile. In each case the operations were carried out by the same team of Americans and Filipinos who had created Magsaysay.

Magsaysay’s identification with the CIA’s pragmatic approach to a global crusade that transcended mere national politics was shared by his successor, Carlos Garcia, despite Garcia’s famous ‘Filipino First Policy’ favouring Filipino business. In 1957 the ‘Permeas’ rebellion against President Sukarno was under way in Indonesia. Sukarno’s increasingly virulent anti-Western stance was inevitably labelled ‘Red-leaning’, and a group of Indonesian colonels detected to the Philippines. Once there they sought refuge, and according to Ninoy Aquino President Garcia asked him if the exiles could be accommodated at the Hacienda Luisita, the huge estate in Tarlac which Ninoy’s in-laws, the Cojuangcoos, had lately acquired. He arranged for the renegade Indonesians to have sanctuary there as well as a training camp for anti-Sukarno subversion (American arms were already being supplied from the Philippines to rebels in Indonesia). ‘We even set up an elaborate radio network so the colonels could contact their own people,’ Ninoy testified.

To look back now at this period from the century’s end is a deeply melancholy business, and all the more so because the collapse of ‘world Communism’ did not come about through the agency of a latter-day Lansdale. It was less that good triumphed than that evil fizzled. What strikes one about the great crusade, then, is its awesome waste. By 1969, when the war in Vietnam had become deeply unpopular in the United States itself, one answer to the question What was it all for? was supplied by the US Senate in an Armed Services Committee Report signed by Senators Stuart Symington, Stephen M. Young and Daniel K. Inouye:

The American people have lived with fears of a Soviet attack for some quarter of a century, ever since World War II, and have expended a thousand billion dollars on defence in recognition of this possible danger. These gigantic expenditures have been detrimental to many other plans, programmes and policies which now also appear vitally important to the security and well-being of this Nation. The American people now know that many billions of these dollars spent on defence have been wasted.

Commenting on this document, the independent investigative reporter I. F. Stone wrote in I. F. Stone’s Weekly:

The truth is that we have spent a trillion dollars since World War II on a gigantic hoax. The US emerged from World War II, as from World War I, virtually unscathed, enormously enriched and—with the atom bomb—immeasurably more powerful than any nation on the earth had ever been. The notion that it was in
danger of attack from a devastated Soviet Union with 25 million war dead, a generation behind it in industrial development, was a wicked fantasy. But this myth has been the mainstay of the military and the war machine. It all seemed to confirm Eisenhower’s gloomy forebodings about the autonomous nature of the military-industrial complex. Yet as little as eight years earlier, when Lansdale’s highly secret stick-and-carrot attempts to win over Vietnam had not yet degenerated into full-scale war, the ‘wicked fantasy’ had probably not been that clear to anyone in the United States. In his recent memoir Gore Vidal, who once referred to himself with belligerent modesty as ‘America’s biographer’, wrote that when he checked the notes he had taken while hobnobbing with his old family acquaintance, John F. Kennedy, he was surprised to discover ‘how little understanding any of us had of what was actually going on at the time’.

We had been carefully conditioned to believe that the gallant, lonely USA was, on every side, beleaguered by the Soviet Union, a monolithic Omnipotence; we now know that they were weak and reactive while we were strong and provocative. Once Jack [JFK] had inherited the make-believe war against Communism in general and the Soviet in particular, he proceeded, unknown to all but a few, to change the rules of the game. He was about to turn Truman’s pseudo-war into a real war. He was going to fight, somewhere, anywhere. Cuba had done wrong. At Vienna, Laos had been marginalized as a place of no essential interest to us or to the Soviet. Yet in June and July of 1961, Jack had called for a $3.5 billion military appropriation to deal with what he termed the ‘Berlin Crisis’.

Three months earlier, in Arthur Schlesinger’s account, Kennedy ‘saw [Soviet diplomat] Gromyko . . . took him to a bench in the Rose Garden, and observing that too many wars had arisen from miscalculation said that Moscow must not misjudge the American determination to stop aggression in Southeast Asia.’ But as Minsky and Stonefield pointed out, ‘What Kennedy could never grasp was that the United States was playing the aggressive role.

American policy makers, then as now, habitually used American “defensive” rhetoric to disguise intervention. Such was the power of the United States’ own thought-control it is likely that few Americans ever quite grasped why, for example, much of the rest of the world perceived the ring of US bases on friendly soil surrounding the USSR as an aggressive deployment. From these were dispatched daily flights by Strategic Air Command bombers loaded with nuclear weapons targeted on Soviet sites and cities, missions that were always—mercifully—aborted before it was too late. The introduction to the 1955 film starring James Stewart, Strategic Air Command, hopes to disguise this military aggressiveness by pretending that nuclear bombers are defensive aircraft. Against logos of screaming eagles clutching thunderbolts and serried ranks of vast, gleaming B-36s the text scrolls ‘In these skies of peace, the nation is building its defence’.

Secrets and realpolitik notwithstanding, the United States’ source of public moral capital has always been as the defender of freedoms and the champion of ethical governance (as witness a current preoccupation with its own interpretation of what human rights should be, especially in Asian countries like China). And yet the American Revolution was the first great anti-colonial movement, which casts an ironic pall over US foreign policy in the Philippines and elsewhere. As Albert Kahn noted, ‘The very concept of defending a Free World that included a fascist Spain, military dictatorships in Latin America, and a feudal oligarchy on Formosa [Taiwan] placed a certain strain on credibility’. The Marcos era fell squarely into this squalid moral gulf between good intentions in the White House and peasant-hunting in Central Luzon. One of the side effects of this was that disillusionment with Marcos, when it finally came, provoked Washington and much of the American press to cries of outrage. Marcos had been a ‘fake’ from the first, a greedy self-seeker who beneath the guise of . . . (but we have heard all this before). Yet the United States cannot reasonably have it both ways. From the time of President Magaysay in the early fifties, Marcos had espoused America’s broad strategic aims as perfectly as he later fulfilled US requirements for an acceptably reformist and basically amenable Filipino President. If then, like Diem in Vietnam (who had to be assassinated, probably by Valeriano), Marcos turned out to be his own man after all, that was
the Americans' look-out. It was pure hypocrisy to meddle in another nation's internal affairs while protesting benevolence, and then to complain when what they mistook for a loyal puppet turned around and bit them in the leg while dextrously removing their wallet.

All this goes to show that when his more judgemental biographers referred to Marcos as having 'plotted his way to the presidency', the image of Machiavellian cunning and unprincipled opportunism is the least interesting aspect of the story. By the year of his marriage, sheer chance, his own forensic skill and a foreign power's global intentions had given him access to the centre of a stage on which, over the next thirty years, the fortunes of the whole of Asia would be played out. This was surely what Imelda Marcos meant when she was overheard in the mid-fifties saying of her husband 'he is already a statesman, you know', at a time when he was a mere Congressman. Thanks to his Washington connections, he was already thinking like a statesman.

This is not to deny that cunning and opportunism - even ruthlessness - played a part in his ascent, just as they inevitably would in anyone else's winning the presidency of the Philippines. But his main ploy had been to make his own ambitions mesh with those of the United States. If the United States, as we have been assured, had the entirely praiseworthy and unminister purpose of resisting the global spread of Communism, then Marcos can hardly be blamed for having supported this aim. Perhaps after all he did show a streak of political genius in never having been fooled by the granting of Philippine independence into thinking the United States would now withdraw from active interference with its former colony's domestic politics, so long as they did not conflict with American business and strategic interests. It is likely, for instance, that President Quirino never understood why, after his despicable 1949 campaign, he was going to have to be dumped; that the United States had bigger fish to fry in Asia than keeping him in power after he had outlived his usefulness. It was precisely this that Marcos perceived. Far from being newly independent, the Philippines was about to become freshly dependent, this time for global strategic reasons. The US bases would become increasingly important. This was the new post-war realism. Thereafter, in his quest for the presidency, Marcos was artful in knowing how to play off this knowledge against the prevailing spirit of Asian nationalism. Of course he was seduced by his proximity to the real power of a man like Lansdale: anyone would have been who could feel the erotic charge that drives all politicians towards its source. Against this he had to balance the fact that in his innermost self he was still less America's boy than he was an anak ti Batac, a son of Batac, a dissenting Ilocano brought up on stories of heroic patriotism. Eros was destined to win, as it generally does; but the struggle made for a lively and inventive career. When in 1957 President Macapagal was killed in a plane crash with his reputation intact as 'the champion of the masses', Marcos would have known that with luck and pluck it was only a matter of time before he became the next 'America's boy'.

Communists, nationalists, and America's Boy 187
While waiting to present his credentials to President Macapagal in Manila on 1 September 1963, the newly appointed British ambassador, John Addis, wrote one of his regular weekly letters home to his sister Robina. Then forty-nine, he was a career diplomat and a China specialist who had spent the post-war years in Nanjing and Beijing. He was posted to Manila after two years as ambassador to Laos from 1960-2. One wonders how he felt about leaving the Asian mainland where his main interests lay. He was a fluent Chinese speaker and had got to grips with Lao, besides which his private passion was for Chinese porcelain, on which he had always coveted: that of ambassador to Beijing (1970-4). Addis’s presence in Manila thus overlapped the transition from Macapagal’s presidency to that of Marcos, and he was there throughout Ferdinand’s first term of office. By that time he had acquired many emotional ties with the Philippines and went on maintaining cordial – if diplomatic – relations with Marcos until 1983, the year of Addis’s death. Long after he had been posted away, he kept visiting his friends in Manila and writing astute letters about the political scene there. From a historian’s point of view his occasional private conversations with Marcos – the last was in 1982 – provide some idea of the diplomatic world’s attitudes towards the President and his administration.

Sir John Mansfield Addis KCMG was very much a man of his class and time (born 1914, Rugby and Oxford). Neither he nor his sister Robina married. He wrote to her at their family home outside Tunbridge Wells informative, mildly witty letters whose tone seldom varied from an affectionate urbanity. ‘Dear Bina…love from John’ they went, week after week (at moments of excitement twice a week). They were a prolongation of the sort of Sunday letter home he would have been obliged to write when he was first sent off to boarding school, the dutifulness long since become a discipline and softened still further into a reassuring habit. They gave little away about the private John Addis; occasionally a light, mellow homesickness for Tunbridge Wells, nothing whatever about his own erotic affections. For those, one has to read between the lines or talk to people who remember him. For a description of his physical presence one can rely on the man himself, touchingly under few illusions:

I have seen myself on television. It was a shattering experience, and I had to go away after less than a minute. The long face and heavy head, quite bald except for some touches of white, the bad posture, and most odious of all the rich fruity voice, affectedly upper-class. Oh dear! Never again! People must love me very much for my inner qualities!

The letter he was writing to Robina in September 1963 contained the sharp observations of a travelled man with alert political and social antennae. Manila was still strange to him. So far, he had been unimpressed by the leafy and exclusive enclave of Forbes Park, which was full of grandees and his diplomatic kin and kind. ‘First impressions of the rich upper class are that they have exhausted all their natural appetites, bored, artificial, craving novelty.’ In those days his own house was safely far from Forbes Park (where the current residence is). It was downtown on Manila Bay, on the border between the old residential districts of Ermita and Malate which were classy in a quite different way. Even then there were still some aging Ermitenos who could recall the local Spanish dialect once peculiar to those few blocks bordering the bay. Addis’s house was...
pretty and stood in a lovely garden with (again, in those days) a view of the sea. If his first impressions of Manila’s élite had been lukewarm, Addis was more enthusiastic about the ebullient freedom (many would say licence) of the national press.

One good thing that goes on here is the lively debate in the newspapers on matters of current importance, often critical of the Government. One of the issues discussed is the attendance of the Filipinos at the ‘Games of the Newly Emerged Forces’ organized by Indonesia. One commentator urged the Government to refuse to attend on the ground that attendance would be a departure from the Government’s ‘hard anti-red line of no dealings with the Communists’ – i.e. they would be compromised politically by playing basketball against North Vietnam or by racing against North Korea! I feel as baffled as I would be in arguing about apartheid with a South African – where does one begin when the gulf is so wide and there is no visible point of contact? I feel a vague uneasiness over this ‘hard line’ – hard lines which have no give may break suddenly. But there are no signs of any cracks. The two political parties stand for nothing except the organization of power and its benefits. The labour unions, as in the US, are non-political welfare organizations. Even such issues as land reform and the Philippines’ relations with other Asian nations are not matters for political debate. They seem a very immature, not yet emerged, spiritually, from their colonial status, less aware even than the Lao.

Addis’s bafflement at Filipino/American attitudes to Communism was, of course, very much a European’s reaction. In addition, as a scholarly man who knew and loved China, he was fascinated by that vast country’s painful political evolution as it tried to reconstruct itself into a modern state. In 1947 he had been First Secretary and Head of Chancery in Nanjing, the Nationalist capital city so brutally sacked by the Japanese in 1937, and had moved to Beijing in 1949 when Mao’s Communists took over. The period in which he was now writing fell roughly midway between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and was one of intense ideological debate. Addis, though of course not himself a Communist, watched avidly and sympathetically from Manila as best he could.

His comment on the lack of newspaper debate concerning the Philippines’ relations with the rest of Asia is odd, for he had arrived at a tense political moment in this respect, and particularly from the point of view of a British diplomat. The Philippines had an outstanding territorial claim on North Borneo based on a historical family link between the Sultan of Sulu (in the extreme south of the archipelago) and the Sultan of Brunei. According to this the Sultan of Brunei, back in the late seventeenth century, had either leased or ceded North Borneo to his relative in Sulu, and the latter’s presumed – but highly doubtful – allegiance to the Spanish Philippines allegedly made this territory part of the modern Philippine Republic. Until 1963 North Borneo was part of the remaining British Empire then rapidly being dismantled. In that year it was renamed Sabah and, together with Sarawak, incorporated into the new state of Malaysia. This did not prevent the Philippines from prosecuting its claim, however, and President Macapagal formed an unlikely alliance with President Sukarno of Indonesia. Together they proposed that, instead of the new country of Malaysia, a sort of super-confederation of states should be formed. Comprising Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia, it was to be called ‘Maphilindo’. By the time John Addis arrived in Manila this grandiose fantasy was already beginning to founder, and Britain was seen as largely to blame because it was siding quite unashamedly with Malaysia, its former colony. This was not mere caprice on Britain’s part. The formation of Malaysia presented an acute problem of demography. With Singapore, but without Sabah and its Malay population, there would have been a large overall Chinese majority in the new nation. Britain was unwilling to grant independence to a union quite so obviously foredoomed to racial unrest, so it took Malaysia’s part. His country’s sudden unpopularity with Filipinos who supported the Sabah claim was brought home to Addis when his residence was picketed by furious protesters. As he wrote to Robina:

We now have photographs of the little demonstration outside my gate the other evening. Two of the placards read ‘Britishers we shall ax and hammer you’ and ‘White monkeys go home’. I particularly treasure the latter.
A fortnight later he wrote:

There is a very puzzling political situation here, and I don’t see my way through it at all. Politically, the Philippine leaders are very immature. They have preferred not to leave the nursery in which the Americans brought them up. The President, Macapagal, has, I think, some inclinations to be a demagogue and an autocrat, though not the strength of personality of Soekarno. Most Filipinos (sic) assume so strongly that they belong to the West that it is a pleasing adventure for them, no more, to make a little excursion with fraternization with Asian neighbours — like the little rich boy who plays with the children in the street and finds it exciting just because he doesn’t belong to them and has the security of the mansion behind him. I think it was in this spirit that Macapagal entered into his flirtation with Soekarno, perhaps also envying Soekarno’s autocracy and certainly seeing his new role in Asian affairs as a valuable addition to his persona in internal politics, which is what matters most to him. But I don’t think he has realized how far his behaviour over Malaysia has in fact committed him to his new friends and furthered their interests and separated him from his old position in the lap of the Americans. Until last week there was a chance that he would pull back before it was too late. But on Friday, with his full approval, the Foreign Secretary made a statement of policy which commits them further to the pro-Indonesian anti-Malayan line. It was incidentally cruelly and clumsily anti-British. It is a measure of their immaturity and irresponsibility that when I went through the text of the Foreign Secretary’s speech with him yesterday morning pointing out where it was untrue and unjust, his reaction was to laugh and say genially: “Yes, of course you’re right, it wasn’t so, don’t pay attention to that, this was just for internal consumption, to meet criticisms, it was just journalism.” I feel there is nothing to get hold of. With General Phoumi I at least knew I was dealing with a snake..."

(A footnote to the Sabah claim — which is still alive today — is Imelda Marcos’s assertion that some years later Ferdinand offered the United States a base on Sabah for as long as they wanted, in exchange for their help in getting Sabah. If so, Marcos may have intended renegotiating the open-ended status of this proposed lien on Filipino territory once the deal was safely in the bag. Yet by then the whole scheme was surely quite unrealistic.)

It is interesting to watch a middle-aged career diplomat settle somewhat wearily into a new posting, especially when he does not yet realize he will come to love the country deeply. By 10 November Addis had begun Tagalog lessons, which in those days must have been a rarity for any diplomat, especially an ambassador. He reported that “the mental effort is terrible” after Chinese and Lao. Inevitably, his cultural comparisons were with those Asian countries he knew well and he found himself shocked by the living conditions of the poor in Manila and began an informal archive of newspaper cuttings of various horror stories he came across. He was particularly distressed by the tale of a poor mad mother of three children whose charred skeleton was found, still chained, in the remnants of her house. He was probably unaware that in 1912, referring to Spanish colonial times, an American doctor had reported: “There was no governmental provision for the insane, and it was no uncommon sight to see these unfortunate tied to a stake under a house or in a yard with a dog-chain, and it often happened that during fires, which are so frequent in towns built of nipa, they were burned because no one thought to release them...”

Addis’s judgement that the two main political parties of the day (Liberals and Nacionalistas) stood for nothing “except the organization of power and its benefits” was not far wrong. This had an acute bearing on domestic political events that were unfolding in Manila beneath his eyes and which were about to take Ferdinand Marcos from being a Liberal Senate President to winning the presidency of the Philippines as a Nacionalista. Even before the 1961 presidential campaign Macapagal and Marcos, both Liberals, had come to a working verbal agreement. This was that in exchange for Ferdinand’s support and that of the Ilocano bloc (the so-called Solid North) which he could muster, Macapagal promised to limit his
presidency (if he won) to a single term of office and then in 1965 to throw his own weight behind Ferdinand’s candidacy.

As early as 1964 Marcos was makings it clear he had not forgotten this quid pro quo ‘Of course I want to be President of the Philippines,’ he told an interviewer. ‘Yet it soon became obvious that Macapagal was going to renge on his promise and stand again. In a memorable symbolic coup Marcos deserted the Liberals and joined the Nacionalistas as their Opposition candidate, and as such he subsequently fought and won the 1965 campaign. This “defection” was something else for his foreign biographers seized on later as evidence for a radical lack of principle on his part, for self-interested turncoatism. That was not only unjust, it was wrong. Once again it was an assessment made on the basis of a cultural misconception. The fact is that principle (in the sense of a party—ideology as opposed to an individual’s sense of honour) is indeed rare in Filipino politics. The reason is not that Filipinos are inherently less honourable than anyone else, but because the political system they have inherited from their peculiar history of mongrel cultural influences does not depend on party loyalty in the way a European or even an American might understand it. Political parties in the Philippines are loose aggregations of men and women interested in their own preference. The party is seldom more than a convenient horse to carry a candidate on to personal glory. If it looks like weakening or becomes suddenly lame, the animal is swapped without more ado for one that looks sturdier. If this changeover takes place in mid-stream, so much the better for the delighted spectators.

This state of affairs is possible because so little Philippine politics is fought on the basis of a coherent platform of issues. It is far more about personalities, which is why so many showbiz people wind up in positions of power. (As of writing, the country’s current Vice-President is Joseph Estrada, an ex-action-movie star.) If a candidate adopts a particular issue it will usually be because he or she thinks it will be a vote-winner rather than because it stems from a deeply held conviction. Much of the real emotion of an election campaign, and most of whatever wit or originality a candidate can muster, will go into assassinating the characters of the other candidates — even occasionally the candidates themselves. In this respect the model for the Filipino electoral process is more the American than the European style. It is not an electorate that would hold still for the lengthy disquisitions on ideology and policy that, for example, characterize a French campaign. In the local context, therefore, Ferdinand’s swapping parties was not dishonourable. Quite the contrary: once he had seen that Macapagal was not going to honour his own promise he had little choice but to become the Opposition candidate. It was a gamble, of course. To desert the incumbent’s majority party for that of the minority was obviously risky. He was no stranger to taking risks, but he was quite as shrewd as he was brave. His reckoning of his chances included the fact that the Nacionalista Speaker pro tempore of the House was now his cousin-by-marriage. Danieling Romualdez, the very man who had once escorted the Rose of Taboran back to Manila from her penurious exile in wartime Leyte. Danieling was his bridge to the Opposition whose candidate he was about to become. Imelda was overjoyed. ‘He has come home,’ she said of her husband, implying that his being a Liberal had always been a bone of contention between them. At last he was part of her family in politics as well. She now threw all her energies into campaigning for him.

The 1965 presidential campaign was the first in the Philippines to rely on up-to-date techniques, especially radio and TV. In order for the Marcos camp to ensure the blanket coverage it wanted it was decided to recruit Fernando Lopez as Ferdinand’s running mate. Lopez was a member of one of the most powerful families in the country: a typical oligarch of the kind Marcos would turn on and savage some years later. In 1965, though, he needed the exposure the Lopez family’s nationwide TV and radio network could give him. Initially, all attempts to cajole Lopez into running for Vice-President failed. So Ferdinand sent Imelda.

Imelda did not rely on up-to-date techniques to get Lopez to change his mind. Just as she had years before in Mayor Lacson’s office, she wept, she pleaded. And just as it had worked then, it worked now. Lopez agreed. Thereafter, Imelda Marcos became probably the hardest-working campaigner in any election in the nation’s history. She had already gathered around her a nucleus of personal aides: twenty-five young women from the wealthiest families, all dressed in blue. They had started by being known as the ‘Friends of Imelda’ but they soon became famous as the ‘Blue Ladies’. It was one of her private triumphs that she managed to
turn these elegant members of the seigneurial class into gofers who vied with each other for her favours and periodically smacked beneath her slights. The Rose of Tacloban was well on her way to recouping her pound of flesh and deciding that a mere pound wouldn’t quite cover the debt.

There was scarcely a town in the archipelago she did not visit in the company of hand-picked teams of these courtiers. She travelled by helicopter, by leaky boat, in jeeps bouncing over rutted tracks, even by ox cart. She gave the same speech twenty times a day. She shook hands until her own was numb; she kissed babies until her lips bled. And, of course, she sang. She sang herself hoarse. She took the trouble to learn songs in the appropriate dialect, and the locals were spellbound at the sight of this astounding, gloriously appurtenant who seemed to have descended from another world, belting out Ilocano love songs or Waray ballads or Tagalog ditties. (On one visit she passed close to Kansulay, and several villagers went to the rally. ‘She was very... feminine,’ said one judiciously towards the end of the Marcos era.) She went on campaigning even when so exhausted she was barely conscious. Yet she always contrived to look radiant, as the press faithfully kept pointing out. Ferdinand had coached her well, but something else was taking over—something he had perhaps not bargained for: a natural politician’s instinct as well as a genuine warmth in her touch to which people responded. In many ways it was she who set the tone of the Marcos campaign, and there are still people who swear it was she who won him the presidency. (They say three Is won in 1965: Iglesia, Imelda and Ilocanos.) Nothing could better illustrate the distance she had come in the last half-dozen years or so since her nervous breakdown. She was a person who had found her métier.

Macapagal replied with jingles and slogans. Marcos followed suit. By present-day standards ‘Forward the Filipino!’ and ‘Let this Nation be Great Again!’ may seem anodyne enough, but at the time they struck a chord and at least the sentiments expressed made the name of Ferdinand’s Nacionalista party sound plausible. He had stolen a march by commissioning Hartzell Spence to write For Every Tear a Victory. Macapagal, dogged by bad luck (one of his authors died) came up very late with a biography of himself modestly called The Incorruptible. On the grounds that any publicity is good publicity Marcos seemed not to mind that Spence’s book was savaged by several critics. It had served its purpose.

In tone, the Spence book ‘offended and antagonized, was rude, (defaming) a people to glorify one man.’ It painted the Filipinos ‘smaller and blacker to make Marcos look bigger and whiter.’ Many were antagonized by its patently patronizing air, with Marcos praised not for being a ‘good Filipino’ but for being ‘almost like an American’ (In a candid moment, much later, Imelda would confess to a trauma induced by Spence’s book.)

The book was turned into a film, Igindihit ng Tadhana [‘Fated by Destiny’], which was popular enough in the weepy tradition of Tagalog films to add up to ‘at least 300,000 non-intellectual votes’, as one estimate put it. The love scenes between the actors playing Ferdinand and Imelda were chaste and goody, in conformity with popular taste, and probably did much to set a precedent for the couple’s recurring public protestations of love which made Filipinos feel like children overhearing their parents’ bedroom talk. Some were deeply reassured and touched; the more sophisticated reeled with nausea.

The campaign progressed inevitably into its dirty tricks phase. The Macapagal camp revived memories of the Nulundasan case by asking Filipinos if they wanted a murderer as president (‘What else would be new?’ one newspaper replied tartly) Campaigners went around handing out black toothbrushes—a not unwitty reminder that Nulundasan had been shot while cleaning his teeth. The Marcos camp countered ‘The Incorruptible’ with allegations of corruption and sleaze and Macapagal’s links with Harry Stonehill. They also wondered loudly what Macapagal had done in the war that could match their man’s bemiddled heroism. Imelda herself fell victim to a worse trauma even than that occasioned by Spence’s book. She discovered that a faked picture was being widely circulated with her head superimposed on the body of a lubricious nude. She locked herself in her bedroom in San Juan, pulled down the blinds, and gave herself up to ‘anger and pain.’ But she recovered by recalling that the Liberal Party had to be running scared if it needed to resort to such tactics. On election day she stayed in San Juan to vote while Ferdinand flew up to Laog to cast his ballot in
his home territory, the Solid North. He was piloted by a curious Swiss-Filipino industrialist, Hans Menzi, who would remain a faithful and increasingly powerful Marcos loyalist until his death. It so happened that some relatives of Imelda’s had once tried to pair her off with Menzi, an idea that would have caused hilarity in knowing circles. Menzi and John Addis were already friends and would relax from the cares of office by cruising the seasfront at sundown in Addis’s ambassadorial Rolls.

As must be clear by now, anyone becoming President of the Philippines would need the full approval of the United States. Ever since the convention at which Ferdinand topped the ballot and was nominated as the Nacionalistas’ presidential candidate, he had had the backing of the CIA’s machine. He of course had his own influential connections; but in any case Jaime Ferrer, the Lansdale protégé who had helped set up NAMFREL for the 1951 congressional elections and had made sure of Magsaysay’s victory in 1953, had independently thrown his weight behind Marcos from the moment it was clear he could run, and had conveyed this choice to the US Embassy in Manila in person.

Many on the Marcos campaign team were old Landsdale men. One of them, Jose Aspiras, an Ilocano from La Union and former president of the National Press Club, headed the Marcos press campaign. Rafael Salas, a professorial-looking bachelor of thirty-seven, one-time head of the National Economic Council, served as the campaign co-ordinator and legal counsel. He had been president of Lansdale’s National Student Movement when it launched Magsaysay’s presidential bid in 1953. Blas Ople, Ferdinand’s propaganda chief, was a former newspaperman and assistant to Magsaysay. Jose Cristol was a CIA-trained secret policeman who joined the Marcos team to gather political intelligence. He had been chief of Magsaysay’s bogus land reform programme intended to undercut the Hukels. The Agency’s fingerprints were everywhere.

Once again the hallmark of CIA backing was the official imprimatur of laudatory coverage in the American press for the anointed. Dozens of articles about Marcos were published in the United States, nearly all of which drew heavily on Spence’s recent biography. This was the first time that a wider international public became acquainted with him, and they knew him from the start in that book’s histrionic version. The myth was not for denting for at least the next decade, and at the level of White House rhetoric it was still intact twenty years on. In 1965 there could have been no doubt in any American reader’s mind who the blue-eyed boy was in the forthcoming election in the Philippines. It was anyway widely rumoured that the US State Department was no longer happy with Macapagal who, himself infuriated by Fugger Bottom, had changed the day on which the Filipinos celebrated their independence from 4 July (the same as the United States’) to the more meaningful 12 June (12 June 1898 being the day on which General Aguinaldo had proclaimed Philippine independence from Spain from his balcony in Kawit). Washington never forgave Macapagal; and it is probable that he was the first Filipino President never to be invited to the US. It arguably remains his one act as President for which he is fondly remembered by his countrymen, but it was nothing like enough to win him a second term of office. (This is not to suggest that his presidency was particularly dishonourable. Indeed, it could be argued that of all Filipino Presidents, Macapagal had the clearest idea of what he wanted to do when he first arrived in Malacañang. He at least had a plan, which was basically the doctoral thesis he wrote at the University of Santo Tomas rejigged as a five-year socio-economic programme. But it was all too academic, too inflexible, and its failure only made him the more stubborn.)

In the event Marcos won by nearly three-quarters of a million votes. ‘I never had any doubts,’ remarked an exhausted Imelda, even though the uncountable sacks of money that had constantly arrived at their San Juan campaign headquarters must have greatly bolstered her natural confidence. She then went and stood in front of the mirror in her bedroom and began practising a variety of stiff salutes and casual waves. She was watched curiously by the new Vice-President’s niece, Presy Lopez. ‘How does she do it?’ Imelda wondered aloud: ‘How does the Queen of England wave?’

By the time of her husband’s inauguration she had perfected a suitably regal gesture. The parade was a grand affair. The White House was represented by Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. The
CIA’s ‘chief gook-zapper’, Ferdinand’s friend and ex-client Napoleon Valeriano, trotted along on horseback. By then the Marcoses had taken up residence in Malacañang Palace and the first signs of the Camelot-on-the-Pasig it would become were already evident. Yet there was still a certain innocence in the glittery Shenanigans. Nothing yet prefigured the vulgarity of the victory celebrations in Luneta Park for Marcos’s 1969 re-election, when massed choirs sang the Hallelujah Chorus and people swapped horrified glances at the menacing phrase ‘And he shall reign for ever and ever’. Ferdinand’s inaugural speech strove for the Churchillian note: ‘Come, then, let us march together toward the dream of greatness.’ Even the press and Manila’s sophisticates who could see beyond the filmic aspects of the new First Couple’s glamour and who understood the political realities behind their victory were prepared to be faintly impressed as the hero called for heroes to match him:

The Filipino has lost his soul and his courage. Our people have come to the point of despair. Justice and security are as myths. Our government is gripped in the iron hand of venality, its treasury is barren, its resources are wasted, its civil service slothful and indifferent. Not one hero alone do I ask, but many.

There was cautious optimism among the less cynical. During the campaign, the issue of the US bases had been raised once more, chiefly because of the American Embassy’s mishandling of an allegation that two Filipinos had tried to bomb a school on Clark Air Base. Since over thirty Filipinos had already died around the perimeters of American bases in incidents mostly involving ragged scavengers and jittery guards, it was an emotional issue. Marcos had made appropriately nationalist noises. While nobody seriously believed he would, or could, do anything radical about the Americans’ presence on Philippine soil (the bases agreement still had over seventy-five of its ninety-nine years to run), there were hopes that this dashing and youthful politician whose valour had been so widely touted might yet have both the courage and skill at last to plot a more independent course for his country.

It would be a mistake to read Marcos’s victory in the election as proof of his overwhelming popularity with the electorate as a whole. Leaving aside the Solid North, which would have backed a donkey provided it was an Ilocano donkey, much of the country probably did think he presented a plausibly dynamic image, while his beautiful and charismatic wife’s glamour and warmth would have tipped the balance of tens of thousands of wavering. But in Manila, in areas of cultural or ideological dissent (the Muslim south and Central Luzon), and in generally well-informed and educated circles, there was a good deal of scepticism about Marcos. It was no secret that he was already a prodigiously rich man, and everyone knew perfectly well how politicians became prodigiously rich in the Philippines. There was a lot of gossip about his ‘Mr Ten Percent’ methods, as about his deep involvement with Harry Stonehill. His CIA connections — and especially his closeness to Valeriano — were also common knowledge. It all added up to a picture of someone who was just a little too much the complete Filipino politician for comfort. Nothing succeeded like success, and so on; but there definitely were widespread misgivings among the intelligentsia about Marcos becoming President. Contemporary newspaper and magazine articles provide ample evidence of this to counter the picture his propagandists later airbrushed into a glowing retrospective portrait of popular acclaim and trust. It is inherent in the Filipino electoral system that a village like Kamasay can be presented as having overwhelmingly backed a particular candidate when all that has happened is that voters have been given fifty pesos to put their cross against that name on the ballot, and the presence of muscular men with bulges in their hip pockets has suggested that it would be foolish to do otherwise. To try to infer an electorate’s sentiments from such a voting system is as much bogus psychoscopy as the system itself is sham democracy.

It was now 1966. The build-up of American troops in South Vietnam was proceeding at a hectic rate. By June the previous year, there were 75,000 US military there; the Pentagon was foreseeing a total of half a million by 1967. President Lyndon Johnson’s long and agonizing battle for public credibility over the non-existent war in Vietnam (war never was officially declared) was already lost; if a speech by the TV anchorman Walter Cronkite was anything to go by:
The political lie has become a way of bureaucratic life. It has been called by the more genteel name of 'news management'. I say here now, let's call it what it is - lying. 10

Vice-President Humphrey had come to Manila for Marcos's inauguration saying 'The tide of battle has turned.' This was the year LBJ was to call on Congress for $9 billion more in military spending on the war. It was an extraordinary spectacle: the world's most massive and sophisticated war machine ranged against a tiny nation peopled largely by villagers who were simply Vietnamese versions of Kansuans. Yet this aggressive campaign was somehow still perceived by the US administration as being primarily defensive. There was no shred of irony on his part when the US Joint Chief of Staff's former chairman, General Nathan Twining, said that same year:

Red China under its present leadership seems to me at this writing to be practically a hopeless case. Naked force seems to be the only logic which the leadership of that unfortunate nation can comprehend... 11

It was China's thought rather than any 'naked force' that was about to have a considerable effect on Filipino politics and, indeed, on Marcos's future, although at the time nobody knew it. Even as the Cultural Revolution began to hit the world's headlines with stories of the Red Guards' excesses, few realized that at least part of its ideology would strike a chord in peasant societies the world over, and not least in the Philippines. The British writer James Kirkup, passing through Manila in this period, singled out the Manila Times columnist J V Cruz (former President Magsaysay's press secretary and destined to become a Marcos ambassador to Great Britain) for his courage in praising Felix Greene's book about China, A Curtail of Ignorance. Cruz also warmly recommended Greene's Awakened China: The Country Americans Don't Know. 'In the American-dominated Philippines,' Kirkup remarked, 'it takes guts to write such things'. 12 It is a vivid reminder of the climate of public discourse in the Philippines that it actually required courage to review favourably a scholarly book about the huge and ancient nation on the Philippines' very doorstep.

At the least, Cruz's review would surely have gladdened John Addis, who continued to be depressed and angry at what seemed to him a wilful lack of understanding in Whitehall and Washington of Chinese history and China's current motives. He had been Ambassador in Vietniane at a critical moment for Laos, watching sadly as the CIA's 'polarization' doctrine (which had been launched with President Eisenhower's blessing) destroyed Prince Souvanna's delicately balanced neutrality in order for his feudal people to be labelled as either Communists or non-Communists. These were Lao and other tribes who mostly lived so remote from politics they had not even heard of Laos, let alone the United States. Without warning they suddenly found themselves herded off their land and into camps while bombs fell in a steady rain from B-52s on the archaeological splendour of the Plain of Jars.) As Ambassador, Addis had naturally known all about the CIA's backing of General Phoumi's faction, just as he knew about China's own policy of strict neutrality towards Laos. The Chinese were in little position to meddle in foreign adventures: it was as much as they could do to feed themselves, reconstruct, and contain the ideological ferment that Chairman Mao was unleashing.

As the Vietnam war escalated and engulfed neighbouring countries, Addis clearly found himself at odds with official British policy, which was basically one of abject support for the US position. In 1967 he was to write gloomily to his sister about his suspicion that he would never now be offered a 'better' post than Manila (meaning, of course, Beijing).

I realize that my views on China and on Vietnam are not palatable in the Foreign Office. This has been made clear recently. I am not greatly concerned. I have a sense of duty, even of vocation, about the interests to be pursued and also about the time to speak out. I am set on a course, which I must follow, and which will continue to lead me on even if I do not get a new appointment after Manila... 13

At the time of James Kirkup's visit in early 1966 another Manila Times columnist, Alfredo Roces (the future author of Culture Shock/Philippines), was expressing deep misgivings about the way the Vietnam war was beginning to spill over into the Philippines in the
form of battle-weary and often traumatized GIs on R & R rampaging through Manila, Okinawa and San Fernando. He then began to wonder if the war might not begin to involve the Philippines at a more sinister level. He asked exactly what Marcos's election portended where the country's relations with the United States were concerned: precisely the question that was on many intelligent Filipinos' minds, only most lacked the courage or opportunity to put it into print:

Just what is the significance of the Marcos administration in Philippine-US relations? The first obvious point is that the Philippines under Marcos will shift to the right, bound and committed deeper towards the American sphere of influence. To our mind the indications that the Marcos administration will lean over backwards towards pro-Americanism are his choice of men, the fact that the sugar bloc is most vulnerable to US pressure, his statements of military commitment to Vietnam, and, lastly, the persistent shadow of the CIA — in Mindanao during the critical period of election tallying, and at the inauguration, according to our sources. There is also the presence (for the inauguration) of US Vice-President Humphrey, and the [de facto] conversion of Manila and other areas into a rest centre for the American GIs fighting in Vietnam.

Whatever the start of the Marcos era signified politically, it undoubtedly marked the creation of some potent public fantasies. If Ferdinand took office in the guise of a populist reformer, Imelda Marcos took up residence in Malacañang with cries of horror at the state of the place, a reaction that is almost de rigueur for the wives of heads of state in the world over. It is at once a comment on their predecessors' atrocious lack of taste and on the run-down nature of his regime. It serves notice that things are going to change, that fresh blood is about to flow in the sclerotic arteries of government, that things will even look new. Accordingly, the state palace has to set a style, a tone and image of rejuvenation. Where Imelda was concerned, it was not just the old garage in which she had lived as a child or nearby General Solano Street that would have to go. Reminders of the Philippines' own unhappy past equally needed purging from Malacañang. The sombre décor and dreary state rooms were given

enough; far worse was the whole pervasive Third World aura of cockroach bait behind potted palms, door handles with one screw-hold jammed with matchsticks, lights that wouldn't work when it rained and grinning footmen crouching to stuff paper wedges under wobbling table-legs during state receptions.

Her immediate inspiration was probably Lady Bird Johnson, who had had her own ideas of what to do with the deserted set of Camelot she had inherited from the Kennedys. Yet Jackie Kennedy's own famous redecoration of the White House was undoubtedly a greater influence on her for its ethos. The idea of a Palace was what intrigued Imelda: part national showcase (Filipino craftsmanship and Filipino materials) in the carpet-and-chandelier areas to be seen by the world's dignitaries, and part fantasy land in the private zones. The Marcoses' version of The House Beautiful was every bit as metaphorical as Bunyan's in Pilgrim's Progress, though to somewhat different effect. Imelda took her cue from her husband:

As the President said, a government is like building a house. And he told me he would build the structure, I was to take care of the refinements, the trimmings, the details — like curtains, for instance. What kind of people will live in the house? Cultured people, good people. So then the President said: 'That is the house I would like to put up.'

In at least one respect she was unerring. She singled out a national characteristic that has always dogged the Philippines but was so obvious almost nobody ever noticed it: the habit of thinking small and building temporarily. This was no doubt partly the reaction to constant terrmutes and regular typhoons of a predominantly rural people constructing in wood. She ascribed it to her country having been colonized and subjected to so many changing regimes and wars (one has to remember it was still barely twenty years after Manila's almost complete destruction in 1945). The effect on the people of this constant unsettling, she said, was dispiriting,

so much so that Filipinos say: So what? Tomorrow maybe this house will not be mine because some foreigner will come to these shores and take it. There's no incentive, especially in the barrios
There they say: "Para que? What for? So what? It's a total attitude of 'It won't be there tomorrow so why bother?'"

To have shown this level of awareness of how people in the barrios thought was most unusual then for a Filipina First Lady, a testament to all that unprecedented campaigning out in the sticks. It was also at least partly the impetus behind her grand building projects (concert halls, hospitals, a university, convention centres, palaces) that characterized her incumbency and which became derided as mere pathological symptoms of her 'Edifice complex'.

The Marcoses began their first term of office in an amazing burst of energy and with long lists of ambitious projects. One says 'their' advisedly. Although at this stage there was no doubt as to who was the President, Imelda's role was from the first portioned out as having complementary status to his. She had already drawn up a checklist of her own social projects. Among those which began to take shape were nutrition schemes, self-help projects, a nationwide home garden movement for using waste ground to grow vegetables, and an Integrated Social Welfare Programme which included the building of five welfare villages. Several of these replaced an appalling Manila sub-division called Welfareville which was a national disgrace. This was where many of the country's handicapped, orphans, delinquents, mentally ill and otherwise alienated and deprived citizens were herded in sub-human conditions. Voteless, they had never been on any politician's list of priorities. On new sites, often in the countryside surrounding the city, Imelda built brand-new institutions: a training school for delinquent boys, the Marillac Home for abused girls, 'Golden Acres' for the elderly. These were proper, even worthy, ventures for a First Lady; nor was it hard to see why someone with an artistic bent like hers might also have begun various civic beautification schemes. But ordinary people began to shed some of their scepticism when she tackled an unphotogenic ouiblione like the mental hospital in Mandaluyong. The newspaper story about the charred and chained madwoman which had so upset John.

The Marcoses of Malacañang

Addis faithfully reflected a mediæval casualness on the part of the health authorities towards the mentally ill.

It must have taken courage for the erstwhile Rose of Tacloban not only to do something about the problem, but to visit the place in person—which she did, looking her usual fragrant self and wearing a restrained polka-dotted suit and sensible shoes.

What she saw was repulsive. The inhuman conditions at the mental hospital were a disgrace, reminiscent of slave labour camps. The patients were neglected and abandoned. Many of them were emaciated and disease-ridden. Most were in some degree of nakedness.

Most of the pavilions were filthy. The stench was unbearable. The patients were crowded into the pavilions like animals herded into a corral and left to endure the wretched conditions. Most of the wards did not have beds. The sick slept on the cold bare floor. Many of them became chronic tuberculosis patients.

There were not enough knives and forks. Many ate like animals from rusty pails.

The booklet from which this description comes notes that Mrs Marcos made her own private investigations into the ineptitude and maladministration of the hospital officials, and took action immediately. There is a hint here of draconian measures being carried out behind the scenes. But while it was easy to sack and discipline individuals, it was another matter to change a culture's ingrained attitudes and habits. Still, such social projects were greatly to her credit. As to how zealously they were maintained is another issue, but many of them survive to this day although her connection with them is scrupulously suppressed. Senators' wives and actresses pitching for a political career drop by Boys Town and the home for the aged for their photo-op appearances, or go out to Muntinlupa to visit Marillac Hills, nowadays described as 'the Department of Social Welfare and Development's centre for abused children'; but with never a mention of Imelda Marcos. They will even pay a call on the mental hospital in Mandaluyong, these days quite salubrious and progressive, but nobody speaks of her long-overdue act of rescue that brought it into the twentieth century.

Official discredit dates leave no Brownie points.

* The pun on 'Oedipus' is far clearer in Filipino pronunciation, with 'p' for 't'.

** Addis.
While Imelda was busy being motherly (as she put it), Ferdinand was occupied with the country’s infrastructure, organizing schemes for building roads, schools, hospitals, waterworks and the like, as well as drafting policies such as a new labour code and agricultural reforms. In his Manila Times article Alfredo Roque has cited Marcos’s ‘choice of men’ as evidence of his right-wing pro-Americanism. This may have been true, but it was also a fact that a reformer like Ferdinand had very little option when it came to picking a Cabinet. He didn’t want ‘trape’ types – the usual benchwarmers finally rewarded for doing nothing. He needed technocrats, and the best young Filipino technocrats mostly had degrees from American universities. A compromise had also to be reached with older and respected figures whose names would lend credibility. This is how the historian O D. Corpuz described the circumstances surrounding the formation of Marcos’s first Cabinet:

During the 1964-5 campaign I worked with my group, Rafael Salas, Johnny Ponce [Enrile] and myself – they were my juniors at Harvard – on top strategy. That’s to say, we were working on what Marcos’s broad campaign should be rather than on the political relationships between us all as individuals. After the Election, when we’d all been successful, the first chance we had to meet we decided to make one last contribution and form his Cabinet for him. So we did, nominating only people we knew to be first-rate and spotless: [Carlos P] Romulo, [Alfonso] Cavite, [Clemente Gatsas], [Si] etc. They were all appointed. We also nominated ourselves (except for Salas) as under-secretaries – you know, as a way of keeping in touch without onerous duties. For example, I chose to be Under-Secretary of Education Fine; except that we ought to have anticipated that because our chosen Cabinet members were mostly elderly, they were sooner or later going to retire or pass on and we ourselves would be stepping up into their posts as they left the scene...  

* A formulation that felicitously combines the first few letters of ‘traditional politician’ to make the Spanish word for ‘rag’, which has the same overtones as the English concept of ‘dirty linen’. The epithet suggests a private army, sordid mistresses, ill-gotten gains and dubious connections.

This was exactly what happened, and ‘O D.’ duly became Marcos’s Education Minister, a post he held twice (with a resignation in the middle) until 1983 when he finally left to write The Roots of the Filipino Nation.

Corpuz’s group was not the only ‘think-tank’ to provide intellectual backing for Marcos’s presidency. In today’s climate of opinion, when the tendency is to dismiss him as simply one more of the world’s corrupt dictators, it is important to remember that from the beginning he had attracted honourable and intelligent people. He unquestionably did make foolish and scoundrelly appointments in his time, yet it remains one of the sadder aspects of his regime that right until the end he had some of the most talented and qualified people in the country working for him. Back in 1966, such ‘think-tank’ members were his core strategists. One such loose association of journalists, academics and artists was the Medis Group (named after the Medis building in Intramuros, where it met). This had started in 1964, when Ferdinand was still Senate President, with the express purpose of writing speeches for him and doing propaganda work for the forthcoming National Convention. The Group’s leader was Blas Ople (later to become Marcos’s best-known Labour Secretary and a senator). Other members included the journalists Adrian Cristobal, Amado Gat Insing (another future Labour Secretary), Romy V. Diaz (today Senator Ople’s chief-of-staff) and the noted artist ‘Malang’ (Mauro Malang Santos). I think it was Ople’s idea. Macapagal was a great disappointment and Marcos was the only possible choice then. Can you imagine a President announcing ‘I am the best qualified intellectually for the Presidency’? That was Macapagal’s line. He’d easily beaten [his predecessor, President] Garcia, but he was still useless. The Group folded in 1969, I think, when our Government jobs became too demanding. Eventually everyone in the Group got appointed. This also explains how the steady stream of publications put out under Marcos’s name – of which he personally wrote scarcely a word – were often neither stupid nor badly written. In particular, those which provided a rationale for his declaration of martial law were argued by professional journalists like Adrian Cristobal and Florentino Diaz. Even today, well after the awful denouement, their polemics make plausible cases and fairly interesting reading, surviving as rather more than trash propagand...
In early 1966 Marcos appointed Rafael Salas as Chairman of the Rice and Corn Producers’ Council, briefed to make the country self-sufficient in basic grains. The new ‘miracle’ high-yield varieties of rice were just becoming available from IRRI, the International Rice Research Institute at Los Baños, outside Manila. Bypassing regional offices and using direct governmental intervention, Salas imposed technocratic methods that did in fact bring about self-sufficiency by the 1970s. It was an impressive turnaround. Simultaneously, Marcos introduced the most inclusive measure towards general land reform yet enacted. This specifically concerned only rice and corn farmers. Critics said it was too limited, but actually it was a wise move because such land is the most heavily tenanted of all agricultural land. Marcos was highly enthusiastic about the scheme, personally involved. His original idea had been to let farmers pay a nominal rent for 15 years, and after that the land would revert to them. But it didn’t happen.

It didn’t happen partly because of difficulties with the Land Bank that had been set up expressly for the purpose, but mostly because Marcos came up against a predictable and perennial problem. Many of the Philippines’ most powerful oligarchs were themselves landowners and they didn’t want their estates sequestered, parcelled up and given away to their tenants, not even with compensation. Marcos, of course, was not himself from a landowning background – neither in a family nor in a regional sense – and it may be he simply misread the degree of opposition his policies would arouse. If so, he was naive, especially since the landowners employed the very same legal delaying tactics of which he himself was such a master. But there was another aspect to it, which in the long run probably proved more dangerous to him than if he had reneged on his promises for agrarian reform altogether. For, once having started so radically and in such a blaze of publicity, he aroused greater hopes in the country’s peasants than he or anyone else could possibly have fulfilled. This was true above all in the so-called ‘Rice Bowl’ of Central Luzon: the very territory which, since the days of the Hukels, was the most radicalized of the entire archipelago. It was to backfire badly on him, as he was to discover as the sixties wore on and the time of his re-election campaign approached. By then the increasingly vociferous opposition of the student and intellectual left, while undoubtedly influenced by similar movements throughout Europe and the United States protesting against the Vietnam war, in the Philippines also had roots in the discontent of small farmers and peasants in Central Luzon. It was an indication of the extent to which the Maoist theory of China’s Cultural Revolution had caught the imagination of the youth of other Asian countries.

Even so, a good deal of the reforming legislation that Marcos enacted as President is on the books to this day, much of it still ahead of its time (given the context) and remarkably enlightened. The Labour Code, authored principally by Blas Ople, is not only still in force (with some minor amendments) but was considered by the UN’s International Labour Organization as a model for the developing world. Likewise the 1975 laws governing fisheries remain progressive and sensible. This is one of the reasons why ageing technocrats often look back to the Marcos administration with a wistful mixture of pride and sadness. Not only had there been so much promise, but a great deal was actually achieved. That other things collapsed in scandal and disarray, eclipsing the achievements, was a tragedy of a kind and probably accounts for much of the anger still directed at Marcos’s memory. The feeling is that had he not become weakened by moral blindness and illness, he could have been the greatest President the Philippines ever had.

Marcos cared deeply for the public interest. He had a real streak of idealism in him. He built the physical structure of our present development, there’s no doubt about that. All the highways, bridges and electrification were his. In 1965 only ten percent of the Philippines had electricity. By 1986 eighty-five percent did. Lenin himself would have been proud of such an achievement. And it was all done at a time when we had very much less money than is available now.

In September 1966 Ferdinand and Imelda, the developing world’s dynamic duo, flew to Washington for a state visit to the court of Lyndon Baines Johnson. According to Beatriz Francis, Ferdinand had put his wife through a stiff preparatory course before they left, making her read ‘the biographies of several key presidents, and especially of Johnson himself’. From the inestimable tedium of
this exercise she had gleaned two useful facts: LBJ’s favourite brand of scent and his fondness for the colour yellow. The research paid off. At their first White House dinner she wore a brilliant Texas-yellow terno (the formal Filipiniana dress with stiff, high sleeves) and periodically inhaled herself so that her perfume wafted enticingly across the American President’s plate. No doubt a drudge in the lower echelons of the White House’s protocol corps had been doing similar research and discovered that she had a notoriously sweet tooth, for lo! on the menu card was a special dessert named ‘Imelda.’ In any case her feminine wiles worked only too well. After dinner LBJ had several dances with her, and then several more. Other revellers affected not to notice the huge Texan hands straying intimately over the yellow terno’s salient features. When Ferdinand drifted by within earshot, Imelda said to him in Tagalog over LBJ’s shoulder: ‘I’m being groped by this guy, darling,’ to which her husband replied, also in Tagalog, ‘Ignore it, Melody. It’s in a good cause.’ 20 Life at the top

The visit was a dazzling success. Its high point came when Ferdinand addressed a joint session of Congress in a speech brilliantly crafted to mesh with the Spence version of himself as war hero, which his audience would already have known. He gave a dramatic and solemn account of the death of an American GI just before the Fall of Bataan. ‘Yes, my American comrade died in my arms. We were surrounded and we had to break out. He fell and, as he tried to crawl to safety, I returned to him to fall at his side – Filipino and American blood commingling in Philippine soil.’ 27 ‘Commingling?’ To judge from the twenty-two occasions when he was obliged to stop for spontaneous applause, this terrible hokum went straight to Congress’s collective heart. There was not a dry eye in the house. Up in the gallery Imelda was weeping too and, when she was spotted, was herself given a three-minute standing ovation. She then went on to wow New York, singing ‘Strangers in the Night’ to Mayor John Lindsay in Manhattan, going to the Met in a white gown and diamond tiara with Lady Bird Johnson and being assured by Senator Jacob Javits that she had taken New York by storm. A Washington newspaper described Mrs Marcos as ‘a blessing not only to her country but to the world.’

Her husband, meanwhile, was doing equally well with a sheaf of speeches, addressing the National Press Club in Washington, the Philippine–American Chamber of Commerce in New York and the UN General Assembly. To read them now, more than thirty years later, is to be stunned by the ironies they contain. The serenadesque tone of statespeople’s speeches is in any case depressing since it irresistibly suggests to the global public that our lives are in the hands of people whose thought processes are probably every bit as banal as their self-expression. Yet often behind the ritual sentimentality are statements of ironic clarity. As Ferdinand told the National Press Club:

> if democratic institutions cannot grow in the soil of underdevelopment, then the Americans and the Vietnamese are fighting and dying for a hollow illusion in South Vietnam – in effect, an unattainable dream for the developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Then Americans are not fighting in Vietnam to keep open the option for liberty of the Vietnamese people, but for a mirage of their own making. 28

The anti-Communist stance of his own nation, he went on to explain, was rooted in its history; though where recent history was concerned he was evidently the victim of a discretionary attack of amnesia. The Colonel Lansdales of the world of realpolitik might never have existed:

> The Philippines is the first developing country in the whole world, to the best of my knowledge, that has overcome a full-fledged Communist rebellion without the aid of a single foreign soldier. 29

Vietnam, of course, was a major topic in all his speeches. Curiously, the one address he gave that may have most accurately reflected his own personal views was that to the Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps because it was aimed at businessmen it was the least bombastic, and he was more pungent than he had yet been about the US presence in Vietnam:

> But to remain the leader nation of the Free World, the United States has neither the right nor the duty to maintain in Vietnam or anywhere else the posture of imperialist domination and control
The last thing Americans should do is to give any impression that they are in Vietnam to pick up the fallen sceptre of French imperialism. They should make it absolutely crystal clear that they are in South Vietnam only to help the people defend their freedom, and that they will stay there only so long as their presence is needed and wanted. Only in this way can Americans avoid the odium that attaches to the conduct of any state that attempts to pursue at this late day the ancient goals of imperialism under a neo-colonialist disguise.20

Given the number of fellow Asians in his audience, this was judiciously pitched. The Filipinos among them would certainly have picked up on the veiled hint that the Americans might not necessarily be wanted in places they had unilaterally decided were front-line zones in their global crusade. Unlike his other speeches, this revealed a Marcos suffering post-operatively, as it were, from some heroic feat of plastic surgery that had provided him with two faces: that of America’s Boy and that of the Asian Nationalist. He had already succumbed before the state visit to Johnson’s heavy insistence and had reluctantly been obliged to send a Filipino battalion to Vietnam. Unlike the one that went to Korea, however, it was (at least nominally) non-combatant. The Philacg (Philippine Civic Action Group) was a unit of a mere 2,000 men, mostly engineers. It was rumoured that LBJ had been extremely disappointed and put out by Marcos’s refusal to send a fighting force, and Marcos must have needed to call on his considerable resources of plausible cajolery to resist the Texan’s pressure. What better way was there, LBJ had wanted to know, of showing that the Filipinos’ foxhole spirit — so movingly described by Marcos to Congress — was still flourishing, than by sending troops to new foxholes to fight in the crusade with their good American buddies? But the Philippine President had his domestic situation to consider. Grand verbal gestures in the UN General Assembly were all very well; back home it would have been political suicide for him after all the nationalist rhetoric of his election campaign to have sent Filipinos abroad to help fight Uncle Sam’s battles for him elsewhere in Asia. So he had held out for the Philacg engineers and LBJ had to be content with fondling his wife at a White House function. Marcos had told Johnson that it would be far more efficient if the Philippines

sent money rather than men to Vietnam. Years later, Imelda added a footnote to this:

After the fall of Vietnam [Soviet Premier, Leonid] Brezhnev told me that if Ferdinand had sent a combat group to Vietnam as Johnson demanded it would have drawn us into total disaster. ‘As long as Marcos is President, we will never invade the Philippines,’ Brezhnev said. Then Pham Van Dong [Hanoi’s Prime Minister] came here on his first visit abroad. I asked him, ‘Why did you choose the Philippines for your first mission?’ And he said, ‘Because we were so impressed by your husband offering to send money to Vietnam rather than combat troops.’

In any case the whole production of a weeping Congress and a President Johnson greeting Marcos as a war hero took place on a level of discourse that was pure fantasy. The sheer absurdity of the public posturing became evident years later. Sterling Seagrave, who had access to the relevant CIA documents, put it simply: President Johnson knew that the Marcos war record was a total sham, but endorsed it publicly to gain support for his Vietnam policy.21

Overall, the trip was a huge success. Ferdinand had managed to talk LBJ into shortening the US lease on its Philippine bases from ninety-nine to twenty-five years, which greatly helped to appease his opponents at home. The quid pro quo was that the ‘Philacg’ would be replaced by five new construction battalions for Vietnam, to equip which the US would pay $20 million. LBJ also leaned on the World Bank to open new lines of credit to Manila. Some knowing glances were exchanged when the Philippine Finance Secretary, Eduardo Romualdez (who happened to be Imelda’s cousin) announced that the Philippines was looking forward to receiving $125 million. Meanwhile, quieter things were afoot as more and more agreements were signed for the training of Filipino police as well as army officers at military schools like Fort Bragg and Fort Benning in the United States. Counter-insurgency, an issue never far from the minds of post-war Philippine presidents and their American advisers, was predicted to be a growth industry back in the archipelago’s expanding cities and still-extensive jungles. Also included was the deployment of Filipino CIA and
combat personnel in Vietnam, most of whom had been trained in the Huk-killing fields of Central Luzon and were skilled in the use of advanced interrogation techniques. The man who did most to institute these methods was Frank Walton, who had already retained the police in South Vietnam for a counter-insurgency role and who afterwards went on to reorganize the Shah of Iran’s secret police, SAVAK. Little of these dark manoeuvres showed on the surface; yet there were ‘as many as ten thousand counter-insurgency jobs in Indochina...under Walton’s guidance.’

Marcos’s first term of office poses several linked questions, none of which can be answered definitively – or rather, asking them yields nothing but conflicting opinions. The questions are: What really were his intentions when he became President? Was the necessary taint, without which he could never have come to power, decisively outweighed by his reformist, even patriotic, intentions for his country? In which case, precisely when did things begin to go wrong? Or, conversely, had he always considered the presidency as nothing more than an Ali Baba’s cave of loot to be cleaned out as efficiently as possible – which is what everyone asserted after 1986?

Many thoughtful people who had known and worked with him from the beginning of the ‘think-tank’ era when he was Senate President remain to this day convinced that his intentions began by being fairly honourable. He made it quite clear on numerous occasions, both public and private, that he wanted to be remembered as a great President, even the greatest of all – as the man who had finally turned around the Philippines’ chronic social and economic stagnation. ‘Marcos did have a vision,’ Senator Ople confirmed. ‘He was going to transform the Philippines into a modern state by industrialization. He was much agitated by the backwardness of the country regions. As an Ilocano, he was always jealous of the Tagalog regions, which were richer. He was extremely proud of the history of the Ilocos. He knew that in Manila the Tagalogs looked down on Ilocanos and he felt socially inferior.’

It is no doubt a fantasy shared by most incoming heads of state, that of radically transforming their country into a New Jerusalem of sweetness and light and plenty. History is littered with the empty names of these wishful endeavours which lie like last year’s cartridge cases around a hunter’s abandoned hide. Lion Kingdoms, Great Republics, New Deals, Thousand-Year Reichs, Great Societies and – Ferdinand’s own – the New Society: ceaselessly trodden down by their successors armed with the same powerful ambition and fresh hopes. These infantile fantasies of personal greatness are for the most part grotesquely at variance with the true wishes of electorates, who would happily settle for nothing more grandiose than affordable food, decent health and education services, telephones that worked and policemen who didn’t moonlight as members of kidnapping syndicates. Be that as it may, it is safe to assume that the triumphant reception Lyndon Johnson painstakingly laid on for the Marcoses in Washington would have fired both Presidents with appropriate dreams of greatness.

Where Imelda was concerned, it must have seemed there was now nothing she might not dare. What must it have been like for the ex-Rose of Ilocanob, at the age of thirty-seven, to be escorted to the opera by the wife of the President of the United States and to be given a standing ovation by Congress? One effect would surely have been to endow her own fantasies with the one missing ingredient omnipotence. Mrs. Francia renders down her aunt’s character with a succinct accuracy: ‘The world Imelda inhabited was a composite of the Visayan [Leyte] and Hispanic ways of life: a world of feasting and a dream of aristocratic grandeur.’ Anyone who had taken New York and Washington by storm, and had been fêted by the American President into the bargain, had nothing to fear at home. Part of her, at least, was free to play the greedy queen to the point of surfeit.

Her husband must have been left with more complex residues. On the one hand he, too, had had the treatment. But although it was calculated to turn anyone’s head a little, he was enough the professional politician to know that these accolades were both discretionary and temporary. He did not need to be a student of history to grasp the concept of expediency. At the same time President Johnson, whose own dreams of social reform had not yet been broken by the sheer economic drain of the war in Vietnam, would have been lyrical – even piously so – about his ‘all-out war on poverty and hunger’ at home. LBJ’s vision of a Great Society was still undented. In 1966 he was able to boast about ‘the American economic miracle’ (as he did in his economic report to
Congress of that year) and be backed up by men like Sargent Shriver, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, who stated reassuringly: 'Our country is big enough to support a war in Vietnam and a successful war on poverty at home'. This was the sort of hubris that seldom goes unpunished, and in due course the distant mirage of Johnson's Great Society thinned and disappeared. But in late 1966 Ferdinand would have flown back to Manila fired by LBJ's ambition to wage war on poverty and hunger, as well as by the American President's various earnestness of aid and support.

On another level, though, it may not be fanciful to imagine that despite the triumph, there would have been an aspect of Ferdinand that responded to LBJ with an increased passivity. Like all Filipinos of his generation, he had grown up with a self-image of subservience and deference where Americans were concerned. He might have gone to Washington as the President of the Philippines, but he knew he was massively outgunned by this Texan who also physically towered over him. LBJ was notorious for using his size and macho aura to induce feelings of inferiority in other men. The unwary who were invited to spend informal time with the President often found themselves firmly invited to swim with him, only discovering too late that they were expected to swim naked, as he did. The reason for this became all too monstrously apparent as the President stripped off, leaving his shrinking guests to face a hopeless dilemma. Either they risked making remarks about how only 'pancakes' or 'pantsywaists' wore swimming trunks, or they bravely the tape-measure stare of those shrewdly dismissive eyes.

One trusts that Ferdinand was never subjected to this ordeal; for although he himself cultivated a macho image (he had an athletic, even beautiful body in those days, beside which the naked LBJ would have looked like an ogre) and wore Brut after shave into the bargain, the fact was he was in no position to indulge in locker-room competitiveness.

But of course there were other ways than mere physical dominance for LBJ to ensure that Marcos knew exactly where he stood. The Filipino had, after all, grown up with the American missionaries' description of his people as 'little brown brothers' inherent in, and defining, the entire relationship between the two countries. The situation where an American President could with impunity run his hands over a Filipino President's wife to public was simply a logical extension of this relationship. It spoke well of the Marcoses — and, indeed, of the Filipino character — that they could make a joke of it in their own language right under LBJ's nose 'Never mind — it's in a good cause' is the Asian pragmatism that refuses to waste energy by taking offence. (After all, Ferdinand had his revenge. LBJ was merely the first of four American Presidents he saw come and go while he held an unbroken office.) He must have felt far more compromised by the way in which Johnson had made such enormous play with the story of his heroic war exploits. An actor himself, like all politicians, he would have perceived that LBJ also knew it was a bit of a joke, yet at the same time a part of him must have come to believe it was true. The image had been over twenty years in the making; it had been written down for posterity in Spence's book; a presidential campaign had been successfully fought on the basis of its constant repetition. In some sense the story had actually happened. Now this account had been publicly endorsed by the American President. (It went on being believed almost to the end by Ronald Reagan.

The wonderful irony is that Reagan himself was afflicted by an exactly similar inability to separate fantasy from actuality in his own stories of the Second World War. It was well known that Reagan had never left the United States during the war; yet on 29 November 1983 he told the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that he had been given the task of filming the Nazi death camps for the US Signal Corps. The White House tied itself into semantic knots trying to wriggle out of this awesome gaffe. Marcos was by no means alone in being saddled with a mythic past. And yet at any time they chose, the Americans could pull the rug out from under him. Not merely by exposing his war record, of course; that would be deeply embarrassing but not necessarily fatal. But it was a perpetual reminder of all those files buried away on the other side of the Pacific. OSS, CIA, CIC. They would contain some very detailed information about the past, about deals done and corners cut.

So he returned to Manila both glowing with triumph and freshly convinced that whatever else he wanted to do with his presidency, he needed to stay on the right side of Washington. At the very least he wanted to retain American support so that he could win a second term of office. If we allow Marcos his ideals, then, at what
point did things begin to go wrong? Those who assert that even his fancy to go down in history as a great President had always taken second place to ordinary greed would point to the documents which Cory Aquino's PCGG (Presidential Commission on Good Government) agents confiscated from the Marcoses' private quarters in Malacañang after they had fled in 1986. These revealed they had begun building up dollar accounts abroad under the names 'William Saunders' and 'Jane Ryan' as early as 1967. There were certainly Swiss accounts by 1968, with cash deposits of sums like $1.5m not unusual. So where was all this cash coming from that needed constant siphoning off abroad like a safety valve relieving pressure? One thinks all the time of that claim of Mrs Marcos's: 'By 1949 [i.e.] already had 4,000 tons of gold. Then in 1957 with the Bretton Woods Agreement, the US came off the gold standard and we bought another 3,000 tons at $35 per ounce. So at a time when the world total of gold was 17,000 tons, we had 7,000 of them.' What does this mean? Is it true, or is it 'true'? For one thing, it is plainly incorrect in certain details. The Bretton Woods Agreement was reached after a conference in 1944 at which the International Monetary Fund was established. But does this mistake of historical fact suggest the other figures are wrong? Maybe this story has the same status as that of Ferdinand's war as he related it to Hertzell Spence. Perhaps it is designed to reduce the hearer either to utter credulity or to utter disbelief. Any further investigation is discouraged by a smokescreen of the improbable. (Even the current Central Bank Governor talks of 1,231 tons of 'missing Marcos gold'.)

The corruption of the Marcos presidency was being acknowledged within two years of Ferdinand's taking office. Even a foreign diplomat like John Addis commented on it, although with his usual weary sharpness he did put it into context:

I dined with the Macapagal on Thursday, the first time since he ceased to be President. They have built an enormous house overlooking a golf-course in the grandest area — with 'her money' of course. She was wearing large diamonds in her ears and in a ring, and even her daughter, much prettier now, had great pearls set in diamonds. And his administration was much less corrupt than the previous and present ones.

Should the implications of all this invalidate any further claims for a Marcos idealism? The diary Ferdinand kept might be expected to throw some light on his true motivation, but unfortunately its precise standing remains a vexed problem. By his own family's account he wrote this more frequently than John Addis did his letters home. His son said he would usually write it in the evenings after dinner, and could often be heard chuckling evilly. When asked what he was laughing about, the President would say only that he was setting the record straight in a way that would one day bring extreme discomfort to his enemies (or words to that effect). He handwrote it, mostly on loose sheets of Palace stationery which built up into a substantial collection of boxes containing many thousands of pages. He often told his family and close aides that this diary was to be his true legacy: a blow-by-blow account of political realities that would form the centrepiece of the archive he would bequeath the nation. Accordingly, it was very precious to him, which makes it all the more surprising that when he left in a hurry for Hawaii in 1986 some of the boxes were reportedly abandoned and found only later in a dark corner of Malacañang. So far as one can tell, these fell into the hands of the PCGG. Meanwhile, US Customs impounded some, if not all, of the documents the Marcos family took with them into exile; but they must not have returned the diary since according to Bong Bong Marcos it has vanished and the family would dearly like it back. There is a version on CD-Rom which can be obtained with some difficulty, but the text is highly corrupt and has substantial gaps. (This may, however, be down to incompatibility with the Unix operating system that was apparently used for the huge archive.) In the first issue of *Smart File*, Ricardo Manapat (the author of the scholarly exposé of Marcos's 'crony capitalism', *Some Are Smarter Than Others*) gave an account that suggested he had the entire work, which started on 31 December 1969, and was intending to publish it in instalments in each issue of *Smart File*. What more, he quoted 'a foreign diplomat' who was shown the diaries in Hawaii and who commented favourably on Marcos's industriousness. Thus one is left with a clear impression that the entire text does exist. Given Mr Manapat's friendly connections with the National Intelligence Co-ordinating Agency, it seems highly likely that the Marcos diaries — assuming they are genuine — will have been sanitized along the way by both
Americans and Filipinos so that anything truly embarrassing or revelatory remains suppressed.

There is an outside possibility that what has been suppressed included entries that showed Ferdinand's intentions to have been entirely honourable from start to finish. There is no question that the Manichaean dynamics of the 1986 'revolution' demanded that the Marcoses should be allowed not a single redeeming feature, and it is conceivable (though not very likely) that the unedited diaries would have revealed a version of Ferdinand that flatly contradicted the image of a chauvinistic and criminal dictator which so suited people's purposes. As they stand, they convey an impression of someone with a watchful eye on posterity's gaze; a man giving himself some careful dictation as he had once given it to Hartnell Spence. There are many entries whose assertions are later flatly contradicted by evidence that turned up in the wake of 1986 – for example, those dealing with the Dovie Beams affair which we shall come to shortly. Apart from that, one takes the liberty to doubt the tone of such self-conscious loftiness as can be found as early as the second entry:

Yesterday I finally transferred all of my worldly possessions to the Filipino people through the Ferdinand E. Marcos Foundation. I have been planning this for many years but I felt that the beginning of my second term was the most propitious time. This was a decision arrived at after a long deliberation and was not the result of pique, anger, despair or emotions. Nor is it due to a sense of guilt because some of the funds came from the Yamashita treasure. Nor is it just a political stunt. And it seems a burden has been lifted from my shoulders. The surprising thing is that the reaction of people seems to be of no consequence to me. It was a noble act waiting to be done. I feel I am above all the pettiness of men and I look down on them with some contempt but with a counter-balance of understanding. 40

These are not the words or expressions of a man communicating with a private diary ('I have been planning this for many years'), but an exercise in image-building. It does make one suspect that no matter what may eventually come to light in US archives, it is unlikely to show this man in a radically different light. On the other hand, it would undoubtedly furnish some extremely interesting detail from which to make informed deductions. As his son remarked, 'He knew all the gossip in town. At the dinner table the rest of us would be chattering away and he would be reading a book down at one end and now and again he'd look up when someone said something that caught his attention. Then he'd say, 'For you it's gossip; but for me it's intelligence.' 41 The complete Filipino politician

As the Marcoses' first term of office proceeded it was noticeable that Imelda began to acquire a considerable degree of autonomy. She, too, was the complete Filipina politician, not least in her remarkable ability to extract funds from people. This talent became abundantly apparent with her huge project to build the Cultural Centre of the Philippines on a stretch of newly reclaimed land on the foreshore of Manila Bay, not far from John Addis's residence. She had successfully wheedled some money out of LBJ during the state visit but it was nothing like enough and she cast her net wider, generally cajoling and twisting arms until a cascade of money was wrung out. 'I'm like Robin Hood,' she observed, 'I rob the rich. It's not difficult; you just have to smile. You can terrorize the rich, you see. The poor have nothing to lose.' Mrs. 'King' Kaslag, her former music teacher, confirmed her extraordinary ability as a fund-raiser. Whenever she needed funding for a major project she would call her friends Imelda Marcos was our professional beggar. 42

The Cultural Centre was in effect a large concert hall with a complex of administrative offices, built to a design by the Philippines' most distinguished architect of the day, Leandro ('Lindy') Locsin. It was roundly criticized from the pouring of the first concrete for being a white elephant, an absurdity, a grotesque waste of precious resources in a Third World nation where people were dying of hunger and disease. It was also accused of being a Western-style temple for Western-style arts, an accusation many felt was validated when classical concert pianists like Van Cliburn and ballet dancers like Dame Margot Fonteyn came to perform at Imelda's behest. Naturally, these charges carried a large component of self-righteousness and begged several questions. When exactly is a nation to be considered rich enough to be able to construct such a building without a blush? Are we really expected to believe that all Europe's and America's great public art buildings were only built...
once all their hungry had been fed and their sick tended? The clear implication is that the only aspect of a nation worth worrying about is that of the purely material. As Dr Kasiglag suggested in an official report, the Philippines in those days was something of a cultural desert, at least in terms of public recognition of the arts:

In the early sixties the whole issue of art and culture had not yet entered into the public mind. The issue of total human development was an idea whose time had not yet come. The emergence of the Cultural Centre under the leadership of the First Lady focused public and national attention on the arts.

Nothing if not artistic herself, Imelda recognized from the start the crudeness of the assumption that the sole yardstick of a nation was its economy and material development. She had been aware of her own cultural insecurity even as she observed the deep effect she had produced by singing well-loved songs to audiences who ranged from Irving Berlin in person to Kalinga tribespeople on her campaign trail. This conviction of hers that everyone needed culture as much as they needed cash because 'the heart, too, knows starvation' was not a pose, and was made plain in the speech she gave at her Cultural Centre's opening:

Today, we too are people of courage and faith in the future. We are young and struggling to understand ourselves, trying to construct the noble meaning of our race. Our greatest strength lies in being truly what we are: by nature and by grace, one people, by fortune and by fate, Filipinos. Yet so long as we know not ourselves, we face the dangers that face the very young: a lack of soul, a vagueness of values. It is the purpose of this Centre to enrich the minds and spirit of our people and to foster among other people a true understanding of the Filipino self.

Mrs Marcos's CCF remains to this day one of Asia's best auditoriums, with excellent seating and acoustics, while its programmes are carefully even-handed in their choice of Western and Filipino music, theatre and dance. There are times when the CCF seems the most unarguable of her various legacies to the country, and it is of one which any of the world's other First Ladies might be proud.

This is not to say that while its building progressed and she was exploring the thrilling bounds of her omnipotence Imelda was not also acquiring a reputation for arrogance and grandeur. As a foreign diplomat and friend of the Locsin family, Ambassador John Addis was often required to attend various functions of hers. One week he wrote despondently to his sister: 'On Friday I have to fly down to Ilocos to celebrate 3 days' birthday celebration of the First Lady's birthday. My heart sinks. Six days later he followed this more cheerfully: To my immense relief the trip to Ilocos to celebrate the First Lady's birthday was cancelled because of press criticism. Several times a day I have been calling out aloud: 'How glad I am that I am not there!' Three days of festivities in the company of my diplomatic colleagues would have been a terrible ordeal. (Never let it be thought that an ambassador's life is one of untrammelled, gracious ease. Yesterday [with a stomach upset] I stood for 80 minutes while a bank was inaugurated and then after an hour more standing before dinner was faced with shrimp-cocktail followed by poulet à la Kavi. How does one survive?)

However, John Addis was from the start an admirer of Imelda Marcos's Cultural Centre, whose progress he followed keenly. Shortly before its opening he attended a concert at the Meralio Theatre out in Quezon City and, although he couldn't guess its outcome, he did catch a strong whiff of anti-Marcos political rivalry that in Ferdinand's next term was to have dire consequences for many of the 'oligarch' families, and in particular the Lopezes:

The concert a week ago needs some background explanation. Don Eugenio Lopez, a dry statistician figure, is the head of one of the great sugar-growing families. He has extended into business and owns the Manila Electric Company [Meralco] which he has expanded from a lucrative utility company into a vast financial holding company. He must be many times a millionaire but is said to be insatiable for ever more power. Earlier this year he opened his new office block, which has a complete theatre at the back. This is in deliberate rivalry to the First Lady's Cultural Centre, which is to open this week. For Don Eugenio's opening he had over some 'stars' from the Bolshoi Ballet, quite a good girl. But three third-class men who could hardly move off the ground. To steal some of the First Lady's limelight, he had over, a week...
before her opening. Beverley [sic] Sills, the new star of the New York Opera. Her first night was by invitation only - a glittering audience and I know so many of them now. As I walked through the glass doors of the entrance, there was a 'Good evening, Mr. Ambassador' behind me - the Lusinths, so we sat together. Beverley [sic] Sills is superb, one of the very great artists of all time.

In these letters Addis does hint at various events which suggest that, somewhere in the political background, things were becoming seriously unglued after the initial honeymoon period of Marcos's first term of office. Both he and Marcos were approaching the end of a period: Addis as Ambassador in Manila and Ferdinand as a first-term President. Addis's comment that it was newspaper criticism that had caused the cancellation of Imelda's birthday celebrations in 1967 indicated a growing opposition to her extravagant style, if not a personal unpopularity (although she was indeed strongly disliked in many quarters). The reference to the Lopez family's Meralco Theatre having been planned as a deliberate rival to Imelda's CCP shows how things had changed since the days when she had so brilliantly wooed Fernando Lopez as Marcos's running mate in the 1965 election. By now, her husband had come to view the Lopez family as the prime exemplars of the oligarchs he was determined to crush just as soon as he could get himself re-elected. When Blas Ople remarked that Marcos, as an Ilocano, had been made to feel socially inferior in Manila, he was simply voicing the widely held theory that revenge played a large part in the Marcoses' joint attack on the old-money upper class.

John Addis left Manila just at the moment when he sensed things were coming to a head. Unlike probably every other ambassador in Manila at the time, and always the China specialists, he had taken the trouble to go out personally into the wilds of Central Luzon to discover for himself the extent to which Mao Zedong Thought had infiltrated the growing leftist opposition to Marcos. Earlier in the year he had already alluded to 'demonstrations' at the University of the Philippines, and he plainly saw trouble in store for whoever won the election (he was betting on Marcos). Despite his close ties and one particular private affection he had built up, John Addis gives the impression of a certain weariness:

It will be a relief when the elections are over. The politicians are campaigning 24 and more hours a day. Money is being poured out in millions. It is like a wild party and everyone will wake up with a headache . . .

Then, six days later:

Marcos has won, as I predicted. It is a good thing for the country to have broken at last out of the cycle of a 4-year Presidency which has done it so much harm. And Marcos is stronger and ableer than anyone else. For us there is the advantage that we do not have to make a new set of friends again, as I had to when the Macapagalists went, but can carry straight on. I am pleased. It would have broken the First Lady to have lost.

Shortly after this, John Addis was posted home.
Love-nests, leftists and riots

There is a tendency for Marcos loyalists nowadays to speak of his first term of office as though he had been a remarkable reforming President, having placed all sorts of modernizing legislation on the statute books, to say nothing of building a tally of infrastructural projects that far exceeded anything achieved by any of his predecessors. Roads, bridges, airports, schools, hospitals and clinics: there was scarcely a part of the archipelago that had not felt some impact of central government — in many areas for the first time. To a certain extent this is still a tenable opinion; but only if one records that it was not universally shared at the time, especially by foreigners. Somewhere towards the middle of this first term, for example, John Addis sent a typewritten dispatch to the British Foreign Office marked 'Confidential'.

I know that many American officials concerned with the Philippines are disappointed with Marcos's performance, and he is also being more widely criticized by his own people. This is partly a normal feature of the second year of a Presidency. Marcos has in fact done quite well in his roadbuilding programme and in his drive for increased rice production. He has, however, failed to throw his weight behind land reform, while ostensibly conserving the main lines of Macapagal's programme I think that too much has been expected of Marcos and that, particularly at the time of his State Visit to the United States last October [sic. It was in fact September], hopes were expressed which it was not in his capacity to fulfill. He is not a reformer, as Macapagal was. The best hope is that because he is ambitious and wants to be a success, he will for this reason strive to have some solid achievements on the record.¹

When assessing Marcos's record in this first term, his wife and her own social projects must not be left out of the equation since her influence was equally felt up and down the country. And if certain of those welfare campaigns (the 'Happy Christmas' scheme, for example, which by 1968 was sending out half a million bags of presents to 66 out of 73 provinces) smacked of Lady Bountiful, one needs to remember that this was no more than in accordance with prevailing cultural norms. The destinate beneficiaries of these seasonal goodwills would have been touched and thankful to have been remembered just the same. Nearly thirty years later she was to remark of her own generosity with innocent high camp, 'I do not just give; I give until it is beautifully given'.²

For a more interesting and down-to-earth assessment of Marcos's first term one can turn to his celebrated opponent, Ninoy Aquino himself, who in early 1969 was interviewed by De La Salle College's student magazine Horizons and gave the following opinion:

[ Marcos is a blend of the practical and the theoretical, having] always grounded himself on the practical side. He will not tell you that he is an honest man; he is not going to waste time trying to prove that. Because he is not. So maybe you say: 'Terible naman si Marcos, he is crooked.' 'A Marcos man will never answer you, 'That's just not true.' 'What do they say?' 'Could be, but he certainly gets things done.' In other words they [exonerate] him Marcos is practical. You attack him. Guilty. But this is what he says: 'Say what you may, but I've built roads, I've built schools, I've built this, I've built that. Say what you may, but I've exported rice.' And this is where I think Marcos might just succeed himself. I am convinced that he might be the only person who will break the tradition wherein every president has been toppled by the common denominator of corruption. No recent
president has actually done anything—other than corruption. Every president tried to prove that they were not corrupt and they fell. Marcos no longer tries to prove that ‘Accepted I am corrupt. I am nothing new. Everybody has been corrupt anyway, but judge me by my achievements. How many before me have been able to do this?’

But this was before the 1969 election campaign began, marking something of a watershed in Philippine political history as well as in the career of Ferdinand Marcos. He was determined at all costs to have a second term in office, no matter how he might have glossed it as being necessary to complete his ‘grand plan’ for dragging the Philippines into the modern world. The result was an election that surpassed even that of 1949 for fraud and violence, while in terms of spending it was in a new league altogether. Back in the forties, Philippine presidential candidates and national parties had spent something of the order of $1.5–2.5m on campaigning. In 1969 it cost Marcos $168m to be re-elected. This reflected what in effect was the institutionalizing of the traditional patronage system. At some point he must have made the leap in logic, realizing that long chains of indebtedness based on small favours would become more controllable and more accountable if based on hard cash. The effect of this was to ‘up the ante’ in two immediate ways. One was to ensure that from now on, the supposedly democratic Filipino political system became a game for only the wealthiest players (in this sense little different from the American system). The other effect was to begin turning Marcos as much as possible into the personal datu of the entire electorate. From now on his autocratic streak—common to virtually anybody reaching the top in such a society—became more pronounced.

While planning his 1969 campaign he remembered the film (Iginuhit ng Indahan) made from Hartnell’s Spence’s book for his previous campaign had paid dividends. It was a pity to let such a dramatic story go to waste, so he decided to have it rewritten and use it again. This time, though, it would be less of a documentary with Tagalog weepie episodes and more of a full-scale Hollywood epic. It was to be called Ang mga Maharlika or ‘The Nobles’. He turned over the task of having it made to a group of trusted business friends, among whom were his golfing cronies Potenciano

(‘Nanoy’) Illusorio, Honorio (‘Nori’) Poblador, and the manager of Wack Wack Golf and Country Club, Diosdado Bote (Illusorio and Poblador, together with the Chinese millionaire Jose Y. Campos who had helped Marcos in the 1965 election campaign, constituted a triumvirate known jocularly as ‘XYZ’. They acted as front men for Marcos, investing in companies and negotiating takeovers on his behalf. Mining companies were their speciality.) Nanoy Illusorio now got in touch with Paul Mason, a producer at Universal Studios, and together they discussed the crucial casting of the film’s ‘Evelyn’, the Fil-American lady guerrilla with whom Ferdinand had had a fling in the heat of battle during the Second World War. At Christmas 1968 Mason sent over two possible candidates to Manila to audition for this role: Joyce Reese and Dovie Beans. With Dovie Beans Ferdinand was to have an affair that hit the headlines and arguably had far-reaching political consequences.

Since one of the threads running through Marcos’s biography is his much-cited womanizing it seems useful—although far from easy—to acquire some perspective on the matter. As has been mentioned already, rumours of philandering probably never yet hurt a male Filipino politician and, despite pious editorializing, might actually do him good. This strange public double-act of appearing simultaneously to be a man famously wed (like Marcos or Ninoy Aquino) and a celebrated philanderer (like Marcos or Ninoy Aquino) would seem impossible to bring off without public double-think, much as it was in the case of John F. Kennedy: There is little doubt that, despite a brave (and occasionally furious) face, Mrs Marcos, like many another Filipino politician’s wife, suffered a good deal from her husband’s dalliances. She had, after all, been brought up in the demure, pre-war traditions of Spanish Catholicism. Until martial law in 1972 there was plenty of gossip and vulgar speculation in the tabloids about the nature of their private relationship, but she always made it staunchly plain that, as First Couple, they were indivisible in their love for one another.

Strangely enough, and (in view of every possible opprobrium that was to be heaped on Imelda), the charge of unfaithfulness, though frequently hinted at, never stuck to her and was never seriously believed. Apart from anything else she was so clearly one of those people whose phenomenal energy seemed possible only if supplemented by erotic reserves. In the scandal sheets a
sexual relationship was suggested with her known close friends, such as the actor George Hamilton and the wife of Henry Ford II, Cristina; but not even the malicious set much store by such rumours. Nobody doubted she was exceedingly generous to her friends (in 1982 Hamilton bought Charlie Chaplin's Beverly Hills mansion for a sum that included $1m allegedly given by Mrs Marcos), but they did not necessarily assume there had been a carnal quid pro quo. In fact, Mrs Marcos herself tackled such rumours head-on in a magazine interview:

'I have many weaknesses, pero lati [but itching] is not one of them' [laughter] 'I have many weaknesses, but to be a hoise-patote is not one of them' [laughter]. Do these critics or rumours affect the President? 'He's so much he doesn't bother. He and Hamilton? What a choice! Wawa naman [poor thing]!' 9

It was left to the Marcoses' oldest daughter, Imee, to voice clearly what most people had long recognized:

'I'm a fag-bag. And so is my mother. Homosexuals just adore her, and me, as well.' 4

By contrast, there is no doubt that Ferdinand, to put it vulgarly, screwed around. In this, he was really only doing what was expected of any Filipino with great power and wealth. Several of his closest aides and associates would on occasion double as pimps, discreetly ensuring that the President might have relief from the cares of office whenever he felt so inclined. Yet he was by no means as undiscriminating and insatiable as his reputation (which he did little to discount) suggested, and there was always the high moral tone of Catholic petty-bourgeois public opinion to take into account. One of his oldest friends from pre-war UP days, Lomilo Osampo, said:

'About his women - a quarter of it is true. One-fourth. He was mapilli [able to choose]. And all the other things his regime was accused of, probably thirty to forty percent is true. The rest is exaggerated by sheer jealousy and pure hatred.' 8

In fact, there is reason for thinking that mere sexual encounters were not by any means the only thing he wanted, and it was the emotional seriousness of his unexpected relationship with Dovie Beams that caused all the problems.

Various press reports and interviews survive of the affair, but for the fullest account one is obliged to rely on a book entitled Marcos' Love Story by a journalist, Hermie Rota. Although this has been much quoted, nobody has raised certain obvious points - not so much about the book's factual accuracy as about its author's motivation. It was published in the US in 1984, fully fifteen years after the scandal. Why then? Why there? It was scarcely fortuitous that it should have been published on the West Coast, which by then was full of vociferous Filipino exiles from martial law, and at a time when the anti-Marcos campaign was reaching its climax, encouraged by large sections of the American media and government with almost the sole exception of the White House itself. That Rota's book is written with malicious intent is obvious from his Prologue ([Marcos] violated his own oath of office and lost the value of his leadership as clearly shown in the Dovie Beams story. As a result, he is the most hated man in the Philippines today. Would that everybody else who has written about Marcos had come as clean). What is interesting about the book is how the author, in taking pains to reveal Ferdinand in as ridiculous and un-presidential light as possible, often unwittingly makes the man so vulnerable as to be touching.

Dovie Beams was born Dovie Osborne, and enters the story when she was thirty-six, though looking younger. She was formerly a piano teacher from Tennessee, just as she was formerly married to Edward Boehms, who had successfully sued her for divorce in 1962. The judge in the case found that 'Dovie Osborne Boehms was guilty of such cruel and inhuman treatment or conduct toward [her husband] as renders cohabitation unsafe and improper.' A tough nut, this lady, cruising the minor reaches of Hollywood in search of the main chance and now in the Philippines to audition for a vital role in the President's electoral propaganda film. She struck lucky her first evening in Manila. Invited to a party by Nanoy Ilusorio in a house that was still being renovated (the swimming pool was a raw pit with a bulldozer parked at the bottom of it), Dovie was introduced to a very personable man
named Fred. Fred was hospitality itself, and showed her over the house until they reached its deserted recesses, when after some humming and hawing he made the immortal admission: 'I have something to do with the legal profession - I am President of the Philippines. I am in love with you.' It was an auspicious start. To employ the smutty delicacy of the tabloids, 'intimacy took place' only the following evening in more private circumstances, but it was not long before it was obvious that Ferdinand really had fallen in love with her to some extent. Dovie Beams’s role as Evelyn was clinched, and she was set up in the house in Greenhills, now fully renovated, where they had first met.

No matter how much of an optimist, she must have found it hard to believe the luck that had taken her from LA and into a President’s bed within two days of landing in a strange country. Her account gains from her complete ignorance of Philippine culture and politics; only much later did the tape recordings and conversations from which Rota worked reflect a slightly more savvy awareness of the secrets that Marcos let drop in the course of their affair. However, it should not be forgotten that Rota’s book was published long after the event and with a definite political purpose. So one is inclined to believe her assertion that Ferdinand confessed early on to being important with his wife and that he and Imelda had been ‘sexually estranged’ from one another for some years. Maybe this is what all men say to their mistresses; but there again, maybe it is what many men experience after nearly fifteen years of marriage. At any rate, the importance here lies in the revelation that he was prepared to confide in Dovie from the first, to the point of indiscretion and frequency beyond.

The film got slowly under way, with Marcos coaching her in her lines during languorous afternoons spent in the large double bed set up in Greenhills. Nanay Ilusorio might well have been pleased by the evident success of his talent for casting and matching, but as he realized with each passing day that this was no casual romance for his President he began to worry about how Imelda might react when she found out. On several occasions Ilusorio confided in Dovie that he was frankly afraid Mrs Marcos would have him shot. In the meantime they had cast Stephen Boyd to play the lead role as Ferdinand Marcos, but he backed out and was replaced by Paul Burke. (It might well be wondered why Marcos was to be played by a white American actor in a film whose primary purpose was as a propaganda vehicle in a Filipino election, for viewing by a domestic audience. It says something about cultural confusion when an incumbent Filipino President tries to broaden his appeal by turning himself into an American onscreen. Maybe he thought that, like Hartzell Spence’s original book, the film might have an image-making impact on Americans if they could see him — and not merely intimate him — as one of them.)

Dovie likewise claimed to be ‘hopelessly in love’ with Ferdinand, and certainly there were domestic scenes of remarkable ease and familiarity up there on Northwestern St, Greenhills. The President would work naked on his state papers while she played the piano to him in the nude. He even allowed her to see him shifting, which is probably too indecent for a biographer like Rota to have invented. We may take this as presumptuous evidence for the likely validity of at least some of the political chatter she later reports as the elections draw closer. A man whose trust extends to that degree might also have been quite capable of leaving state papers around for her busy gaze to light on.

It was inevitable that sooner or later the press would catch up with the affair, which it did at the end of April 1969. From then on, it became a major topic of public mirth and gossip. Imelda was reputed to go ‘black in the face with rage’ at the mere mention of Dovie Beams’s name. At some point Ilusorio and Poblador accused the actress of taking advantage of the situation and of monopolizing too much of the President’s attention. They threatened to sack her as Evelyn and have her replaced with Suzanne Pleshette; but nobody really believed that a Dovie personally coached by Marcos could suddenly be dropped at this late stage for someone completely new to the role. In any case, Ilusorio was hardly in much of a position himself to make remarks about people taking advantage because there came one day when he had to go to the President and confess that the money Marcos had given him to make Ang mga Matilak had, well, become substantively downsized. He claimed that he had prudently ‘invested it in stocks, but that the stock had gone down rather than up’. These things happen. This was not the first time, and nothing like the last, that Marcos was to hear such a story from a crony to whom he had made a large cash advance. But he was always strangely incautious about such
things, proving yet again that his interest in money was really li-
ited to the political, rather than to the purchasing, power it
represented. Provided the friendship was close enough, he seemed
unwilling to insist on good accounting. One day this was to prove
a large element in his undoing. Meanwhile, he explained to Dovie
that he and Illusorio had once smuggled gold together, so it was all
right about the money. More funds miraculously replaced those
lost.

It is at this point that an inner sadness first leaks onto the page.

Marcos started talking about his father, and how he could have
saved him from the Japanese soldiers who killed him, but his
own cowardice kept him from going to his father's rescue. He
expressed a very profound feeling and a deep sense of guilt
about it.8

It is difficult to judge to what degree Ferdinand, in true Ronald
Reagan fashion, now believed his own stories. But a note of authen-
ticity is struck by this self-accusation of cowardice, an admission
quite unthinkable in terms of his usual public image. Saying that
the Japanese had killed Mariano is surely what any son might do
when confronting the alternative of acknowledging that his father
had been quartered by buffaloes by his own side for collaboration.

Though the modus vivendi Marcos and Washington had tacitly
worked out as regards his war exploits is always presented as
having been a straightforwardly cynical political ploy, the suspicion
is that it may well have cost him dear, and that the war's real
residues had gone on being unresolved and causing him a distress
he could only hint at in moments of unguarded intimacy like those
with Dovie Beams. Rehearsals in bed as she did her best to
impersonate his wartime lover, Evelyn, must have awakened
painful memories or at least made him thoughtful about the way
he had allowed a fictionalized account of his war to stand for him.
As his old friend Leonilo Ocampo remarked, 'He never enjoyed his
life. You know who enjoyed it?' Imelda.9

By September the affair had become notorious and Dovie was
herself nervous about its future, as about her own. When she flew
to the US for studio dubbing sessions she took with her a cache of
things to put in a safe against the rainy day she sensed might be
coming. Among them were some cassettes she had secretly made of
their love-making, including recordings of the President singing
flamenco folk songs to her post-coitally as they lay in bed. He had
taken some Polaroid pictures of her and they had exchanged tufts
of each other's pubic hair. By now Ferdinand was begging her to
have his baby, a love-child that seemed to have considerable sig-
nificance for him. He talked about it obsessively, and had even
decided it was to be a son named Lawin (Tagalog for 'eagle'), which
seems more likely than its alternative dialect meaning of 'flying
fish'). Yet Dovie did not conceive. When one day she discovered
her birth-control pills, she seemed more mortified and downcast
than angry.

Away from their bed in Greenhills, Marcos was preoccupied with
his efforts to win a second term of office. He told Dovie that no
Philippine President had ever served out a full second term, and he
was determined to win regardless of the means. This included
being prepared to use the Communist threat as an excuse to declare
martial law if need be. (In the event, he did not declare martial law
until 1972, so this provides at least circumstantial evidence that it
was an option he had been toying with for some years.)

Campaigning had now started in earnest. Marcos was up against
the Liberal, Sergio Osmeña Jr and his running mate Genaro
Magsaysay, the late President's brother. (How the old names per-
petually recur in Philippine politics as a testament to the clanish
mentality of datuism!) Sergio Osmeña, a former Mayor of Cebu
and son of the President of the old Commonwealth whom
MacArthur had replaced with Manuel Roxas in 1948, had himself
been accused of collaboration with the Japanese during the war.

Specifically, he was alleged to have made a killing by selling scrap
metal to the occupiers, though like most of the others he had been
granted a blanket amnesty. With a fair degree of chutzpah, given
his own wartime activities, Marcos now raked up these old charges
to unseat him against his, while Osmeña and Magsaysay brought out
the old black toothbrushes once more.

In July 1969 the American President Richard Nixon, who had
replaced LBJ the previous year, came to Manila on the first leg of
a swing through Asia and made a show of impartiality by spending
time with both contenders. There was never any doubt where US
support lay, however. Washington judged Osmeña as weak and,
with his past, not a man who could be guaranteed to react infallibly as America's Boy. Nixon's tour of Asia came at a critical time for the American President. Having seen what the Vietnam war had done to his own predecessor, as well as what it was doing to the United States, Nixon was determined to find a way out of Vietnam as quickly as was consistent with honour, an expression that in practical terms meant incurring a minimum of American casualties and a maximum of face saved.

The speech Marcos gave at the state dinner he threw for the Nixons was, in its way, a small masterpiece of political juggling. He started easily with fulsome praise for the day's hot topic, the Apollo Moon landing which had taken place only six days before, but moved discreetly onto the offensive to hint that, no matter how great US technological prowess, America was by no means sitting pretty:

Ladies and gentlemen, we have as our honoured guest tonight a man who has assumed the leadership of a nation in crisis, a nation confused by overwhelming internal problems. 10

He then made an almost casual transition to the question of Communist subversion in Asia, thus bearing out what he had told Dovie Barnes about not hesitating to use this gambit:

The greatest threat to almost all Asian countries today is not external aggression but internal subversion, either by indigenous forces alone or with support from without. This is true in the Philippines today. We are fighting, and will continue to fight, all attempts to subvert our free institutions with Filipino troops alone as we have done in the past. We are confident we can overwhelm efforts to destroy our Republic through subversion. But we do expect fulfillment of American commitments of assistance embodied in formal treaties between the two countries. The pledged assistance takes the form of equipment, armaments and material, but not ground troops. 11

Gradually he slides from a grateful acknowledgement of American help, through reminders and veiled threats, to an assertion of Philippine nationalism:

In return for American assistance and friendship, we have allowed the United States certain concessions, including the lease of bases for the use of its armed forces and the grant of certain economic privileges. 12

Basically, Marcos's demand was for maximum US aid with minimum US interference. Such regional arrangements would operate for as long as necessary under the American nuclear umbrella but without the involvement of American troops. It was as much a crafty campaigning speech as one statesman's toast to another, delivered from an actual position of comparative weakness but pitched to sound as though Marcos were dictating terms to Washington. His patriotic cheer would not have been lost on the voters for the speech was widely reprinted and would have sounded good taken in conjunction with stories of Osmeña's alleged wartime collaboration. As he sat there, Nixon must have mused about this man LBJ had privately referred to as 'that son-of-a-bitch' when it appeared to him that Marcos had approached Washington's milk cow, jauntily swinging an enormous pail, once too often.

But when Nixon had left, and away from this comparatively serene level of politicking, the 1969 election campaign degenerated into atrocious violence in which whole villages were burned to the ground by local warlords acting for one or other candidate. Philippine Constabulary murder squads known as 'the Monkees' capitalized in all those exchange training visits to the US. Other military gangs such as the Suzuki Boys and the Baracolos terrorized provincial electorates. In the end, Marcos won by almost two million votes, an absurd margin that made humiliatingly obvious the level of fraud. It was a victory for the 'three G's' of Filipino politics: goons, guns and gold. As news filtered back to the capital of ballot boxes in the provinces vanishing en masse to be replaced by carefully stuffed boxes that had been stored in military safe houses, Eduardo Lachica of the Philippine Herald observed: 'The liberals were outspent, outouted, and outgunned,' while Sergio Osmeña refused to concede defeat, a position he never altered, maintaining ever after that Marcos had not by any stretch of termology won the 1969 election.

Curiously, this outcome appeared to have a profoundly depressing
effect on Ferdinand. Far from exulting in the victory he had always planned on winning 'by whatever means', he now found himself unexpectedly affected by the public outcry. Dovie Beams thought him 'withdrawn' and said her lover had lost his usual self-confidence, as though he feared that the people might not have preferred him after all. The problem was that, like many a Filipino politician before him, he had been utterly unable to resist overkill. After all, too much democratic process merely increases one's chances of losing, so the thesis, to aim for is 99 percent of the vote, leaving a generous 1 percent up for grabs. Given an incumbent President's almost unlimited power to fix things in his own favour, he in fact had no need to win by such a ludicrous margin (a temptation he would again fail to resist in the snap election of February 1986). By indulging in such gross manipulation he lost all way of gauging what true support he had. Having taken this fatal electoral step, it was impossible for him to retreat. From here on he had to rely on his own propaganda machine and hัดot (bussed) crowds to guarantee an impression of mass approval no matter what he did. For a man of Marcos's unexpected insecurity and need for reassurance it was doubly regrettable because in fact he could still count on a good deal of unforced grassroots support right to the end.

It was probably to counter the charges of having won the election by simply flattening the opposition with a golden steamroller that he made his curious, uneasy pledge at the Oath of Office ceremony at Luneta Park:

Moved by the strongest desire and the purest will to set the example of self-denial and self-sacrifice for all our people, I have today decided to give away all my worldly possessions so that they may serve the greater needs of the greater number of our people through a foundation to be organized and to be known as the Ferdinand E. Marcos Foundation.

Whereupon massed choirs sang the Hallelujah Chorus. It is interesting to compare this text with his diary entry the following day (quoted on p. 222). The care he takes in his diary to assert that the decision was 'not the result of pique, anger, despair or emotions' almost certainly indicates that these were precisely the reasons for it. After all, why would anyone think that pique or despair might be the hidden motives for a decision he goes on to describe as 'a noble act waiting to be done'? It makes no sense, except as an unconscious admission of how much his self-esteem had been shaken by the consequences of his own ruthless tactics. It was yet another demonstration of how little good could be expected of a political system which made such things possible and hence, in a winner-takes-all atmosphere where no unethical hoids are barred, inevitable. It was not Marcos's fault that politics practically anywhere on earth guarantee that Mr. Nice Guy loses; but it was his fault that his own anxiety led him to allow the Philippines' electoral process to sink to indiscriminate depths of terrorism and fraud. He was, after all, the President; and the President sets the tone of a campaign. (But as O D. Corpuz so wisely remarked, 'in every Filipino President beats the heart of a tribal chief'.)

His affair with Dovie Beams survived throughout most of 1970 even as it became more and more a pretext for public mockery. The election had served to polarize all sorts of dissent and opposition to Marcos's continued presidency; and the affair with Dovie Beams was targeted as his Achilles' heel the more that threats grew to the stability of his regime, particularly from the student left and the New People's Army (the NPA, which was the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines and of the National Democratic Front, had been established on 29 March 1969, exactly twenty-seven years after the founding of the Hukbalahap) in October 1970 the Philippines Free Press - the country's oldest and most respected weekly news magazine - led with a cover story about Dovie Beams which was very damaging to the President, partly because it made him look ridiculous but also because it hinted at a serious rift between him and Imelda whose consequences went far beyond the merely marital.

For some time Filipino observers had been getting wind of an increasing polarization in Malacañang Palace between what they identified as the Ilocano and Leyteño factions of, respectively, the President and Mrs Marcos. This, too, was a consequence of datuism, since each relied on his or her own network of political patronage, and the two sets of appointees did not necessarily get on with each other. Gossip leaked out of monster feuds and constant bickering, of disagreements about projects and countermanded orders. Mis
Marcos's own political power had been steadily growing the more she acquired confidence and her welfare and building programmes acquired funding. To her already considerable ambitiousness was now added the goad of humiliation over her husband's much-publicized unfaithfulness. It is hard not to feel for her. Through no fault of her own she had been made to look like a failed wife by a Hollywood third-ranker who was herself, as it happened, a failed wife. There is some reason for believing that for a while Imelda felt herself wounded to the point of seriously considering separating, and her confidantes attest to her utter mortification and rage. She reacted as many a scorned woman before her, with venom. She was, after all, no stranger to the notion of getting even. Her first act was to have Ang mga Mahalik na Banned starring Dovie Beams, ordering banks to freeze her account with the Filipino production company to make the point quite clear. She then gave orders to the Commissioner of Immigration and Deportation, to go to Greenhills in person and serve a deportation order on her. The actress frustrated him by the simple expedient of slamming the door in his face. When shortly afterwards she fell ill, he had a second chance.

She was in Manila Medical – I served the deportation order on her there. She was very thin and did not strike me as at all attractive; but still, there was no doubt about (her and the President's) relationship. Marcos was a womanizer, no question.

But this was not about womanizing so much as a love affair that had got out of hand. Via the US Embassy Dovie Beams received an offer that assured her came from Imelda of $100,000 in cash in exchange for all her tape recordings and other evidence. Now seriously scared, Dovie put herself under the protection of her Embassy and Ambassador Henry Byroade. She then called a press conference where she confirmed the existence of the tapes she had made of her love-making sessions. In the Bay View Hotel across the road from the Embassy she backed her claim by playing to reporters some of the recordings of the President, drowsy with erotic contentment, crooning in the double bed up in Greenhills. Unknown to her, two of the reporters made copies of the recordings which they promptly sold to several prominent people including Benigno Aquino, who was said to have cheerfully paid $500 for his cassette.

Student protesters at the University of the Philippines commandeered the campus radio station and broadcast a looped tape; soon the entire nation was listening in astonishment to President Marcos begging Dovie Beams to perform oral sex. For over a week the President's hoarse injunctions boomed out over university loudspeakers. Special forces troops sent to recapture the radio station crumpled with laughter. Barely able to keep a straight face, Ninoy Aquino called for a Senate investigation.

On 11 November 1970 Dovie Beams was whisked to Hong Kong, escorted by the US Consul, Lawrence Harris. At the airport she was immediately arrested by British intelligence as much for her own safety as for the debriefing they presently conducted. They told her that a man named Delfin Cueto, who had been sitting near her on the plane, might well have been hired by Mrs Marcos to kill her in Hong Kong (Cueto was believed by some to be Ferdinand's half-brother). When they arrested Cueto he reportedly told the British officers that his name was Fred, that Dovie Beams was his mistress and that there was no connection with Ferdinand Marcos. Dovie Beams eventually made it back home to Los Angeles where she made copies of everything and stored them in different safes as her security. Apparently she was never entirely happy with Rolet's book and allegedly wrote her own, copies of which she also stashed in various vaults. She lived for some years in circumstances that suggested her two-year affair with the President of the Philippines had not gone unrewarded, occasionally fending off emissaries from Imelda who offered her various inducements to part with her hidden material. She was recently reported as having died, after earning for herself a special niche in post-war Philippine history.

Given all the evidence, it would seem pointless for either the President or his wife to have attempted to deny the basic fact of the Dovie Beams affair. One excellent reason for doubting that Ferdinand ever intended his diary to be more than a highly sanitized version of his Presidency with posterity in mind is supplied by an entry where he affects to treat the whole affair as though it had no connection with him. He had been impersonated by 'Fred'
as part of an elaborate attempt by a mentally unstable Dowie Boehms [sic] to blackmail him:

Called in Ambassador Byroade [ ] to find out what the participation of the American government is in the Boehms blackmail conspiracy. They deny any such participation and claimed that the presence of Consul Harris was merely to guarantee her departure. [ ] There is an indication that the Fred whom she talks about is Federico Delfin Cueto. He is also known for having been introducing himself as President Marcos. And he may have done so to Boehms. He is now in Hong Kong in the same Ambassador Hotel in which the Boehms woman is staying. [ ]

She (Boehms) was treated for a brain injury in a hospital some time ago. We are now checking Memphis, Tennessee, Los Angeles and New York hospitals and asylums. She is a psychiatry case.36

That the ‘Boehms woman’ did not drop out of the President’s mind is suggested by a postscript to this tale. According to Rotea, in 1972 Marcos’s trusty lieutenant Nanoy Illusorio was sent to find Dowie in Beverly Hills and the following conversation allegedly took place:

Illusorio: He [Marcos] loves you very much. And he wants you to come back as the First Lady

Dowie: What about the First Lady Imelda?

Illusorio: Well, she is going to die.

Dowie: How is she going to die?

Illusorio: Just wait and see.17

A few months later, on 7 December 1972, Mrs Marcos was presenting awards at a televised ceremony at the Nayong Filipino pavilion near Manila International Airport. Suddenly a man wearing a formal suit lunged at her with a knife in full view of the cameras. Her security guards wrestled him to the ground and shot him to death, but not before he had deeply gashed an arm that Imelda had instinctively thrown up to defend herself (she bears the scar to this day). His name was later given variously as Carlito Dimasal or Limallig, believed to be either a Moslem from the south with a grievance or a resident of Batangas with no personal motivation.

No more was ever heard of him. Imelda was widely praised for her dignified behaviour, it being considered that few people survived an assassination attempt with such composure. Thereafter she bore her wound proudly and not long afterwards appeared at the Nixon inaugural with her injured arm in a sling made of a double strand of pearls. (It should be stressed that the circumstantial linking of this event with Illusorio’s alleged ‘prediction’ of Mrs Marcos’s death rests entirely on Hermie Rotea’s account which, as has already been noted, had its own political axe to grind at a time when no rumour about either of the Marcoses was too perverse or grotesque to be published as gospel by the exiled opposition in the US.)

In the immediate aftermath of the Dowie Beams scandal Marcos went on the attack, using a Manila newspaper he owned, the Republic Weekly. Between February and April 1971 the paper published ten articles calculated to discredit the actress as ‘an obscure Hollywood bit-player who had come to Manila to extort money from President Marcos and from certain Filipino businessmen who claim to be close to the President. When she failed to get the thousands that she wanted, Miss Beams rocked the nation by involving the President in a lurid sex scandal with herself.18 Her psychiatric record was dredged up from among those of her divorce proceedings. Her therapist had described her as ‘a latent schizophrenic’ and noted her ‘pursuit of erotic self-satisfaction [sic] through romance’. Better still was the account Dowie had given reporters of her own amatory career:

According to her in her various conversations with media representatives, she had had carnal relations with the late President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Ted. She was intimate with the Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau. She went to bed with the former Prime Minister of England, Harold Wilson. She had sexual relations with the present Prime Minister of West Germany, the former Mayor of Berlin, the President of France, the Sheik of Kuwait, Baron Ernst Valentine von Wendel, Prince Hohenhow, Howard Hughes, Senator [Albert] Gore of Tennessee.

(Harold Wilson? Can it be that we journalists of the late sixties actually missed finding a love-nest in Hampstead Garden Suburb?)
This demolition of Dovie Beams was countered by another magazine, the Graphic, which had initially published all her material, such as the transcripts of her tapes. This was shortly to earn the Graphic summary closure— one of Marcos's early acts under martial law. The passage quoted immediately above was included in Imelda's private dossier of the scandal which was found in the Palace after the Marcoses' flight in 1986. Also in the file was painful evidence of what it had signified for her: Ferdinand's Polaroid snapshots of the naked Dovie Beams, in one of which the actress's vagina had been obliterated by furious ballpoint scratches.

Many people considered that the Dovie Beams affair gave Imelda Marcos the impetus she needed to acquire emotional, even political, dominance over her husband:

Imelda had caught him philandering, and that weakened his hold over her. Marcos had been cast as a bumbling Casanova [ ] To Imelda, who had so carefully nurtured the image of a perfect marriage—and her image of Marcos as a superhero—his public humiliation was unforgivable. Marcos had squandered his side of the partnership, and now the scales of power tipped in Imelda's favour.

It is believed that the preparations exacted from Ferdinand by his wife included the Benguet gold mines that he was stealthily trying to acquire via the good offices of 'XYZ'. These now passed to the Romualdez family by means of a takeover conducted by similar methods (specifically, it was fronted by the Ayala Corporation, through Enrique Zobel, who took over the Benguet board on behalf of Imelda's favourite brother, Kokoy Romualdez.) Some believe this acquisition should be viewed differently, however. After the Dovie business Kokoy knew he could get away with whatever his imagination—or that of the Wall Street types who advised him in his takeovers—suggested. Thus he didn't get Benguet as Ferdinand's expropriation to Imelda but through the President's general disinclination to stop him. It was almost as if Marcos was suddenly weary. From then on, Kokoy's clout grew.

An interesting after-effect of the Dovie Beams affair was that of making amends by public works. Ferdinand had already claimed to have built the San Juanico Bridge between Samar and Leyte (Imelda's home province) for his wife. Certainly the public billowing Ferdinand attached to it was 'A Birthday Gift to Imelda the Fabulous by the President', even though such a road link was a vital part of the nation's Pan-Pacific Highway running the length of the archipelago. From now on the Marcoses began to play out their martial tiffs by means of public monuments. Not only that, but the longer martial law dragged on the more frequently the controlled press printed 'intimate' poems from one of the First Couple to the other, generally couched in embarrassing terms, on birthdays and anniversaries. Their ingenuous tastelessness embraced the Philippine nation as an extension of the First Family, assuring the children that Daddy and Mommy loved each other very, very much, and this was one family that would never break up (in February 1997 Senator Gloria Macapagal, the daughter of the late President, published her own Valentine message to the nation in Tagalog which translated as 'I treasure true love. I want you to be part of my dream'. Some commentators saw this as a new low in Philippine politics in the use of cloying intimacy as part of a steely campaign of self-promotion, for the Senator was making no secret of her plans to stand as a Presidential candidate in 1998. Yet it was really nothing new. The Senator understood to a nicety that while most Filipinos would not remember the Marcos era clearly enough to draw that politically risky parallel, they would paradoxically recall that her own political capital ultimately derived from her connection to Marcos's immediate predecessor.) Datos again.

By now, in the initial days of his second term, Marcos was in trouble. The intense public disquiet that his tactics for winning the election had caused was a separate issue from the growing opposition—of the left, but the left certainly capitalized on it in the early months of 1970. The rioting and demonstrations of the so-called 'First Quarter Storm' were so serious that for a while Malacañang Palace was under siege and the gates had to be welded shut. And this came about despite the deployment of the anti-riot squads of the dreaded Metropolitan Command. (METROCOM had been set up in July 1967 with American security technology supplied under USAID. This permitted complete nationwide co-ordination with the National Bureau of Investigation's computerized intelligence network at Camps Crame and Aguinaldo, the military bases on...
Manila's main ring road, E. de los Santos Avenue [EDSA]. In command of this entire network was the Philippines' chief of secret police, Fabian Ver, a fellow Ilocano and relative of Ferdinand's (as well as his most loyal maharika.)

It is now a part of received wisdom that these demonstrations of the First Quarter Storm were really instigated by Marcos himself in order to give him a pretext for the martial law he had long been planning. Dovie Beams claimed to have heard him say as much, though this was towards the end of the affair when she had acquired enough knowledge of local politics to know how to interest the journalists who interviewed her. There is no question that Marcos — both as the man he was and in the political tradition he was operating from — had the requisite craftiness to use the tactics of agent provocateur when it suited him. (The faked 'assassination attempt' on Juan Ponce Enrile which was supposed to have provided the final straw for precipitating the declaration of martial law in September 1972 was a case in point.) But the evidence is now overwhelming that the First Quarter Storm was quite spontaneous. Indeed, it was the very genuineness of the protesters' rage that took Marcos completely by surprise and occasioned his severe post-election depression. (Not least among the contributory reasons for this was the indignity of having been mocked over the campus loudspeaker system of his own beloved Alma Mater, UP.)

On 26 January 1970, he emerged from having opened Congress to be greeted by 'The Battle of Burgos Drive': 40,000 demonstrators demanding a stop to such things as subservience to Washington and the widespread form of corruption involving 'grease money' or tongs. Everywhere placards denounced 'Senatongs', 'Iongressmen', 'Fixcals' and the 'House of Representathieves', as well as 'US Puppets'. There were also jocular references to Ferdie & Melody: Bonnie & Clyde. A large coffin entitled 'Death of Democracy' was paraded in front of the security forces, and before he could reach the safety of his car the President was attacked by a papier-mâché crocodile labelled 'The Administration' that bit his pompadour. (Bisaya, crocodile, is everyday slang for someone on the take, being most commonly used to describe the police.)

It was precisely because of the enormous power he wielded through his American-trained security network that Marcos would have found it almost impossible to have organized the very sort of riots METROCOM was expressly designed to prevent. It is anyway highly doubtful if he could have arranged disruption on such a scale, nor would he have risked rioting so severe it actually caused Palace aides to decamp to the safety of Baguio, taking with them crates of money and state papers.

I recalled that night in January 1970, when, at the height of the so-called First Quarter Storm, a mob had gathered outside Gate 4 of the Palace. They rammed the gate with a commandeered fire truck they had set on fire, throwing Molotov cocktails and shouting, 'Dante! Dante!' [Bernabe Buscayno, aka Kumander Dante, Commander-in-Chief of the New People's Army — NPA] We had repulsed them with water cannons. It was bedlam but we put that down. That same night, a convoy of trucks prepared to leave the Palace loaded with papers, guns, ammunition and money, all headed for Baguio, where it had long been decided the seat of government would be set up if the Palace fell to the mob.

The convoy was leaving the Palace grounds when Col. Fabian Ver called me and ordered me to ride in the lead truck. [ ] We made Baguio in good time with our load, and set up the place in case the President and his party arrived... 20

As it happened, METROCOM prevailed and the Marcoses did not have to flee to Baguio, but for a moment it had been a close thing.

The University of the Philippines (UP) out in Quezon City was the radical students' focal point — so much so that it was frequently and disparagingly referred to as 'The Diliman Republic' or 'The People's Republic of Diliman' ('Diliman' is the name of the University's main campus Diliman means 'dark' in Tagalog; diliman is therefore a place of darkness or shade, and commemorates the forest that stood there before the campus was built after the Second World War. It is a lovely name, with its pleasing irony that a seat of enlightenment should be named for obfuscation.)

Student radicalism was, of course, much in the air at the time, and not only in the Philippines. As one might expect, the Filipino movement had close links with the revolutionary as well as with the ideological left. To show how the latter was still predicated on nothing more (but nothing less) revolutionary than the old question of land reform, the General Secretary of the new Communist Party
of the Philippines, Luis Taruc, had written to the Manila Times from his prison cell in Camp Crame a few years earlier:

In assessing the Huk problem today we need to study the centuries-old background of feudal landlordism, of the virtual slavery of the masses of our people. For social justice’s sake let us not forget that the Hukas are the living symbol of resistance and rebellion against the status quo, and as such must be looked upon with understanding and sympathy by the privileged class whose long-range selfish interest is on the side of non-communist genuine Hukas. We must reform and change according to the Christian democratic way, as called upon by Pope Paul VI in His Holiness’ encyclical ‘On the Development of People’. There is no other way, and we cannot delay, for time is running out on us. Otherwise, godless totalitarianism will do it for us at the cost of so much bitterness, hate, and destruction of lives, property and time-respected human values, human freedom and spiritual expression.

This is interesting not only for its reasonableness (the jailed General Secretary of the CPP invoking a Papal encyclical about social justice, no less) but for its anxious premonition of martial law, then still five years in the future. Far from indulging in alarmist special pleading, Taruc was by no means alone. The Manila Times had already noted that foreign observers were making the same point, while Raul S. Manglapus (an Opposition senator) in a speech to the Rotary Club in October 1967 said that ‘the outgoing Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines whose former post was in Latin America said publicly in Manila [ ] that he found in this country’s disparity of wealth and in the conditions of society, the same symptoms of revolution as those in pre-Castro Cuba.’

Meanwhile, it is instructive to let someone who was intimately involved with events on the left put them into perspective, if only to show once and for all the absurdity of the widely held belief that ‘the left’ was a mere tail which the old dog Marcos could wag at will.

The new party [CPP] grew phenomenally among the young. I was Chairman of the Philippine Committee for Freedom in South Vietnam. There were huge anti-war demos in front of the US Embassy in 1964 and 1965 – much earlier in the Philippines than elsewhere. I was going on leftist conferences abroad when I was a student at UP between 1960 and 1965. For example, I went to Indonesia with Nuri Masud [the founder in 1968 of the Moslem MNLF – Moro National Liberation Front] and Adrian Cristóbal, who was then a starving leftist. In 1966 I went to China with [now Senator] Hezonza Alvarez as guests of the Chinese Youth Federation, the Red Guards organization, so we saw the Cultural Revolution at close range. I came away definitely thinking it could be duplicated here. They were seductive concepts for young people then: egalitarianism, a classless society, the dictatorship of the proletariat. You wanted a cause to embrace and Maoism filled the void. So we returned to the Philippines preaching Maoism – or at least some of us did. Sonny Alvarez didn’t.

In 1969/70, at the beginning of his second term, Marcos had become very unpopular. The Party’s strategy was to hasten the victory of the Maoist revolution in the Philippines. The plan was for there to be increasingly violent disturbances in the city as the guerrilla movement spread throughout the countryside. In 1969 China had agreed to send material help to the Filipino revolution. We had highly secret contacts with Beijing. Marcos certainly had no idea of these preparations. As a journalist [with the Manila Chronicle], one of my tasks was to act as liaison between the Party and our representatives in Beijing. I was a courier. I went twice to Hong Kong with important documents and instructions to our man in Beijing.

Meanwhile, Marcos was becoming a despised tyrant. There were bloody demonstrations, including the First Quarter Storm, in which many students died – many from heaven, as far as the Party was concerned. All we lacked were weapons. The NPA [New People’s Army] already existed under Kumbander Dante, but it too had virtually no guns. We badly needed arms, so in 1971 the Party decided the time was ripe for a quantum leap in the struggle. So we sent a delegation to China to negotiate aid in the form of heavy weapons. Our first task was to arrange an arms shipment to Isabela. A ship was bought here in the Philippines and a shipping ‘company’ established. The Chinese