

# The return of Gloria

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It's one of the greatest comebacks in Philippine political history, the ascension of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to the speakership of the House of Representatives. If it were a movie, it could be called, as one wag pointed out, "From House Arrest to House Speaker."

Arroyo, of course, was never granted the privilege of house arrest, which she once accorded to her predecessor, Joseph Estrada. What she did experience was nearly five years of detention at the Veterans Memorial Hospital in Quezon City, her only real "crime" being her refusal to be the Yellows' marionette.

And yes, six years of non-stop vilification and blame from the insecure, vindictive and incompetent president who succeeded her, Noynoy Aquino. Aquino, who was so obsessed with Arroyo that he spent nearly all of his entire term pointing to her as the culprit when things went wrong and claiming credit for the things Arroyo did, when they went right.

I'll be the first to admit that it's not as much fun defending Arroyo now, when she is firmly back in the saddle as Speaker, as when Noynoy Aquino was bitch-slapping her with lawsuit after unfounded lawsuit just to keep her in jail with a permanent orthopedic brace around her neck. But the restoration of Gloria needs to be noted, if only because it proves an old contention of mine that Aquino's policy of political vendetta was not only unproductive but also totally unjustified, since none of the myriad charges he lodged against Arroyo was able to stand up in court.

This nation's history never witnessed such a monomaniacal but ultimately worthless pursuit by a successor of his predecessor. I don't think even Cory Aquino, from whom Noynoy must have gotten his vengeful streak, acted as badly towards Ferdinand Marcos as her son did when it came to Arroyo – and Cory was already vindictive in the extreme.

But the vicious vengefulness of Noynoy comes into even sharper focus when compared to the forgiving, forward-looking policy taken by President Rodrigo Duterte towards those who went before him. If Duterte was even half as revenge-obsessed as Noynoy, the latter would not be enjoying the comforts of his refurbished Times Street man-cave these days but would instead be behind bars for any one of the serious charges that he is facing.

And Duterte has never, as far as I can recall, blamed Aquino for all the corruption, laziness, incompetence and lack of empathy that he presided over for six long years. The potty-mouthed hick mayor of Davao City may have his faults, but indulging in the blame game isn't one of them.

But ultimately, Arroyo's return to power, in a political environment that isn't historically conducive to such comebacks, speaks eloquently of the flawed Yellow ideology that gripped the country for three decades and which only ended with the arrival of Duterte. Her assumption to the speakership is only the latest instance of the truth catching up with, and destroying, the mythology carefully constructed and maintained by the Aquino family and its true believers, who still insist that they have a monopoly of all that is good and true.

And Arroyo's return to power is largely symbolic, I think, despite the usual fear-mongering by the Yellows and their captive media, who say that she is once again engaged in a power grab that will end only when she is back as the undisputed ruler of the land in some shape or form. (This is a particularly insidious scare, because it glosses over the role of Cory, her favored oligarchs and the rest of the Yellow establishment in installing Arroyo after they had decided to hijack the presidency from the people and their choice, Estrada.)

Arroyo is not ever going to succeed Duterte, least of all because they are almost the same age. I think she agreed to assume the speakership – which her House colleagues had been clamoring for since 2016 – because of the message it would send about her determination to rehabilitate her tarnished image and as a reminder to Noynoy and his allies that they are no longer powerful enough to ruin her one more time.

And Duterte is just the kind of president who will not be threatened by an Arroyo speakership or the possibility that she may go for his position, according to some febrile Yellow plot. Duterte knows that the people are behind him and that those who want to destroy him cannot succeed as long as he has their support.

In Arroyo, Duterte probably sees a partner in pushing vital legislation sans the baggage of a Pantaleon Alvarez, his longtime friend who never really grew into the position of Speaker. And I am sure that Duterte knows that if Arroyo's speakership doesn't work out, the same congressmen who installed her can be induced to replace her, as well.

As for Gloria herself, she is politically mature and statesmanlike enough to understand this unspoken pact with the president. She is, in my opinion, motivated by ensuring that she leaves government with her legacy intact and, by leaving Congress next year at the end of her third term as congresswoman of Pampanga from the lofty post of Speaker, becoming a silent rebuke to Aquino and all who had tried to demolish her and erase her legacy.

On a personal note, I wish to extend my congratulations to Arroyo, whom I visited several times in hospital detention and at her home during the rare furloughs she was allowed by Noynoy. I always knew that she would survive Aquino, even when the campaign to discredit her was at its fiercest, because she was always infinitely wiser, more intelligent and more dignified than her shrill, incompetent and fake-righteous foes.

Gloria Arroyo is not a saint. But she was a great president, despite her flaws.

History will bear this out. Just as history will eventually expose the Aquinos for their three decades of fakery, cupidity and lack of love for their country and their fellow Filipinos.