



FORUM 3

Rapporteur's Report

Members of the Marcos family are back in office—Imelda Marcos as representative of Ilocos Norte during the 2010 elections, Maria Imelda Josefa “Imee” Marcos as governor of Ilocos Norte in 2013, and Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. as senator in 2010. What are the implications of having the Marcoses back in the government? What does this say about the Filipino people? These are the important questions raised on 28 November 2013 at the Pulungang Claro M. Recto, Bulwagang Rizal, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman in a forum organized by the Third World Studies Center on the political rehabilitation of the Marcoses.

Ricardo Jose, director of the Third World Studies Center and professor at the Department of History, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman, welcomed the audience to the forum and briefly explained its context. Noting that it has been forty years since the martial law declaration, he observed that some of the memories of martial law are changing with a new generation of Filipinos and the advent of social media. This shift in prevailing generational memory has significant political consequences. One of which is the return to power of the Marcoses.

WHAT REHABILITATION?

Amado Mendoza Jr., professor at the Department of Political Science, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman, started the discussion by disclosing that he was imprisoned from September 1973 to December 1974 and was tortured for about two weeks. This, he said, will not influence the assessment that he will make on the political fortunes of the Marcoses.

He explained that political rehabilitation is “the restoration of a person’s political state from a previous one.” The main question, Mendoza said, is if it was necessary to rehabilitate the Marcoses because he hypothesized that political rehabilitation is not necessary because the Marcoses “only suffered a temporary loss of status.” He stressed that the status of the Marcoses is secure and was only harmed in the eyes of those who fought martial law. The Marcoses suffered electoral defeats previously—Imelda Marcos ran for presidency in 1992 and Bongbong Marcos ran for a senatorial position in 1995. Members of the Marcos family still managed to get local government positions, and it was only in 2010 that Bongbong Marcos won a senatorial seat. Mendoza mentioned that the primary reason for Bongbong’s win is that he did not associate himself with his father and so managed to avoid the need to defend his father during the electoral campaign.

Mendoza stated the reason why the Marcoses do not need political rehabilitation: those who opposed the Marcoses during the martial law years have failed to revise history to convey the story of their sacrifice and struggle.

HISTORICAL REVISIONISM AND THE PREVAILING VIEW ON MARTIAL LAW

Ferdinand Llanes, professor at the Department of History, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman explained what historical revisionism is. He said that historical revision, in historiography, is “a new interpretation, a new way of looking at things and why [it happens].” He added that revisions are sometimes legitimate and important.

Llanes proceeded to explain that there is another type of historical revision, and this type uses illegitimate techniques. Also called “negationism” or “a narrative of denial,” Llanes pointed out that this revision is the kind that tries “to negate something that people would perceive to have happened,” and this is the one that is being associated with the Marcoses. But the question is: is there a prevailing or dominant view to be changed? Do the people think negatively of martial law such that the Marcoses would need to make some revision?

According to Llanes, Filipinos born from 1986 up to the present do not have personal memories of martial law. This is the segment of the population that is exposed to online and other media materials that glorify the Marcoses, and, given their uncritical handling of information, they may eventually vote the Marcoses into public office.

To see why this generation would vote for the Marcoses, Llanes looked into two sets of materials: 1) the social media, specifically videos about the Marcoses and martial law that can be found in the internet, and 2) the textbooks for basic education. He showed four videos that presented Marcos and martial law in a positive image. Textbooks constitute the second set of materials. Llanes thinks that “the image of the martial law period and the Marcoses are quite tame.” Comparing the textbooks with the videos, Llanes asserted that the actual perspective or view of independent authors is that martial law is good. Given that textbooks present a sanitized view of martial law, Llanes asserted that there is no need for the Marcoses to revise history. With this kind of education, it is not surprising that the youth may vote for Bongbong Marcos.

IDENTIFYING BONGBONG'S VOTERS

Gerardo Eusebio, a senior lecturer and political consultant, started by sharing how he got involved in the 2010 senatorial campaign of Bongbong Marcos. He and Bongbong came from the same school, De La Salle Greenhills, and were friends. Bongbong's wife, Liza Araneta, drafted him to be the campaign operations manager. He said that campaign consultants also follow certain ethical codes, that they only offer their services to people who they think can rightfully aspire to be elected. His perception of Bongbong Marcos is that he has “equanimity.” Marcos ran under the Nacionalista Party and ranked seventh with around 13 million votes. Most of his votes came from Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, and Abra. He also added that Metro Manila “was not really a very strong Bongbong area” and that they got more votes in Bulacan because there were a lot of loyalists there. Aside from the Ilocos provinces, Bongbong also got a lot of votes in Eastern and Western Visayas, Imelda Marcos's home turf, and in some parts of Mindanao. Eusebio shared that they got a lot of support from the senior citizens. Marcos loyalists and members of Kabataang Barangay (Marcos-decreed youth council in villages) are also part of this older generation. So with a very good media strategy, which included a catchy jingle and good placement of ads, Bongbong's victory was sealed.

On the question of the Marcoses' rehabilitation, Eusebio said that the past and current administrations after the authoritarian regime lost the opportunity to let the people feel the benefit of being in a democracy.

ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Butch Hernandez, executive director of the Eggie Apostol Foundation, mentioned that one of their foundation's core beliefs is that the state the people find themselves in is directly attributable to the educational system they went through. In connection to Llanes's argument, Hernandez presented data from a study by Maria Serena Diokno and the UP Department of History. In the study, textbooks that are being used today were evaluated and checked. He highlighted Diokno's comment that "the nature of historical knowledge is to interrogate and to evaluate statements that are authored and not to accept them at face value."

How do ideas about martial law reach the children? Hernandez displayed the results of the English proficiency test for Grade 1 and 2 teachers in 2012 that showed low figures. For the National Achievement Test results in 2012, results for Grade 6 students revealed scores that were below the minimum passing rate. He said that it has been the same for thirty years with meager 5-10 percent improvement every now and then. Given that in high school, higher order thinking skills are already needed, Hernandez emphasized how important basic education is by showing how fourth year students got lower scores especially in the test's critical thinking component. He defined critical thinking as "the ability to make an informed opinion on any particular issue at hand based on information that you gather." All of the data that Hernandez presented leads to the conclusion that our education system is weak.

He then showed pictures before martial law was declared. He explained that the martial law period was the hardest to get information about. Whatever photographs, videos, and news accounts there were, they were often the product of the Marcos regime's censorship.

He also maintained that the Marcoses could win an election and have as much chance as Manny Pacquiao when it comes to the presidency. He stressed that there is a need to reform the education system if we want the people to think critically and make informed opinions. There should be reform from basic to tertiary and even to post-graduate education because "it is affecting our ability to think critically." He concluded by quoting the late Haydee Yorac: "We deserve who we elect."

OPEN FORUM

Some of the points that were highlighted in the open forum were a) the need to provide a fuller picture of martial law that is not centered only on key personalities alone but on the central features of the regime, b) the use of social media and other technological innovations are powerful tools in raising the consciousness of the people regarding martial law, and c) the kind of narrative that should be told about the country's dark past.

On the first point, questions and comments from the audience—mainly students—indicate the need for a history or a resource material on martial law beyond the usual diatribes against the Marcoses. There were many other actors who were complicit and benefitted in the rise of Marcos and his eventual control of almost all aspects of the lives of the Filipinos; their complicity must be understood and accounted for. If the nation's martial law experience were to offer any cautionary tale, it should be of making people aware of how authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are formed and sustained. Having this knowledge is key to the constant vigilance in the fight against oppressive regimes.

Getting the vast and complex chunk of information on martial law to the current generation is the next challenge. Not much hope can be pinned on the educational system given its dysfunctions. The alternative, it would seem, would be through social media. But social media, or the internet, remains out of reach for the marginalized classes. What remains is an enlightened class that is willing to engage face-to-face those who articulate their preference for the Marcoses, or at least, do not have a fully formed opinion of their unsullied benevolence.

But what is the story that must be told? How should it be told? Crafting the narrative and mastering a medium for it is as crucial as gathering all the relevant facts on the Marcoses.

Overall, it can be said that much still needs to be done and that the effort should come not only from the older generation but from the younger ones as well. Vigilance, historical awareness, and critical thinking are needed more than ever. If we do not want the past to repeat itself, then we need to actively remind the Filipino people not to forget. ❀—**RAYA MAE B. MANALO**

MARIA LUISA T. CAMAGAY, professor, Department of History, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman served as the forum's moderator.

