

Rhetoric and Memory: The Arrival, Display, and Burial of Ferdinand Marcos's (Dead) Body

Orville B. Tatcho

University of the Philippines Baguio

ABSTRACT

Planned in secret, the burial of Ferdinand Marcos on the 18th of November 2016 at the Libingan ng mga Bayani (Philippine Heroes' Cemetery) drew criticism and renewed interest in the journey of the dictator's corpse. Through a rhetorical analysis of publicly available images of the return, display, and interment of Marcos's body, and using the framework of rhetoric and memory, the study argues that the postmortem career of Marcos's corpse engaged discourses of power and reconciliation, belonging and identity, and closure and erasure. The paper then makes a case for the dead body as a site of memory, narrative constructions, and attempts at rewriting history.

Keywords: burial, Ferdinand Marcos, Libingan ng mga Bayani (Philippine Heroes' Cemetery), memory, rhetoric

As an authoritarian who ruled the Philippines for over twenty years (from 1965 to 1986), Ferdinand Marcos's legacy remains a contentious issue. After declaring martial law in 1972 to extend his presidency indefinitely, Marcos led a personalist, authoritarian regime that "used the armed forces and paramilitary groups who arrested and imprisoned more than 60,000 citizens and harassed or liquidated alleged subversives" (Celoza 1). Aside from numerous human rights violations, the Marcos regime was notorious for the estimated \$10 billion in public assets stolen from government coffers, out of which only \$650 million was recouped by the presidential commission tasked with recovering the Marcos family's ill-gotten wealth (Villamor).

In 1986, Marcos was overthrown in what is known in Philippine history as the "People Power" uprising or EDSA Revolution. EDSA or Epifanio delos Santos Avenue is a highway located in the Philippine capital of Manila and the site of popular demonstrations that ended the autocratic rule of Marcos. Marcos was ousted through the non-violent political effort of strategic groups such as the military, the Catholic church, and civil society (Thompson 433). Aside from military defection and the concerted effort of strategic groups, two significant events led to Marcos's ouster. The first was the assassination of the formidable opposition leader, Benigno

“Ninoy” Aquino in 1983, a crime broadly attributed to government forces preserving Marcos’s rule. The other turning point that led to the uprising was the massive cheating in the 1986 snap elections which Marcos had called to legitimize his government in the face of widespread international criticism (Reaves).

As political turmoil ensued, the Marcos family fled the country in 1986. Then United States President Ronald Reagan, a friend and ally of Marcos, provided asylum to the latter’s family in Hawaii. During Marcos’s term as president, the level of corruption was unprecedented that the “conjugal dictatorship” of Marcos and his wife, Imelda, landed the former on the list of the most corrupt leaders in history—second only to Indonesia’s Suharto (Hodess 15). It was reported that when the Marcos family left the Philippines for the US, their jet “held 50 pounds of gold bullion and \$5 million–\$10 million worth of jewelry” and “a second plane carried 22 boxes filled with \$1.2 million of newly minted currency” (Traywick).

In 1989, and while in exile, Marcos died of lupus in Honolulu, Hawaii. Initially placed in a mausoleum, his remains were returned to the Philippines in 1993. From 1993 to 2016, Marcos’s body was publicly displayed in his hometown in Ilocos Norte, a province located in the Philippine north. His remains were finally interred at the Libingan ng mga Bayani (from hereon referred to as *Libingan*) in November 2016, after almost three decades of lobbying by the Marcos family, whose request to have the former dictator’s body interred at the Libingan was rejected by five successive post-Marcos presidents (Branigin).

The Return to Power of the Marcoses

While Marcos’s burial at the Libingan seemed to be the pinnacle of his family’s efforts at political restoration, it was only one part of a larger plan by the Marcoses to return to power. The political comeback of the Marcoses started in 1991 when Imelda Marcos, then in exile, was allowed to return to the Philippines to face charges of tax evasion and graft (“Timeline”). Meanwhile, 1992 was a bittersweet year for the Marcos family as Imelda unsuccessfully ran for president, but Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. won a seat in Congress as the representative of the second district of Ilocos Norte (Agence France-Press).

While Ferdinand Marcos’s body was finally returned to the Philippines in 1993, the Marcos family’s quest for political power continued even as Bongbong lost the senatorial election in 1995 and as Imelda ran for president in 1998 again, only to withdraw her candidacy days before the election (“Timeline”). From 1995 to 2007, Imelda and her children, Bongbong and Imee, continued to occupy local positions in Ferdinand Marcos’s home province of Ilocos Norte. The breakthrough came in 2010 when Bongbong Marcos was elected as senator. Six years later, he narrowly lost the

vice presidency in the election that saw Rodrigo Duterte's rise to the presidency. In 2016, Ferdinand Marcos was finally buried at the Libingan with Duterte's blessing (Agence France-Press).

As if to signal a reversal of the Marcos family's past electoral losses, Imee Marcos also won a seat in the Senate in 2019 ("LOOK: Imee Marcos"). In the run-up to the 2022 Philippine presidential election, Bongbong Marcos was topping pre-election presidential surveys (Domingo), foreshadowing his eventual, decisive victory in the polls. Fielding his own anointed successor who later withdrew from the race, Duterte attacked Bongbong, calling the latter a "weak leader" (Buan, "Duterte"). While Duterte did not support Bongbong's presidential bid, the former was instrumental in the burial of Bongbong's father at the Libingan.

Marcos's Burial During Duterte's Term

During the presidential campaign of 2016, eventual winner Rodrigo Duterte, the former mayor of Davao City who ran on a crime-busting platform, promised to bury Marcos at the Libingan. In his first three years in office, Duterte ordered the Philippine police to shoot drug suspects as part of his bloody war on drugs (Buan, "Supreme Court"), jailed an opposition senator based on trumped up charges, and threatened to close the country's largest television network, which he accused of having bias for another candidate during the campaign ("Rappler Talk"). On different occasions, Duterte also extolled Marcos's authoritarian leadership.

Duterte's admiration for Marcos was no secret, and his alliance with the Marcos family was fueled by rumors that the latter contributed to his campaign (Villamor). When Duterte ordered Marcos's burial at the Libingan months after winning the elections, protests ensued as Filipinos were dismayed by efforts to recast Marcos as a "hero." Martial law victims who filed a petition to the Supreme Court claimed that the burial amounts to "a total denial of the abuses committed by the Marcos regime" (Pasion).

Solicitor-General Jose Calida, in defense of Duterte's order, reiterated that the "notion that only 'heroes' can be buried at the Libingan is a 'legal and historical' misconception," claiming further that Marcos's burial does not make him a "hero" and does not constitute a rewriting of history but merely an act of recognizing that Marcos had been a Philippine president (Pasion). Duterte also favored the burial "not because he [Marcos] was a hero but because he was a Filipino soldier" (Villamor). As a resting place for heroes and martyrs including war veterans, dignitaries, former presidents, and national artists and scientists, the Libingan is like the Arlington National Cemetery in the United States, which serves as a "national shrine for military memorials" (Cabrera).

Dead Bodies as a Site of Memory

While place and space are indeed part of the controversy in Marcos's burial at the Libingan, this paper argues that the corpse can also be a site of memory as it is invested with meaning and symbolism (Guy; Harper; Johnson; Verdery). On the one hand, Marcos's dead body functions as a site of memory in which different narratives can be constructed. On the other hand, the narratives and memories mediated *in* and *through* Marcos's corpse are polysemic or carry multiple meanings, suggesting that no single political actor has the monopoly over what Marcos's body signifies. This paper therefore interrogates what the Marcos family and their allies in government endorse as "official narratives" of how Ferdinand Marcos should be remembered and what his burial at the Libingan signifies.

Through a rhetorical analysis of images of Marcos's body from the time his remains were returned to the Philippines to his eventual burial at the Libingan, I argue that the postmortem career of his corpse was enmeshed in narratives of power and reconciliation, belonging and identity, and closure and erasure that cater to the political interests of the Marcoses. Taking off from Grey Dickinson et al.'s framework of rhetoric and memory, I use rhetoric as a "mode of critique" to render Marcos's burial and the images related to the political journey of his body as "meaningful," "legible," and "consequential" to different actors (17–18). Dickinson et al.'s framework also states that memory is animated by *affect*, conceptualized as the ways in which emotional connections to what is observed in space, place, and time produce effects such as anxieties, shared identities and histories, and a sense of belonging (17–18).

For the rhetorical analysis, I chose five publicly available images for two reasons. First, as visual evidence of the events of the past, the images support the objective of this paper to present an accurate account of the postmortem career of Marcos's corpse. Second, images either supplement or provide a counterpoint to the dominance of words and language in public discourse. A historical account of the journey of Marcos's corpse thus benefits from the study of a wide range of texts, foremost among which are images. To set the stage for my rhetorical analysis, I briefly explain the rhetorical nature of memory (Dickinson, et al.) and dead body politics (Guy; Johnson; Schwartz, "Dead Matter"; Verdery).

Materiality of the Corpse

Margaret Schwartz argues that a corpse "may be said to be an assemblage of multiple elements, some of which are human and some of which are not" (4). As an assemblage, the corpse is composed of an entanglement of material and symbolic elements that inflect commemorative practices. The materiality of the

corpse allows families and communities to memorialize the dead through rituals and practices of display and burial. Memory as a symbolic construction—images and pictures in our heads, affect and emotions—may also be animated through viewing a physical, tangible corpse. It is through the corpse that death assumes a corporeal form. The corpse rots and may spread disease, and when viewed, reminds us of our own inescapable immortality.

The materiality of the corpse then attests to the need for interventions such as embalming to slow down the process of decomposition (Schwartz, “Dead Matter”). Upon his death in 1989, and prior to his burial at the Libingan in 2016, Marcos was embalmed and kept in an air-conditioned mausoleum as a shrine for supporters. The embalmed corpse and its materiality can therefore act as a signifier, a site of meanings that animate memories and discourses through its sheer visibility.

The display of corpses facilitates another rhetorical intervention that capitalizes on the material aspect of the corpse—photography. Photography uses the “corpse as a medium to represent ideas about death in general even as they [work] to capture the likeness (and thereby secure the social memory) of an individual person” (Schwartz, “Dead Matter” 20). Photography allows the extraction of memories for ideological purposes through the interpretive communities that give a corpse its meaning (Verdery). Through interventions such as embalming and photography, the corpse is preserved as a site invested with meanings and symbolisms.

Symbolic Aspects of the Corpse

Aside from its corporeal form, the corpse is also discursively inscribed (Verdery), a perspective that this study takes and builds on. Scholars have recognized that dead bodies have political utility in that various actors are engaged in a tug-of-war to control meanings and symbolisms attached to the death and memory of political figures (Guy; Johnson; Verdery). Lyman Johnson notes that dead Latin American heroes and martyrs often have “postmortem careers,” by which he means the “processes through which these bodies are selected as political vessels, the forms in which they are venerated and memorialized, and the ways in which these bodies are invested with meaning” (2). Marcos’s body is no exception. It has a postmortem career that invites controversy not only over where it should be buried but also in the kinds of memories it animates.

Meanwhile, dead bodies can be used politically in various ways: as a vessel to celebrate the freedom of a country through a deposed dictator (Auchter, “@GaddafisGhost” 291), as a symbol of the body politic (Guy; Johnson), as an instrument to lobby for justice (Verdery 31), and as a way for current governments to advance narratives (Arguelles 263). In each of these cases, different actors extract multiple

and often conflicting meanings from the dead body. The dead body is thus a site of polysemy or multiple meanings and interpretations (Verdery 34–38). Depending on who is viewing the corpse, the corpse can be perceived as good or evil, or be disregarded or memorialized. Because dead bodies can no longer talk, they can only symbolize the will of the body politic (Cantwell 621). The traveling corpse of Evita Peron, for instance, attests to this, with her supporters and critics in a constant fight to establish its rightful place in Argentina's history.

While Marcos's corpse no longer signifies intentionally and voluntarily, it still engenders debate among people who wish to either preserve or contest his legacy and memory. The meanings and memories invested in Marcos's corpse lend credence to Katherine Verdery's argument that a corpse has "legitimizing effects not because everyone agrees on its meaning but because it compels interest *despite* divergent views of what it means" (34–38). The interest that Marcos's corpse generates has to do with the political struggles and controversies in the country's authoritarian past which continues to haunt Filipinos to this day.

Verdery also points out that corpses "can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions" because they have been permanently silenced and thus "words can be put into their mouths" (31–38). The fact that dead bodies cannot verbally respond is advantageous for groups wanting to deny or distort historical records as a means of political legitimization. This can be seen in the Marcos family's involvement in advancing versions of history that sanitize Marcos's legacy of violence, their refusal to apologize for crimes committed during his term, and their outright denial of his wrongdoings.

Extracting Memories from the Corpse

Memory is a product of rhetorical action as it is "based on the capacity to *re-present* an event, a person, or an idea that one has already encountered" (Blair 56). The memories extracted from the corpse depends on the agency of those viewing it, such as their families, the state, and the public who can choose to remember or forget. However, what is remembered has less to do with what happened in the past than what is needed in the present. In the case of Marcos, the need of the present was framed by Duterte as the need for healing and national reconciliation. Central to this interest is the process of remembering which "always involves an act of forgetting as well, creating both presence and absence" (Palczewski et al. 86). Marcos's corpse is thus caught in the dialectics of foregrounding mythical over accurate historical narratives and activating positive stories in the interest of erasing an unfavorable, tragic history.

What must also be considered is that the “recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information” (Schwartz, “The social” 374). Remembering Marcos’s legacy involves political choices by actors who emphasize an aspect of the dead person’s life over others. Recollection of the past activates a host of memories associated with the Marcos regime like the “people power” uprising that ousted him in 1986, how the Filipino body politic still struggles to hold the Marcos family accountable for crimes of the past, and how a considerable segment of the same body politic agrees with Duterte that national healing and reconciliation are in the interest of the present.

Specifically, in the context of burial and reburials, Jessica Auchter argues that a burial is a “mechanism of state identity construction,” where mass graves serve as sites of “examin[ing]... the logic of memorialization governing political violence” (“Burial” 113). Burials and reburials are ways by which states, in their attempt to forge national identities in post-genocide contexts, manage questions about who belongs and do not belong in the body politic. Marcos’s burial at the Libingan is also an avowal by the Duterte government of Marcos’s role and place in Philippine history as a “former president” and a “Filipino.”

As an instance of how corpses or dead bodies can belong to a body politic, Christine Harold and Kevin DeLuca examine how the “abject” and “lynched black body” of then 14-year-old African American Emmet Till who was abducted and tortured in Mississippi in 1955 was used collectively by the black community to rally against racial injustices and abuses suffered in the hands of “unmitigated white power” (263). Marcos’s corpse and its consequent burial at the Libingan also serve a political purpose, albeit a nefarious one. Unlike Till’s body which was used by his family to show the horrors of racial violence, the rhetorical power of Marcos’s corpse was used for the political vindication and return of the Marcos family.

Studies have been conducted on the politics of memory (Rubin), the debate on where to bury Marcos from the perspective of dead body politics (Masangkay and Del Mundo), and the conceptualization of memory as a process that benefits Marcos at the expense of his victims (Martin). This study contributes to this discussion by foregrounding the corpse or the dead body itself as a site of memory. Drawing on the arguments of Dickinson et al., my perspective on memory and affect advances two points. First, affect and memory are also animated by dead bodies. They depend on the materiality of the corpse insofar as the “relationship between the living and the dead is mediated by a visible dead body” (Harper 308). Rituals, such as viewing the dead, “evoke one’s own personal losses or one’s identification with specific aspects of the dead person’s biography” (Verdery 33). It is on this level that dead bodies allow the living to think, feel, remember, and experience things.

Second, since dead bodies cannot talk and actively signify, it is important to recognize how meanings, stories, and narratives about a corpse are constructed through the memories of the living. Memories of the living may not be historically accurate, but they nonetheless influence a corpse's postmortem career by making the dead and its legacies relevant to the present (Guy; Johnson). The preservation of Marcos's corpse, while done for the purpose of waiting to inter him at the Libingan, is also part of his family's desire to memorialize him and fulfill what they claim was the dictator's wish. The succeeding analysis thus capitalizes on interpretations of what the Marcos family deems as the rightful resting place of Ferdinand Marcos from the time his remains were brought back to the Philippines in 1993 to his burial in 2016.

Using images drawn from an online search related to the return, display, and burial of Marcos's body, the analysis proceeds in three parts—the return of Marcos's body to the Philippines, the display of his remains in his hometown, and his eventual burial. These images are publicly available in online news articles about the history and journey of Ferdinand Marcos's corpse leading to his burial. Where necessary, the rhetorical analysis of the images is also supplemented by digitally accessible news articles and Supreme Court decisions.

The Postmortem Career of Marcos's Corpse

In tracing the postmortem career of Marcos's corpse, the central arguments of the succeeding discussion are as follows: (1) the return of Marcos's corpse deals with themes of power and reconciliation, (2) the display of Marcos's dead body speaks to notions of belonging and identity, and (3) the burial of Marcos spotlights issues of closure and/or erasure.

The Return of Marcos's Corpse

There are two points of discussion about Marcos's return to the Philippines: the power of his corpse and its intersections with memory as debated in the body politic in 1989, and how Marcos's corpse was central to discourses of identity and reconciliation.

The Corpse: Power and Memory. Following his ouster in the 1986 EDSA Revolution, Marcos and his family fled to Hawaii in exile. Upon his death in 1989, the matriarch Imelda invoked the right of their family to return to the Philippines with her husband's remains. Then President Corazon Aquino, wife of slain opposition leader Benigno Aquino Jr., however, did not allow their return to the country "in the interest of the safety of those who will take the death of Marcos in widely and passionately conflicting ways" (Gavilan, "Timeline"). Even though Marcos was

ousted in a generally peaceful people's uprising, there were still Marcos loyalists and supporters in the Philippines, as well as in Hawaii where the Marcos family was granted asylum. Aquino's reason for not allowing the return of Marcos's remains to the Philippines highlights two things. First, the body of Marcos can engender "passionate" and "conflicting" reactions from people who might destabilize the peace and order in the country. Second, bodies, which are powerful tools that can be used for political purposes, are believed to catalyze material consequences such as those feared by Aquino.

While most Supreme Court justices agreed with Aquino's concerns, Justice Isagani Cruz's dissenting opinion in *Marcos v. Manglapus* states:

By and large, it [Marcos's corpse] has been met with only passing interest if not outright indifference from the people. Clearly, the discredited dictator is in death no El Cid. Marcos dead is only an unpleasant memory, not a bolt of lightning to whip the blood . . . This only shows that if he was at all a threat to the national security when he was already moribund that feeble threat has died with him. As the government stresses, he has been reduced to a non-person (which makes me wonder why it is still afraid of him).

While Marcos's death in Hawaii and the return to and display of his corpse in his hometown in northern Philippines did not inspire a movement among his loyalists, what Cruz missed in his analysis is the ability of the of the Marcos family, particularly Imelda, to lobby hard to restore the Marcos family's name. Imelda never gave up on a hero's burial for Marcos even as a succession of four presidents after Corazon Aquino rejected her plea to have Marcos interred at the Libingan (Branigin).

The strong reactions to the return of Marcos's remains to the Philippines also highlights anxieties about how the Filipino people would react, given that various groups have different memories of Marcos. Dickinson, et al. mention that memory is partial and partisan and, while there are shared and common memories, meanings and interpretations still vary, and different groups may contest the stories that "should" be told when remembering a person's legacy. What can often mediate between multiple meanings is the "body" in question. To his family and followers, the legacy of Marcos or "Apo Lakay"—a name denoting respected elder or leader and a vernacular reference in Marcos's mythology—lives on. To his critics and the Filipino people who joined the 1986 EDSA Revolution, Marcos's return impinges on the triumphalist narrative of the people's uprising that deposed the dictator.

Ann-Marie Cantwell argues that “political upheavals also have been marked by disputes over whose body will, in fact, become the icon of the new body politic” (621). Events in Philippine history show the points in which figures (and bodies) became prominent. The assassination of Marcos’s archnemesis, the opposition leader Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr., helped catapult his wife/widow, Corazon “Cory” Aquino, to the presidency. When Cory Aquino died in 2009, Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III—the son of Cory and Ninoy—was elected to the presidency the following year. However, in 2016, a resurgence of pro-Marcos propaganda and authoritarian nostalgia became evident.

Regardless of “effect,” the return of Marcos’s corpse to the Philippines has consequences. Former President Corazon Aquino was concerned about the destabilizing effect Marcos’s corpse may have on the Philippine body politic while Justice Cruz denies any such potency. For the Marcos family, Imelda’s insistent lobbying to have Marcos’s corpse interred at the Libingan shows a sense of belief in the dictator’s legacy—a legacy the Marcos family argues is worthy of admiration and therefore can launch a political comeback for the Marcos kin. The debate about the supposed effect of Marcos’s corpse illustrates Verdery’s argument on the polysemy of the corpse. Different stories can be extracted from Marcos’s corpse, and hence, different memories, reactions, and interpretations become possible because of it. His family and loyalists may ascribe heroism and exceptionalism to Marcos’s corpse. On the other hand, Aquino and survivors of the Martial Law period attach feelings and memories of threat, trauma, and excess to Marcos’s corpse.

When Marcos died in Hawaii in 1989, it was apparent that his claims to rule the Philippines were far from over as his supporters argued for the return of his remains to the Philippines (Cantwell 620). The Marcos family had to wait for Corazon Aquino’s term to finish before they could have Marcos’s remains flown to the Philippines. Then in 1992, under the leadership of the new president, Fidel V. Ramos, the Marcos family signed a deal with the Philippine government allowing Marcos’s body to be flown to the Philippines on the condition that his remains be flown directly from Honolulu, Hawaii to his hometown in Batac, Ilocos Norte.

Returning for Reconciliation? While no one can say for certain what then President Ramos’s intentions were, his directive to fly Marcos’s remains to the latter’s hometown seems to have recognized a precarious situation, suggested by the refusal to have Marcos’s remains flown to Manila. After all, Marcos was deposed by the people’s uprising in EDSA, a famous street in Metro Manila. If there is a place that would most likely welcome Marcos and embrace his legacy, it is his hometown.

Dickinson, et al. state that memory “narrates shared identities and constructs a sense of communal belonging” (13–14) and this is true in the case of Marcos. Marcos took pride in his identity as an Ilocano, the largest ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines which mostly resides in the Philippine north. It is not surprising then that the Marcos family would agree to have the dictator’s body flown to his hometown. As Marcos’s shared identity with Ilocanos provides a sense of communal belonging, the notion of the “solid north” or the regionalist block vote also stands to benefit the Marcoses in contemporary Philippine politics.

The fourth to the last photograph in Jodesz Gavilan’s article “From Hawaii to Ilocos Norte: The Long Journey of Ferdinand Marcos” shows the arrival of the Marcos family with the flag-draped coffin of Ferdinand Marcos. Carrying the coffin are retired military generals and the late President’s son, Bongbong Marcos (wearing the black armband). Bongbong is wearing a *barong* or an embroidered formal shirt known as a Filipino national attire for men. Following the coffin are Imelda and Imee Marcos, wife and daughter of the late dictator, respectively. They are both wearing black-colored Philippine *terno*, a Filipiniana dress known for its butterfly sleeves. Imelda dons the *terno* in different state functions and is known to have popularized it in the Philippines. The full regalia of the Marcos family coupled with the presence of retired military generals, the media, and Marcos supporters signify the beginning of the show, a public performance commenced by the return of the dictator in a new “life” form.

Indeed, the Marcos family returned the way they had left: putting on a show for everyone to see, making their presence felt, not wanting to succumb to oblivion. After all, “Marcos... was a master of the political spectacle, and melodrama was both the mode and modus operandi of his statecraft” (Espiritu 1). The return of Marcos’s corpse to the Philippines may be a cause for celebration for his supporters in his hometown where the Marcos family still enjoys a huge following to this day. The arrival of political figures seems to carry significance in the public imaginary given one precedent: in 1983, the body of opposition leader Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino was shot dead by Marcos’s henchmen as he stepped off the plane, abruptly putting an end to an otherwise anticipated showdown between Ninoy, the nationalist, and Marcos, the dictator.

The arrival of the Marcoses and how they staged it can thus be interpreted as a plot about one’s “dignified” return to the homeland. While there may be attempts at reconciliation between Marcos and the body politic that deposed him, the arrival also involved the Marcos family’s desire to reclaim and redeem political power. The third to the last photograph from Gavilan’s “From Hawaii” shows children and residents waving Philippine flags with a portrait of the late Ferdinand Marcos as a hearse carrying his coffin parades in his hometown.

If one looks at the Philippine flag as not mere paraphernalia, the Marcos family is communicating something deeper: Marcos's identity as a Filipino. Noteworthy too is the mood and general reception to Marcos's arrival in his hometown. As a report in the *Washington Post* describes, it was a "bizarre and somewhat macabre homecoming," a festive atmosphere "intended by the Marcos family to be a symbol of reconciliation between supporters of the autocrat and those who deposed him in 1986, including the current president, Fidel Ramos" (Branigin). The origins of the discourse of national healing by the Duterte government is palpable in the Marcos family's narrative of reconciliation, where even as Marcos's remains were directly flown to Ilocos, the arrival of the family on Philippine soil signifies the first contact and reconnection between the Marcoses and the Filipinos post-1986. The sense in which the Marcos family established reconciliation and a shared identity with the Filipino people is further explored in the next section, which deals with the interim between Marcos's return to the Philippines in 1993 and his burial in 2016.

Marcos on Display: The Home (Belonging) of a Filipino (Identity)

After the arrival of the Marcos's remains in 1993, Marcos was kept in a crypt in his hometown. The last photograph in Gavilan's "From Hawaii" shows Marcos's embalmed body through a sealed glass coffin in a mausoleum. One cannot deny the extent to which the Marcos family was willing to preserve the memory of the dictator. The lavish display of his corpse in his hometown from 1993 to 2016 was made possible by using massive resources to sustain embalming, air-conditioning, and other costs for its upkeep. The decision of the Marcos family to display the late dictator in a mausoleum also served another purpose. Led by its matriarch, Imelda, the family refused to bury Ferdinand Marcos "until the government yield[ed] to her demand for a burial in the National Heroes' Cemetery in Manila" (Branigin). In the interim, Marcos's corpse found a home in his hometown where the Marcos family projected the dictator as a mere Filipino who belongs to his people and country.

The Corpse and its Home. Marcos's return to his hometown and wish to be buried in a place of his choosing illustrate the intricate link between place and memory. Places "are objects of attention and desire" and "construct preferred public identities" (Dickinson et al. 23–30). As the resting place of deceased Philippine presidents, patriots, national heroes, and those conferred as national artists, and national scientists, the Libingan inspires reverence and remembering. However, Marcos first had to settle for another "home" where he would remain displayed and unburied.

Cantwell argues that "bodies can remain unburied, be reburied, put on display, or any combination of these until political resolution has been reached" (621). Unfortunately, the political resolution for the Marcos family did not come easy

as successive presidents after Ramos were also against a heroes' burial for the late dictator. Estrada, elected in 1998, "abandoned his plan of finally burying Marcos at the Libingan, supposedly scheduled on July 11, 1998, after it was met with various sentiments that flared up" (Gavilan, "Timeline"). For his part, Benigno Aquino Jr. understandably did not act on the long-standing request of the Marcos family because Marcos was perceived to have had a hand in the killing of his father (Espiritu).

The Corpse as Filipino. Another image of Marcos's body on display in Ilocos shows what was written in his epitaph. The first photograph in the *BBC* article "Philippines: Duterte Orders Ferdinand Marcos Body Move" captures onlookers passing by Marcos's crypt. The black epitaph reads "FERDINAND E. MARCOS," "1917-1989," and "Filipino." The corpse is wearing a medal and the traditional embroidered Filipino formal shirt *barong*, and in the background is the Philippine flag. All these mark Marcos's identity as a "Filipino" and invoke a sense of nationalism. In his minority opinion in *Marcos v. Manglapus* where the Supreme Court upheld Corazon Aquino's decision to bar Marcos's return to the Philippines in 1989, Justice Padilla states: "Mr. Marcos is a Filipino and, as such, entitled to return to, die and be buried in this country." Such is the importance of place as it "mobilizes power in ways not available to other forms or technologies of memory" (Dickinson et al. 23).

The political power base of the Marcos family is in the Philippines, particularly Ilocos, and through Marcos's burial in the country, the family established his affinity with the Filipino people. As indicated in his epitaph, Marcos wants to be remembered as a Filipino, both as an identity and to signify his belonging to our political community. Other labels used to describe Marcos such as "president," "patriot," or "veteran" will draw different and contested memories due to the controversy surrounding his legacy and achievements. The label *Filipino* does not carry any baggage when attached to Marcos's body and memory. As Justice Teodoro Padilla wrote, "our democracy is built on the fundamental assumption (so we believe) that the Constitution and all its guarantees apply to all Filipinos, whether dictator or pauper, learned or ignorant, religious or agnostic as long as he is a Filipino" (*Marcos v. Manglapus*). Nonetheless, the fact that Marcos is a Filipino does not so easily settle the issue of his burial at the Libingan. While being buried there does not confer on him the status of "hero" (*Ocampo v. Enriquez*), his burial at the *Libingan* can be used by the Marcoses for political vindication in the future.

One must also reflect critically on the label "Filipino" since it is not as unproblematic as one might think. Horrors can be committed in the name of nationalism because the construction of a national identity can be exclusionary. Saying that Marcos should be buried at the Libingan because he is a Filipino and a president who

served the country, while “legalistic,” as Duterte claimed, is an oversimplification of the moral and political dimensions of the issue. A hero’s burial has implications for how one is remembered. As Dickinson et al. argue, memory relies on “material and symbolic support” (18), and Marcos’s burial at the Libingan lends both kinds of support to a narrative of exceptionalism, and even heroism.

Marcos’s Burial: Closure or Erasure?

The Supreme Court’s decision to have Marcos’s body interred at the Libingan states that Marcos’s dishonorable discharge through the EDSA Revolution of 1986 “should not automatically be given a particular legal meaning other than its obvious political consequence – that of ousting him as president,” concluding that the “the country must move on and let this issue rest” (“Full Text: SC Decision”). In line with the idea of closure, Solicitor General Jose Calida also said that President Duterte “desires to begin the long overdue healing of our nation and to exorcise the ghost of enmity and bitterness that prevent us from moving forward” (“Full Text: SC Decision”). For the Marcos family and the Duterte administration, the burial at the Libingan represents closure or “moving on.” However, such closure is partial as it only serves the memory of the Marcos and the interests of the political elite. Marcos’s burial at the Libingan continues to engender impassioned debates.

The first photograph in the *Rappler* feature “LOOK: Marcos Burial Photos Past and Present” shows Marcos’s flag-draped coffin being prepared for entombment. The Philippine flag hovering over Marcos’s coffin signifies the Philippine nation’s moving on and rising above memories of the past. The image suggests that the chapter on Marcos is closed, that he is no longer on display and no longer physically visible. As the family buried the dictator, so should the country bury the issues and controversies associated with him. While the military was crucial to Marcos’s authoritarian rule and its downfall, the image shows military personnel participating in the rites and rituals fit for a soldier’s burial. They helped maintain peace and order during the burial and Marcos’s body was thus treated with respect in the presence of his friends and family.

While Marcos was given full military honors, the exact date of the burial was publicly confirmed only an hour before the ceremony. This prompted the then Vice President of the Philippines, Leni Robredo, to remark:

As stated in several decisions from the Supreme Court, Ferdinand Marcos was a thief, a murderer, and a dictator. He is no hero. If he were, obviously his family would not have to hide his burial like a shameful criminal deed. (“Robredo on Marcos”)

Robredo noted that the Marcos family “flouted the law where the decision does not become final and executory until 15 days or the resolution of the [motion for reconsideration]” (de Jesus). The Supreme Court released its decision on November 10, and eight days later, Marcos was buried at the Heroes’ Cemetery. Robredo expressed concern about the “secret” coordination between the Marcos family, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) together with the Philippine National Police (PNP), which demonstrated how the “judicial process [was] thoroughly disregarded” (de Jesus).

The circumstances surrounding the burial of Marcos’s body, under the radar or hidden from public view, is far from the way that his family handled the arrival of his remains which journalists described as a “bizarre spectacle” and a “macabre homecoming.” Jody Madeira asserts that “states use in/visibility as a framing strategy to accomplish projects of control, accountability, and punishment” (127). In the case of Marcos’s burial, invisibility was used for control, to avoid challenges and complications of a media circus and a popular protest. However, the invisibility of the burial drew attention to itself, making the burial a ripe target for popular protest. Clearly, this invisibility performed by the government was not able to silence the critics of Marcos.

In *Ocampo v. Enriquez*, the Supreme Court says that lessons during Martial Law are already engraved in history textbooks and educational institutions, and commissions have already been instituted to assist and ensure reparations to Martial Law victims. However, unlike Duterte and the Marcos family, critics and protesters are against “moving on” or letting the divisive issue on Marcos’s legacy rest because nobody in the Marcos family ever admitted or apologized for any of the crimes committed during Martial Law. The historical distortions on social media which show a rosy picture of the Marcos regime (see Hofilena; Mendoza; Ressa) also discount the memories of the victims of Martial Law.

Bradford Vivian argues that “distorted recollections and outright forgetting” serve as “anathema to maintaining healthy collective memory and the forms of public identity it promotes” (5). The Marcos family’s use of propaganda amounts to distorted recollections while the public’s ignorance, apathy, and indifference to issues during Martial Law can lead to outright forgetting. While Marcos’s burial may be viewed as a mechanism for healing, reconciliation, and closure for the Marcos family, and even the Duterte administration, the same burial may be tantamount to the erasure of the memories and accounts of the crimes committed by the Marcos regime against the victims of Martial Law.

CONCLUSION

The Marcos family's call to "move on" necessitates closure; yet closure has been elusive for four reasons. First, only an insignificant amount of Marcos's ill-gotten wealth has been recovered by the Philippine government. Second, the justice system seems to be broken as cases against the Marcos family and their cronies continue to be dismissed. While there have been convictions, such as that of Imelda's for plunder, the offense is bailable, and enforcement is another problem. Third, the partisanship and polarization among educators in the Philippines make it a challenge for them to provide a nuanced, holistic picture of what happened during Marcos's term, and to dispel myths, misconceptions, and historical distortions related to the Marcos regime. Finally, the Marcos family has also been unwilling to admit and apologize for the crimes committed during the Marcos regime.

In relation to bodies as a site of remembering, Marcos's body is talked about because it continues to be memorialized by his family. What his body represents depends on memories of the living and whose memories are emphasized. Having economic and political capital, the Marcos family fulfilled the dictator's wish. Unfortunately, who gets to be remembered are those who can turn the present in their favor and rewrite their troubled past.

Remembering Marcos as a "hero" also comes at the cost of the memory of his victims. If Marcos is a "hero," then what does one make of his crimes and the atrocities committed during his time in office? If Marcos is a "hero," then what happens to the memories of victims and survivors of Martial Law? Verdery points out that the "complexity (of dead bodies) makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history" (29). Dead bodies function as sites of memory because they make possible a set of meanings, stories, and interpretations. However, only dead bodies that amass enough symbolic and political capital, like that of Marcos, can be imbued with favorable memories and revisionist narratives.

If certain bodies serve as sites of memory, we should then ask: what memories are we privileging and forgetting? What happens to the memories of struggle, the need for justice, and the triumphalist narratives of People Power, which have come to define the Filipino spirit and identity? While memories may be structured by place and the deployment of space, a dead body can also be a site of memory and discourse. The controversy surrounding Ferdinand Marcos's burial is therefore not just about where he should be buried but about the just and critical appraisal of memories and legacies.

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Orville B. Tatcho (obtatcho@up.edu.ph) is an associate professor and the chair of the Department of Communication, University of the Philippines Baguio. He obtained his Ph.D. in Communication and Information Sciences from the University of Alabama where he was a Fulbright-CHED scholar from 2018 to 2021.