



## FORUM 5

### Rapporteur's Report

The fifth and final forum in the series entitled “My Husband’s Lovers: *Ang Pag-ibig at Pagkamuhi Kina FM at Meldy Magmula sa mga Martial Law Babies Hanggang sa Kasalukuyang Henerasyon* (My Husband’s Lovers: The Love and Contempt for FM and Meldy from the Martial Law Babies until the Present Generation)” was held on 4 February 2014 at the Pulungang Claro M. Recto, Bulwagang Rizal, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. The forum aimed to uncover the dynamics that surround the ever-changing public image of the Marcoses and their impact on Filipinos from different generations.

The panel for this forum was composed of Teresita G. Maceda, professor at the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, UP Diliman; Frank Cimatu, editor of *Mondo Marcos* and correspondent for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*; and Raissa Robles, correspondent for the *South China Morning Post* and publisher of raissarobles.com.

#### MYTHMAKING AND THE MARCOSES

Maceda shared her personal experiences during martial law, including the injustice suffered by the sibling of a friend and co-faculty member at UP Baguio who was tortured simply for being related to a suspected member of the underground movement working to overthrow the dictatorship. Despite being described by others as apolitical, her friend was arrested without a warrant. This story of injustice during the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos, sadly, was not one of a kind. Even before the declaration of martial law, members of the military were already rounding up suspected activists. Others were able to escape, including the sibling of Maceda’s friend, but thousands were not. Almost no one was spared: one may not have experienced it

herself/himself, but may know someone who did—a family member, a friend, or a colleague. These were the realities of martial law which, according to Maceda, “despite efforts to erase from memory are carved in the collective memory of the people.”

Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, however, created other realities for the Filipino masses and utilized the mass media to construct a myth that would validate Marcos’s rule. The semibiographical film *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* was among the most potent of the Marcos family propaganda as it set the stage not only for Ferdinand Marcos’s presidency in 1965 but for his almost fourteen-year dictatorship by claiming that it was his destiny to rule the country. *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* had all the ingredients to make a truly captivating myth: a bitter struggle at the beginning (being charged for the murder of his father’s political rival), success after adversity (topping the bar exams and getting himself acquitted of murder), courage in times of war (Marcos’s alleged war exploits), and most importantly for the Filipino audience, victory in love (winning the heart of Imelda).

Despite the controversies surrounding the film, Marcos won the hearts and minds of many Filipinos. At a time before turncoatism was fashionable, it was a mortal sin to shift from one political party to another. But Marcos did—from the Liberal Party to the Nacionalista Party—and he was able to successfully launch a run for the presidency against incumbent Diosdado Macapagal, his former partymate. In Maceda’s words, “the Filipinos put their hopes for a better future in the hands of a sorcerer.”

According to Maceda, it was during his second term in office (beginning 1969) that Ferdinand Marcos revealed his true intentions. The streets, by this time, were beginning to be filled with protesters from the different sectors of society and Marcos was already preparing for his authoritarian rule. He had started to ensure the loyalty of the military to him and had soldiers trained in torture and psychological warfare. At the same time, Marcos had started building his “brain bank” of technocrats. Marcos had been creating, according to senator Jose Diokno quoted by Maceda, a “Throne of Bayonets.”

Meanwhile, the First Lady Imelda Marcos had been working nonstop in organizing her own loyal coterie, collecting art works, and most important of all, building state-of-the-art infrastructures. She personally handpicked architects, engineers, and interior designers, for her prestige buildings (e.g., the Folk Arts Theater and the Manila Film Center). Imelda’s “edifice complex” sank the nation deep in debt.

Moreover, for the sake of “the true, the good, and the beautiful,” informal settlers were forcibly relocated. Imelda also spent people’s money on herself. Seeing herself as the epitome of beauty, she declared, “Filipinos want beauty. I have to look beautiful so that the poor Filipinos will have a star to look at from their slums.”

All of these were part of the validation of the authoritarian regime and the facade to hide the atrocities being committed by the Marcoses from the Filipino masses. And to help them in their efforts to introduce the concept of Bagong Lipunan (New Society), the Marcoses (re)created and promoted an ordinary myth—that of “Malakas and Maganda,” the strong and the beautiful. This myth, implies that the “new society” for the Filipino people begins with Ferdinand and Imelda.

Maceda believed that the myths created by the Marcoses were responsible for making the masses accept and tolerate the Marcos dictatorship. She also believed, however, that Ferdinand and Imelda did not create these myths alone. “Only the people can be the source of myths,” she said, citing as another example the case of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr., whose myth of martyrdom sprouted after his assassination. His wife, Corazon “Cory” Aquino, who was then a full-time stay-at-home mother to their four children, later became the protagonist in her own myth—light defeating darkness (Marcos), defeating the dictator to become the first woman president of the Philippines. Maceda hoped that the time will soon come that the Filipino people will see the truth behind the Marcos myths.

Maceda lamented how, unlike other nations which suffered from brutal dictatorships, the Filipino people seem to “prefer to just fold our memories away.” She believes that while we do not easily forget, our leaders have chosen to do so, giving way to politics of accommodation and patronage, resulting in the many issues and problems of the past remaining unresolved up to this day. Unlike other countries with similar experiences, the Philippine government did not create truth commissions so that the victims of martial law could face their torturers; no markers were built in places where the atrocities had been committed; no murals crafted to give life to the slogan “never again.” As a result, not only do the myths perpetuated by the Marcoses remain potent, but so do their other legacies: turncoatism, corruption, cronyism, poverty, and extrajudicial killings, among many others.

Maceda emphasized the need to remember and commemorate, to “awaken the thoughts of the people that were dulled during the long years of martial law,” and to think critically. Only through these can another dictatorial regime be prevented. She then concluded by singing a satirical song by Los Enemigos, which derides a number of Marcos cronies and technocrats, stating that there is still hope if the audience members can recognize the names of the ridiculed.

Cimatu provided an overview of the Marcos cults and loyalists after martial law. Being a “Marcos baby” (born between 1965–1985)—as well as being born to a Marcos loyalist family, Cimatu generally had a good impression of Marcos and martial law while he was growing up. He did not personally experience the atrocities of the dictatorship although one of his siblings was an activist and it was only later, as a correspondent for a daily paper, that he learned about the dark side of the Marcos regime.

His first encounter with the Marcos cults came while he was on assignment for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* after the EDSA Revolution. He covered the arrival of the remains of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in his hometown in Ilocos Norte. Among the first cults he encountered was Espiritu Santo, which splintered from the Philippine Independent (Aglipayan) Church and was headed by Bernabe Abella. Another was the Pangasinan-based Gold Eagle, whose members believe that Marcos will return to this world in the form of a golden eagle. Another was Alpha Omega Sagrada Familia Hesukristo Espiritu Santo, Samahan ng Anak ng Diyos, a cult based in Blumentritt, Manila and had around 300 members. As reflected in the inscription “This is the Dawn” in the former dictator’s statue in Batac, the cult’s members believe that Marcos was the “bringer of light.”

Cimatu then talked about other loyalist groups. One active group is the FIRM-24K (Friends of Imelda Romualdez Marcos), a political organization with tens of thousands of members. The Commission on Elections approved its application as a partylist and was able to garner tens of thousands of votes during the 2010 elections. While denying any connection to it, Imelda was photographed leading an induction of FIRM-24K’s newly-elected officers.

Marcos loyalists are also utilizing technology and have been active in promoting the Marcoses in social media platforms such as Facebook. Cimatu pointed out that while the loyalists and cult members have traditionally been senior citizens, those active in Facebook mostly belong to younger generations. Nevertheless, these Marcos loyalists

continue to idealize and project a positive image of the Marcoses in Facebook where they can reach a large number of people. Some have been projecting Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. as a viable candidate in the next presidential elections.

In closing, Cimatu cited an essay written by Belinda Aquino of the University of Hawaii, which was on a study she conducted on Marcos loyalists in Hawaii. Most Filipinos in Hawaii have Ilocano roots and this shared ethnicity was exploited by the Marcoses during their exile there. According to her study, of the 150,000 Filipinos in Hawaii, only one percent are outspoken Marcos loyalists. Majority of them belong to the younger generation, come from a middle class background, and are educated. Even though they knew about Marcos’s post-EDSA reputation, they chose to either continue supporting the Marcoses or remain neutral. Some chose to stay silent, which especially bothered Cimatu. He believed that silence will enable the Marcoses to return to power and reverse the gains achieved under democracy.

In her presentation, Robles had two objectives: (1) to deconstruct how Ferdinand Marcos could be considered a hero by a number of Filipinos twenty five years after his death and twenty eight years after the declaration of martial law; and (2) to deconstruct how his widow Imelda and their three children are now back in the highest rungs of society.

According to Robles, Ferdinand is considered a hero and the three other Marcoses are in positions of power, first and foremost, because “the generation that overthrew the Marcos conjugal dictatorship thought that the regime was so brutal and so greedy in its accumulation of wealth and power that people did not need further reminding of it.” The people who lived through martial law failed to document their experiences for the future generations and popular history textbooks have not been updated to include the martial law era. She believes that “part of the reason is that many intellectuals who could have written about that era were co-opted by the dictatorship to become propagandists or to turn out think tank reports. They are, therefore, ashamed to reveal what they did during martial law.” Without the extensive details of the horrors of the martial law period, the Marcos family was able to create new myths for a new generation Filipino voters: “(1) martial law was a ‘benevolent dictatorship’; (2) there were no human rights violations and abuses during the period . . . (3) the economy boomed under Marcos; and (4) Marcos was the greatest president since he built the most number of infrastructures.”

Robles then proceeded to “deconstruct” each of the myths, beginning with the idea of a “benevolent dictatorship” or “smiling martial law.” According to her, in stark contrast to what the Marcoses are now selling to the younger generation, fear was what prevailed throughout the country during the martial law period. Marcos had total control of the country and “the military and the police could also pick up anybody at will on the streets or right in their homes and one had to be very careful about making jokes about the Marcoses and the ‘New Society’ in public.” The Filipinos, however, only realized this after the Marcoses left the country. Based on reports by human rights organizations, there were at least 10,000 human rights victims who were killed or tortured.

According to Robles, a little-emphasized legacy of the Marcos authoritarian regime was the continuing war in Mindanao. In Mindanao, 60,000–80,000 civilians and rebels died between 1972 and 1976, while over one million people were displaced, due to the wars against the Moro National Liberation Front. This all-out war in Mindanao contributed greatly to the misunderstandings involving Muslims and the lack of progress in the peace process in southern Philippines.

Robles then examined the economic legacies of the Marcos regime. When Marcos became president in 1965, the Philippine foreign debt was less than USD 1 billion. In 1986, this became USD 27 billion. The Marcos dictatorship also caused the value of the peso to “nose dive” from PHP 3.90 per USD in 1965, to a low of PHP 20 per USD in 1986.

The second reason that may explain the positive perception of the Marcoses was their exploitation of certain cultural norms and Filipino values that “help them propagate their own version of reality.” The first norm she identified was “respect your elders.” Robles explained that “Ferdinand Marcos exploited this by calling himself ‘apo,’ which in Ilocano means ‘elder person in authority.’” She also pointed out that advanced age is the reason Imelda Marcos is still respected. Another norm was “do not speak ill of the dead.” This, Robles claimed, goes against the very writing of history. The third cultural norm was “forgive your enemies.” According to Robles, “a person who does not forgive his enemies is often labeled vindictive,” therefore, “the public should stop demonizing Marcos in the spirit of reconciliation.” The fourth cultural norm was “do not bring the sins of the father on his children.” This is despite the son having “long been in cahoots with his father and mother” or him now being “the legal executor of his father’s estate” and

“one of the named beneficiaries of the USD 356 million Swiss bank accounts.”

The Marcos children, according to Robles, are attempting to reinstate their father politically using taxpayers's money. Many key activities of governor Maria Imelda Josefa “Imee” Marcos for Ilocos Norte were in honor of her late father such as the “‘President Marcos Cup’ for practical shooting, a rock concert called ‘DaReal Makoy Concert 2,’ the ‘Marcos Fiesta 2013 Flash Mob Full,’ which details the life of Marcos in a dance, and ‘The First Ferdinand Marcos Sirib Intercollegiate Debates 2013.’” His birthday was also declared as “Marcos Day” in Ilocos Norte. “All these are intended to project the Marcos version of history,” Robles said. Robles also highlighted the effective use of the Marcoses of social media platforms.

Robles cited that in 1998, Mahar Mangahas of Social Weather Stations wrote about “a remarkable softening of public opinion towards Ferdinand Marcos.” Mangahas opined that this was partly due to changing demographics and Marcos's passing in 1989. Robles continued quoting Mangahas in adding that the survey results were “not about the character of Marcos but about the character of the Filipino people. Not many of us would care to hold a grudge against someone long dead, not even someone like Ferdinand Marcos.” This trend continued and by 2011, Ferdinand Marcos was named in the “top three most identified Filipino heroes” by 5.1 percent of respondents.

A third reason is that the government is not condemning the Marcoses but attempting to forge a compromise settlement with them. This promotes a sense of injustice according to Robles, as stated by associate justice Artemio Panganiban: “The waiver of all claims against the Marcoses would be a virtual warrant for all public officials to amass public funds illegally, since there is an option to compromise their liabilities in exchange for only a portion of their ill-gotten wealth.”

In resolving the issue of mythmaking by the Marcoses, Robles recommended actions that must be taken. Documentation of torture, including from the side of the Marcoses, is needed. She encourages “a historiography of martial law,” for it to be written in black and white, and for credible references to be easily accessible. In addition, she believed that the “delusions [and] attempts to erase history” of online Marcos loyalists have to be vigorously engaged.

## OPEN FORUM

The forum opened with a question by Aaron Mallari of the UP Department of History. He asked the panel about striking a balance between teaching students about the martial law period without falling into the trap of demonizing Marcos and his government. Maceda, a professor herself, advised that as a teacher, one must take a stand. She recommends showing students documents and narratives, and letting them speak for themselves. Robles recommended challenging the students' views by making them participate in pro- or anti-Marcos debates where they take the side contradictory to their beliefs.

Next, a UP student asked the panel how we know if the anti-Marcos propaganda, e.g., allegation of atrocities, were not manufactured by his enemies. Robles responded that there are voluminous documents of crimes committed during martial law but these documents are sealed. Only recently have they come to the surface. On the question of whether Marcos was the greatest president, she commented that we have to look at the entire picture. The good things that he did were overrun by the monumental bad things. Maceda added that she came from a military family and she had firsthand knowledge of military men who served as torturers. The collective memory of people about the martial law period are not lies because they are anchored on actual experiences.

A student from the UP Asian Center made a comment on the changing views about the Marcos era. In his view the emergence of a more positive perspective on martial law is because there is new information that was not highlighted previously. Instead of having varying perspectives, he is looking for one definite perspective. Robles reiterated the necessity of writing new history books. Cimatu agreed with the student's observation by sharing that it took him almost a decade before he was able to get both the positive and negative sides of martial law. Maceda added that "all theorists make stands" but "also allow for different perspectives." The problem for scholars is that it is a never-ending debate while the problem for the people is how to tell this story to future generations in a way that they will understand its context.

Another student asked what lessons can be learned from martial law. She highlighted her background as a native of Batac, Ilocos Norte. Growing up in "Marcos country" and being surrounded by Marcos loyalists shaped her understanding of martial law. Maceda sympathized with the student's position, but also pointed out that only select



provinces such as Ilocos, Leyte, and Samar flourished under Marcos. Maceda encouraged the student to reflect on the “mystique of Marcos.” Robles told the student that her questioning stance means that there was “an awakening” in her that she should embrace. Another student, whose mother was Ilocano, wondered if Marcos was being excessively demonized to elevate other administrations. Among the panelists’ responses, Maceda stated that we have to be critical of all administrations. ❀—JOSHUA B. BAQUIRAN

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

