



Where to Bury Marcos? Dead Body Politics in the Marcos Playbook

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ABSTRACT. Almost three decades after his demise, the burial of Ferdinand Marcos, former president and dictator, continues to be a divisive issue in Philippine politics. Even in death, he is still able to draw both feelings of veneration and rage. It is in this context that this article draws together several versions of Marcos's dying wish on where he must be buried and juxtaposes these claims with the Marcoses' political maneuverings to get back into power. The objective is not so much to determine with certainty Marcos's wish, but rather to build a chronology of when his supposed wish was invoked, by whom, and for what political purpose. Relying on news accounts and other secondary sources, this article traces several versions of Marcos's dying wish regarding his final resting place in the shifting accounts of his family members and close associates throughout the years after his death. Using the frame of dead body politics, this article offers a close scrutiny of how human remains have intermingled with the politics of the living. The article argues that both the disputes surrounding the final resting place of Marcos's body and keeping his remains above ground as some sort of cult relic have served not only to sustain myths about his regime, but also to bolster the family's extant political interests.

KEYWORDS. Ferdinand Marcos · Marcos burial · Marcoses · dead body politics

INTRODUCTION

In the morning of November 18, 2016, news broke out that Ferdinand Marcos, the former Philippine dictator, was interred in the Libingan ng mga Bayani (LNMB) or Heroes' Cemetery, as commentators would say, "like a thief in the night" (*CNN Philippines* 2016). The corpse of the former dictator was finally buried after it was frozen for some years in Hawaii, paraded along his home province in Ilocos Norte, and then displayed for decades in a refrigerated coffin in a mausoleum for public viewing. Twenty-seven years after Marcos died, one can marvel at the conveyance of his dead body from one place to another, ultimately ending at the cemetery reserved for heroes in the nation's capital—a

supposed end-game in a political scheme that the Marcoses played for decades.

This article traces the unfolding of these developments, beginning with the ailing dictator's dying wish to conditions in the present where his dead body continues to figure in Philippine society. The paper traces several versions of Ferdinand Marcos's¹ "dying wish" in the reported declarations of the Marcos family throughout the years after his death. It also recounts the ways in which the family navigated the political terrain as they demanded for Marcos's final resting place. More critically, this paper probes how the living Marcoses have benefitted from these declarations.

To meet the above objectives, data from newspaper articles from 1988 to 2016 were collected and systematized. The following digital archives were used: newspapers.com, newsgoogle.com/newspapers, washingtonpost.com/archive, archives.chicagotribune.com, nytimes.com, and articles.latimes.com. Related materials were also found during field research in Mariano Marcos State University in Ilocos Norte, the bulwark of the Marcoses. Keywords used were a combination and variations of "Ferdinand Marcos," "death," "burial," "Libingan ng mga Bayani," "Heroes' Cemetery," and "dying wish." Journalistic accounts were thus used to put together the declarations made by the Marcos family, developments in relation to Marcos's dead body, as well as the public opinion at the time. Biographies of key personalities, related pieces of legislation, and court decisions were also consulted to supplement the news articles. The events and developments recounted in these primary and secondary documents were organized chronologically and structured into a narrative to outline the various declarations of Marcos's dying wish and the responses of the Philippine government and different sectors of the society.

This paper begins with a discussion of dead body politics as a conceptual framework. Next is our findings, which is an account of the changing declarations and political maneuvers of the living Marcoses. We conclude with a discussion of how dead bodies have been used by the Marcoses in the pursuit of their various political ends.

1. From here, Ferdinand Marcos will be referred to as "Marcos" and his family members will be signified using their first names (i.e., Imelda, Imee, and "Bongbong" for Ferdinand Marcos Jr.).

STUDYING THE POTENCY OF DEAD BODIES

If Rodrigo Duterte feigned being undecided about his bid for the presidency in 2015, he was certainly decisive about interring Marcos in the LNMB. As part of initial academic efforts to gauge the former Davao mayor's first six months as president, Cleve Arguelles (2017) weighed in on Duterte's controversial decision. For Arguelles (2017, 275), the Marcos burial "resuscitates authoritarian fantasies of the Philippine nation while de-legitimizing democratic legacies of the EDSA People Power." While it is true that Duterte was a key actor in giving the late dictator a state burial, a more in-depth appreciation of the issue compels us to go beyond the Duterte administration, go back to the past and put in plain view the long-running attempts of the Marcoses to rehabilitate the memory of their patriarch in varying degrees of accommodation with several of the preceding administrations.

Existing literature points to the potency of human remains to become repositories of meanings and discourses of change for the society surrounding it. Anne-Marie Cantwell (1990, 614) argued that individuals turn to the remains of the dead especially in times of political instability, that is, how corpses can become icons to which individuals impute their vision of change and the society they want. Cantwell (1990, 615-24) gave examples of this in history where human remains have been turned into relics by the living as they are "searching for a definition," from "cults of royal saints" in medieval Western Europe, the mummification of remains of Egyptian pharaohs, to the Andean Incas. While human remains have the form and force to represent and legitimize a particular sociopolitical order, Cantwell (1990, 626) wrote that societies also turn to the desecration of the dead as an expression of the people's aversion towards the current order of things, such as the exhumation of the royal graves in Saint-Denis during the French revolution in an effort to expunge the memories of the reign of the monarchs. In 1817, what was left of the remains of the Valois and Bourbon royal families were reburied on the grounds of Saint-Denis as an attempt towards legitimation of the newly ascended King Louis XVIII.

In order to "animate" the study of political transformations that happened in "postsocialist" Eastern Europe, Katherine Verdery (1999) explored the meaning-making practices that surrounded the repatriation and reburial of human remains. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, states like Romania, Hungary, and Croatia started the repatriation of the remains of their "cultural treasures" like musicians and painters

who died abroad either in exile or asylum, in order to “refurbish national identities” that were, for the longest time, subsumed under the Soviet blanket. Dead bodies were used as “symbolic capital,” meant to accompany their reconsolidation of political power, and in certain respects, of global standing, as a result of the devaluation of what they previously considered as political capital after the fall of communist parties. Political aims, therefore, benefit from the sacredness, the sense of awe that the living holds over dead bodies. Furthermore, she posited that the symbolic effectiveness of human remains lie in their ambiguity, not only their materiality (following Cantwell 1990), producing symbolic capital depending on the observer’s disposition, the dead person’s story (or at least the aspects that are being emphasized), and the context by which the dead body is placed.

Finn Stepputat (2014) added another dimension to the study of dead body politics. While maintaining that the sheer materiality of human remains warrants a close investigation, his edited volume sought to demonstrate how death becomes an occasion for the state to exercise its sovereignty. An article by Lars Ove Trans (2014) in the edited volume pursued the story of the repatriation of Julio, a migrant from Zapotec Indian community in San Pedro Yalohua, Oaxaca in Mexico, who died in Los Angeles. In the process of bringing home Julio’s remains, his family found themselves having to steer the rules and claims of varying political communities. But more than this, the repatriation has unwrapped notions of nationhood and belonging. The federal state of Mexico has been supportive of repatriating the remains of its people, and this is because the return of departed Mexicans fit into a political narrative of the state and the “diasporic consciousness” among the migrants, that their “final allegiance is demonstrated by their choice of burial site” (Trans 2014, 83). Stepputat (2014) thus shifts the attention to state capture of the dead to show the different meanings invested in dead bodies.

Based on the salient literature reviewed, there appears to be a trend in dead body politics scholarship toward routes of power. Dead bodies can be both icons of legitimation and repositories of meanings for societies in transition (Cantwell 1990), used as social capital (Verdery 1999), and can also become objects of the state’s exercise of sovereignty (Stepputat 2014). Embedded in the manipulation and repositioning of human remains by the living, therefore, are discourses of power and notions of nationhood.

In this paper, the corpse of the late dictator is seen as a corporeal symbol for memorialization, which is central to the creation of mythologizing narratives about the man and his regime. Marcos's dead body was kept above-ground and displayed for decades, has accumulated a cult following, has attracted rumors regarding its authenticity, has become an object of people's rage, and has been used by his family in political negotiations with administrations that succeeded him. The mere materiality of his remains played an important role in stirring so much divisiveness. Ascertained by existing works on the topic, dead bodies not only represent the past, but are also intimately associated with the existing order, and for purposes of this paper, current interests. The rehabilitation of Marcos's image, undertaken through the crusade for a burial in the LNMB, is not just for the tarnished memory of the dead man and his regime, but for the extant political agenda of his living family members. Dead body politics, therefore, is concerned with how human remains have intermingled with the politics of the living. In the Philippine context, it is tied to the conversion of dead bodies into relics that have the potency to generate multiple meanings and therefore create polarities that in turn sustain and consolidate political bases.

THE DYING WISH OF JOSEFA MARCOS

As an important prelude to the drama, we begin with the dying wish of Marcos's mother, Josefa. Marcos was already seriously ill when he and his family fled the Philippines for Hawaii on February 25, 1986, the height of the People Power Revolution. Then President Corazon "Cory" Aquino banned Marcos and his family from returning to the Philippines, fearing that their return would "destabilize" her already shaky government.

An early attempt at coming home was upon the death of Elizabeth Marcos-Keon on December 15, 1986.² The next day, Cory called an emergency cabinet meeting where they anticipated that Marcos may request to come home for Elizabeth's funeral. Prior to this, there was a report that a radio station in Manila broadcasted a speech from

2. Pro-Marcos writers such as Salvador Escalante and Augusto de la Paz (2000) claimed that Marcos sought US President Reagan's help to return to the Philippines in light of Elizabeth's death. The US State Department allegedly replied and said that Marcos should take it up directly with Cory's government.

Marcos saying that he wanted to spend Christmas in the Philippines (Associated Press 1986a). Several taped messages were also sent to his supporters saying that he wished to return to the country. Meanwhile, Cory's cabinet unanimously decided to ban Marcos from coming home. Presidential spokesman Teodoro Benigno threatened arrest if Marcos came home for his sister's funeral or for the holidays (Reid 1986). The following day, Marcos's ailing mother wrote to the ministries of defense and foreign affairs saying, "The loss of my elder daughter, coming after the forced departure of my son, is almost too much for my old and infirm body to bear . . . I have little time left in this world. This visit may be my last opportunity to see my son. I can only pray it will be granted" (Associated Press 1986b). The day before this letter was sent, another Marcos sister, Fortuna Marcos-Barba, said that they had delayed telling their mother about Elizabeth's death, and that they never told her the full story of her son's ouster (Associated Press 1986a). In a press conference, Benigno said that they had anticipated this request, but citing "national interest," the ban on Marcos's return remained. He went on to say that the government was willing to let Josefa leave for Hawaii, and offered to shoulder the transportation expenses (Associated Press 1986b).

Two years later, on May 4, 1988, Ferdinand's ninety-five-year-old mother died of cardiac arrest. Hours before her death, in a letter to Cory, Josefa allegedly said that her dying wish was to have her son by her side on her deathbed. In a carefully crafted emotional letter to the president (unsigned but furnished with her alleged thumbprint), Josefa implored Cory to let her child, who was at the time also in critical condition, come home to bury her (Reaves 1988, 8). News reports pointed to a custom among Ilocanos of waiting for the eldest child to come home before burying the family matriarch (Murdoch 1989, 7). A few weeks after Josefa's death, Cory made a concession: Marcos's three children can come home to visit their deceased grandmother. Oliver Lozano, lawyer and spokesperson for the family, responded that the Marcos children will not go home without their father. At that time, Marcos loyalists flocked to the streets to demonstrate against Cory's restrictions and were quick to frame the issue of Marcos and his family's return into that of human rights (*Washington Post* 1988, 5). One can find this ironic not only because of the Marcos regime's tawdry human rights record, but also because when Josefa was still alive, Marcos and his family had no qualms politicizing the health of their matriarch. After eight years of hospitalization, the Aquino government

paid for Josefa's hospital bill that reportedly amounted to USD 57,333, because the Marcoses claimed that they could not afford it, which was of course untrue (Tribune Wires 1986, 21). Gambling on Josefa's well-being was another maneuver to score cheap political points against Cory's administration.

Upon her death, the Marcoses made sure that Josefa's body was on full display (Le Vine 1988). They delayed her burial for four years to pressure Cory into allowing the Marcoses to go back to the Philippines. Josefa's body was treated monthly by the famed mortician Frank Malabed; her expensive gowns were routinely changed and her makeup retouched frequently (Murdoch 1989,7). Despite Josefa's prolonged wake, Cory did not yield.

The Marcoses then turned to their legal options. They filed a petition with the Supreme Court questioning Cory's powers in prohibiting them from returning home. Consistent with the earlier clamor of Marcos loyalists, their petition invoked their "liberty of abode and right to travel." The high court ruled on September 15, 1989 that the president was indeed entitled to determine whether or not the Marcoses can return home on the basis of her "residual unstated powers" as the chief executive "to safeguard and protect general welfare" (*Marcos v. Manglapus*, GR No. 88211, September 15, 1989). Upon the death of Marcos two weeks after the ruling was released, the family filed a motion for reconsideration. Again, the motion was denied articulating that the death of Marcos did not change the circumstances specified in the earlier court decision (*Marcos v. Manglapus*, GR No. 88211, October 27, 1989).

Indeed, Josefa's dying wish became a rallying point for the Marcoses' return to the Philippines. Pressure also came from anti-Marcos groups and individuals (Drogin 1989, 1) to reunite Marcos and Josefa when both were still alive (Associated Press 1988, 6), and Cory certainly did not go unscathed. This marked the Marcos family's first attempt to use a Marcos corpse to send their message to the Philippine government. As one observer aptly puts it, Josefa's body, which was under vigil for years and which had accumulated a cult following, was not just the remains of Imelda's mother-in-law. It was "another stick with which to beat Mrs. Aquino, who won't let Mrs. Marcos bring the body of Ferdinand home in the way she wants" (Fathers 1991, 11). But before Marcos's return, we backtrack to tell the story of his dying wishes.

THE DYING WISHES OF FERDINAND MARCOS

A person's dying wish or *huling habilin* conjures a melancholic and sentimental scene of a person in her or his deathbed. It is a compelling mental image for most Filipinos, in that one is duty-bound to honor a loved one's final request. The importance of the *huling habilin* is reflected in the Filipino (Christian) custom of including (almost always as first agenda) in what we call today as "last will and testament" or *testamentos* during the Spanish period, the testator's wish for their final resting place. This includes how they would like to be buried, sometimes with specifics on the ceremonies itself, and the person or persons who will be responsible for implementing these wishes.

The first mention of Marcos's alleged dying wish was to "be allowed to return to the Philippines," which he reportedly said when he was rushed to a hospital in Hawaii due to heart failure (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1989, 8). In February 1989, urged by Imelda, then vice president Salvador Laurel flew to Hawaii. Laurel claimed that in his hospital bed, Marcos told him this: "Just let me die in my own country. I want to be buried beside my mother" (Laurel 1997, B14). The ailing Marcos purportedly instructed Laurel to convey a message to Cory: that Marcos wished to give 90 percent of his wealth to be distributed to the Filipino people, with only 10 percent to be left for his family. In his biography, Laurel regretted that Cory refused to listen to Marcos's alleged settlement, suggesting that it could have saved the Philippines from the ensuing debt crisis (Diaz-Laurel 2005, 187), a problem that Cory's administration inherited from Marcos. Cory remained firm that she would not allow Marcos to return to die and be buried in the Philippines (*St. Cloud Times* 1989, 10).

Since Cory made the recovery of the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth a top priority with the creation of the Presidential Commission on Good Government through her very first executive order on February 28, 1986, the Marcoses dangling their plundered riches for political accommodation have become a familiar gambit on their part in the succeeding years. And Marcos bequeathing all his earthly possessions to the Filipino people is an old trick. Upon reelection in 1969, he made a pronouncement that all of his "material possessions" had been transferred to a non-profit to be known as Ferdinand E. Marcos Foundation for eventual distribution to all Filipinos (United Press International 1969, 1). This Marcos lie is fundamental in the growth and proliferation of scammers trafficking in this marvelous possibility

of Marcos directly giving back his loot to every Filipino (see Ariate 2017 for a more recent example).

After more than three years of exile in Hawaii, on September 28, 1989, Marcos died. Marcos had been “a frail, chronically ill man with multi-system abnormalities,” the most life-threatening of which was his renal problem (Aruiza 1991, 349). He succumbed to cardiac arrest. Ferdinand Jr., or “Bongbong,” announced his father’s death. Bongbong declared what was supposed to be his father’s final wish: “His instructions to us were to bury him in the Philippines, and we are continuing to hope that he’ll be allowed to go home” (*Los Angeles Times* 1989, 7). Imelda, on the other hand, said that her husband was to be cremated and his ashes scattered in the Philippines “to fertilize his country” (*Philadelphia Inquirer* 1989, 18). In another instance in October 1989, Bongbong declared, “There’s one point I want to make perfectly clear and that is, the final resting place of my father is going to be Ilocos Norte” (Associated Press 1989b, 6).

A ban on moving Marcos’s remains was put in force by the United States Federal Aviation Administration at the request of the State Department. No aircraft carrying the body of the former dictator could fly from Hawaii (or any location in the US) to the Philippines. The measure was put into effect as early as June 1989, two months before Marcos passed away (United States Department of State 1990). A similar restriction was implemented by the local Civil Aviation Board (Villanueva 1992b).

Meanwhile, Imelda was determined that Ferdinand would not be buried in foreign soil. Marcos’s body was treated and kept in a temporary refrigerated crypt in the Valley of the Temples Memorial Park in Hawaii until they could return to the Philippines. She exclaimed, “Not only will it be a political statement, it will be a spectacle—an international spectacle to have Marcos (lie in state) here” (Gannet News Service 1989, 4). For Marcos to be buried in exile would leave a lasting image of a once glorified but overthrown despot. Despite this pronouncement, it was reported that a few days before Marcos’s death, Imelda requested interment for her husband at a war veteran cemetery in Hawaii through her Washington lawyer, Richard Hibey, only to be denied by U.S. officials (Wright 1989, 1).

Unmoved by the death of Marcos and amid exhortations from both pro- and anti-Marcos groups saying that even in death, the man has the right to return to his country, Cory was determined not to allow the return of the late dictator’s body (Drogin 1989, 1). Officials

in Washington upheld Cory's security assessment regarding the return of Marcos's remains. In a statement, Cory said,

In the interest of the safety of those who will take the death of Mr. Marcos in widely and passionately conflicting ways, and for the tranquility of the state and the order of society, the remains of Ferdinand E. Marcos will not be allowed to be brought to our country until such time as the government, be it under this administration or the succeeding one, shall otherwise decide (Associated Press 1989a, 10).

Declared before the witnessing public, the wish supposedly uttered by the dying man changed several times even after his death.

WHAT THE MARCOSES WANT, THE MARCOSES GET

The standoff over where to bury Ferdinand Marcos is the latest example of 'body politics'—a Filipino game Corazon Aquino's supporters once played themselves to rally a nation and topple a dictator...The object is to play on the Filipino's almost mystical respect for the dead to promote the cause of the deceased and the fortunes of the living (Associated Press 1989c, 7).

Midway through Cory's term, Imelda was acquitted of fraud and racketeering charges in the United States. She threw a victory party wherein she echoed that it was her "foremost desire" to reunite Marcos with his mother (Our Wire Services 1990, 5). In August 1991, Cory's government allowed Imelda to return to the Philippines in order to face tax fraud charges—but the ban on the remains of her husband was sustained (Times Staff and Wire Reports 1991, 11). Imelda declared that with her return, her mission was to "rehabilitate" the name of her husband and reunite him with his mother first before both of them could be buried (Fathers 1991, 11).

In October of the same year, Cory finally approved the return of Marcos's remains, on the condition that it shall be flown directly to Laoag, Ilocos Norte and shall be buried within nine days beside his deceased mother. But Imelda envisioned a grand procession in the country's capital to signify her return with her husband's dead body. She refused the government's condition and said that she was determined to pursue her husband's sacred dying wish, which was to be buried in the LNMB with full honors, as a former head of state (*Ilocos Times* 1991). Given the family's political fortunes at the time, this was obviously a longshot.

For someone who was about to face numerous criminal charges, Imelda's tone was reconciliatory as she stepped on Philippine soil for the first time after five years in exile (Associated Press 1991, 4). Wounds from the Marcos regime had not healed, and yet she was vocal about her resolve to rehabilitate the image of her late husband. But upon her return, Imelda seemed to have lowered her expectations as to what she could realistically demand from the current government. She expressed that she would only bring home the remains back to the Philippines if it could be buried near Manila, specifically "on a hillside outside Manila...as a simple soldier" (Tierney 1991b, 4). Such display of the late dictator's remains was exactly what Cory was apprehensive of, in fear of causing disorder in her already unstable administration. From 1986 to 1987, she faced six attempts to overthrow her—most of which were farcical coups staged by forces that remained loyal to Marcos.

Short of two weeks of landing in Manila, rumors that Imelda intended to run for president started swirling around, and in January 1992, she made it official (Associated Press 1992a, 4). Conveniently, Imelda accepted Cory's original concession for an Ilocos Norte burial shortly after she announced her presidential bid (Associated Press 1992b, 45). This compromise was but a step for Imelda, who was accustomed to getting her way; she made it clear that an Ilocos Norte burial would be temporary and her husband's remains will be transferred to Manila, where he supposedly wanted to be buried. The country then witnessed Imelda waving her new passport in front of a spectating crowd, ready to leave for Hawaii to fulfill the final wishes of her late husband (Associated Press 1992c, 20). Plans were underway for a burial ceremony bound to happen in April of that year, right during the peak of the election season. But just two weeks before the scheduled transfer from Hawaii, Cory announced that Marcos's remains cannot return before election day on May 11. Then Executive Secretary Franklin Drilon expressed that the decision was intended to prevent potential turmoil that such public display of the corpse might cause (Reswos 1992, 11). Miriam Defensor-Santiago, who ended up in second place in the presidential race, promised a state burial for Marcos as an attempt to woo the Ilocano vote (Lande 1996, 17).

Barely a week after election day, as Imelda trailed sixth in the presidential race, she announced that she will boycott the hearings of the multitudes of cases filed against her as "personal civil disobedience." She believed that she could have won the elections if not for electoral fraud (Reuters 1992). Meanwhile, as guaranteed by palace officials,

talks about burial plans resumed after the elections. On May 28, even before the final results had been turned in, Drilon announced that they were prepared to listen to proposals from the Marcos family regarding the burial of their deceased patriarch (Villanueva 1992a). Imelda lost the presidency to Fidel Ramos.

Just two months after Ramos's inauguration, Bongbong, then elected to the House of Representatives, filed House Resolution 80, which called for the return of Marcos's remains to the country and the provision of state honors befitting his stature as former president. Less than half of the lower house at the time approved the resolution.³ Not long after that, the Ramos administration resumed talks with the Marcoses. Ramos directed Rafael Alunan III, who served at the time as the Secretary of Interior and Local Government, to negotiate the burial arrangements with the Marcos camp, represented by Roque Ablan. A closer examination will show that the agreed-upon terms with the Ramos administration were even more stringent than the preconditions made earlier by the Cory administration, which the Marcoses flatly refused.

The first condition was that the body shall not be paraded around or even pass Manila—the Marcoses stayed true to this, when the body landed in Ilocos Norte in September 1993 (*New York Times* 1993). Ramos's second condition was that instead of being conferred state honors, Marcos should instead receive military honors fit only for an army major—(allegedly) the highest rank he obtained during the Second World War. The family rejected this provision and regarded it as an “insult.” Bongbong, who was the family's spokesperson at the time of the negotiations for burial arrangements, insisted that his father “was not merely a major” (Glauberman 1993). As we know, the Marcoses did not fulfill the third condition either, which was to immediately bury Marcos's body (Schmetzer 1993).

Before Marcos's body was flown out of Hawaii, a wake was organized by his family and supporters in Farrington High School in Kalihi in Oahu. The body was then brought to Guam, where his casket was again displayed to supporters. But the late dictator's return to the

3. House Resolution No. HR000080, “Resolution Entreating the Executive Department of Government to Allow the Return of the Remains of the Late President Ferdinand E. Marcos to the Philippines to Lie in State at the Malacanang Palace and to be Accorded a State Funeral with all the Courtesies Befitting a Former President of the Republic of the Philippines within Ten (10) Days from Arrival,” filed on August 13, 1992, <http://www.congress.gov.ph/legis/>.

country on September 7, 1993 was the true spectacle. Songs were sung and rituals were performed as hundreds of women wept in the crowd. His “black-lacquered, gold-handled casket” was placed on a public bier at the airport (Times Staff and Wire Reports 1991, 11) and was transported to St. William Cathedral in Laoag as it was carried by a horse-drawn hearse. The body was displayed overnight in front of the governor’s office and was moved to Batac the next day to be displayed beside his still unburied mother (Associated Press 1993a, 6).

News outlets did not miss the subtext of this “performance.” One report noted that “Marcos’s body is being displayed like the relic of a saint in his home province of Ilocos Norte and the melodrama created there is meant to wipe out throughout the rest of the Philippines any lingering memories of the disastrous legacy of the Marcos years” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1993, 12). Another account said, “Family and supporters of the deposed president are trying to use the occasion to try to rehabilitate Marcos’ image . . . The Marcos family purchased air time on a national television network to broadcast an hour-long documentary on the accomplishments of the 20-year Marcos administration” (Guerrero and Reid 1993, 3).

Inevitably, the ceremonies attracted Marcos cultists.⁴ Bernabe Abella, a former intelligence officer during the Marcos regime and at the time of the burial, leader of the Gold Eagles cult, revealed that Marcos secretly founded cults to “use mysticism against both the Communist and Muslim rebels in the south” (Guerrero 1993, 13). With the passing of their charismatic leader, they metamorphosed into a clique that worshipped him as their god. In this congregation, “God the Father is Ferdinand Marcos, God the Son is ‘Bongbong’ [...] and the Holy Spirit is Imelda Marcos. They are the Holy Family” (Associated Press 1993b, 12). Meanwhile, true to the family’s word, two days after Marcos’s body returned to the Philippines, his mother Josefa was finally buried. She was kept refrigerated and displayed in their home in Batac for almost five years after her death (Fathers 1991, 11).

HOW THE UNBURIED MARCOS WAS KEPT “ALIVE”

While it would seem that the issue about the late dictator’s body should have ended with its return to Ilocos Norte, it turned out that

4. Frank Cimatu, a veteran journalist, has a more detailed account of the Marcos cults in Maceda, Cimatu, and Robles 2012-13, 232-37.

it was just the beginning. His widow refused to bury him until the government granted their demands. Marcos's body became a morbid curiosity for more than two decades—that is, if it was still his real corpse displayed for public viewing. Interviewed by an Australian correspondent Mark Barker in 1996, Imelda said that the same sculptor responsible for waxing the corpse of the late Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin was the artist who waxed Marcos's remains.⁵ She further exclaimed, "He says it's his masterpiece. Some say that, of all the projects I ever did, this was the best: to make someone who was dead look like he was alive, and it was done in record time." Flippant about the possibility of his husband rising from his silk bed and saying "Hi!" Imelda turned more sentimental and said: "Before, I would take him for granted. Now, he is with me all the time. The longer he is dead, the more perfect he becomes" (Barker 1996, 168).

Accounts saying that the dead body on display in Ilocos was a mere replica—with the real corpse buried beneath the glass coffin appeared in the news as early as 1994 (*Akron Beacon Journal* 1994, 47) and resurfaced frequently after that. The questionable authenticity of Marcos's remains has been the subject of unceasing murmurings. When the local electric cooperative cut off the electricity in the mausoleum in 1996 because of the family's failure to pay around PHP 5.643 million in unpaid bills, journalist Frank Cimatú claimed that he witnessed Marcos's body melting from the heat (Cimatú 2010, viii). In 1998, amid the public outrage over Estrada's decision to bury Marcos in the LNMB, Cory publicly said that the body was just a mannequin. Heherson Alvarez, citing as his source a nun close to the Marcoses, claimed that Marcos's remains had already been buried a long time ago. Ostensibly, the body displayed in Batac was just a wax replica flown from Boston (where it was allegedly made) to the Philippines "in pieces—head, hands, and other parts—by his widow, Imelda Marcos, when she was allowed to bring the body home" (Carey 1998, 7). Marcos's dead body had reached the status of an urban legend. Even school kids visiting the mausoleum doubted the authenticity of the displayed wax-like corpse. Frequented by visitors all

5. The team responsible for maintaining Lenin's corpse has publicly acknowledged some of their works (the embalming of Kim Il Sung and the maintenance of Ho Chi Minh's corpse, for example), but Ferdinand Marcos's body is not one of them. Marcos's mortician Frank Malabed, in his many interviews regarding Marcos's body, never mentioned having cooperated with anyone, especially those who were responsible for maintaining the late Soviet leader's remains.

year round, the mausoleum of Marcos's body was joined by a museum that housed a wide variety of Marcos memorabilia from the time he was a soldier, including his supposed war medals, to the years he served as president. Based on our own visits, in 2013, the museum in the Ferdinand E. Marcos Presidential Center (the official name of the mausoleum compound) was reconfigured to follow the plot of the earlier published Marcos mythology, *For Every Tear, A Victory* by Hartzell Spence.

There is one more character to this plot, and his name was Frank Malabed, the famed mortician responsible for making Marcos look "alive." Malabed, who was deemed by many as the country's "mortician to the stars," hailed from a family in the same business. In the 1960s, he tagged along when his father came to work as a mortician in the US Clark Air Base, where thousands of corpses of soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War were prepared for their journey home (Agence France-Presse 2012). Interviewed in 2012 as Imelda insisted in her clamor for a hero's burial for her husband, Malabed revealed to the *Inquirer* that he "pumped in special cavity fluid to make sure the body remained intact for 25 years" (Morella 2012). Though Marcos was his most controversial client, he was also responsible for embalming Benigno Simeon "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.'s body right after his assassination, among many other big names. He was also the man behind Josefa's five-year-long wake. Responding to hearsay that the longevity of Josefa's body was a "miracle," he calmly responded that it was just due to formalin, frequent baths, and makeup (Friend 1989, 18). There was an apparent interplay between the authenticity of Marcos's displayed corpse and Malabed's reputation as the "mortician to the stars" (Morella 2012). After the state burial conferred by the Duterte administration to the late dictator, and amid renewed speculations that the body was a mere replica, Malabed sustained that he had just examined the body "by hand" two months prior and declared it to be in good condition (Morella 2016).

MARCOS'S CORPSE AS A BARGAINING CHIP

This paper traced the developments leading to the final version of Marcos's dying wish, which according to his family, was to bury him in the LNMB "among his fellow soldiers." This, however, begs another question: what are the undercurrents that lie beneath the crusade to bury him in the LNMB?

Cemeteries, in themselves, possess a character of “sacredness” because it becomes, for the loved ones and for the public, a context for memorialization, and a “context for grief” (Rugg 2000, 261). On June 16, 1948, President Elpidio Quirino signed into law Republic Act (RA) 289, “An Act Providing for the Construction of a National Pantheon for Presidents of the Philippines, National Heroes, and Patriots of the Country.” The main intent of RA 289 is “to perpetuate the memory of all the Presidents of the Philippines, national heroes and patriots for the inspiration and emulation of this generation and of generations still unborn.” In keeping with this, Quirino signed Presidential Proclamation 431, which allotted land for the “national pantheon.” This parcel of land, however, was utilized by Ramon Magsaysay’s (Quirino’s successor) administration for what we now know as Quezon Memorial Park. In 1954, Magsaysay issued Executive Order 77 which directed the reinterment of remains of war veterans from Bataan and elsewhere in the country to the Republic Memorial Cemetery in Fort William McKinley. A few days later he signed Presidential Proclamation 86 which changed the name of Republic Memorial Cemetery to Libingan ng mga Bayani since the former name was “not symbolic of the cause for which our soldiers have died, and does not truly express the nation’s esteem and reverence for her war dead.” Marcos, in 1964, through Presidential Proclamation 208, allotted 142 hectares of the Fort Bonifacio Military Reservation for “national shrine purposes” (Quezon 2016). Persons who may be allocated a plot in the LNMB were specified in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Regulation G 161-373 issued during Cory’s administration (this was later on republished, the latest version of which was in 2000, G 161-375).

At the height of the Marcos burial controversy in 2016, there had been debates regarding the status of LNMB as a “national pantheon,” citing RA 289. The petitioners argued that as contemplated in the law, the purpose is “to perpetuate the memory of all the Presidents of the Philippines, national heroes and patriots for the emulation of this generation and of generations still unborn,” and as such provides for the legal standards for interment at the cemetery. AFP Regulation G 161-375, on the other hand, simply contains implementing rules for RA 289, and thus should not violate its intent. Thus, according to the petitioners, the violation of human rights and the systematic looting of public coffers during his regime disqualify Marcos for a plot in the LNMB. The majority decision of the Supreme Court upheld that

Duterte's decision to inter Marcos in the LNMB does not violate any law or jurisprudence. The high court ruled that the petitioners' interpretation would put into question the legality of the burials of all the other remains in the cemetery, and that it would encroach on the authority of the executive branch in the designation of plots in the LNMB. They further argued that an LNMB burial does not confer the status of a "hero" to the late dictator.

The idea of an LNMB burial as the dying man's wish first appeared during the latter part of Cory's administration, as they were publicly negotiating for the return of Marcos's remains. However, the idea of burying Marcos as a war veteran was contemplated even before he died, when Imelda requested (and was eventually rejected) for a burial beside American war veterans in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific during their exile in Hawaii. At the time, she cited that a burial in the said cemetery was just fitting for her husband because during the Second World War, he allegedly fought alongside American combatants (Wright 1989). From crusading for a burial in the Philippines, to one in Ilocos, then in Manila, and finally in the LNMB, the "dying wish" of the late dictator seemed to hone in on this ultimate burial site as the Marcoses regained more political clout.

When Joseph Estrada, who served as mayor of San Juan from 1969 until the end of the Marcos regime, was elected president in 1998, he immediately scheduled the burial of Marcos in the LNMB. It is worth mentioning that Imelda also ran in the eleven-person presidential race in 1998. Seeing that she was lagging behind in the opinion polls, she withdrew her candidacy and threw her support behind Estrada. Earlier in the election period, then Vice President Estrada also called for the abolition of PCGG; he asserted that the agency was no longer fulfilling its roles, and thus its functions should be transferred to regular courts (*Manila Standard* 1997). In this campaign trail, he also made a statement that the then Leyte first district representative Imelda Marcos should be extended executive clemency from her graft conviction laid down by the Supreme Court in 1993 (*Manila Standard* 1998).

Estrada made the decision about Marcos's burial in the LNMB even before he was seated in power (Burgos and Lacuarta 1998). Cement was already poured on the foundation of what could have been Marcos's tomb site beside President Carlos Garcia's grave some weeks before Estrada was sworn in on June 30, 1998. And since these were still the final days of Ramos's presidency, he ordered to stop the work being done on what could have been Marcos's grave (*The Times*

1998). Imelda reportedly agreed to Estrada's provision that the government would not bequeath the late strongman a state burial (Associated Press 1998a, 3). Then President Estrada made preconditions of his own: (1) "No organized groups would be allowed along the route to the cemetery, (2) the rites should be strictly religious and the funeral should be limited to the immediate Marcos family of not more than 50 persons, and (3) no political statements would be permitted" (Reuters 1998, 9).⁶ However, due to the uproar from anti-Marcos groups and individuals, the Marcoses backed away (Aquino 1998, 9). The New People's Army of the Communist Party of the Philippines threatened to kidnap the late dictator's family and their associates if Estrada continued with the scheduled interment in the LNMB. Family members of war veterans even threatened that they would exhume their dead and move them elsewhere should the coming administration continue with its plan (*Town Talk* 1998, 3). Estrada reckoned that such mayhem was not the best way to begin his presidency. He admitted that it was a miscalculation on his part, thinking that burying Marcos in the LNMB would end the bitter tensions between pro- and anti-Marcos camps. Estrada then urged Imelda to bury the remains of her husband in their hometown in Batac (Associated Press 1998b).

For a brief period in 1999, the year after the furor surrounding Estrada's acquiescence to the Marcos burial in the LNMB, and also her first year as a district representative of Ilocos Norte after the EDSA Revolution, María Imelda Josefa "Imee" Marcos proclaimed that they were deserting their claim for a plot in the LNMB. The late dictator's eldest daughter said, "I want a beautiful island like the burial site of Princess Diana for my father." She continued that "a hill overlooking the South China Sea would be an ideal location" (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1999, 8).

Barely three years in power, Estrada was toppled by the "People Power II" revolt or "EDSA Dos" as a result of the public's outrage over the various corruption scandals that he was embroiled in. His vice president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, succeeded him. During the Marcos regime, she was identified with the opposition (following her father's footsteps), contributing anti-Marcos economic analyses to the *Philippine Signs*.⁷ Her road to politics started with a Department of Trade and Industry appointment from Cory, who also supported her during EDSA Dos. Macapagal-Arroyo began her term with questions on the

6. Numberings were added by the authors for clarity.

7. See <http://www.bantayog.org/signs/>.

legitimacy of her ascent to the presidency (*Estrada v. Desierto*, G.R. No 146710-15, March 2, 2001).

During Macapagal-Arroyo's term, one of the strongest calls to lie to rest Marcos's remains expectedly came from Ilocos. However, the Ilocanos were not inclined towards a burial in Manila, much less at the LNMB. They wanted Marcos to be buried in his home province, where they believed he was most valued. There was once a proposal to establish a "Libingan ng mga Bayaning Ilocano," where Marcos could be interred alongside Ilocano revolutionaries Gen. Artemio Ricarte and Fr. Gregorio Aglipay. According to the family's spokesperson Lito Gorospe, at the time (September 2002), Imelda considered several options for burial sites, all of them were said to be located in Batac. One of the options, said Gorospe, was Mariano Marcos State University, a state-run university named after the late dictator's father (Arzadon 2002).

Macapagal-Arroyo's reelection in 2004 was marred with accusations of electoral fraud. In 2005, an audio recording bearing her conversation with election commissioner Virgilio Garcillano about rigging election results circulated far and wide. In no time, former associates started jumping off her ship: a handful of the members of her cabinet resigned; calls for her own resignation hailed from the ranks of her supposed allies (Hutchcroft 2008). This crisis in Macapagal-Arroyo's administration and her struggle for political survival became the context of succeeding negotiations with the Marcos family.

Macapagal-Arroyo's term was a peculiar chapter in the Marcos book. Macapagal-Arroyo's administration was clearly enervated by the scandal back in June 2005. It is in this context that Macapagal-Arroyo called for "reconciliation" with different elements in her administration. The politically savvy Imelda was among those who obliged. She pursued reconciliation with Macapagal-Arroyo and was reported to be in "constant communication" with palace officials regarding Marcos's burial in the LNMB (Adriano 2005). On the other hand, Imelda's children claimed to be part of the opposition; the same alliance was joined by groups who ousted their father from power. Imee opposed Macapagal-Arroyo's policies on diverse planes, but this would be most exemplified by her signature on the impeachment complaint filed against Macapagal-Arroyo in 2005 (Porcala and Molina 2005). In one of the supplemental complaints filed by one of the Marcos family lawyers, Oliver Lozano (*GMA News Online* 2006), he included as a basis for indictment Macapagal-Arroyo's refusal to entertain a 75-25 compromise deal on the Marcos wealth as renegotiated with Imelda,

which he claimed could have been a solution to the hounding economic crisis (*GMA News Online* 2007). But on the day the impeachment complaint was put to a vote in the lower chamber, Imee was nowhere to be found. She later explained that her stance on Macapagal-Arroyo's impeachment "weighed heavily" on her. At the time, rumors spread that her absence was an upshot of a deal between the family and the Macapagal-Arroyo administration regarding the LNMB burial of her father, which she of course denied. One must also note that Oliver Lozano had a reputation for being a "serial filer of impeachment suits." During Macapagal-Arroyo's term, he was reported to have filed the first yet the "weakest" impeachment complaints. Pundits say that these ineffectual complaints were filed in order to maneuver around the rule on double jeopardy, or the restriction preventing an accused from being tried again on similar charges. The charade perpetrated by Lozano and Imee points to mutually beneficial political accommodations between the Marcoses and Macapagal-Arroyo.

Prior to this, Macapagal-Arroyo called for "closure," which was effectively a cue for the Presidential Commission on Good Government to settle with the Marcoses. Despite opposition from its former chairman Jovito Salonga, then Commissioner Ricardo Abcede revealed that the talks between Imelda and the Philippine government had already begun (Tiongson-Mayrina 2006). In a compromise deal, the Marcoses shall give the Philippine government access to their ill-gotten wealth. After which, at the minimum, the Philippine government and the Marcos family will have to agree on how they will subdivide the amount. The dismissal of cases filed against the Marcoses may also be an element of such a deal. There is a dubious coincidence between the negotiations regarding the Marcos burial in the LNMB and the commencement of the settlement agreement on Marcos wealth.

Despite talks between Imelda and Macapagal-Arroyo in the prior years, the latter's nine-year term ended without concrete developments on the LNMB burial. There could not have been enough room to negotiate because of the Marcos children's public stance against Macapagal-Arroyo. But in hindsight, one can reasonably argue that Macapagal-Arroyo's unpopularity might have played a role, even more so than the Marcos children's public stance against her administration. Her net satisfaction rating by the end of her term was -17 (and this is a stellar grade compared to her -53 rating by the end of the first quarter of 2010) (Social Weather Stations 2010). With such a divisive issue that indeed had the force to open wounds from the martial law years,

not going through with Marcos's LNMB burial must have been a calculated decision on Macapagal-Arroyo's part.

Remarkably, Marcos's immediate family seemed to be on different pages regarding the burial issue, at least during Macapagal-Arroyo's term. Bongbong and Imee in particular, similar to her 1999 pronouncement, might have been open to, if not more biased towards discontinuing the campaign for a burial in the LNMB and entomb their father somewhere else just to put an end to the issue. Imelda, on the other hand, remained persistent. Political opportunism was displayed in plain sight: Imelda, who was the only immediate family member not serving in public office other than her daughter Irene, saw the reconciliation phase of Arroyo as an opportune time to lobby for the interment of her husband in the LNMB. When Arroyo was in most need for allies, Imelda jumped to her rescue. On the other hand, Imee and Bongbong might have seen coalescing with the unpopular Arroyo as damaging to their own political careers at the time, and therefore placed themselves in the opposition. At a certain point, as discussed later in this paper, differences in opinion among the family members about the final resting place of their patriarch would eventually end as they would converge towards the version of the dying wish that best suited their political interests.

During the term of Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III as president, namesake and son of the slain opposition leader to Marcos, Ninoy, and former president Cory, the arena for contestation for the Marcoses shifted to parliamentary channels. This may be due to the fact that there would be little space for the Marcoses to negotiate with the chief executive (despite Bongbong being elected as senator) about the burial issue, as Noynoy and his close associates made clear during their 2010 election campaign.

In 2011, Salvador Escudero, a former member of the Marcos cabinet and by then representative of Sorsogon's first congressional district, filed a resolution calling for the interment of Marcos's body in the LNMB. He was convinced that knowing the sentiment of the country's elected representatives would be the best way to put an end to the decades-long debate. Despite the resolution obtaining 216 signatures,⁸ Noynoy refused to act on the resolution because he said

8. HR01135 s. 2011, "A Resolution Urging the Administration of President Benigno C. Aquino to Allow the Burial of the Remains of Former President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos at the Libingan ng mga Bayani," filed on March 23, 2011, Congress.gov/legis.

that any decision he will make on the issue might be construed as “biased” (Cheng 2011). Instead, he authorized then Vice President Jejomar Binay to undertake a study and make a recommendation on the issue. After numerous letters were sent to different groups in civil society and members of the academe, and after online surveys were conducted to get the public’s pulse on the issue, Binay recommended that the best compromise would be to bury Marcos in Ilocos Norte with full military honors (Esplanada and Burgonio 2011).

Binay prematurely declared that he was able to convince the Marcos family with his proposal; Bongbong Marcos said in a later interview that they were not yet consulted about the matter (Tan 2011). In 2016, Abigail Valte, former spokesperson for Noynoy—in response to Binay’s claims that Noynoy’s government missed the opportunity to put an end to the burial issue because the president failed to act on his proposal—revealed that the reason why nothing came out of Binay’s proposal was because Bongbong refused a burial in Ilocos Norte and insisted that his father be buried in the LNMB (Adel 2016). Despite this, before supposedly refusing Binay’s proposal, Bongbong said publicly that he was open to a burial in Ilocos Norte if it puts an end to the controversy (*ABS-CBN News* 2011). Recall that in 1989, Bongbong said quite definitively that his father should be buried in Ilocos Norte.

In June of 2011, Juan Ponce Enrile Jr., son of Marcos’s former Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile, filed House Bill 4876 that proposed allocating 25 percent of the land occupying LNMB’s land for a burial site dedicated to former Philippine presidents. This section of the cemetery would have been called “Libingan ng mga Pangulo” (Presidents’ Cemetery). The younger Enrile believed that this would be a good compromise to finally put closure to the issue (Office of Rep. Juan Ponce Enrile Jr. 2011). Allowing the remains of Marcos to be buried somewhere he categorically qualified seems to be an attempt to remove value-judgements from the debate. Yet, the bill was not even put to a vote. Predictably, the government led by Cory and Ninoy’s son did not confer Marcos with a burial in the LNMB. The issue however, was revived during the 2016 presidential elections through the campaign of former Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte.

One important trip in Duterte’s campaign trail was in Ilocos Norte. While he was there, he promised Ilocanos that if elected president, he would allow Marcos to be interred in the LNMB “because he was a great president and he was a hero,” and because doing so would

supposedly result in “nationwide healing” (Ranada 2016). As a result of Duterte’s pronouncement during the election, his eventual win in May 2016, and the intensified debates regarding Marcos’s LNMB burial, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) promptly circulated a pamphlet debunking Marcos’s war records, which were often cited as basis for granting him a place in the LNMB (NHCP 2016). A little over a month after being sworn in, Duterte reiterated his resolve to finally bury Marcos in the Heroes’ Cemetery. The next day, martial law victims rushed to the Supreme Court to petition against Duterte’s statement (Pasion 2016).

As it was in 1989, the decision was again up to the Supreme Court. After numerous petitions filed against Marcos’s LNMB burial, the high court issued a *status quo ante* order on the president’s decision to inter Marcos in the LNMB. With this in effect, the body of the late dictator could not be moved to the LNMB without an order from the court. The *status quo ante* order was supposed to last until October 18 but was extended until November 8, 2016 (Rappler 2016). Just when the petitioners thought that the move by the Supreme Court was a good sign in favor of their cause, the high court rebuffed the petitions and upheld the president’s decision (Tan 2016). As in *Marcos v. Manglapus*,⁹ *Ocampo v. Enriquez*¹⁰ also put into question the executive powers of the president (Candelaria and Herbosa 2016, 10). The latter decision reinforced that the president has powers under his office to allow the interment of the late Marcos in the LNMB which is “in a parcel of land of the public domain devoted for the purpose of being a military shrine.” It was also within Duterte’s determination, as cited by the decision, that to bury the remains of the ousted president would lead to “national healing and forgiveness” (*Ocampo v. Enriquez*, G.R. No. 225973, November 8, 2016). Essential to the Supreme Court decision was the argument that burying Marcos would not confer him the status of a hero. It argued that the privilege of interment has been loosened

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9. The case was named as such because Ferdinand Marcos was one of the petitioners who called for his and his family’s return to the country while Raul Manglapus, acting at the time as the Secretary of Foreign affairs, was one of the respondents.
 10. The case was named as such because Saturnino Ocampo, journalist and former Bayan Muna representative, was one of the group who filed the petition against an LNMB burial for Marcos while Rear Admiral Ernesto C. Enriquez, in his capacity as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Reservist and Retiree Affairs of the AFP, was one of the respondents. Enriquez was the one who gave the directive to the Commanding General of the Philippine Army to provide interment services with military honors to the former President Marcos.

up over the years to include non-military personnel such as widows of former presidents and secretaries of national defense.¹¹ The court ruled that though the Marcos regime's human rights violations record may nullify his status as former president, it does not take away the fact that he was a former soldier, Secretary of National Defense, and a Medal for Valor awardee.¹²

As if to prove their claim about Marcos's dying wish, the Marcos family released his last will and testament dated March 17, 1982, wherein he said, "I desire that my remains be buried according to the rites established by law and with dignity suitable to my position and other personal circumstances" (*ABS-CBN News* 2016). The release of Marcos's last will and testament supposedly confirmed that Marcos really wished to be buried in the LNMB, as the family claims. Clearly, he did not specifically state this; the last will and testament was rather silent on the specifics of his final resting place. Other versions were released by Marcos supporters, one of which was Erick San Juan (1998) in *Raiders of the Lost Gold*. Again, none of these specified that he wanted to be buried in the LNMB.

In the morning of November 18, news of the private and unannounced burial rites given to the late dictator stunned the public. This supposed attempt to attain "nationwide healing" by Duterte prompted nationwide demonstrations, which recollected not only human rights violations and the looting of the national treasury by Marcos but also condemnation of the newly seated president for allowing the controversial interment rites. The protesters yelled and brought placards that bore statements like "*Marcos magnanakaw hanggang libingan*" (Marcos, a thief even in his grave) and "*Hukayin, hukayin*" (exhume him).

Within the same day, the family released professionally-captured and edited snippets of the burial, which are commonly commissioned for weddings and birthday parties, same-day edit as they call it. Bearing the internet hashtag #*SalamatApo* (Thank you, venerable father), longer versions were uploaded days later on YouTube showing the entirety of the tribute program for the late dictator. Marcos's purported accomplishments and war feats were narrated by the ceremony's host as the video panned alternatively from his casket to his children sitting

11. This took effect in 1986, as mentioned earlier, when AFP Regulation G 131-373. identified the individuals eligible for a plot at the LNMB.

12. Ibid.

in the front row. Clips from this record were also used in the Marcos centennial tribute video that featured ordinary folks, Marcos's supporters (some of whom are from the academe), and the Marcos children with their individual anecdotes about their father (PH Today 2017). All this was reminiscent of the pro-Marcos media blitz that followed the arrival of Marcos's remains in 1993.

Even before public outrage settled, Raissa Robles (2016), a veteran investigative journalist, published an article that put a spotlight on Marcos's grave. Normally, graves are six-foot deep excavations of earth; special equipment is used to lower the coffin to the ground. But what some people saw from online photos and footages was that Marcos's grave was big enough to fit not only the coffin, but several people inside. In one of the photos from the ceremony, four men were carrying the coffin into what seemed to be a tiled inner chamber. Robles argued that it is possible that Marcos's "secret underground chamber" is related to the "hydraulic refrigeration system" whose design was commissioned by Imelda years back and up to this moment, is still in her possession. This feat of engineering will allegedly keep the late dictator's body from deteriorating. If this is true, and despite Marcos's dying wish finally granted, what is with the family's fixation with keeping Marcos's remains from decay? Unless, of course, the additional space in the grave is meant to accommodate other family members. As mentioned, wives of deceased presidents can also be buried at the LNMB.

On November 21, Bayan Muna Representatives Satur Ocampo and Neri Colmenares filed a petition to declare in contempt the Marcos family and key members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Department of National Defense for the surprise burial. Later in the day, Albay Representative Edcel Lagman, filed a motion to the Supreme Court for the exhumation of Marcos's remains. He wanted the body to undergo a forensic examination to determine whether it is indeed the late dictator's remains or if it is a replica. Earlier in November, Ariate and Reyes (2016) also made an argument that the 1935 ruling against Marcos in the Nalundasan murder case could be used as a basis for barring Marcos's interment in the LNMB (and eventually, his exhumation). Marcos, along with his two brothers Mariano and Pio and brother-in-law Quirino Lizardo, filed eight separate complaints against Calixto Aguinaldo, the prosecution's main witness, accusing him of false testimony even before the trial of the Marcoses had begun. This was against the rules of court, and thus

the four men were found guilty of contempt of court. While Justice Jose Laurel acquitted Marcos of the murder case, the contempt verdict against the three Marcoses and Lizardo was sustained. However, it would be up to legal experts to determine whether this verdict can be considered as a violation of AFP Regulation G 131-375, which disqualifies individuals who have been convicted with finality for “an offense involving moral turpitude.”

THE MARCOS DEAD BODY POLITICS

Various versions of Marcos’s dying wish, including his mother’s, served to bolster the family’s political agenda at distinct points in time. Imelda and her family used Josefa’s dying wish to create public pressure for their return to the country. Thereafter, the moribund Marcos wished to come home to die in his country. The return of his family to the country with his remains was framed as an act of honoring his “sacred” final wish and that of his mother’s as an attempt to conceal the political opportunism that hounded their comeback. Notions about death and around the relationship between mother and child were used to change the narrative from political to “moral.” Msgr. Domingo Nebres,¹³ a priest close to the Marcoses was quoted saying, “This is not a question of politics; [but] a moral question” (Le Vine 1988). It was clear that the issue was political in nature. The refusal to bury Josefa until the family and Marcos’s body were allowed to come home and invoking their right to travel and abode, were political means to this one end: the Marcoses reclaiming their place in Philippine politics.

The saga quickly escalated into a battle between the Marcoses and the newly-installed government led by Cory. It was clear that Imelda was determined to rehabilitate her image and that of her dead husband. And Cory was equally resolved not to let her succeed. The tugging between Cory and Imelda reached its peak when Imelda was able to come home to face tax fraud charges. Imelda unequivocally refused an Ilocos Norte burial, which they originally demanded when Marcos died in exile in 1989, but saw it opportune to agree right after announcing her presidential bid. It was clear that the body and the

13. He was also the priest who officiated Marcos’s temporary entombment in Hawaii and is associated with the Marcos loyalist organization called Friends of Imelda Romualdez Marcos, or FIRM.

narratives surrounding it were instrumental to her political agenda at the time.

The first mention of an LNMB burial was only by the end of Cory's presidency. The late dictator's corpse eventually arrived in the country, not under the auspices of Cory but that of Ramos, Marcos's cousin. The dying wish became more specific: the dead Marcos then wanted a burial in the LNMB "among his fellow soldiers." With minor permutations from the Marcos children, this became the final version of the dying wish that the family carried through the succeeding administrations leading up to Duterte's. Since the burial ground is primarily a cemetery for those who have fought in the war as well as former Philippine presidents, the cause to bury Marcos in that specific cemetery is discernibly attached to the man's projected and highly questionable image as a war veteran.¹⁴ However, it is important to note that in recent years, the family had been consistent with saying that Marcos should be buried as a soldier; though many of their allies still harked back on his "accomplishments" as a statesman. It is within the family's interest to avoid making allusions to Marcos's reputation as the former head of state, at least immediately after Duterte was elected, since the images of atrocities and plunder were still fresh in people's memories. His war record, on the other hand, is one that is less accessible to people's knowledge and recollection and therefore, a more potent narrative for myth-making. The attempts to bury Marcos in the LNMB became crucial as the Marcoses geared up for succeeding electoral battles. Chronicles of Marcos's past achievements, real or fictional, became important as his living family members vied for renewed national prominence. The political maneuvers of the Marcoses show the powerful potential of dead body politics. They can deconstruct the political baggage that comes with an infamous family name like Marcos and reconstruct it into favorable narratives.

14. To illustrate, Imee was interviewed multiple times after the Supreme Court ruled in November 2018 that Marcos can be buried at the LNMB. She repeatedly emphasized that her father was a soldier at heart, in her own words, "*sundalong sundalo ang palaisipan.*" She quipped that her father religiously attended ceremonies for Bataan Day Veterans' Memorial, et cetera, and would go to the hospital in V. Luna or Veterans Hospital even if there are more famous doctors in other clinics. A claim belied when Marcos himself started suffering from renal failure. Instead of going to said hospitals, he was treated in secret by medical specialists in Malacañang. For a record of Imee's statement, see *GMA News* (2016).

Lest we forget, there is another undercurrent to the LNMB issue that was already touched upon earlier in this paper: the Marcos narrative that they are victims of political persecution by the government, starting with that of Cory. In a pamphlet entitled *Ferdinand E. Marcos: World War II Veteran, Hero, President*, written by Remigio Agpalo (1993), University of the Philippines professor of political science and known Marcos supporter, Marcos was described as a “vilified hero,” and the denigration of his record as a war veteran was said to have started when he ran for president against Sergio Osmena Jr. in 1969. The message was that the revelations regarding the fabrication of Marcos’s numerous military distinctions were mere black propaganda crafted to serve the interests of his opponents. The pamphlet then continued to trumpet Marcos’s alleged prowess and sacrifices during the war (see also Fajardo, Adevos, and Sayoc 1997). This same narrative was echoed in pro-Marcos books published by the Katarungan at Katotohanan Foundation Inc., among many others (see for example, Escalante and De La Paz 2000; Sohmer, Escalante, and De La Paz 2000).

In another story, the Marcoses claimed that they were the ones who had experienced injustices and not the ones who pillaged state coffers while in power. For example, in the wake of planning Marcos’s burial in 1992, there were concerns that the transfer would be delayed because the family could not shoulder the expenses that chartering a plane from Hawaii to Laoag would entail (Associated Press 1992d). They framed themselves as victims: Imelda even said that her family might have to live in the slums of Tondo upon returning home (Tierney 1991a, 62). Prior to Imelda’s return to a life of imagined poverty, she and her entourage lodged in a luxury hotel in New York. Surrounded by four “high-priced American lawyers,” she said in a press conference that she will come home “penniless” (*Los Angeles Times* 1991, 2). These, of course, are all tied with the overarching narrative that all the succeeding administrations refused to lay to rest a dead man, a “simple soldier,” the way he supposedly wanted.

With no exception, all the succeeding administrations needed to deal with the Marcos burial issue. Though Cory was initially successful in keeping the Marcoses at bay, she had to make several concessions in the middle of her term. Ramos mobilized his cabinet to negotiate with the Marcoses about Ferdinand’s resting place. Estrada decisively ruled in favor of the Marcos family’s claim for a plot in the LNMB even before he was seated in power. He could have proceeded but was stopped by the public outrage, halting abruptly what was supposed to be the

“honeymoon” stage of his presidency. Although major developments were not seen during Macapagal-Arroyo’s term, the debate was still alive and rumors about settlement between her and Imelda afflicted her term. During the tenure of Noynoy, the way the game was played had changed. The history between the two families made it obvious that there would be no negotiating, at least not in the same manner the Marcoses negotiated with Noynoy’s predecessors. Possibly rooting from this lack of elbow room, the cause took another course: from direct dialogues to a more legislative and in some respects, “participatory” route. Much like Estrada, current President Duterte, who repeatedly said that Imee was one of the few who supported him during his presidential campaign, was resolute in allowing the burial in the LNMB, but unlike the former, uncompromisingly so. Indeed, we see that the changing demands of the family about their patriarch’s final resting place was performed in the backdrop of their shifting political fortunes upon their return.

There was a robust contestation on the meanings surrounding this sacred ground for “heroes.” The petitioners said that giving an LNMB burial was tantamount to dishonoring the people’s revolt in 1986 and condoning human rights violations committed during the martial law years. The official decision of the Supreme Court had a more legalistic take: it expressed that because the rules regulating who may be buried in the LNMB has been loosened throughout the years, therefore it is not as “sacred” as the petitioners appraise (*Ocampo v. Enriquez*, G.R. No. 225973, November 8, 2016). Some of the protesters demanded for an exhumation because Marcos does not deserve to be interred in such hallowed grounds. As the spontaneous nationwide protests following the burial would tell us, the Marcos camp was not able to convince everyone. There was enough public outrage to mobilize thousands but not sufficient to bend the Duterte administration’s resolve. From Robles’s feature about Marcos’s grave, it seems like the story has not ended for the Marcoses. They may still have more cards to play given the family’s preoccupation with keeping the body intact, thus “alive,” readily viewable, and still symbolically powerful.

The prolonged campaign to grant their family patriarch a state burial served as a potent rallying point for the memorialization of Marcos’s achievements, fake or otherwise. Among others, this crusade functioned to keep the Marcos name afloat, and was a powerful tool for polarizing opposing sides to the burial issue and generating more impassioned constituencies supportive of their cause. Marcos’s dead

body was used to manufacture the many fictions surrounding the late president, one of which is the myth that he was the most decorated soldier in the Second World War. The protracted pursuit for an LNMB burial “among his fellow soldiers” was a necessary hallmark to seal the legitimacy of his alleged war exploits. True enough, burying him in the Heroes’ Cemetery “does not make him a hero,” whatever Imee meant when she said it, but it did give a legitimizing mold to the decorated war veteran narrative that was at the time propped up by Duterte.¹⁵ Echoing Verdery (1999), a dead body’s ambiguity, that is, the fact that it can no longer speak for itself, can induce an infinite number of interpretations.

Weighing in on the Marcoses’ project to bury Marcos in the LNMB, we attempted to show that (1) the Marcos family was inconsistent with Marcos’s dying wish and these changing demands were calculated moves designed to benefit their specific political agenda at different points in time; (2) the late dictator’s remains were used as a material symbol for his memorialization and parallel to that, for the furtherance of favorable narratives about his regime, and; (3) the body has been a vital tool, if not a central instrument, in the family’s negotiations with succeeding administrations starting with Cory up until Duterte, who had varying degrees and modes of accommodation for the Marcos family. In retrospect, if Marcos’s remains were buried in Hawaii when he died in 1989, the Marcoses would have just sought for other ways to return from exile and eventually make a political comeback. The family still retained sufficient political and economic capital despite their humiliating exile in 1986, perhaps still enough to revive their influence and rehabilitate their sullied image, but the sacredness and the ambiguity that enveloped Marcos’s preserved remains allowed them to go back with a symbolic capital that proved—and continue—to be powerful.

We have, in this article, also attempted to illustrate how a dead body has interacted with the politics of the living. But there were certainly more aspects that may prove to be interesting themes for further exploration—for instance, the vestiges of the cults that deify Marcos (and for some, his family), their worldviews, and their affinity with Marcos’s dead body. But more than this, the establishment of

15. Alfred McCoy (2000) wrote about how Marcos created civic rituals out of war commemorations during martial law. According to him, these rituals have been essential in the trumpeting of his own (alleged) war heroism that were in turn, used for political means.

quasi-religious groups and the fabrication of his war exploits give us a glimpse of the larger enterprise of conceiving a personality cult—initiated by Marcos and propped up by his close associates even after his demise. The products of which indeed resonated with the Filipino political psyche, and to this we owe much of the signifying power of his dead body. Despite the fact that we had to go back three decades to trace the events and declarations surrounding the late dictator's remains, the issue continues to figure largely in the present political order. For one, the Marcoses continue to hold and contest local and national posts. Over the decades, Marcos's remains, real or wax, had been used as a political tool, an object of both veneration and indignation, and a material form through which the state has exercised its power all at the same time.

In 1983, Marcos's political nemesis, Ninoy, was assassinated at the tarmac of the Manila International Airport, now his namesake. Ninoy's blood-stained, all-white suit garbed his mutilated body. His widow decided that her late husband's body shall be displayed and paraded in its abject state. Thousands of Filipinos hailing from all over the country flocked to Manila to mourn the death of one they considered as a "modern day martyr." Maria Zamora (2008, 5) said that Ninoy's body "ignited a collective sensual social experience and became a vehicle for a nationalist communion of belief." This experience, she remarked, served as an important prompt leading to the EDSA Revolution that toppled Marcos's two-decades-long rule. Fast forward to 2009, Cory's death spawned clamors for the presidential run of her son who previously commanded little public attention during his then short stint as a senator.

Philippine politics is replete with examples of dead bodies animating the politics of the living. They appear to have the potency to bolster a person's political career and end another's. Much to the understanding of the Marcoses, dead bodies, and in general, death, appears to have the capability to strike a sensitive chord with the Filipino public. Conceptions surrounding death and dead bodies, however diverse, are a vital part of the Filipino political landscape, and thus have the power to generate conditions of polarities that can be exploited for certain political ends.

Marcos buried in the LNMB may not even be the end of this saga. The Marcoses would have to be constantly on guard and continue to spend their political capital just to keep their patriarch where he is at. They have to keep on churning propaganda and commissioned history

to justify the presence of Marcos in that cemetery lot. Efforts that will no doubt create countervailing narratives from those critical of the Marcoses and Marcos's regime. They would have been keenly aware that in Spain, Francisco Franco, a dictator like Marcos, after being buried in the Valley of the Fallen for forty-four years, was exhumed and transferred to a low-key grave beside his wife (*BBC News* 2019). From a three decade saga of burial next comes the saga of exhumations. ❀

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The first draft of this paper was presented by the first author in the conference "The Remains of a Dictatorship: The Philippines under Marcos" by the Ateneo de Manila University held on August 3-4, 2017. Later on, the second author gathered additional data and greatly expanded the paper. The authors would like to thank Joel F. Ariate Jr., Miguel Paolo P. Reyes, and Elinor May Cruz for their help in crafting and improving this paper and the Center's former director Ricardo T. Jose for his constant support.

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