

MAPPING COMMEMORATIVE CULTURES, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

CASE STUDY: The Philippines

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Despite a long history of seemingly unending cycles of conflicts– resolutions – then more conflicts, the transitional justice initiatives stumbled as Philippines failed to address the fundamental institutions obstacles to justice and lacks a living practice or culture of commemoration. Indeed, to find a better future, we must address the mistakes of the past or they may reappear in the future, as is the case in the Philippines.

This paper focuses on two important junctions in Philippine history: 1) the Marcos-era Martial Law, and; 2) the 1986 People Power Revolution. As the Philippine government failed to exert sufficient efforts to hold the Marcoses and their cronies to account, the political machinations and manipulations of the Marcos family and their political allies, coupled with short-term “amnesia” and generally forgiving nature by the Filipino public. A massive disinformation campaign launched by the Marcos-Duterte camp, the Marcoses are now back in power, with the son and namesake of the dictator (Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr.) elected as the 17th president of the Philippines.

1. Background on the Period of Violence

MARTIAL LAW (MARCOS ERA).

At the tail end of his first term as president, President Ferdinand Marcos ordered the implementation of “Oplan Merdeka,” which was launched to acquire the island of Sabah from Malaysia using a group of Tausug and Sama

Muslims from Sulu that were part of a special unit called “Jabidah.” They trained in secret in Corregidor island and were promised admission into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for their service. But as the operations went awry, the servicemen were killed, and their bodies burned and dumped in Manila Bay.¹ The Jabidah Massacre stoked the fire to escalate the Muslim separatist movement in the country, and is one of the alleged reasons Marcos used to justify the imposition of martial law.² Despite this and other controversies, Marcos would be re-elected for a second term as president in the 1969 elections. His inauguration led to numerous protests, including the First Quarter Storm³, where students from the University of the Philippines barricaded themselves inside the university and led protest actions against the government during the first quarter of 1970. This led to violent dispersals, attacks, arrests and the death of 4 protesters. Another event used to justify the declaration of martial law was the Plaza Miranda Bombing on August 21, 1971, where during a “miting de avance” at Plaza Miranda, two hand grenades were thrown onto the stage, killing nine persons and injuring 100 others.⁴

Marcos claimed that martial law was the country’s last line of defense against the rising tide of chaos and disorder caused by increasingly violent student demonstrations, the threat of communist insurgency by the New People’s Army–Communist Party of the Philippines–National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF), and the Muslim separatist movement led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), apart from continuing violence in Mindanao. After declaring martial law Marcos imposed a news blackout and the immediate takeover of various news outfits such as ABS-CBN, Channel 5, and other print and radio stations.⁵ The only media outlets allowed to operate at that time belonged to Marcos cronies, which glorified the administration, while censoring the abuses.⁶ Various fictitious news stories were published by the government-controlled media, which served to justify martial law. The government and its police and military forces had free reign to rule with impunity. Oppositionists feared being branded as communist rebels or sympathizers because when arrested, they would almost surely undergo torture, which was usually whitewashed by the administration.⁷ Many enforced disappearances, especially of outspoken activist youths, were committed at this time.⁸

THE 1986 EDSA PEOPLE POWER REVOLUTION.

Amid growing restlessness and an economic crisis, Ferdinand Marcos called for a snap election in November 1985. Due to growing criticisms from both local and international institutions, Marcos decided to hold a “free” election to validate his continued mandate to lead the people.⁹ The widow of Ninoy Aquino, Corazon Aquino, then announced her candidacy for the presidency, but Marcos expected to dominate the snap elections.¹⁰ However, the atrocities under martial law were still fresh in people’s minds. Many sporadic protests were held between 1983 since Ninoy Aquino’s assassination up to 1986 when the actual EDSA People Power Revolution took

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place. Many claim that Ninoy Aquino's murder triggered the People Power Revolution.¹¹ While there were already many protest actions before the snap elections, Ninoy's murder intensified the people's anger to the boiling point. Ninoy was an outspoken Marcos oppositionist, whom many say was the closest Marcos ever had to a political rival.

Amid the tumultuous times, Marcos was declared the winner of the snap elections. The numerous reports of massive cheating, fraud, intimidation and vote-buying were largely ignored by the government-controlled COMELEC (Commission on Elections). On the other hand, the National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), a citizen-led election monitoring watchdog, showed that Cory Aquino won by a comfortable margin. At about the same time, the Governor of Antique Province (a Cory Aquino supporter) was murdered allegedly by the bodyguards of a local leader of a pro-Marcos right-wing political party, the KBL (Kilusang Bagong Lipunan), in front of the provincial capitol where the local canvassing was being held. People questioned the election results, believing them to be fraud-laden. Thirty-five computer workers at the national COMELEC tabulation center walked out during the actual national canvassing being aired live on TV, protesting the widespread tampering of election results. Opposition assemblymen similarly walked out in protest over the same issue.

2. Background on the Significant Dates or Events Being Commemorated

MARTIAL LAW.

On September 23, 1972 at 7:17 p.m., Ferdinand Marcos declared that the entire country was placed under Martial Law by virtue of Proclamation no. 1081.¹² This marked the beginning of another 14-year one-man rule which would last until Marcos was exiled from the country on February 25, 1986. By declaring martial law, Marcos suspended the writ of habeas corpus and the 1935 Constitution, dissolved Congress and padlocked the doors to the national assembly, the Batasang Pambansa, while he assumed both legislative and executive powers. September 23 is remembered as the anniversary of the declaration of martial law, where many atrocities and human rights violations were committed, too numerous to count, and so many abuses left unaccounted for.¹³

PEOPLE POWER REVOLUTION.

The 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution led tens of thousands of Filipinos from all walks of life to demonstrate along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), the main artery of Metro Manila, to call for an end to the Marcos dictatorship. The events of February 25, 1986, altered the course of our nation's history, showing the Filipino people's will to herald an era of peace and democracy. Over the years, we have continued to remember this momentous occasion by honoring the sacrifices of those who fought the dictatorship. By virtue of Proclamation No. 1071, s. 2015 by President Corazon Aquino became a special non-working holiday throughout the country to commemorate the movement which "restored our democratic institution and ushered in political, social and economic reforms in the country."¹⁴

The People Power Revolution was a culmination of events with various key players that made the bloodless revolution possible. On February 15, 1986, Ferdinand Marcos was declared as the winner of the snap elections. The following day, Cory Aquino, together with two million people, converged at the Luneta Park to call for civil disobedience to pressure Marcos to step down. She also called for a boycott of all businesses owned by Marcos' cronies.¹⁵

On February 22, 1986, two significant events happened: first, Defence Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and AFP Chief of Staff General Fidel Ramos officially withdrew their support to the Marcos administration. Second, Cardinal Sin called on the people to support Enrile and Ramos. They held a press conference to declare their withdrawal of support to Marcos, where both admitted to massive cheating during the snap elections. When Marcos got wind of their withdrawal, he asked Enrile and Ramos to surrender so that they could negotiate. In the evening, Chief of the AFP Intelligence Service, General Fidel Singson, was ordered to destroy *Radio Veritas*, the radio station broadcasting Cardinal Sin's messages. But before that could happen, Cardinal Sin went on air to encourage people to go to EDSA to support and protect Enrile and Ramos. Nuns and seminarians were among the first to arrive, forming a human barricade around the gates of Camp Crame. Subsequently, more and more people arrived to fill the streets of EDSA.¹⁶

On February 23, tens of thousands of people were already surrounding Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo along EDSA in response to Cardinal Sin's calls in *Radio Veritas*. AFP Chief General Fabian Ver led the attack on both Camps, while Marcos loyalist-troops went on a mission to destroy the *Radio Veritas*' transmitter in Bulacan. By this time, civilians formed human barricades to stop the armed soldiers and tanks, with nuns and clergy at the forefront. Marcos appeared on television, presenting several arrested military officers (branded as turncoats) and demanded that Enrile and Ramos immediately resign from their post.

On February 24, EDSA became a field of chaos with tires set on fire, and sandbags and old vehicles scattered on the road to block the way leading to Camp Crame. Armored Personnel Carriers began to enter EDSA but found it difficult to weave their way through the streets. Marcos claimed the people were committing rebellion, while General Fabian Ver and General Josephus Ramas signaled the soldiers to attack the civilians using tear gas.¹⁷ Ferdinand Marcos and his family appeared on television that morning, stating the lifting of the "maximum tolerance policy" and issuing a state of emergency, while General Ramas issued a "shoot-to-kill" order.

In the early morning of February 25, 1986, people were called on to surround Club Filipino to safeguard Cory Aquino's inauguration as the President. During Aquino's oath taking, Marcos held his own inauguration at the Malacañang Palace Ceremonial Hall. The channels that were to air Marcos' address were blocked by anti-Marcos soldiers who took down Broadcast City Complex. In EDSA, Marcos' loyalist soldiers rammed down the makeshift barricades on the streets using tanks and armored vehicles. General Ver called on the soldiers to proceed in containing the rebellion, even at the cost of killing citizens. The soldiers fortunately did not carry out their mission orders.¹⁸ Spontaneous people power movements arose in different parts of the country, supporting the calls for ousting the dictatorship, and by 9 p.m. of February 25, Marcos and his family fled the Malacañang Palace aboard US helicopters en route to Hawaii. The crowds forced open and stormed the palace, exposing to the public the opulence and excessive wealth that the Marcos family had amassed during their time in power.

THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT NARRATIVES VS NARRATIVES OF VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS.

The official government narrative was to highlight the achievements of the administration (many infrastructure projects, Marcos' supposed war heroism, and that peace and order were brought to the countryside) while downplaying the atrocities. In his rhetoric, Marcos contended that a system of "constitutional authoritarianism" was absolutely necessary to "reform society" and create a "new society" under his authority.¹⁹

The narrative of the victims of martial law were more about human rights violations, hopelessness, and only getting by because of an extreme resolve to survive. Many martial law victims said they were ready to die for the country during the People Power Revolution. The unarmed citizens begged the armed pro-Marcos soldiers not to shoot for they are all brothers, and the soldiers fortunately did not shoot the unarmed citizens, despite their orders.²⁰

Sadly, the lessons of the past were not ingrained deeply into the minds of the people for long because on May 9, 2022, the people elected Marcos' son as the 17th President of the Philippines. The narratives employed by the son (Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.) are strikingly similar to that of his father, trumpeting claims of good works and exaggerated accomplishments, while not addressing issues of corruption, plunder and human rights violations which has continually hounded the Marcos family. For Marcos, Jr., much of the narrative relies heavily on disinformation spread through social media and the "trolls" he employed.²¹ The use of these "troll farms" are surprisingly effective in the digital age, where people just tend to believe what they see posted in social media without exercising due diligence and fact-checking. On average, Filipinos spend over four hours daily using social media platforms, which is the highest across the Asia Pacific region, with 78.5 million registered users of social networks.²²

One of the main narratives disseminated by the Marcos government was that they were the "conceptualizers and implementers of infrastructure and architectural marvels that uplifted the Filipino Culture".²³ They claim these structures as proof of the "golden age" under the Marcos administration.²⁴ However, the truth is that much of these infrastructure projects were built using foreign loans, and that a lot of "grease money" and bribes were pocketed by corrupt officials. Among the infamous projects built under the Marcos administration was the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, which cost billions but was never used due to outdated technology, dangerous conditions and fears of a nuclear meltdown. Another was the Manila Film Center where hundreds died because the building's construction was being rushed in time for the Manila International Film Festival. A huge scaffolding collapsed above laborers, burying 169 workers who fell to their death in the quick-drying cement.²⁵

The narratives of the victims and survivors show the sufferings of individuals who dared oppose the oppressive Marcos regime, where an act of investigative journalism could result in enforced disappearance, torture, rape, etc. even among the youth.²⁶ Despite the horrific practices, the perpetrators would often be exonerated by claiming they were just following orders, and that they were done in the line of duty.²⁷

Survivors Hilda Narciso and Maria Cristina Bawagan were guest speakers at a symposium entitled "Martial Law: Echoes from the Past" held in the University of the Philippines at Los Baños on Sept. 18, 2019. Both martial law survivors shared their stories of being political prisoners under martial law. "*Maging mayaman ka, maging mahirap, basta taliwas sa kagustuhan ni Marcos ang iyong ginagawa, pwede kang mamatay* (Even if you are rich or poor, as long as what you are doing is against the wishes of Marcos, you can be killed)," Bawagan said. She recalled that some of the common forms of tortures included electric shocks to the genitals, water cure, dunking the head in a toilet bowl full of excrement, "Russian roulette," being buried alive, being stripped naked, sleep deprivation, being hung upside down, and rape and sexual abuse. Narciso was a teacher and a church worker in Davao when she was taken by the military, and was repeatedly tortured and gang-raped while in detention. "*Iyong pakiramdam mo na ikaw ay binaboy, binastos, pinahiya, pinasama, tinanggalan ng pagkatao. Mabuti pa ang basahan, kaya mong linisin, ang tao, parang hindi*" (You feel violated, abused, humiliated, degraded, and dehumanized. A rag is better off because it can be cleaned, not like a person). She added:

*"Sinasabi namin sa inyo ang katotohanan kasi ang katotohanan ang magpapalaya sa inyo (We are telling you the truth because it is the truth that will set you free)."*²⁸

Neri Colmenares, a former Senate candidate, shared that he was 18 years old when he was arrested by the military for supporting the return of student councils and publications. He was beaten for five days and was electrocuted. He also experienced the infamous "Russian Roulette," and each time the soldier pulled the trigger, he felt his brains were already "splattered on the wall." Colmenares commented: "Your body can become numb when you reach a certain threshold for pain, but the mind has no limits for accumulating harm." He added that what haunts him until now is the mental torture.²⁹

STATE-ENABLED OPPRESSION.

The implementation of a media blackout through Ferdinand Marcos' Letter of Instruction No. 1-A, s. 1972, further exacerbated the atrocities committed by government officials as the courts would not be in session during this period.³⁰ The claimed existence of subversive movements during martial law became the most convenient justification for the arrest of political opponents, contributing to public growing discontent.³¹ The Marcos dictatorship is historically remembered for its record of mass human rights abuses which targeted the political opposition, student activists, journalists, religious workers, farmers and others who were critical of his administration. Based on the documents of Amnesty International, Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, and other human rights monitoring entities, the Marcos dictatorship was marked by at least 3,257 known extrajudicial killings, 35,000 documented tortures, 77 disappeared, and 70,000 incarcerations.³² Some 2,520 of the 3,257³³ murder victims were tortured and mutilated before their bodies were dumped in various places for the public to discover - a tactic intended to sow fear among the public. This practice later became known as "salvaging."

GAPS/POINTS OF CONTENTION BETWEEN OFFICIAL NARRATIVES VS NARRATIVES OF VICTIMS/SURVIVOR GROUPS.

The gap between the two narratives is caused by a difference in perspective and interests. The official government narrative downplays the atrocities and overemphasizes the achievements to the point of embellishment.³⁴ But the narrative of the victim and survivor groups focuses on their experienced atrocities, and demands of accountability. Further, additional investigations uncovered huge deficits in government funds resulting from mismanagement and embezzlement by the Presidential Family.³⁵

However, the official government narrative was not always like this. During the Cory Administration (1986 to 1992), the State recognized the atrocities suffered by the victims of martial law and vowed to rectify them. Through the 1987 Constitution, the presidential power to declare martial law was severely limited, and the administration, through the Presidential Commission on Good Government, dedicated itself to the recovery of the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth. The Aquino administration also restored civil liberties and released the political detainees of martial law.³⁶ This stance of recognizing the atrocities of martial law continued into the Benigno Aquino III (Cory Aquino's son) administration from 2010 to 2016. In 2013, the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act was legislated, which provided P10 billion in compensation to the human rights victims of martial law.³⁷

But as the Duterte Administration came to power in 2016 to 2022, the official government narrative reverted back to its original position, downplaying the abuses committed during martial law.³⁸ It is common knowledge that the Marcoses are close allies to President Duterte, with Duterte even admitting to admiring and copying the military-style rule of the dictator.³⁹ The newly elected administration of Bongbong Marcos will likely continue along this line, which greatly contrasts with the narrative of the martial law victim and survivor groups.⁴⁰ The stark difference in opinion can be clearly seen in the fairly recent case of *Ocampo v. Enriquez*,⁴¹ with a 9-5 decision of the Supreme Court, deciding in favor of allowing the burial of Marcos in the Cemetery of Heroes (Libingan ng mga Bayani).⁴² Many of the atrocities committed and presented as evidence in the case were disregarded, with the focus of the courts revolving around the medals and supposed military achievements of the former president, thus earning him the right to be buried there. This sparked great public outrage, and reignited fears of historical revisionism and for the government to possibly erase the atrocities during that period.⁴³ Martial law survivor Bonifacio Ilagan (Filipino playwright, screenwriter, filmmaker, journalist and editor) said in an interview that the People Power movement was imperfect because it was not successful enough to prevent the Marcos family from returning back to power.⁴⁴

3. How is the Significant Date or Event Commemorated in the Public Sphere by Officials?

September 23 is commemorated as the date of the declaration of martial law in the Philippines. President Duterte did not designate it as a public holiday, saying that it is a day of protest, and if it were to be a holiday, this would only allow public gatherings for mass demonstrations.⁴⁵ Much of the Duterte administration refused to recognize the anniversary of the declaration of martial law, and this practice is predicted to continue with the Marcos, Jr. administration.

The EDSA Revolution is officially commemorated due to its historical feat of bloodless revolution which took down the Marcos dictatorship. It is commemorated in the public sphere on February 25 as a national holiday. For the National Historical Commission, their most recent activity is a Commemorative Online Exhibit which screened video clips about the EDSA revolution, followed by a forum where speakers shared their personal experiences during the revolution.⁴⁶ Other agencies arrange a series of dialogues to share insights about the event, and bring up parallels that exist then and now. A wreath laying event to honor the heroes of the People Power Revolution was held by the EDSA People Power Commission, where they also showed a multimedia presentation about martial law.⁴⁷ The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) published a Memorandum Circular 2022-012 regarding the commemoration of the EDSA Revolution, calling on all local chief executives, the DILG Minister of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and DILG regional directors to conduct commemorative activities related to the EDSA Revolution.⁴⁸

EXAMPLES OF OFFICIAL COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES.

The Monument of Heroes (Bantayog ng mga Bayani) shows multiple artworks and monuments commemorating the hardships during the 21 total years of the Marcos dictatorship.⁴⁹ Among these is the “Wall of Remembrance,” where the names of heroes and martyrs of martial law are inscribed on granite walls. The Bantayog also shows other artworks depicting the heroism as well as the horrors of that time.⁵⁰ This is a concrete reminder of the events that happened, the lives that it took and the stories behind them, hoping to block efforts at historical distortion and revisionism, and autocratic tendencies. The Freedom Memorial Museum is a project of the Human Rights Violations Victims’ Memorial Commission, a body created under Republic Act No. 10368. This legislation - known as the “Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act,” was signed into law in 2013 by then-President Benigno Aquino III. The Commission is tasked to raise awareness among the youth regarding the excesses of President Marcos’ administration. It opened the bidding for the museum construction on September 2020 and projected to open on September, 2022, on the 50th anniversary of Marcos’ Martial Law. However, with Marcos, Jr. as the next president, people fear the museum might not receive clearance for construction, or that the funds might end up elsewhere.

4. How is the Significant Date or Event Commemorated in the Local Sphere by Victim and Survivor Communities/ Victim- or Survivor-centered Associations/Civil Society Organizations?

Despite the government’s negligence or refusal to declare the anniversary of the declaration of martial law a holiday, the people continue to hold spontaneous mass actions on that date,⁵¹ even with government opposition and strict police regulation.⁵² The protests seek to keep alive the memories of this bleak period of Philippine history, and to serve as a grim reminder of the dangers of autocracy and unchecked powers. The protests also serve as a forum for the expression of grievances of recent administrations, in the hopes of change.⁵³

On February 25, 2022, to commemorate the 36th People Power Anniversary, CSOs and survivor groups held a gathering at the EDSA shrine. The people’s alliance emphasized that the waning interest in the commemoration of the People Power Revolution is due to the rise of disinformation plaguing the country, propagated by online “trolls.” Conferences and forums were conducted to help combat the online propaganda.⁵⁴ Other organizations held online conferences to debunk the fake news, and hold a discourse on politics, history and the mass movement. A number of discussions recounted the events of People Power leading to the ouster of Marcos, while various symposia featured experts on human rights and historians discussing the tumultuous era.⁵⁵ Dissemination of first-hand account information was the theme, with the common call at the end being “Never Again to Martial Law!”

CSO AND COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES OR INTERVENTIONS TO RECOGNIZE THE VICTIMS' NARRATIVES.

Civil Society Organisation, especially Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) and People Organisation (POs) have been very active providing victims narratives, including assisting communities to develop campaign, provide capacity building, and awareness raising. Organised groups of victims and victims' families have lead the advocacy for the creation of the Human Rights Victims Claims Board, which also provide a recognition for victims of Martial Law and resolve claims for reparation for victims.⁵⁶ In addition, a modern take on the commemoration of Martial Law is the Virtual Martial Law Museum, an online learning resource created by a community of educators and citizens committed to teach values and convey the lessons of martial law to the public.⁵⁷ By being online, the Martial Law Museum allows for easy access to anyone with internet access. It seeks to end a repeat of the events that allowed the atrocities of martial law to take place.⁵⁸ Martial Law is also commemorated through artworks, theatre plays and films or documentaries about that period. Through these media, the emotions carried with the stories are better conveyed, providing depth and personal interest to the stories, making them more meaningful to the observers. These forms provide a longer-lasting impact and more faithfully convey the messages that the victims and survivors seek to share.

5. How is the Significant Date or Event Commemorated in Your Organization?

Commemoration activities are meant to remind the people of the horrors of Martial Law, but with the massive ongoing disinformation campaigns, less importance is given to the lessons of the past, raising the threat of these being forgotten.⁵⁹ Keeping the memory alive and preserving the truth in Philippine history is essential so that these appalling events may never be repeated, nor would the people allow it to be repeated.⁶⁰ No one should be given so much power as to have full control over a state to the detriment of its people.

The Alternative Law Groups (ALG's) historical roots can be traced with the lawyers' and advocates' movement against the Marcos administration that focused on civil and political rights (defending the victims of illegal detention, arrest and torture, etc). After the ouster of Marcos, there was a rise in the need for other legal services that catered to a broader population that includes multi-sectoral work concerning farmers, fisherfolk, urban poor, women and children, indigenous peoples and the environment. This direction gave way to the concept of what became known as "alternative lawyering," the common bond which cements the ALG coalition. The ALG also collaborates with other partner CSOs to hold webinars, forums, develop information, education and communication (IEC) materials on martial law and the People Power Revolution. We integrate the lessons of martial law into our training, webinars and publications.

CSO COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES.

Social media is recognized as an effective platform today considering the prevalence and accessibility of online platforms to anyone with a smartphone. It is currently used by CSOs to disseminate factual reports to contradict the fake news and “alternative truth” statements of the administration.⁶¹ Other important approaches include awareness-raising activities and participation in martial law protest actions together with partner organizations.

FUNCTIONS OF COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES.

Commemorative practices aim to expose the truth surrounding martial law, as well as celebrating the People Power Revolution. We participate in peaceful protest actions led by partner CSOs, knowing it is crucial, now more than ever, to counter the government’s disinformation campaign. We need to value the lessons from the past so they can be avoided in the future. It is important that people know the historical events and consequences of the actions of Marcos and the people behind him.⁶²

TENSIONS BETWEEN OFFICIAL NARRATIVES AND NARRATIVES OF VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS.

Tensions between the two narratives – the government narrative versus the narrative of the victim/survivor groups – are unavoidable due to the contradictory nature of their respective interests. The administration’s narratives aim to hide the truth about what really happened to escape prosecution and accountability. This runs counter to the narrative of the victims and survivors, which seeks to expose the injustices they suffered, and demand accountability. Notably, the current president Marcos, Jr. has never apologized for the atrocities committed during his father’s administration.⁶³

CSO’S WORK TO ALTER DOMINANT PRACTICES WHICH OFTEN SIDELINE ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES.

The May 2022 elections serve as a strong testimony to the power of social media, which led to the election of Marcos, Jr as president. A similar event was seen during the 2016 US Presidential Elections where Donald Trump came out victorious through the heavy use and manipulation of information in social media.⁶⁴ The CSO community now sees social media as the latest battleground for countering disinformation. For example, it was announced that one of the first priorities of the Marcos, Jr. administration is to hire vloggers and social media influencers to cover and promote government activities. However, it is difficult to openly challenge the dominant government narratives due to rising security concerns, particularly with a rampant practice of red-tagging by the government, as red-tagged individuals are immediately exposed to harassment and death threats.⁶⁵

6. Lessons Learned

Using the lens of the Transitional Justice Framework, we can identify the gaps, challenges and weaknesses of how the Philippines moved forward from the dark days of the Marcos regime towards the restoration of democracy, and continue on to the present context where 31 million Filipinos elected the son of the dictator as the country's 17th president.

TRUTH

The truth about the martial law years was deliberately covered by the perpetrators to escape prosecution and accountability. With the vast ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses, in connivance with their political allies, they flooded social media with fake news and "alternative truths." More efforts should have been done to expose the truth about the human rights violations and atrocities under the martial law years. The government has been reluctant to open archives for fear of possible threats to national security.⁶⁶

PROSECUTION

During the People Power Revolution, the Filipino people were jubilant that the dictator finally fled the country. However, more efforts should have been exerted by the Cory Aquino government to prosecuting the Marcoses and their cronies. Of course, her government was also walking a tightrope, trying to balance efforts in pursuing the Marcoses and leading socio-economic development programs, especially when working with people, agencies and institutions that were pro-Marcos. Eventually, the Cory administration suffered six failed coup d'état attempts from pro-Marcos military forces.

REPARATIONS

More initiatives should have been done to provide recognition and reparations to the victims of martial law. A national act was passed in 2013 to establish Human Rights Claim's Board to provide reparations to the victims of martial law under the Marcos regime. Eventually, in 2017 out of more than 75,000 applications received, 96% have been adjudicated, leading to widespread dissatisfaction from other victims and their families. Government acknowledgment and recognition is an important part of justice that the victims crave for, but the government has flip-flopped from denying the atrocities, to recognizing the victims, to once again denying the atrocities. In addition, it is essential that the government institutionalizes the remembrance and commemorative activities so it will not be left to the whims of the chief executive whether to commemorate these activities or not. Such activities should come automatically.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

To prevent the recurrence of past mistakes, it is vital to reform the institutions which allowed the abuses to happen in the first place. This includes the judiciary (which should become truly independent, free from influence, and puts finality on the cases), the military and police (to safeguard and protect human rights, to ensure no whitewashing on cases, to rein in impunity, to police their own ranks, and to strengthen accountability), and other socio-economic-political institutions. When left unchecked, the danger of actions by political groups to upset the country's socio-political situation will always be there.

The Filipino people generally became complacent during the Cory Aquino presidency, knowing that the dictator had been ousted, and that democracy was finally restored. The lesson that people must remain constantly vigilant because new challenges will always emerge. For example, the use of social media to spread disinformation quietly began during the Duterte administration and climaxed with the 2022 elections, where 31 million Filipinos elected Marcos, Jr. as the president. Many CSOs were shocked with disbelief at the electoral outcome. All of a sudden, we awoke to a new context where social media controlled the minds, opinions and perspectives of many unknowing and gullible citizens. The troll farms became the fastest and easiest machinery for spreading propaganda. What is needed is more education and awareness-raising activities for the people to become more analytical and critical of content they encounter online. Students must be taught about the atrocities under the martial law years. There must be an institutionalization of commemoration practices so that people will not forget. When left unchecked, the dangers of widespread misinformation may slowly creep in to take over and overshadow the truth, so fact-checking tools are crucial in reducing the spread of fake news and to rebuild trust and confidence in society.⁶⁷

Peaceful protest actions, based on the freedoms of speech, expression and association, form an integral part of the democratic society we have built. The bravery displayed by the people who held their ground in the face of heavy artillery and their cries for change in the streets of EDSA has allowed us to live freely today. As a result, basic human rights such as prohibition of torture and the right to freedom of expression are embedded and protected in our laws. The People Power Revolution taught us the power that the people have in the face of powerful dictators, for true power emanates only from the people.

7. Identify Best Practices That Work to Instill an Inclusive Memory Culture and Broader Goals of Reconciliation, Recognition, Truth-Seeking, Education for Future Generations and Non-repetition.

With the current administration's priority of clearing the Marcos family name, a lot of disinformation and revisionist narratives are being shared online. So for CSOs, social media has become the latest battleground to counter false information with the truth. CSOs also stage protest actions during the commemoration of martial law and conducted webinars, publications, film screenings and development of IEC materials. Notably, some institutes of higher learning support the commemoration of martial law. For example, the Freedom Memorial Museum will be constructed on the University of the Philippines' campus grounds to officially recognize the wrongdoings and atrocities of martial law. The Ateneo de Manila University conducts webinars, video screenings, panel discussions and livestream activities to commemorate the declaration of martial law and show the negative impacts on our country.⁶⁸ Other learning institutions similarly stage their own commemorative activities.

CSO INITIATIVES THAT FACILITATE WIDER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT.

Many CSOs commemorate martial law with a sharing of victims' experiences through conferences or symposiums. These sessions feature similarities and parallels from the Marcos administration, to the Duterte administration, up to the current Marcos, Jr. administration. CSOs also conduct information drives and postings in social media. They also engage in policy reform initiatives, which are crucial to prevent future atrocities.⁶⁹

CSO INITIATIVES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESSFUL MEMORY CULTURE.

CSOs engage in social media, conduct webinars and discussion sessions, publish IEC materials, conduct protest actions, etc. The goal is to increase the awareness level of the general public - from blindly accepting what they see in social media as gospel truths, to being critical and analytical of information being presented to them.

CSO INITIATIVES THAT ENCOURAGE CONSTRUCTIVE PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND DEBATE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Many CSOs and communities try to promote greater civic engagement to raise public awareness of government-led initiatives to hide the truth and distort and revise historical facts. This is done through social media, education sessions publications and IEC materials.

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