

Martial Law Perspectives from the People: An Analysis of the Interviews Conducted by the Students of Readings in Philippine History

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to aid the students in their further understanding of Martial Law in the Philippines inasmuch enable them to experience history through the perspectives of the Filipinos who had experienced the event. Marcos's Martial Law was widely known as one of the darkest events in Philippine history. Incidents during those years continued to be remembered by the new generation whose platform of learning spans the schools and Internet browsing. Despite the remembrance, some information on the said event was being distorted by false narratives. Using the oral history methodology by the college students of Readings in Philippine History, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the event, with the support of Gadamer's theory of perspectives in the analysis of various accounts, not only from civilians of Metro Manila, but also from several regions of the country. In addition, the interviews gathered may shed a light on some of the notable misconceptions about martial law in history.

Keywords: *Martial Law, oral history, Ferdinand Marcos, perspectives, Marcos era*

Introduction

n the 21st of September 1972, President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos placed the Philippines under Martial Law through Proclamation No. 1081. Two days later, the president himself appeared on the television screens of every family in response with awe and stunned with mere silence. Martial law was proclaimed with the intention to combat the communist insurgency in the country. In accordance with Primitivo Mijares, however, the proclamation was intended to prolong the presidency of Marcos

for life. presidency of Marcos for life.¹ As a result, various incidents occurred after the proclamation, such as the arrest of political oppositions whom the president cited as threats to the Republic. In addition, various groups such as students, businessmen, and media personnel were also arrested, as they were deemed subversive to the government. Furthermore, government-controlled media, strict curfews, and the suspension of the *writ of habeas corpus* dominated the country, shrouding the community with fear and pondering on what was next for the livelihood of every civilian.

Almost a half-century has passed, and the period of Martial Law during the Marcos administration remained to be considered one of the darkest years in Philippine history. Despite the aim of declaring martial law was to ensure the security of every citizen during a state of rebellion, the Marcos years overshadowed the previous martial laws in history with fear and trauma. Controversially, the Martial Law era was deemed by some as the “Golden Years” in Philippine history claiming the country reached prosperity and experienced a crime-free society. Thus, debates not only for scholars but also within the Filipino community ignited in hopes of understanding the event.

Through the Readings in Philippine History subject, a required General Education subject taken by every college student in this generation², the researcher utilized the opportunity to let the students understand the significance of history in the Filipino identity by utilizing the methodology of oral history conducting an interview with citizens residing from various regions of the country who had fully experienced the Martial Law era. As a result, this article aims to discuss the Martial Law era in the Philippines, based on the narratives gathered by the college students. In addition, it was then supplemented with various sources in hopes to understand the credibility of these narratives. The article intends to further provide understanding to the readers in hopes of clearing controversies for the current generation surrounding one of the darkest years of Philippine history.

The college students, notably from the University of Santo Tomas and Chiang Kai Shek College, conducted the interview in relation to the Martial Law during the Marcos administration. A snowball technique was utilized in

¹ Primitivo Mijares, 2017, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos*, Revised and Annotated, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 28.

² Office of the President. Commission on Higher Education. *General Education Curriculum: Holistic Understandings, Intellectual and Civic Competencies*. CHED Memorandum Order No. 20. 2013.

gathering their respondents who had fully experienced the said event either from their close family relatives or friends, preferably those who were born prior to the years of the declaration. The respondents chosen in this study are mostly city dwellers from different areas of the Philippines particularly belonging to the lower classes of the society. The study, in addition, was conducted by the students as part of their final performance-based examination for the Readings in Philippine History subject in which can either be in a form of a written or a short documentary output.

Throughout the process, the students primarily focused on guide questions in conducting the interview notably focusing on the situation of the Philippines a) before the declaration of Martial Law; b) during the declaration of martial law based on the accounts of the interviewed civilians; c) after the lifting of martial law. The students may also incorporate other questions in relation to the topic in hopes to expand their understanding of the event. Afterward, they gathered credible materials in relation to the topic such as the Marcos administration and the Martial Law days to support their analysis and interpretation of the narratives gathered. Furthermore, since selected respondents are only gathered, it is important to also consider that the study does not cover the view of the majority about the event.

In relation to this study, the researcher also incorporated other materials related to the topic in the hope to analyze the credibility of the narratives. The theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer on hermeneutics was utilized in further analyzing the narratives gathered. Hermeneutics is known as the theory of interpretation, which began by expounding religious scriptures to make sense of sacred texts and eventually extended to the interpretation of all linguistic products in hopes to elaborate on unfamiliar historical texts.³ Gadamer, who studied and expanded on the work of Martin Heidegger, exclaimed those prejudices are important in historical interpretation, as this is a way of accessing the historical traditions. In accordance with Gadamer in his work, *Truth and Method*,

What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the viewpoint of the absolute self-construction of reason in fact belongs to historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept

³ Rudolf A. Makkreel, 2009, "Hermeneutics." In *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, by Aviezer Tucker, 529-539, West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 529.

of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudice.⁴

Gadamer further made distinctions about these prejudices that it can be either due to human authority or over hastiness which may lead to misunderstandings. Prejudices in narratives cannot be avoided as these are part of the tradition of a person as they live in this world. Hence, in application to the study, one perspective of Martial Law cannot provide a general explanation of the event to the public, as there are numerous accounts that contribute to the understanding of it. In understanding the narratives gathered, the theory served as a framework for analyzing the various perspectives of Martial Law in the Philippines.

Before Martial Law

Under the Nationalista party, Ferdinand E. Marcos assumed presidency on December 30, 1965. During his first term of office, the economy of the Philippines was suffering as not only poverty persistently growing among the people but also problems of graft & corruption within the government was worsen.⁵ Through the narratives gathered, most of the respondents mention the Philippines was economically struggling with citizens having difficulties not only in search of labor opportunities but also with their standard of living such as the struggle of availing some produce. According to Ben Catanghal, a 97-year-old respondent living in Pasig City, “Ang buhay ng mga mamamayan, lalo na ng mga manggagawa, at ako ay isa sa mga manggagawa, ay mahirap ang buhay. Mababa ang sahod, mataas ang halaga ng biling kaya mahirap ang buhay ng mamamayang, mga pangkaraniwang mamamayan.”⁶ A respondent who was then a student of the De La Salle University narrated further on the Philippine economy at that time stating the occurrence of inflation that caused slow economic growth.⁷ In addition, Jaime Adolore, a respondent who was then a fourth-year Arts and Letters college student at the University of Santo Tomas, recalled the country was in chaos with no direction as President Marcos was

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 2004, *Truth and Method*. 2nd, Revised, Wiltshire, UK: Continuum Publishing Group, 278.

⁵ Augusto V. de Viana, 2011, *The Philippines: A Story of a Nation*, Quezon City: Rex Printing Company, Inc., 314.

⁶ Francisco Catanghal, interview by Nicole Dominique M. Foja, Nicole Anne C. Sy, Lyka Gabrielle R. Terrado, Paula Nadine D. Tuazon, and Ma. Camille Andrea P. Urbano, *Transcript of Interview with Francisco Catanghal*, May 2021.

⁷ B, interview by Joanne Yvonne C. Ang, Lance Eduard N. Gernandiso, Roger P. Lua, Johaira L. Wu and Yong Qing Zeng, *Interview with B*, December 19, 2020.

reelected for a second term.⁸ He became the first president to win reelection after defeating Sergio Osmeña, Jr. in a controversial fashion as the 1969 election was considered to be the noisiest and dirtiest during that time.⁹ In political terms, President Marcos was considered a lame-duck as he was expected to step down from his presidency yet all of a sudden he won.

As a result of the political and economic problems, civil unrest persistently growing and became rampant. Mass movements were evident not only from students on school university campuses, but also from various sectors particularly the labor unions. Catanghal would recall participating in the movement as the leader of the union protesting the unjust governance of the government. Sadly, he would be arrested and imprisoned for a year when martial law was declared.¹⁰ One of the most notable protests before the declaration occurred during the state of the nation address of President Marcos in 1970. This incident was known as the First Quarter Storm where thousands of students stormed the Malacañang and the U.S. Embassy.¹¹ Adolore even recalled a wooden casket was thrown over the president¹² as anti-Marcos protests further grew to signal wide public dissent.

President Marcos came into power with a pledge to make the Philippines great again. He laid down various programs such as directed toward the agricultural sectors. Furthermore, the thrust of the government was the promotion of new nationalism in hopes of reviving the traditional ways of the country.¹³ One of the programs of the government in connection with reviving the Philippines' golden past was the promotion of Filipino culture by building numerous architectures as one of their actions. Grandiose brutalist architectures such as the Cultural Center of the Philippine Complex and notable hospitals such as the Lung Center and the Heart Center became the symbol of the government's promotion of the New Society. However, not everyone was granted the privilege of enjoying these infrastructures. Mr. Floro Escultura, a respondent, recalled they were not catered to all. Notably the hospitals, he stated "Maganda lang tingnan, well wala naming pumupunta. Wala naman

⁸ Jaime Adolore, interview by Mark David Damo, *ReadPH*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXBtyPS-4vw>.

⁹ de Viana, *The Philippines*, 316.

¹⁰ Catanghal, *Transcript*, 2021.

¹¹ Alexander R. Magno, 1998, *Tyranny Descends*. Vol. IX, in *Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People*, by Alexander R. Magno, 143-163, Asia Publishing Company Limited, 144-145.

¹² Adolore, *ReadPh*, 2021.

¹³ de Viana, *The Philippines*, 314.

masyadong mga pasyente dahil pangmayaman.¹⁴ Thus, the infrastructure programs became not only the hallmark of the corruption of the government but also a façade that divides the Filipino social class.

Even though narratives of struggles were utmost the response of the citizens, some respondents recounted different experiences from the years prior to the declaration. Ms. Lhenette Flores, for instance, recalled that they could still stroll around parks and malls with their friends.¹⁵ Mr. Ricardo Reyes also claimed the governance of the country was good and that people could move freely during that time.¹⁶ Overall, some respondents remembered the Philippines was simple and peaceful despite reports of frequent civil unrest.

The government, nevertheless, found it necessary to declare Martial Law as the country was experiencing unrest, rebellion, and various reports of crime. Numerous respondents especially those residing in the urban area recalled numerous reports of bombings in various public places from the busy streets of Carriedo, notably the Joe's Department, terror threats in the NAWASA water station,¹⁷ and the most notably Plaza Miranda Liberal Party senatorial rally on August 21, 1971, which proceeded with the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.¹⁸

During Martial Law

When President Marcos declared Martial Law, the country was shrouded with fear and the sudden feeling of distress. Flores recounted her mother crying with fear as the scene of tanks and soldiers surrounding the area reminded her of the years of the Second World War that she had experienced.¹⁹ Panic, in accordance with Mr. Reyes, was observed by the citizens, as they felt uncertainty from the government.²⁰ Mr. Emerito Cruz, who was a scriptwriter for Fernando Poe Jr. during that time, recalled having difficulty commuting

¹⁴ Floro Escultura, interview by Fidel Allen B. Nacion III, *Interview with Mr. Floro Escultura and Mrs. Lilia Escultura*, May 30, 2021.

¹⁵ Lhenette Flores, interview by Angelo Rey Sebastian, Micaela May Benigno, Casxandra Flame Cruz, Cristina Uy and Gaudencio Ocillos, *Martial Law Documentary*, December 12, 2021.

¹⁶ Ricardo Reyes, interview by Angelo Rey Sebastian, Micaela May Benigno, Casxandra Flame Cruz, Cristina Uy and Gaudencio Ocillos, *Martial Law Documentary*, December 12, 2021.

¹⁷ Mijares, *The Conjugal Dictatorship*, 208-209.

¹⁸ de Viana, *The Philippines*, 317.

¹⁹ Flores, *Martial Law*, 2021.

²⁰ Reyes, *Martial Law*, 2021.

home from work during the first days of the declaration. Vehicles were barely available at that time; thus, he had to walk from Kalentong, Mandaluyong to Jose Rizal University.²¹ During the first months, citizens were still anxious in their every movement; thus, it would be recorded that people were disciplined, yet this was the case due to fear as they were under strict surveillance. People were tongue-tied as they feared arrest by the military.

Some of the respondents expected the declaration, as they observed the series of incidents. Like Mila Aguilar, an activist during that time proceeded to go underground after the declaration.²² In accordance with Mijares, prior to declaring Martial Law, the government studied the situation of the country which includes consulting the U.S. government by seeking their blessing granted it would protect their national interest.²³ As a result, Martial Law was declared to protect the Philippines against the communist rebellion. Furthermore, the declaration was utilized as a vehicle to justify a way of destroying the old corrupt society by replacing it with a “new society.”²⁴ Discipline was strictly imposed over the entire country with the government insisting on the slogan “*Sa ikauunlad ng bayan, disciplina ang kailangan*” becoming, thus, the propaganda of the government towards the betterment of the New Society.²⁵ Contrarily, it was intended to prolong his presidency. Corruption within the oligarchies even persisted during the Martial Law regimes. Being himself also belonged to an influential oligarchical family, Marcos utilized his power to distribute the wealth and properties to some of his cronies from one elite to another.²⁶ In addition, the Marcos couple were even known to have possessed numerous bank accounts internationally possessing an extravagant amount of money under the pseudonyms William Saunders for Ferdinand and Jane Ryan for Imelda Marcos.²⁷

Military officials consistently patrolled every place in the country arresting curfew violators, as it was strictly imposed after the declaration. Some civilians,

²¹ Emerito Cruz, interview by Angelo Rey Sebastian, Micaela May Benigno, Casxandra Flame Cruz, Cristina Uy and Gaudencio Ocillos, *Martial Law Documentary*, December 12, 2021.

²² Mila Aguilar, interview by Aliza Soliman, Kim Limuel Dolor, Janica Jhana Bawi, Minette Ramirez and Mark Jude Panes, *3ME-D_5 ReadPH_Finals*, June 7, 2021, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZuBgepDIHIVC_zCYaUt-TU2GgcJbqEAR?usp=sharing.

²³ Mijares, *The Conjugal Dictatorship*, 8-9.

²⁴ de Viana, *The Philippines*, 323.

²⁵ Magno, *Tyranny Descends*, 156.

²⁶ Ricardo Manapat, 2020, *Some are Smarter than Others: The History of Marcos' Crony Capitalism*, Annotated, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 75-76.

²⁷ Manapat, *Some are Smarter*, 439.

especially the teenagers, were displeased to hear about this proclamation. Mr. Nonito Ruiz recalled hating the imposition of curfews as it prohibited them to hang out with their *barkadadas*.²⁸ Frank Santos, a resident in Manila & 7-years-old when Martial Law was declared, recalled encountering a member of the Metropolitan Constabulary (Metrocom) when they had to go to St. Luke's Hospital for their father. Due to the difficulty of acquiring a taxi, the Metrocom asked a vehicle to step aside and forced the passengers to go out. They even strictly asked for the removal of the tint in the glass window.²⁹ In addition, Mr. Cruz remembered they must carry an ID to be presented to the military officers once they were told to stop due to their suspicions. These IDs were presented as proof of their profession.³⁰ Asuncion G. Manalo, a respondent, recalled an instance of military abuse. She recounted,

Sobrang nakakatakot daw sumakay ng jeep kasi marami daw may mga baril mga tao at bawal magkwentuhan. Sa gabi daw, wala talaga nagsasalita baka daw kasi may militar na nakaaligid. Sobrang dami daw NPA sa Mindoro noon tapos hinuhunting lahat ng ex-militar, eh si lolo ex-military. Ang ginagawa daw ng NPA is, tinotorture daw mga ex-military. Binabalatan daw yung talampakan at pinapalakad sa ipa ng palay hanggang sa mamatay.³¹

Generosa Lydia L. Benito, a respondent from Tagudin, Ilocos Sur, recalled an incident of military abuse towards curfew violators. She recalled one of her neighbors who lived two blocks away was shot to death just for not following the curfew regulations.³² In addition, mass media was placed under the control of the military as operations of radio, television stations, and newspapers ceased. With the government placing most of the sectors then under the supervision of the military, Filipino civilians further feared that there would be a military takeover for the entire country. An interview with Mr. Noel Mayores recounted,

²⁸ Nolito Ruiz, interview by Clarisse Jessica A. Mayores, *Interview with Mr. Nolito Ruiz*, May 30, 2021.

²⁹ Frank Santos, interview by Pamela Rio M. Balingit, Ma. Ruth Naomi Beltran, Angelica Fe P. Cabanag, Angelo V. Cantos, Charles Jakob Z. Sta. Ana and Raphael Carlos C. Panganiban, *Interview 1: Frank Santos, Manila*, May, 2021.

³⁰ Cruz, *Martial Law*, 2021.

³¹ Asuncion G. Manalo, interview by Brian Andrew M. Alfonso, Matthew Henry T. Clerigo, Jon Danmar M. Malacas, Gieo Aldrich P. Tiangco and Christian Paul A. Valencia, *Asuncion G. Manalo, 65 years old*, June 7, 2021.

³² Generosa Lydia L. Benito, interview by Adrian Blas, Cesar Oliver Lunaria, Isak Pau, Francis Jeff Ting and Lewis Miguel Yabut. 2021. *Interview with Generosa Lydia L. Benito*, June 7, 2021.

“When the martial law was implemented, we were afraid. There are curfews and we tend to just go home and lock ourselves in our house. Actions were lessened. The media was held by the government and there is no freedom of expression. The power is on the military. Every time they can arrest us and kill us. We can still do things but those are very limited. We also have limited access to media and television back then so we only here news on the radio. What I remember is that there are cases that people are being abducted and they are being killed without due process. In our province, here in Marinduque, there is of course a curfew but unlike in Manila, the military here in Marinduque is more considerate kasi halos naman lahat magkakakilala dito. The life in here, we always thought, ‘basta hindi kami gumawa ng masama, hindi kami huhulihin.’ Ang alam ko wala namang pinatay dito. Wala rin eleksyon noon. Ang naaalala ko ang dami talagang dinukot noon, ang daming pinatay. Pero dahil hindi kami involved in political aspect, hindi kami ganoon naapektuhan.”³³

It was etched in the minds of every Filipino civilian during that time they would be safe from arrest or death if they lived a simple life by following the law and free from subversion. Civilians who were caught either participating in activities or hoarding materials in relation to subversion against the government. Nenita B. Rivera, a respondent from Iloilo, recalled her father was heavily affected by being a gunsmith. She recounted,

“...He was a machinist and we had this small machine shop right inside our house. He was also a passionate gunsmith, specializing in making silencers for guns. Most of his clients were military men as well as gun enthusiasts. He was also a member of a legitimate gun club. During that time, he was advised by some clients to safekeep the guns for we might be raided and the guns will be taken along with him. My father, out of fear for his family, wrapped all guns in plastic and threw them at the river at the back of our house. I remembered he said that he’d rather throw them in the river than let the military get hold of them. I felt my father’s disappointment and sadness then.”³⁴

Fashion preferences among civilians were also strict, markedly among males, prohibiting them to wear long hair forcing them to be trimmed on the spot, or hence face arrest due to accusations of subversive involvement. Public gatherings were either strictly under military surveillance or prohibited as they

³³ Noel Mayores, interview by Clarisse Jessica A. Mayores, *Interview with Mr. Noel Mayores*, May 30, 2021.

³⁴ Nenita B. Rivera, interview by Pamela Rio M. Balingit, Ma. Ruth Naomi Beltran, Angelica Fe P. Cabanag, Angelo V. Cantos, Charles Jakob Z. Sta. Ana and Raphael Carlos C. Panganiban, 3: *Nenita B. Rivera, Iloilo*, May, 2021.

were suspected to be the root of subversive activities. Parties and celebrations were markedly prohibited during the night. Ms. Flores even remembered caroling during Christmas were prohibited.³⁵ A respondent from Dumaguete city recalled when he was a freshman in a Catholic university who was actively involved in both religious and socio-civic organizations. He recounted,

“The police and the military were the most powerful group at that time. They were very visible in public places with their guns; they entered houses without any search warrants. They just arrested people without due process.

“My most scary experience was when I was in Kalilangan, Bukidnon attending a seminar sponsored by the Christian Life Communities and Jesuit Fathers when some military personnel surrounded the seminar venue and interviewed us, asking what programs and activities we were participating in. They informed us that just a few towns away, there were people massacred. I could not tell my parents about it because there were no cell phones or internet connections, nor did we have a telephone in the house.”³⁶

Education remained a priority during the Martial Law era emphasizing the propagation of nationalistic sentiment and civic responsibilities. Students returned to schools and universities months after the declaration, yet they were strictly under military surveillance. Mr. Ruiz recalled when school resumed in January 1973, many protocols were changed and introduced such as speaking ill against the government and prohibiting student gatherings.³⁷ Furthermore, some students were even hired as spies for the government to report activities deemed subversive. A documentary film by Lauren Greenfield on the political life of Imelda Marcos, entitled *The Kingmaker*, would state the incident of espionage as recalled by Etta Rosales as she mentioned being interrogated by some of her students in detention in relation to her involvement with subversive activities.³⁸ This served as evidence for some students becoming a tool of government propaganda for youth empowerment, especially with the formation of the *Sangguniang Kabataan* or the National Youth Commission, a small political organization headed by the daughter of the president, Imee Marcos. In relation to youth empowerment and the emphasis on education, some farmers

³⁵ Flores, *Martial Law*, 2021.

³⁶ The respondent did not reveal his name. Interview by Pia Marie K. Rebosa, Andine Kriszha L. Romano, Julianne Marie I. Salvosa, Annika Renee S. Sanchez and Kristine Mae D. Servañez, *INTERVIEWEE NO. 2*, June, 2021.

³⁷ Ruiz, *Interview with Ruiz*, 2021.

³⁸ Lauren Greenfield, 2019, *The Kingmaker*, Directed by Lauren Greenfield. Produced by Frank Evers and Lauren Greenfield. Performed by Imelda Marcos.

became beneficial to the student scholarship by the government. Mr. Ruiz would recall through the coconut industry known as Coconut Federation (Cocofed), that the children of the farmers in Lucena were granted scholarships to any school of their choice and a monthly allowance.³⁹ Cocofed was a private sector organization of all farmers in the coconut industry which drew money out of the farmers placing the funds under the Marcos government and its cronies.⁴⁰ Thus, coconut farmers became poorer despite their children being granted scholarships.

Nevertheless, the resumption of classes became a risky opportunity for student activists to resume the protest on university campuses against the government. Immediate arrests were expected by some students who participated as they eventually discovered some of their classmates had gone missing for several days. Dubbed *Desaparecidos*, those who were arrested by the military were never to be heard from again. Some of the activists resorted to either going underground or climbing mountains to avoid detainment and escape death. Mila Aguilar, a 23-year-old activist, recalled hiding underground and resisting arrest for thirteen (13) years. She would not only recall escaping death but also struggled to survive in the mountains such as eating lizards and dogs.⁴¹ Others who were caught or accused of subversion were arrested immediately without a warrant and detained in military camps such as Camp Crame and Fort Bonifacio. Adolore, being an active member of a nationalist civil organization, further recalled being detained in Fort Bonifacio after participating in a movement in Mendiola. He would state the place was a ghetto where detainees were compressed together like in a can of sardines, and there was no privacy, especially when using the comfort room.⁴² Furthermore, civilians were also cautious in interacting with each other particularly with activists as any communications about activism may endanger them. Family members of activists, in addition, were also not safe from arrest. With tears, Ms. Flores remembered the sister of her activist friend was innocently arrested, raped, and killed.⁴³

Activists were not the only victims of military abuse during the declaration. As mentioned, an autocratic rule was imposed over the entire country; consequently, any illegal actions from the civilians were strictly prohibited.

³⁹ Ruiz, *Interview with Ruiz*, 2021.

⁴⁰ Manapat, *Some are Smarter*, 159-160.

⁴¹ Aguilar, *3ME-D_5*, 2021.

⁴² Adolore, *ReadPh*, 2021.

⁴³ Flores, *Martial Law*, 2021.

Civilians may continue with their work livelihood, but they were heavily under surveillance by the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA). As such, some of the respondents would mention this was the best part of the Martial Law regime as they claimed their community became peaceful and crime-free. However, it became an elaborate scheme for some civilians to plant accusations against someone they saw as an enemy. Adolore recalled he was planted with a pillbox bomb leading to his arrest while going home from a rally.⁴⁴ Another respondent recalled an incident of military officers raiding their homes due to accusations. Leda Michelle Gervacio, 6 years old when Martial Law was declared, recalled military officials raided their home and detained her parents. She recounted,

“Nung nag uumpisa na pasukan, sila mama sa bahay ng mga military nung bata pa kami tinago kami sa aming aunty para hindi kami makita or mamukahan, so paguuwi namin galling school hindi kami dumeretcho kaagad sa bahay, kasi hinihintay pa namin umalis ang mga military sa bahay bago kami umuwi and tinatago kami para hindi kami gawing pain or baitsa parents ko, kasi at that time malakas kami sa import and export kasi nag-oout of town sila guakong (grandfather from the motherside) para sa business namin, and at that time siniraan kami ng ibang mga tao out of envy, kasi naswertehan kami dahil nag booboom kami kasi okay ang business partner namin, tapos parang chinismis kami na dahil nag booboom ang business naming military para iinterrogate kami sa bahay, then suddenly nag declare sila ng raid kaya kaming mga bata tinago kami sa kapatid ng mama ko, and yung lolo at lola nila pauwi na sila sa Cebu at that time, tapos tinawagan sila na wag muna umuwi at mag stay muna sila sa Cebu for a while, pero ang nanay ko at ang mga kargador na trap sila sa bahay, at that time kaya sila yung kinuha at kinulung sila sa Camp Crame, and nag pa sabi sila sa news para lumabas ang father ko at siya yung pumunta kila mama at ni torture siya, by nilublob siya sa drum ng tubig at binuhusan siya ng 7-up sa mukha and hinarap ang ilaw sa mukha niya everyday para lang umamin siya, until may isa silang kakilala na colonel siya yung what we say as immunity nila mama at papa at that time, kasi siya yung nag ligtas kaila mama at papa by making a letter at sinasabi na bawal nila saktan si papa hangang ipalaya siya pero matagal na siya tinorture, and may isang time na pumunta ang the same colonel na nag torture kay papa kay mama at sinabe “na kung mahal daw talaga niya si papa sumama daw siya sa kanila at puntahan daw nila si papa na nasa first hotel daw at may malaria daw siya at kailangan daw sumama si mama para gamutin si papa”, and ang sagot ni mama sakanila ay “kung mahal talaga ako ng asawa ko kahit mamamatay na siya dapat puntahan

⁴⁴ Adolore, *ReadPh*, 2021.

parin ako ng asawa ko dito”. Thankfully, hindi sumama si mama sa kanila, kasi dati daw pag sumama daw si mama sa kanila may possibility daw nairape daw si mama, and after the next day binigyan sila mama and yung mga kargador ng pagkain at bagong damit ng mga military and may natanggap na din sila na letter galling kay Marcos na pwede nasilang palayain, and nung paglabas ni papa sa camp crame puti na ang buhok niya dahil sa sobrang torture, kaya hindang hindi namin makakalimutan ang pangalan nang colonel nayun by which I can’t name drop, kasi siya yung colonel na nag torture kay papa at siya din yung colonel na may balak na lokohin si mama na sumama sa kanila.”⁴⁵

Gervacio also recounted their family driver was also detained and experienced torture for his association with her family. The said driver’s nails were removed and bloody when he went home, while further interrogating matters related to the family.⁴⁶

After Martial Law

President Marcos lifted the Martial Law on January 17, 1981, a week before the papal visit of Pope John Paul II. It was a move by the government to provide an image to the pope and internationally the country returned to normal.⁴⁷ One of the respondents, Ms. Teresita Yee, recounted the incident,

Pumunta si pope nung 1981, ano feel nila? Hindi nila nilift, tilted, pakitang tao lang pero sa totoo wala namang pinag kaiba, ganun parin. Pacool sa ibang bansa. Nandun parin ung kaba, kase everytime na vocal na icriticize sila either nasa kulungan ka, lulutang katawan mo, or nawawala ka.⁴⁸

The statement of Yee confirmed with other references as the lifting of the martial rule was just a temporary facade to the dictatorial regime. President Marcos further extended his rule even though his powers to legislate were terminated as the declaration was lifted, yet he may still execute such action

⁴⁵ Leda Michelle Gervacio, interview by Andrew Phillip P. Bajamundi, Nataniel M. Bayron, Yi-Heng Chen, Hazel Anne D. Choa and Athena Leicharise L. Gervacio, *Transcript of Leda Michelle Gervacio Interview*, December 13, 2020.

⁴⁶ Gervacio, *Transcript of Leda*, 2020.

⁴⁷ de Viana, *The Philippines*, 330.

⁴⁸ Teresita Yee, interview by Andrew Philip P. Bajamundi, Nathaniel M. Bayron, Yi-Heng Chen, Hazel Anne D. Choa and Athena Leicharise L. Gervacio, *Transcript Interview of Teresita Yee*, December 13, 2020.

during an instance of a state of emergency that required immediate attention.⁴⁹ Ms. Manalo recounted,

After Martial Law was lifted in 1981, still the Philippines did not enjoy genuine freedom from dictatorship because the late Pres. Ferdinand Marcos retained all of his powers through purposeful revisions in the Philippine Constitution and presidential decrees. Press freedom continued to be curtailed; election results were manipulated; insurgency continued; social unrest persisted...until it reached a situation beyond control...⁵⁰

Nevertheless, warrantless arrest and immediate detention continued through the Presidential Commitment Order (PCO), formerly the Arrest, Search and Seizure Order (ASSO).⁵¹ Thus, there was no wondering many of the respondents barely recounted the lifting of the martial rule as the years that everything was back to normal. Mr. Santos recalled, "Oo, actually, in essence. No'ng 1981, parang ni-lift niya 'yong Martial Law kuno... may lifting ng Martial Law no'n eh. Pero walang naniniwala kasi parehas lang naman 'yong...wala namang pagbabago."⁵²

The last years of the Marcos presidency were highlighted with notable events leading to the decline of the administration. These events were the sudden illness of President Marcos with death possibly impending and the assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr. on the tarmac of the Manila International Airport after arriving from a triple coronary bypass heart operation in the United States. Furthermore, the economy of the country continued to worsen remarkably with the plunging of sugar and coconut prices in the world market and a serious debt crisis.⁵³ Massive protests proceeded the days after the assassination blaming Marcos not only for being the mastermind, but also for the country's persisting crisis. These events would lead to the 1985 Presidential Snap Election between Marcos and the widow of "Ninoy" Aquino, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino which proceeded with the EDSA People Power I, when Marcos was declared the winner. The public civilians, outstandingly the

⁴⁹ Dante Miguel Cadiz, 1981, "The Legal Effects of the Lifting of Martial Law on the Power of the President to Legislate," *Ateneo Law Journal*, Accessed October 14, 2021. <http://ateneolawjournal.com/main/varticle/490>.

⁵⁰ Manalo, *Asuncion G*, 2021.

⁵¹ Alexander R. Magno, 1998, *Life Under Marcos*. Vol. IX, in Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People, by Alexander R. Magno, 165-181, Asia Publishing Company Limited, 165.

⁵² Santos, *Interview 1*, 2021.

⁵³ de Viana, *The Philippines*, 331.

supporters of Aquino, marched throughout EDSA protesting for Marcos to step down.

When Marcos officially stepped down from the presidency, the people in EDSA rejoiced, as they saw it as a sign of the revival of democracy. They stormed the Malacañang Palace and took anything that they could get, claiming those were stolen from the people. Mr. Santos recalled the event when Marcos stepped down stating there were dancing on the streets and happiness among Filipinos.⁵⁴ Ms. Manalo also recounted the event. She recalled, “...nung narinig na sa radyo veritas na umalis na Marcos, si June Keithley pa raw nagbalita, eh pinatugtog daw sa Radyo Veritas yung Philippine National Anthem, dami raw umiyak nung first time nila ulit narinig ang Philippine National Anthem.”⁵⁵

What was intended to be the revival of democracy for the Filipino civilians, however, not all individuals carried the same sentiment. The aftermath of the Marcos regime unintendedly produced an ideological rift between the supporters of the Marcoses and the Aquinos. One factor could be the country entering into an enormous economic crisis and debt notably with the said ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses that reached 25 billion dollars. Several respondents claimed the Philippines persistently became poorer and crime became rampant again after the regime. Teresita Pulido recalled,

“Balik na uli sa dati, kaso bumagsak na ang economy, kaayusan, at kapayapaan. Yung bilihin nag mahal, tumaas yung sweldo pero di sapat kasi walang price control. Mas gumulo din at dumami ang krimen at patayan. Tumaas ang sweldo. Ang sweldo dati ng maestra ay 212 na kayang bumili ng isang kaban na bigas. Nung after martial law, naging 400+ pero di na makabili ng bigas na isang sako. Tumaas din ang tuition. 100+ pesos lng dati na 21 units na.”⁵⁶

This negativity to an extent, led some Filipinos to prefer Marcos as their president claiming he was the most brilliant due to the numerous projects and achievements the Philippines gained during his administration. Nevertheless, there were also positive responses from some respondents, yet the dark history remained etched in the mind of every Filipino. Ms. Alfonso stated,

“Nung nalift yung Martial Law bumalik na ang freedom sa lahat ng bagay. Pwede na ulit lumabas, gumala, freedom of speech at sa

⁵⁴ Santos, *Interview 1*, 2021.

⁵⁵ Manalo, *Asuncion G*, 2021.

⁵⁶ Teresita Pulido, interview by Brian Andrew M. Alfonso, Matthew Henry T. Clerigo, Jon Danmar M. Malacas, Gieo Aldrich P. Tiangco and Christian Paul A. Valencia, *Teresita Pulido, 80 years old*, June 7, 2021.

iba't iba pang bagay. Nung highschool ako ang saya-saya namin nalift na yung Martial Law kasi makakapag aral na uli kami ng maayos makakalabas at nawala na yung fear namin na mamatay kami kaagad pag may ginawa na isang bagay pero nandun parin yung mga trauma na naexperience namin.”⁵⁷

Summing Up

The Martial Law during the Marcos regime remained to be one of the darkest times in Philippine history. Despite the contributions the government provided that remain to be part of the daily lives of every Filipino, its legacy was overshadowed by the years of human rights abuses, corruption, and autocratic governance.

The oral history conducted by the college students of Readings in Philippine History became a memorable experience for them as they reflected on the accounts of every respondent. It opened the students to another view of history out of the traditional classroom setting, as they experienced the martial rule from various accounts of the respondents. Some narratives may bear prejudices on how they remembered the event, but they should not be taken for granted, as long as they conformed with proper evidence. Facts about Martial Law remained the same, but the truth may vary on the people who experienced it.

Furthermore, it not only served as a reminder for them, but also provided them with adequate knowledge against the misinformation and act of distorting and denying history surrounding the events of the Martial Law regime, with an attempt of revision on the part of the supporters. In addition, the activity also became an exercise for the students to be further educated in history, enabling them to learn to look through different perspectives of the country's history and critically analyze them afterward with the proper evidence to determine the credibility of the data they have gathered.

As the Philippines commemorate half of a century of the Martial Law regime, these accounts persisted to be a timeless memory of the Philippine past that must never be forgotten by the contemporary generation. “Never Forget” has been the public outcry of the Filipinos who experienced the darkest moment of

⁵⁷ Ms. Alfonso, interview by Brian Andrew M. Alfonso, Matthew Henry T. Clerigo, Jon Danmar M. Malacas, Gieo Aldrich P. Tiangco and Christian Paul A. Valencia, *Ms. Alfonso, 53 years old*, June 7, 2021.

history, and it must remain to never be forgotten. Quoting the philosopher George Santayana, *“Those who do not remember the past, are condemned to repeat it.”*

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